

University of Essex

Placement Learning Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Procedure

Introduction

1. The University's Placement Learning Whistleblowing procedure applies to all students registered on schemes involving professional practice placements, including health, social work and education. The procedure supplements the University's general Whistleblowing Policy. It relates to incidents occurring when on placement which contravene relevant professional codes of practice, whether or not they are directly related to the educational process and whether they involve a colleague or an employer.
2. The procedure applies to all relevant schemes leading to awards of the University of Essex, although the office holders identified in Section A below may be adapted where the scheme is offered through a partner institution of the University.
3. In the context of this procedure, whistleblowing is defined as raising serious concerns about malpractice or serious wrongdoing in the workplace without fear or reprisal. The procedure is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may involve any of the following:
 - a. committing a criminal offence
 - b. failure to observe a legal obligation or to comply with an instrument of governance
 - c. miscarriage of justice
 - d. endangering health or safety or the environment
 - e. administrative malpractice (financial or non-financial)
 - f. abuse of service users
 - g. other improper conduct or unethical behaviour
 - h. suppression or concealment of any information relating to any of the above.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list and any matters raised under this policy will be considered seriously.
4. The University recognises that students on placements have a duty to report dangerous, abusive, discriminatory or exploitative behaviour and practice. It also recognises the relative powerlessness and vulnerability of students who may be undergoing a process of assessment by work-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.

5. No detrimental action of any kind will be taken against a student making a complaint of the nature described above, provided that it is done without malice and in good faith. A malicious or vexatious complaint, however, could result in disciplinary action.

Section A: Placement Learning Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Procedure

Where an incident results in whistleblowing, the following procedure shall apply:

A.1 A student wishing to report a matter should in the first instance report their concerns to the relevant Head of School/Department or their designated Deputy.

A.2 The Head of School/Department will advise the student on the preparation of a statement setting out the issue ('Statement of Issue') and of the procedure that will be followed. This advice shall include advising the student on the possible limits placed on any investigation as a result of protecting anonymity. It is **not** the role of the Head of School/Department to draft the Statement of Issue or to counsel for or against its submission. It is, however, appropriate for the Head of School/Department to advise the student in circumstances where the alleged incident is in fact part of normal practice such that the evidence identifies no malpractice (e.g. misinterpretation of legal methods of constraint in appropriate circumstances).

The Statement of Issue should include information on the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates) and the reason why the student is particularly concerned about the situation. It is advantageous if others are willing to put their names to the statement.

A.3 The Statement of Issue will be submitted by the Head of School/Department to the Dean of the School and the Academic Registrar on behalf of the student. This action will not imply any endorsement or support for the allegation by the Head of School/Department. The student's name will be disclosed to the Dean of the School and Academic Registrar.

A.4 The Dean of the School will forward the Statement of Issue to a named person at the organisation concerned requesting that the matter be investigated. The identity of the student will only be disclosed by the Dean of the School with the express written permission of the student.

A.5 All organisations accepting students on placements 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 whistleblowing process. Where no such process currently exists, the placement organisation will be required to put in place an appropriate process which will be specified in an annex to their contract with the University. 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 student submitting a Statement of Issue.

A.6 On conclusion of the investigation by the organisation concerned, a report setting out the conclusions and actions taken will be submitted by the organisation to the Dean of School, who will forward the findings to the Academic Registrar, Head of School/Department and student. All parties involved must undertake to keep information relating to the outcome of the investigation confidential.

A.7 If the University is satisfied that the placement provider is fulfilling its responsibilities under the relevant professional code of practice and the QAA Code of Practice for Placement Learning, 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 students (for example by withdrawing students from that placement provider) and the public (for example by referring its concerns to the relevant professional body). In all cases, the disclosure and the subsequent outcome will be reported to the Dean of School and Academic Registrar.

A.8 If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, he or she may make a formal complaint under the University's *Complaints Procedure for Students* or the relevant complaints procedure at the partner institution concerned.

Document owner	
Document author	
Document last reviewed by	Aminah Suhail, Quality Enhancement Manager
Date last reviewed	21/04/2022
Review frequency	Annually