Raising Concerns Policy (formerly Whistleblowing)

Policy Number:
014-2014

Academic Year: 2026/2027

Target Audience:

Governors

All Staff

All Students

Volunteers

Contractors

Suppliers

Members of the Public

Summary of Contents

The aim of this policy is to provide individuals with a process to facilitate the reporting of concerns of suspected wrongdoing within the College and highlight the protection afforded to those who disclose concerns under the Disclosure Order.

Enquiries

Any enquiries about the contents of this document should be addressed to:

Title: Deputy Chief Executive

Email Address: policies@serc.ac.uk

Review Information (Responsible Owner):

First Created: 2014

Last Reviewed: August 2026

Next Review: August 2027

Change Type at last Review:

No/~~Minor/Significant~~ ~~(~~delete as appropriate)

Approval/Noting By:

CMT: 9 October 2026

Lead GB Committee: Audit Committee

Governing Body: October 2026

Related Documents:

Anti-Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan

Grievance Policy Non-Teaching Staff
Grievance Policy Lecturing Staff

SERC Financial Regulations

DEL Financial Memorandum FE 1/08 Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998
SERC Complaints and Compliments Policy

Superseded Documents (if applicable):

Whistleblowing Policy (05-2011)

Date of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations Screening (Section 75):

October 2021

Date of Last Accessibility Screening:

November 2024

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 South Eastern Regional College is committed to the highest possible standards of openness and accountability in the delivery of its services. Raising a concern (also known as whistleblowing) relates to anyone internal to or outside the College notifying the College about danger, wrongdoing or illegality that affects others (e.g., staff, students, taxpayers, customers, or members of the public.)

3.0 Purpose and Scope

3.1 The purpose of this policy is:

a) to reassure staff that they can raise genuine concerns about potential wrongdoing in confidence, through a clear internal reporting process without putting their position at risk, and;

b) to provide arrangements through which anyone who is not a member of staff can raise concerns about the proper conduct of public business by the College;

c) to promote a culture in the College whereby staff, students and others have the confidence to raise concerns openly, and where those concerns are dealt with in line with the guidance from NI Audit Office (NIAO) to public bodies.

3.2 This policy applies to members of the Governing Body, staff, students and members of the public who want to raise concerns.

4.0 Policy Statement

4.1 It is the College's policy to:

encourage staff, students, and others to raise issues of concern;

have clear procedures that enable staff, students, and others to raise genuine concerns;

deal with concerns raised in a timely, proportionate, and confidential manner.

ensure that concerns raised are taken seriously;

ensure that any fact-finding and/or investigations follow the approved procedure and that reports, and decisions are documented;

maintain a register of concerns raised (and actions taken) for monitoring by the College's Audit Committee and Sponsor Department in line with statutory requirements.

5.0 Types of Concern

5.1 This policy relates to concerns about suspected malpractice, risk, abuse or wrongdoing within the College. Types of concerns could include, but are not restricted to:

a) risk to children and/or vulnerable adults;

b) unlawful conduct;

c) abuse of public funds;

d) threat to health and safety;

e) failing to safeguard personal and/or sensitive information;

f) a breach of the employee Code of Conduct.

5.2 Personal grievances or dissatisfaction in respect of employment issues are not considered to be whistleblowing and are not dealt with under this policy unless the concern raised is deemed by the College to be in the public interest.

5.3 Issues which affect staff personally, such as a breach of their employment rights, or bullying and harassment will be dealt with under the appropriate College HR Policy, e.g., Dignity at Work or Grievance Policy.

5.4 This policy does not deal with complaints about the College's performance or standards of service and any issues of this nature will be dealt with under the College's Customer and Complaints and Compliments Policy which is available at the following link. Complaints and Compliments Policy – SERC

6.0 Raising Concerns

6.1 Members of College Staff

6.1.1 The Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 provides protection for workers who raise concerns. The Order provides protection to any member of staff who makes a disclosure of information, which, in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure, tends to show one or more of the following:

a) a criminal offence has been committed (e.g., fraud), is being committed or is likely to be committed;

b) a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject;

c) a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;

d) the health and safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered;

e) the environment has been, is being, or is at risk of being damaged;

f) the information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding sub-paragraphs has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

6.1.2 If you are a governor, contractor, trainee, agency worker, volunteer or independent consultant working for the College you are also protected under the Order, and you can raise concerns in the same way as College staff.

6.1.3 Any concerns should be raised (either orally or in writing) with the individual's Head of School or Unit in the first instance and copied to the Deputy Chief Executive. If an oral complaint is made the manager will be responsible for documenting that complaint.

6.1.4 If, for whatever reason, the individual believes that raising the concern with the Head of School/Unit is not appropriate, the concern should be raised with a member of the College Management Team. Contact details for members of the College Management Team are available on the staff intranet.

6.1.5 If the individual believes it is not appropriate to raise the matter with a member of the College Management Team, the matter can be raised with the Governing Body, via the Secretary to the Governing Body who can be contacted at governingbodysecretary@serc.ac.uk .

6.1.6 If the individual feels unable to raise a concern to the College directly, the matter can be raised to the College's Sponsoring Department, Department for the Economy, via its

dedicated mailbox, managed confidentially by the Department's Fraud and Raising Concerns Branch. Email: raising.concerns@economy-ni.gov.uk Phone: 028 9025 7422.

6.1.7 A member of staff who raises a genuine concern under this policy will not be at risk of losing their job/position or suffer any form of detriment as a result, except where the individual has been complicit in the commission of the offence.

6.1.8 A member of staff who believes that they have suffered a detriment as a result of raising a concern can make a complaint in accordance with relevant College procedures, e.g., Dignity at Work.

6.2 Non-Staff Members

6.2.1 Any non-staff member, e.g., student, member of the public can raise a concern using the College's dedicated confidential mailbox: raisingconcerns@serc.ac.uk

6.2.2 If the individual feels unable to raise a concern to the College directly, the matter can be raised to the College's Sponsoring Department, Department for the Economy, via its dedicated mailbox, managed confidentially by the Department's Fraud and Raising Concerns Branch. Email: raising.concerns@economy-ni.gov.uk Phone: 028 9025 7422

6.2.3 While the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 applies to workers (as defined in the Order), the College will endeavour, as far as possible, to apply the same principles in respect of concerns raised by non-staff members.

7.0 Handling Concerns

7.1 On receipt of a concern, the College will acknowledge receipt within five working days and provide the person raising the complaint with a contact point for the process.

7.2 The College will assess what action needs to be taken.

7.3 If the concern is about possible fraud, the College will deal with it by following its Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan, available on the College's website.

7.4 If, after initial assessment by the College, it is deemed the concern falls more properly within the staff Grievance Policy (or other HR Policy), the Complaints Procedure, or that it would be best investigated by another body, for example, the Department for the Economy, PSNI, the individual will be notified.

All concerns raised will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately in accordance with the College's Raising Concerns Response Plan. All enquiries will be undertaken in a proportionate and appropriate manner.

7.5 Information and documentation relating to any concern raised will be restricted in order to protect the identity of all those involved, including those against whom allegations are made.

8.0 Communication

8.1 It is important that the College has as much information as possible in order to undertake enquiries. If a concern is raised anonymously, this will prevent the College from providing feedback and may restrict the College's ability to fully investigate concerns.

9.0 Confidentiality

9.1 Concerns raised will be treated in the strictest confidence and all information is held securely in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations.

9.2 If, in raising a concern, an individual wishes to maintain their confidentiality, this should be stated at the outset so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Confidentiality will be maintained as far as reasonably possible. However, it may not always be feasible to maintain confidentiality if this impedes the fact-finding investigation or the College is required, by law, to disclose details.

10.0 Further Information and Guidance

More information and confidential advice is available from the Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) website Protect - Speak up stop harm (protect-advice.org.uk) Protect is an independent charity that can provide impartial expert advice. They can be contacted by telephone on 020 3117 2520 or completing the Advice Line web form at Contact our Advice Line - Protect - Speak up stop harm (protect-advice.org.uk).

11.0 Review

11.1 This Policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required to reflect changes in legislation or circumstances

12.0 Communication Plan

The Policy will be placed on the SERC intranet and will be available to all staff.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.1	October 2024	Cover updated to reflect recent structure changes. Updated Section: Any enquiries about the content of this document should be addressed to: Deputy Chief Executive Bangor Campus Castle Park Road, Bangor, BT20 4TD Section 6.13 updated to reflect recent structure changes. Updated Section: Any concerns should be raised (either orally or in writing) with the individuals Head of School or Unit in the first instance and copied to the Deputy Chief Executive. Section 6.16 updated to reflect change in contact details of the Department of Economy. Updated Section: Phone: 028 90 257422. Section 6.2.2 updated to reflect change in contact details of the Department of Economy. Updated Section: Phone: 028 90 257422. Section 10 updated to reflect change in contact details of the Department of Economy. Updated Section: They can be contacted by telephone on 020 3117 2520 or completing the Advice Line web form at Contact our Advice Line – Protect – Speak up stop harm (protect-advice.org.uk) Section 11 updated to reflect updated review periods. Updated Section: The policy will be reviewed biennially, or when the need for change has been identified.
1.2	November 2023	Cover sheet updated and review changed to annually
1.3	August 2025	Section 12 updated to reflect communication channels Updated Section: The procedure will be placed on the SERC intranet and will be available to all staff
1.4	August 2026	Reviewed, no changes.