

Whistleblowing Policy

(Making a Disclosure in the Public Interest)

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Issue: 5.1

Issue Date: January 2021

Review Date: January 2022



Introduction

SIRM is committed to the highest standards of openness probity and accountability.

An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of SIRM to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. It is a fundamental term of every contract of employment that an employee will not disclose confidential information about the employer's affairs. Nevertheless, where an individual discovers information which they believe shows serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then this information should be disclosed internally without fear of reprisal, and there should be arrangements to enable this to be done independently of line management (although in relatively minor instances the line manager would be the appropriate person to be told).

Policy

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) 1998 protects the employee against detriment or dismissal for raising concerns about matters in the public interest. The Act seeks to ensure that any person suspecting malpractice knows how to raise concerns and what procedures are in place to deal with the concern.

It should be emphasised that this policy 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 SIRM nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures. Once the "whistleblowing" procedures are in place, it is reasonable to expect staff to use them rather than air their complaints outside SIRM.

Aim

To ensure that "whistleblowing" is facilitated in a manner, which fosters openness yet, allows for the legitimate protection of the "whistleblower".

Scope of Policy

This policy is designed to enable employees of SIRM to raise concerns internally and at a high level and to disclose information, which the individual believes, shows malpractice or impropriety. This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to the invocation of other procedures e.g. Prevent Duty, disciplinary. These concerns could include:

- Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- Corruption or bribery
- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Dangers to Health & Safety or the environment
- Criminal activity
- Suspected acts of terrorism or suspected radicalisation
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal any of these

Safeguards

I. Protection

This policy is designed to offer protection to those employees of SIRM who disclose such concerns provided the disclosure is made:

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- in good faith
- in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it tends to show malpractice or impropriety and if they make the disclosure to an appropriate person (see below). It is important to note that no protection from internal disciplinary procedures is offered to those who choose not to use the procedure. In an extreme case malicious or wild allegations could give rise to legal action on the part of the persons complained about.

II. Confidentiality

SIRM will treat all such disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner. The identity of the individual making the allegation may 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.

III. Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of SIRM.

In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account will include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

IV. Untrue Allegations

If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

Procedures for Making a Disclosure

On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible, to the appropriate designated investigating officer as follows:

- Complaints of malpractice will be investigated by the Manager unless the complaint is against the Director or is in any way related to the actions of the Director. In such cases, the complaint should be passed to the Managing Director.
- In the case of a complaint, which is any way connected with but not against the Manager then the Managing Director will act as the investigating officer.
- Complaints against the Managing Director should be passed to Director of Teaching and Learning who will nominate an appropriate investigating officer.
- The complainant has the right to bypass the line management structure and take their complaint direct to the Managing Director. The Managing Director has the right to refer the complaint back to

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a Director if she feels that the Director can more appropriately investigate the complaint without any conflict of interest.

If there is evidence of criminal activity then the investigating officer should inform the police. SIRM will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder a formal police investigation.

Timescales

Due to the varied nature of these sorts of complaints, which may involve internal investigators and / or the police, it is not possible to lay down precise timescales for such investigations. The investigating officer will ensure that the investigations are undertaken as quickly as possible without affecting the quality and depth of those investigations.

The investigating officer, should as soon as practically possible, send a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed. If the investigation is a prolonged one, the investigating officer should keep the complainant informed, in writing, as to the progress of the investigation and as to when it is likely to be concluded.

All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address.

Investigating Procedure

The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained.
- The investigating officer should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or other representative at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures.
- The investigating officer should consider the involvement of the SIRM auditors and the Police at this stage and should consult with the Managing Director.
- The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals / bodies.
- A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to the Managing Director.
- The Managing Director will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate SIRM procedures.
- The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.
- If appropriate, a copy of the outcomes will be passed to SIRM Senior Management Team (SMT) to enable a review of the procedures.

If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Managing Director or a member of the SMT.

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If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, SIRM recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to the prescribed persons such as:

- Health and Safety Executive
- Skills Funding Agency
- Ofqual
- an MP and/or Local Councillor
- or, where justified, elsewhere