

SOUTH BANK ACADEMIES

Speak Up Policy

Introduction

The South Bank Academies (Trust) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. This Speak Up Policy and procedure supports this commitment.

This Speak Up Policy is about the ways in which concerns about perceived malpractice may properly be raised within the Trust and if necessary outside the Trust.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act gives legal protection to workers against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. Where an individual discovers information which he or she believes shows malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation then it should be disclosed without fear of reprisal, and this may be done independently of line management.

Scope

This Speak Up policy is intended to allow students, staff and others associated with the Trust to raise concerns and disclose information about perceived malpractice.

The term 'malpractice' includes, but is not limited to:

- financial malpractice, impropriety or fraud
- breaches of financial controls, false accounting/reporting, financial and other reporting irregularities
- academic malpractice
- failure to comply with Trust's legal or regulatory obligations – for example about the health and safety of students, employees or the public, anti-discrimination legislation, trading standards or environmental protection laws
- unethical business conduct, where colleagues receive or solicit anything of value from a third party or promise, offer or give anything of value to influence the decision of a third party in procurement or contract execution for Trust
- any other criminal activity, such as assault
- bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation of others
- colleagues who are involved in the taking, buying, selling of drugs or other forms of substance abuse
- a miscarriage of justice
- actions intended to hide any of the above
- behaviour which might damage South Bank Academies' reputation

Aim

All employees have the right to be able to raise a concern about working practices and other areas of concern in the public interest and receive feedback on actions taken. South Bank Academies will seek to engender an ethical and open culture in which establishes safe routes of communication without reprisal, impartial and effective investigative procedures which respect confidentiality. The key principles therefore are to:

- Provide avenues for employees to raise genuine concerns internally as a matter of course and receive feedback on actions taken

- Ensure that matters are dealt with quickly and appropriately and ensure that concerns are taken seriously
- Re-assure employees that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistle-blowing in good faith

Operation

Initially, an employee should normally raise concerns to their line manager or where their line manager is concerned, the Principal. Students are encouraged to raise any concerns with a member of staff who can assist in progressing the concern. Any issues concerning the Principal should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer. Any issues concerning the Chief Executive Officer should be made to the South Bank Academies Audit Committee which is independent of the senior management team, letters for this committee should be sent to the Trust's Head Office address available on the Trust's website.

Ideally, concerns are better raised in writing. The employee should set out the background and history of the concerns, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reasons why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation. If an employee does not feel able to put the concern in writing, the employee should telephone or meet their line manager or Principal. It is important, however that when the concern is raised, the employee makes it clear that they are raising the issue via the Speak Up procedure.

Although an employee is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, they will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for concern.

An initial meeting will be held between their line manager or Principal and the individual raising the concern to establish there is genuine and sufficient grounds for concern and that the concern is appropriately being raised by the Speak Up Policy. Employees may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meetings under this Policy who must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation. A formal record will be kept of this meeting which the person raising the concern will be asked to sign. The line manager or Principal should positively encourage the employee to do this as a concern expressed anonymously is much less powerful and more difficult to address.

After the initial meeting, the line manager or Principal will determine if an investigation is appropriate and what form it should take. A record will be kept of this meeting and the agreed actions. In the case of any concerns regarding the Principal, the Chief Executive will determine if an investigation is appropriate.

The line manager or Principal will communicate with the employee during the investigative process and will write a response at the end of the process outlining the steps that have been taken and provide advice and guidance on further actions if the outcome is deemed inappropriate.

At all stages the identity of the individual raising the concern will be kept confidential as far as possible.

The line manager, Principal or Chief Executive will explain to the employee if that during the process it is uncovered that the allegations are in any way malicious or vexatious, then disciplinary action may be taken against them.

If the investigation finds the allegations to be unfounded the matter will be considered to be closed unless any new evidence is received.

A brief anonymised report of all disclosures and any actions taken will be regularly reported to the South Bank Academies Audit Committee.

Independent reporting line

Alternatively employees can use South Bank Academies' independent reporting line provided by Safecall. You can contact Safecall in confidence by:

- phoning: 0800 915 1571
- emailing: lsbu@safecall.co.uk
- completing a web form available at www.safecall.co.uk/report

Each matter will be considered by the relevant member of the senior management team and the Chair of the Audit Committee, who is independent of the senior management team. If a member of the senior management team is the subject of the disclosure it will be considered solely by the Chair of the Audit Committee.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The South Bank Academies Audit Committee and Chief Executive Officer will monitor the operation and effectiveness of the Speak Up Policy.