

**RAISING CONCERNS (WHISTLEBLOWING) POLICY & PROCEDURE.**

**1. Introduction**

In order to uphold the high standards expected to safeguard the public it is important that procedures exist for disclosing and addressing malpractice within organisations to which students are exposed. All students who complete programmes in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences will have undertaken placements in a variety of settings, in which it is possible, that they may witness practices that they consider to constitute malpractice. All staff and students have a responsibility in highlighting or communicating issues or concerns.

This Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy and Procedure aims to offer guidance to facilitate and support students, academics and practice staff to safely raise complaints/concerns that may arise in practice placements.

An important aspect of the process is assuring and maintaining confidentiality which will be guaranteed at all times. However, due to the nature of some situations there are occasions where anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

**2. Policy Statement**

This policy and procedure applies to all programmes within the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences that require student allocation to a practice placement as part of a programme of study. It has been developed in collaboration with **Placement Providers.**

**As a public body the University recognises its responsibilities under the Public Interest Disclosure Act (‘Whistleblowing’ Act 1999) and the second report on Standards in Public Life (Nolan Committee 1996) that staff and students are permitted to** speak freely without fear of disciplinary action, victimisation or discrimination. In addition, the policy seeks to enable students to raise complaints about the practice and serious professional misconduct that contravenes the Code of Practice of the General Social Care Council, the Health Professions Council; or the Nursing and Midwifery Council. This policy and procedure should be applied and understood within the context of the Bournemouth University, Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedures.

The Care Quality Commission published a guide to Raising a Concern which can be accessed from <http://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/20111214_whistleblowing_quick_guide_final.pdf> (accessed 14 December 2011).

As Dehn (<http://www.cfoi.org.uk/pdf/corruptiongd.pdf>) (accessed 27/7/11) points out, the person concerned with serious wrongdoing in an organisation faces three options:

* To stay silent
* To blow the whistle internally or with the responsible person
* To blow the whistle outside to the authorities or the media.

This policy recognises that silence should not be an option of choice.

In particular the University acknowledges the relative powerlessness and vulnerability of students who may be undergoing a process of assessment by work-based staff during their practice placements and takes seriously their responsibilities towards their students.

This is particularly so for students who may be seconded from the host placement provider organisation. In such cases where the seconded student raises an issue or concern related to their employing organisation, any subsequent investigation MUST be addressed from the perspective of the individual as a student undertaking a programme at Bournemouth University Faculty of Health and Social Sciences and therefore this policy and procedure WILL apply. Seconded students may also wish to refer to the Widening Access Policy signed by them with their employer/sponsor.

**3. Definition of Whistleblowing**

*“Raising a concern about malpractice within an organisation or through an independent structure associated with it”*

**UK Committee on Standards in Public Life**

In the context of this policy and procedure, Whistleblowing is defined as ‘raising complaints or concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing in the workplace without fear or reprisal’.

Bournemouth University, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences will ensure that they do their ‘reasonable best’ to manage staff and students against possible risk and harm. For the purpose of this policy risk is defined as any situation that the student is involved in, which gives rise for concern for any of the parties involved.

The student practice placement evaluation questionnaire provides students the opportunity to identify issues and give feedback from their placements. However, if their complaint is serious and needs to be reported urgently, then the guidance below shows how this should be undertaken.

This policy does not seek to address issues that may be dealt with under existing complaints procedures. It seeks to enable students to raise concerns, in good faith, that relate to the following categories set out as ‘qualifying disclosures’ in the Public Interest Disclosure Act (1999):

* Criminal offences
* Failure to comply with legal obligations
* Miscarriages of justice
* Health and safety dangers
* Damage to the environment
* Concealment of information about any of these matters.

**4. Procedure**

4.1 A student who has a concern whilst on (or following) a practice placement, or a member of University staff who may have/share the concern, must raise it **immediately** with their Practice Assessor/Practice Learning Adviser/Academic Adviser.

The student may wish to seek pastoral support from their Academic Adviser.

Discussion with the student at this stage, should focus upon achieving resolution for the student, improving practice and preventing repetition of malpractice.

If the issue is resolved at this stage, **no further action is required.**

4.2 If the cause for concern is not resolved, the Academic Adviser or other first recipient of the concern must advise the appropriate Programme Lead and Head of Practice Education. Escalation to Head of Department and / or professional lead will be undertaken as required.

The Programme Lead will ensure that appropriate pastoral support is available to the student. Where requested, and where possible, the anonymity of the person making the allegation should be protected.

The Programme Lead should ensure provision for guidance about statement writing, outlining the concern/issue is available for the student.

It is the Programme Lead’s responsibility to ensure that the student accesses all appropriate support available within the University in respect of Additional Learning Needs, Counselling, Chaplaincy, and other student support services.

The Programme Lead should then ensure that the Head of Practice Education and the University Practice Learning Advisers are informed of the concern/issue, and make contact with the Placement Provider’s Senior Manager. BU will identify a central point of contact for the placement provider to communicate with.

The student will be supported in presenting their complaint to the placement provider organisation, consistent with the complaints procedure of that organisation.

The University will retain a continuing interest in any investigation by providing pastoral support to the student and through communication with the central point of contact from BU.

The final outcome of the investigation should be reported to the Student, Head of Practice Education and other appropriate stakeholders.

At any point in this procedure it may be necessary to disclose to or inform a professional and regulatory body. It may also be necessary to comply with safeguarding laws on the protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) and protection of children (POCA).

**5. Interviewing the Student**

If a representative from the placement provider wishes to interview the student, then they should contact the student to negotiate an appropriate date and time. The student’s University representative will attend, if the student wishes, to provide pastoral support.

**Unsatisfactory Resolution?**

Where the complainant and University staff, involved, are not satisfied that resolution has been achieved, a meeting of the key personnel involved should seek to develop an action plan aimed at ensuring the protection of the student and of the public interest. This may involve communication with appropriate authorities or regulatory bodies. In these circumstances consultation with the Dean of School and the Head of Student Services is required. The implications for future use of the placement should be considered. Finally, the student should be encouraged to reflect upon the personal and organisational learning that has arisen as part of this process.

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