



# **Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle-blowing) Procedure**

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner taking into account the requirements of the funding bodies and the standards in public life set out in the reports of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (formerly known as the Nolan Committee - see [www.public-standards.org.uk](http://www.public-standards.org.uk)).
- 1.2 It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will not disclose confidential information about his or her employer's affairs. However, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows malpractice/wrongdoing within QMUL then this information should be disclosed without fear or reprisal, and may be made independently of line management.
- 1.3 The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which came into effect on 2 July 1999, gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed, victimised or suffering any other detriment from their employers as a result of making a "qualified disclosure" i.e. disclosing information which is deemed to be in the public interest.
- 1.4 The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 made three key changes to the Public Interest Disclosure Act:
  - amended the definition of "qualifying disclosure" to introduce a public interest test;
  - removed the requirement that certain disclosures be made in good faith, replacing this with a power to reduce compensation where disclosure is not made in good faith;
  - introduced vicarious liability for employers if a worker is subjected to detriment by a co-worker for making a protected disclosure.
- 1.5 In addition to the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle-blowing) Procedure, the following policies are available on the QMUL intranet:
  - Financial Regulations
  - Scheme of Delegation of Financial Authority
  - Anti Bribery and Corruption
  - Anti Money Laundering
  - Standards of Business Conduct
  - Fraud and Corruption Policy and Response Plan

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 This procedure is designed to allow employees or other members of QMUL to raise concerns or disclose information where the individual has a genuine and reasonable

belief of malpractice which is in the interest of QMUL or of the public to be investigated. These will usually include one or more of the following:

- A criminal offence, such as financial malpractice, impropriety or fraud
- The breach of a legal obligation or failure to comply with the Charter, Ordinances and Regulations of Queen Mary University of London
- A miscarriage of justice
- A danger to the health and safety of any individual
- Damage or potential damage to the environment
- Academic or professional malpractice, improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Deliberate concealment of information relating to any of the above

Matters relating to individual staff or student circumstances or concerns should be addressed through QMUL's Code of Practice on Grievance or Student Complaints Procedure respectively.

- 2.2 Victimization of any individual who has made a qualified disclosure using this procedure in good faith will be treated as a disciplinary offence irrespective of whether the allegations raised are subsequently upheld.
- 2.3 A number of other policies and procedures are in place, including QMUL's Code of Practice on Discipline and QMUL's Procedure for Investigating Allegations of Misconduct in Academic Research. Allegations which fall within the scope of those procedures should normally be made and considered in accordance with the relevant procedure.
- 2.4 The Public Interest Disclosure Act applies to employees, trainees, agency staff and contractors. Although not protected by the Act, it is expected that other members of the QMUL community, such as members of Council and students as well as volunteers and self employed persons providing services for QMUL, will also use the procedure set out below to disclose any information with they believe shows malpractice or impropriety.
- 2.5 It is emphasised that this procedure is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial or business decisions taken by QMUL, nor may it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under grievance or disciplinary procedures. It is expected that members of QMUL will use this procedure to raise any concerns internally in the first instance rather than with agencies external to QMUL.

## **3 Procedure**

### ***3.1 Making a Disclosure***

All disclosures should be made in writing to the designated person(s) listed below.

- 3.1.1 In the first instance, disclosures should be made to the President and Principal. The Chair of Council will immediately be informed.
- 3.1.2 If the allegation concerns the President and Principal, the disclosure should be made directly to the Chair of Council or, where the issue falls within the review of the Audit and Risk Committee, to its Chairman. Whichever Chair receives a disclosure will then become the designated person for the purpose of these procedures.
- 3.1.3 If there are any major concerns about the actions of a QMUL employee or worker of an agency/organisation, in relation to child abuse<sup>1</sup>, then the allegations should be made to the designated Principal Safeguarding Officer (PSO) who will take forward the concerns raised in accordance with the College's Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults.
- 3.1.4 The designated person will inform the Director of Human Resources of any and all disclosures they receive.

### ***3.2 Confidentiality***

- 3.2.1 QMUL will treat all disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation will be kept confidential so long as it does not hinder or frustrate any investigation. However, the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement as part of the evidence required. The individual making the disclosure will be informed if it is felt that their identity needs to be disclosed or is likely to become apparent in the progress of an investigation.
- 3.2.2 QMUL expects the individual making the disclosure and all others involved in any subsequent investigation to observe strict confidentiality in relation to the nature of the disclosure, the identity of those involved and any other information relating to the investigation.

### ***3.3 Anonymous Allegations***

- 3.3.1 This procedure requires individuals to sign any disclosures they make. In exceptional circumstances, concerns expressed anonymously may be considered at the discretion of QMUL. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include the:
- seriousness of the issues raised;
  - credibility of the concern; and
  - likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the Principal Safeguarding Officer can be obtained from the HR Department

### **3.4 Vexatious Allegations**

3.4.1 If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, but this is not upheld by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. However, if an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations which are found to be motivated by personal gain or the desire to cause harm or damage to the reputation of other(s), and particularly if he or she persists in making them, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned.

### **3.5 Investigating a Disclosure**

3.5.1 Within ten working days, the designated person will consider the information made available to him/her and decide on, and advise the individual who has made the disclosure of, the form of investigation to be undertaken. This may be:

- to investigate the matter internally
- to refer the matter to the police
- to arrange for an independent inquiry.

3.5.2 If the decision is that investigations should be conducted by more than one of these means, the designated person should satisfy him/herself that such a course of action is warranted.

3.5.3 Where the matter is to be the subject of an internal inquiry, the designated person will then determine:

- who should undertake the investigation (see 3.5.4)
- the procedure to be followed
- the scope of the concluding report.

3.5.4 In deciding who should undertake the investigation, the designated person will check with the proposed investigator that they:

- are not responsible for or substantially connected to the matter raised
- are able and willing to conduct the investigation in a timely way (see 3.5.7)
- are adequately experienced or knowledgeable about conducting investigations of this character
- do not believe themselves to be conflicted in any other respect.

3.5.5 Where the allegation concerns a breach of QMUL's Financial Regulations and/or procedures, QMUL's Internal Auditor will normally undertake the investigation as the investigating officer.

3.5.6 Where the allegation does not involve a breach of QMUL's Financial Regulations and/or procedures, the investigation may be undertaken by another member of staff of QMUL appointed as the investigating officer by the designated person for this purpose.

3.5.7 The investigating officer will report his/her findings to the designated person. Any investigation will be conducted as sensitively and speedily as possible and normally within 20 working days.

- 3.5.8 A member of the HR Department will be nominated to keep the individual who has made the disclosure advised of progress and likely timescales.
- 3.5.9 Where a disclosure is made, the person or persons against whom the disclosure is made will be informed of the nature of the allegation, the evidence supporting it and will be given the opportunity to comment on the evidence and present any explanation before any conclusions are reached.
- 3.5.10 In instances where there is reasonable belief that any individual implicated by the allegation raised through a disclosure could jeopardise the progress of an investigation, for example by destroying records, then that individual may be temporarily suspended from duty. Any such suspension will:
- be without prejudice i.e. will not imply or assume any actual or potential wrong doing on the part of that individual
  - be confirmed in writing to the individual in question, setting out the reason(s) for the suspension and any practical arrangements for the duration of their suspension.
  - be on full pay
  - be of the shortest duration possible and reviewed on a regular basis.
- 3.5.11 As a result of this investigation, other internal procedures may be invoked, such as:
- Code of Practice on Discipline
  - Code of Practice on Grievance

or it might form the basis of a separate investigation.

In some instances it may be necessary to refer the matter to an external authority for further investigation.

### ***3.6 Reporting of Outcomes***

- 3.6.1 After the investigation, the designated person will inform the individual making the disclosure, normally within five working days, of what action is to be taken where this does not breach confidentiality for other individuals concerned (for example if an outcome is that disciplinary action is to be instigated against another individual).
- 3.6.2 If the allegation is not upheld following an investigation, the individual concerned will be informed of the reason for this.
- 3.6.3 The designated person will submit a report of all disclosures and any subsequent taken to the Audit and Risk Committee. Where the issue falls within the purview of the Committee, a detailed report will be submitted, in other cases a summary report, in order to allow the Committee to monitor the effectiveness of the procedure. Copies of the report will be retained for a minimum of three years by the designated person.

## **4 Appeal**

- 4.1 The individual will be given the opportunity to remake the disclosure, in writing, stating in full the grounds for appeal, within ten working days. An appeal can be made on the grounds that either the procedure was applied incorrectly or the action taken was inappropriate in the circumstances.
- 4.2 The allegation should be remade to a second appropriate person. For example, if the initial disclosure was made to an officer of QMUL then the subsequent disclosure might be made to the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee or to the Chair of Council.
- 4.3 This second designated officer will consider all the information presented, the procedures that were followed and the reasons why the allegations were not upheld. The outcome of this will be either to confirm that no further action is required or to decide that further investigation is required. In the latter case, the second designated officer will follow the procedures referred to in 3.5 above.
- 4.4 In the event that the disclosure is remade to a second appropriate person, the individual making the disclosure will not subsequently have access to the further College policies or procedures for the continued pursuance of the same matter.

## **5 Review**

- 5.1 The Academic Registrar and Secretary to Council may review this policy following the conclusion of an investigation if any procedural or other problems were experienced during the course of an investigation, or if there is a change to best practice or national guidance in respect of public interest disclosures. QMUL's trades unions will normally be consulted on any substantive changes proposed.