# School of Health and Social Care

# University of Essex

**Procedure for raising Concerns About Practices and Behaviours in Practice Partner Organisations**

AIM……………………………………………………………………………………. 1

POLICY STATEMENT……………………………………………………………… 1

INTRODUCTION…………………………………………………………………….. 2

INITIAL ADVICE AND GUIDANCE………………………………………………… 3

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR…………. 4

**AIM**

This document sets out how the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex supports students and staff who experience racism and discrimination whilst undertaking practice placements as part of their programme of study. All practice placements are undertaken within organisations with whom the University have an established partnership agreement. In line with the university’s commitments as set out in its Equality and Diversity Policy 2019-25, **we expect that partner organisations and their employees share similar values to the university, and have policies and procedures in place to address, challenge and tackle racism and discrimination.**

**POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy document has been constructed in alignment with the university’s policy statement on equality, diversity and inclusion:

* The University of Essex celebrates diversity, challenges inequality and is committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members.
* We expect all members of our communities, employees, workers, contractors, partners, students and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. We do not tolerate discrimination against any individual or groups of people because of their age, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, because they have a disability, or because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or have recently given birth.
* To support our value-commitment to inclusivity, we extend protection from discrimination beyond our legal obligations to cover other forms of difference such as socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances, appearance, personal interests.

**Introduction**

1. This Disclosure Procedure (referred to as “The Procedure”) applies to all partner organisations who provide practice-based learning within their services to students registered on programmes involving practice placements in health, social care and education. The Procedure supplements the [University’s Whistleblowing Policy](https://www.essex.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/governance/policies), which applies to practices within the university.
2. The Procedure relates to any incident which contravenes the Equality Act (2010); other legislation relating to bullying, harassment and hate crime; professional codes of practice; partnership agreements or other significant breaches in policy, irrespective of whether the incident is directly related to the educational process.
3. The Procedure applies to all relevant programmes leading to awards made by the University of Essex. It is designed to ensure that members of the university (students and staff) can undertake their learning and working in a safe and welcoming environment without fear of prejudice, exclusion or hate.
4. The Procedure provides a context for raising concerns about discrimination, malpractice, unlawful behaviour or other serious wrongdoing in the workplace without fear of reprisal. The Procedure is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may involve any of the following:
	1. Discrimination based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability or any other protected characteristic by anyone present in the organisation;
	2. Committing a criminal offence;
	3. Harassment and/or bullying
	4. Failure to observe a legal obligation or to comply with an instrument of governance;
	5. Endangering health or safety or the environment;
	6. Administrative malpractice (financial or non-financial);
	7. Abuse of service users;
	8. Other improper conduct or unethical behaviour;
	9. Suppression or concealment of any information relating to any of the above.
5. The above is not intended to be a comprehensive list and there may be other examples not included above that members of the university can raise. These will be considered seriously.
6. The University recognises that members of the university community (students and staff) have a duty to report discriminatory, dangerous, abusive, or exploitative behaviours and practices. The Procedure also recognises the relative powerlessness and vulnerability of students who may be undergoing a process of assessment by practice-based staff during their placement. The University takes seriously its responsibilities towards students and regards it as important that students are able to voice their concerns and that their interests are safeguarded as far as possible.
7. No detrimental action of any kind will be taken against a member(s) of the university community (student or staff) raising a concern of the nature described above, provided that it is done without malice and in good faith. A malicious complaint, however, could result in disciplinary action.

**Initial Advice and Guidance**

If you observe, or are involved in, a practice-based incident that raises serious concerns, you are advised to take the following steps.

**Firstly, seek support**. Speak to someone you trust and feel comfortable with, this could be a personal tutor or colleague, a bullying or harassment adviser, a ‘Speak Up Guardian’, or a student representative. You can also access [wellbeing support services](https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/professional-services/student-wellbeing-and-inclusivity-team), where you will be able to speak to someone confidentially.

**Secondly, challenge behaviour** (only if possible). If students and staff feel they are able to challenge the behaviour, a calm and non-confrontational approach often works best. This gives the other person a chance to apologise, reflect and learn.

**Thirdly, keep a record**. Consider writing or recording voice notes on your phone to remind yourself of the incident(s), while ensuring these are protected and secure. Keep things simple and stick to the facts. Take note of date; time; place; who was there; what happened; how you felt.

**Fourth, report behaviour and complain**. Students and staff should familiarise themselves with the formal procedures for reporting and dealing with harassment or similar behaviour as outlined below.

**Procedure for Reporting Discriminatory behaviour**

**1** A member(s) of the university (student or staff) wishing to report an incident should report their concerns to **a trusted person** in the university. For students this will usually be the personal tutor, divisional placement lead, or programme lead – but could be another staff member that the student trusts. For staff this will usually be the line manager, academic adviser or mentor.

**2** The **trusted person** will advise the student or staff member on the preparation of a Statement setting out the issue or incident. The trusted person will familiarise the student or staff member with the contents of this Procedure. It is **not** the role of the **trusted person** to draft the Statement or to counsel for or against its submission, but to offer support.

**3** The **trusted person**, in collaboration with the student or staff member reporting the concern, may determine one of the following actions:

**Informal action**

* Raise the concern with the relevant team manager or education lead and, where appropriate, the staff involved to challenge the behaviour.

**Formal action**

* The person reporting the behaviour, in collaboration with **the trusted person**, should complete an incident report form by clicking on the QR code or link below:

<https://essex.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3rwuocmmJT0eKz4>

* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to pursue an investigation through the provider organisation’s complaints procedure.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to forward the Statement to a named person at the organisation (usually the person who oversees practice placements in that organisation) requesting that the matter be investigated urgently.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to explain the expectation of a formal investigation, requesting an indicative timeframe and the requirement to provide a response to **the trusted person** and Director of Practice Partnerships that includes outcomes and actions taken or planned.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to follow-up with the named person at the placement organisation to monitor the progress of the investigation.

**Options for students who are mid-placement**

* Remain in current placement area with the same educator
* Remain in the same placement area with a different educator
* Transfer to another placement area, where this is possible within the existing placement circuit

Support for HSC staff can be provided by the HSC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead and identified Committee members.

**4** The Director of Practice Partnerships and HSC Placements Team will retain oversight of the cases that are reported. Anonymised details of the cases may, as required, be shared with the others. Non-anonymised details will only be shared with the consent of the person raising the concern.

**5** All practice partner organisations must identify an appropriate **contact person** for the purposes set out above, who is competent to implement an appropriate internal investigation. Normally this will be via the organisation’s own established raising concerns procedure, complaints procedure or whistleblowing process. Where no such process currently exists, the placement organisation will be required to put in place an appropriate process. This will set out the circumstances in which such a procedure might be invoked and confirm the rights of anonymity and freedom from discrimination for the member of the university submitting a Statement. The practice partner organisation would normally be expected to complete their investigation within **28 days of receiving the report**. If the investigation is not completed within this timeframe, an update on progress and an estimated date of completion should be provided by the placement provider to the Director of Practice Partnerships and **the trusted person**.

**6** On conclusion of the investigation by the organisation concerned, a report setting out the findings, outcomes and actions taken will be submitted by the organisation to **the trusted person** and the Director of Practice Partnerships, who will forward the findings to the Dean of School as well as the student or staff member who raised the concern. All parties involved must undertake to keep information relating to the specific outcome of the investigation confidential. Outcomes of investigations will be retained by all parties. The university will retain information for review of quality assurance processes and reserves the right to share strictly anonymised outcomes for the purposes of shared organisational learning, where both organisations and the member making the referral have provided consent for this information to be used in this way.

**7** If the University is satisfied that the practice partner organisation is fulfilling its responsibilities under the relevant laws, partnership agreements, professional codes of practice, or other policies, then no further action will be taken. Where this is not the case, the University will take further action to fulfil its own responsibilities towards its members (for example, by reviewing the suitability of that organisation to offer placements) and the wider public (for example by referring its concerns to the relevant professional body).

**8** If the student or staff member of the university who raised the concern is not satisfied with the process or outcome of the investigation at any point, they may make a formal complaint under the University’s *Complaints Procedures*.