

Whistleblowing Policy

January 2024

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Approved by: Head of Centre
Frequency of review: Biennially
Next review due: January 2026

1. Introduction

Impact North West Ltd (Impact) is committed to maintaining a culture of openness, accountability and integrity. We seek to ensure that employees and workers at our centres feel secure in raising concerns about any activity which may harm individuals or undermine Impact. We have adopted this Whistle Blowing policy to provide clear guidance to those who may need to raise concerns.

2. Purpose

Impact expects its employees, and others involved in the work of the centres, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Impact's work to come forward and raise those concerns.

An employee may be the first person to realise that there could be something seriously wrong within the centre. However, they may feel that speaking up would be disloyal to colleagues or to Impact. They may also fear harassment or victimisation.

This policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns;
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied;
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have raised any concern in good faith.

3. Application of Policy

All employees and workers at Impact have a responsibility for whistleblowing. The purpose of this policy and procedure is to make it clear that employees can raise concerns in confidence without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. Employees are encouraged to raise serious

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concerns in the first instance **within** the centre rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside, and it is preferred that the matter is raised when it is just a concern rather than waiting for proof.

This policy and procedure applies to all employees and those working for Impact, for example, agency staff and volunteers.

4 Scope

This policy and procedure is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures, including the centre's complaints procedure and grievance policy.

This policy should be used for concerns about:-

- any unlawful act, whether criminal or a breach of civil law;
- maladministration, as defined by the Local Government Ombudsman.
- breach of any statutory code of practice.
- breach of, or failure to implement or comply with, Financial Regulations or Standing Orders.
- any failure to comply with appropriate professional standards.
- fraud, corruption or dishonesty.
- actions which are likely to cause physical/mental/psychological danger to any person, or to give rise to a risk of significant damage to property.
- loss of income to the centre.
- abuse of power, or the use of Impacts' powers and authority for any unauthorised or ulterior purpose.
- discrimination in the provision of education.
- any other matter that staff consider they cannot raise by any other procedure.

It should be emphasised that this policy and procedure is intended to assist employees or workers who have discovered malpractice or serious wrongdoing, provided they make the disclosure in accordance with the policy. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by the centre nor may it be used to reconsider any matters that have already been addressed under the harassment, complaint or disciplinary procedures. Individuals who make disclosures outside the arrangements set out here will not be protected under this policy and may not be protected under the Act.

5 Protection

It can be difficult for an employee or worker to make the decision to report a concern. If a concern is raised in good faith and based on reasonable belief, there should be nothing to fear.

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Impact will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation and will take appropriate action to protect an individual when they raise a concern even if they are genuinely mistaken in their concerns. Any harassment or victimisation of a whistleblower would result in disciplinary action against the person responsible.

Under The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, workers are protected from dismissal or other detriment as long as they follow their employer's whistle blowing procedure. Any investigations arising from whistleblowing will not influence or be influenced by any other procedures to which an employee may be subject.

If an employee's concern is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them. If, however, it is determined through an investigation that an employee made an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against them.

6 How to Raise a Concern

It is hoped that in most cases an employee/worker will feel able to raise any concerns internally with the Head of Centre, speaking to them in person or putting the matter in writing if they prefer. They may be able to agree on a way of resolving a concern quickly and effectively.

Where the concern relates to the Head of Centre, the employee/worker should raise the concern with the Founder/Executive Head of Centre

The Head of Centre and/or or Directors will meet with the employee/worker as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. Recording sufficient details to enable the matter to be thoroughly investigated. As a minimum, they will record the name of the employee/worker but also indicate whether the individual wishes his or her identity to remain confidential and the nature of the concern.

It may not always be possible to maintain confidentiality and the Head of Centre and or Directors should explain this to the employee/worker. In such instances, the employee/worker will have the choice of either withdrawing or agreeing to his/her identity becoming known to enable the concern to be effectively dealt with.

The employee may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this policy. The confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation must be respected.

The Head of Centre (or Directors) will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the employee/worker with a copy as soon as practicable after the meeting, along with an indication of how they propose to deal with the matter, where possible.

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If the concern is about the Head of Centre and you wish to contact the Directors then please see the Business Manager for their contact details.

7. Investigating a disclosure

Once an employee/worker has raised a concern, the Head of Centre and/or Directors will carry out, within 10 working days, an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. The employee/worker will be informed of the outcome of this assessment. The employee/worker raising the concern may be required to attend additional meetings to provide further information.

The Head of Centre or Directors may consider it appropriate to refer the concern to an external agency for consideration in advance of any internal investigation. This may be appropriate where concerns about child safeguarding, potential criminal activity or unsafe working practices are raised. Where this is deemed appropriate, no further internal investigation should be undertaken until clearance is given.

Where necessary, the centre may appoint an investigator or team of investigators, including those with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable Impact to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

The Head of Centre and/or Directors will aim to keep the employee/worker informed of the progress of the investigation and likely timescale. Sometimes the need for confidentiality may mean that the employee/worker cannot be given specific details of the investigation, or any disciplinary action taken as a result. The employee/worker is required to treat any information about the investigation as strictly confidential.

If it is concluded that an employee/worker has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, they will be subject to disciplinary action under the centre's disciplinary policy and procedure.

Whilst it cannot always be guaranteed that the outcome will be in line with the employee's/worker's expectation, concerns will be dealt with fairly and in an appropriate way.

There is no right of appeal against any decisions taken under this policy and procedure.

8 External disclosure

Employees or workers who believe that the matter has not been taken seriously or is being covered up may choose to report the concern externally to an appropriate body, details of which are shown below:

- the Local Authority

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- a Prescribed Person or Body (e.g. Ofsted, Education Funding Agency, Children Commissioner or NSPCC - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>)

9. Confidentiality

Impact view confidentiality as a two-way process and will endeavour to maintain this approach, though they recognise this cannot always be guaranteed. In return we would expect concerns the employee/worker has raised through this policy will remain equally confidential until there has been an opportunity for their assessment.

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the identity of the employee/worker raising the concern if that is their wish. If Impact are not able to resolve the employee's/worker's concern without revealing their identity, it will be discussed with them beforehand.

Impact also wishes to state that although a concern may also be raised anonymously, it may impede the designated manager's ability to undertake a thorough assessment if the employee/worker chooses to do so. The Impact would hope that the protection provided by this policy would negate the need for such actions. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but may be considered by Impact taking into account:

- the seriousness of the issues raised; the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

The Head of Centre and/or Directors) will decide in each case whether a complaint made anonymously should be investigated.

10. Support and Advice

If the employee/worker wishes to access advice then they may wish to speak to the Public Concern at Work charity via e-mail whistle@pcaw.org.uk or telephone (020 7404 6609).

11. Report to Directors

The Head of Centre will report to Directors the outcome of whistle blowing investigations, anonymising the detail but confirming the outcome and any centre actions arising from the investigation.

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