Academic Guardians UK

Whistleblowing Policy

This policy summarises current working practices in relation to Whistleblowing.

AGUK believes whistleblowing to be the reporting of suspected wrongdoing in the workplace, in support of AGUK's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people

London Registered Office
Kemp House, 152-160 City Road, London, EC1V 2NX

Telephone
+44 (0) 203 515 8880
+44 (0) 203 815 7943

Mobile
+44 (0) 7931 954 106
+44 (0) 7823 321 993

Email

info@academic-guardians.co.uk

Online
www.academic-guardians.co.uk

Policy owner	Updated	Review date
Andrew Kettle	August 2024	August 2025

Policy:	Whistleblowing Policy
Summary:	This policy summarises current working practices in relation to Whistleblowing. AGUK believes whistleblowing to be the reporting of suspected wrongdoing in the workplace, in support of AGUK's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. AGUK expects all staff (including self-employed consultants), partners and volunteers to share the commitment to the company's overall aim.
Policy Owner:	AGUK (Academic Guardians UK Ltd) Directors
Date Introduced:	August 2021 Update: August 2024
Next Review Date:	August 2025

1. Whistle Blowing

1.1. AGUK believes whistleblowing to be the reporting of suspected wrongdoing in the workplace, in support of AGUK's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. AGUK expects all staff (including self-employed consultants), partners and volunteers to share the commitment to the company's overall aim.

1.2. By encouraging a culture of openness within the organisation AGUK believes it can help prevent malpractice -- prevention is better than cure. That is the aim of this policy. This policy applies to all employees of AGUK and to other workers within AGUK including, local coordinators, agency workers, and drivers. Whilst homestay host families and students do not benefit from the same statutory protection as staff, the procedures in this policy also apply to them.

1.3. By encouraging a culture of openness AGUK wants to encourage employees, workers, students, local coordinators and homestay hosts to raise issues which concern them. They may be worried that by reporting such issues they will be opening themselves up to detrimental treatment or risking their job security; that is quite understandable but is not the case - all staff have statutory protection if they raise concerns in the right way. This policy is designed to give staff that opportunity and protection. Provided they are acting in the public interest, it does not matter if they are mistaken. There is no question of employees having to prove anything about the allegation they are making but they must reasonably believe that the information they have tends to show some malpractice. While students and homestay hosts do not benefit from the same statutory protection as staff, the procedures in this policy also apply to them. If there is anything which employees, workers, students, local coordinators and homestay hosts think AGUK should know about they should use the procedure outlined in this policy. By knowing about malpractice at an early stage AGUK stands a good chance of taking the necessary steps to safeguard the interests of all staff and protect the organisation. In short, staff, homestay hosts and students should not hesitate to 'blow the whistle' on malpractice. Note: This policy is not the procedure for general grievances. If an employee has a complaint about their own personal circumstances then they should use the normal grievance procedure, and homestay host and students should follow the complaints policy procedure. If an employee or student has concerns about malpractice within the organisation, then they should use the procedure outlined in this policy.

1.4. AGUK actively encourage all personnel, partners and volunteers to report any serious concerns they may have about any aspect of the company including issues such as:

- health and safety concerns
- damage to the work environment
- the criminal offence that has taken place was about to take place
- disobeying the law
- the covering of the wrongdoing
- the conduct of its personnel or others acting on behalf of the company at work or representing the company and external functions for work or pleasure
- discipline, grievance, harassment and bullying
- recruitment and selection of host families and taxi drivers

1.5. Making a whistle blowing disclosure:

1.5.1 AGUK is committed to this policy. If an employee, local coordinator, homestay host or student uses this policy to raise a concern that is in the public interest AGUK gives them its assurance that they will not suffer any form of retribution or detrimental treatment. AGUK will treat their concern seriously and act according to this policy. They will not be asked to prove anything about the allegation they raise, but they must reasonably believe:

- that the information they have tends to show some malpractice, and
- that the disclosure is in the public interest.

1.5.2 If an employee, local coordinator, student or homestay host asks for a matter to be treated in confidence AGUK will respect their request and only make disclosures to third parties or other staff with their consent.

1.5.3 If an employee, local coordinator, student or homestay host is concerned about any form of malpractice they should normally first raise the issue with their immediate superior. There is no special procedure for doing this -- they can tell that person about the problem or put it in writing if they prefer.

1.5.4 If they feel they cannot tell their immediate superior, for whatever reason, they should raise the issue with a senior member of management.

1.5.5 Homestay Host and students should raise such concerns with the Designated Safeguarding & Prevent Lead or the Deputy Safeguarding Lead (see 1.6 for contact details) in the first instance.

1.5.6 If an employee, local coordinator or student has raised concerns and is still concerned, or the matter is so serious that they feel they cannot discuss it with either of the two persons named above, they can consider raising the matter with the appropriate regulator. A list of the bodies currently listed as regulators for this purpose and the areas they are responsible for is available from Public Concern at Work (see below), and from Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

1.5.7 The NSPCC have a whistleblowing helpline which is available for staff, local coordinators and homestay hosts who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures within the organisation. They can call 0800 028 0285 between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday or can email: help@nspcc.org.uk.In addition, *Protect* provide a free, confidential advice line for concerned staff to call before whistleblowing. The helpline is 020 317 2520 and their website is www.pcaw.co.uk

1.5.8 Additionally, as AGUK is accredited by AEGIS (Association for the Education and Guardianship of International Students) it is also possible to raise a concern with them by contact directly at http://www.aegisuk.net/contact-us

1.5.9 Employees, local coordinators and students may raise a whistle blowing concern anonymously from an anonymised email to Andrew Kettle (andrew@academic-guardians.co.uk) or by post Whistle blowing Policy, Academic Guardians, Kemp House, 152-160 City Road, London EC1V 2NX.

1.5.10 Victimisation of staff or employees who make a whistle blowing disclosure on grounds of that disclosure is never acceptable, and all allegations of such will be investigated fully and (if proved) dealt with severely by AGUK.

2. How AGUK will respond

2.1.1 After an employee, student or representative has raised a concern AGUK will decide how to respond in a responsible and appropriate manner under this policy. Usually this will involve a confidential meeting with the whistle-blower. AGUK will then normally make internal enquiries first, but it may be necessary to carry out an investigation at a later stage which may be formal or informal depending on the nature of the concern raised. External investigators such as auditors may be brought in where necessary, and AGUK will cooperative fully (where necessary) which enforcement bodies such as the CMA, police, UKVI, and HMRC, and with regulators. AGUK will endeavour to complete investigations within a reasonable time.

2.1.2 AGUK will keep the employee, local coordinator, homestay host or student informed of the progress of the investigation carried out and when it is completed and will provide feedback throughout the process. AGUK will not be able to inform them of any matters which would infringe the duty of confidentiality owed to others.

2.1.3 AGUK will normally aim to arrange an initial meeting within 48 hours of a disclosure being made and conclude an investigation within 20 working days.

2.1.4 It is not usually possible to provide feedback to staff or students who make anonymous disclosures, although feedback can be requested to an anonymised email account.

2.1.5 AGUK will keep (anonymised) records of: -

- The number of whistle blowing disclosures it receives, their nature, and whether confidentiality was requested
- The date and content of feedback provided to whistle-blowers.

3. Advice, support and awareness

3.1.1 In accordance with guidance on whistle blowing published by the Department for Business & innovation, AGUK is committed to raising awareness amongst its staff, local coordinators and homestay hosts of their whistle blowing rights and duties. This policy will be made available on the AGUK website, portals and intranet site. Reference to whistle blowing will be included in the induction process for new staff and managers.

3.1.2 Public Concern at Work (now known as Protect) is a leading independent charity whose main objectives are to promote compliance with the law and good practice in the public, private and voluntary sectors. They are a source of further information and advice for staff whistle-blowers at https://protect-advice.org.uk/

You can also find advice on whistle blowing for employees through ACAS
http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1919
Or the .gov website
https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing/what-is-a-whistleblower

3.1.3 AGUK can signpost and support access to mentoring and counselling for staff during the stressful whistleblowing process if requested by the employee.