



Oriel College

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Version: v.6

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A. Introduction

The College is committed to conducting itself with honesty and integrity and expects all College members (students, staff and members of Governing Body) to maintain standards which align with this.

However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides employees with legal protection against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of disclosing certain genuine, serious concerns.

The following policy and associated guidance have been designed to assist employees who wish to make such disclosures, and to secure their proper investigation. Although the terms of the Act offer protection specifically to employees, the College's policy is also available to student members and members of Governing Body (Trustees).

B. Scope

This policy covers all employees, academic staff, student members, and members of the Governing Body. This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and the College may amend it at any time.

All College members are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. It is the responsibility of Governing Body to provide a safe environment for all other staff and members of College. This policy is intended to assist College members who believe that they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is intended to do so by fostering an effective culture of keeping people safe which identifies, deters and tackles behaviours which minimise or ignore harm to members of the College and/or covers up or down plays wrongdoing. This policy is not designed to address the following:

- To question financial or business decisions taken by the College.
- To reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under grievance or disciplinary procedures.
- To investigate an individual or collective personnel dispute for which there are established pathways for complaint and resolution.
- To investigate an academic dispute between a student and the College (complaints of this nature should be addressed to the Senior Tutor).

Remit

For the purposes of this policy, 'whistleblowing' is defined as a report by a College member of specific malpractices, detailed below, to the relevant College authorities identified in **Section I**.

Following the relevant legislation, this guidance is directed specifically at the disclosure of information which in the reasonable belief of the person making the disclosure tends to show malpractice involving one or more of the following:

- Criminal activity, including fraud or financial irregularity, corruption, bribery, or blackmail.
- Failure to comply with legal obligations.

- Danger to health and safety, including breaches under measures imposed by the College's Bronze, Silver, and Gold Groups and/or the Major Incident and Planning Committee.
- Sexual harassment that has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur within the College environment
- Damage to the environment.
- Unauthorised disclosures of confidential information
- Negligence
- Academic or professional malpractice.
- A miscarriage of justice.
- Failure to comply with the statutes or policies and procedures of the College.
- The deliberate concealment of any of the above matters.

This policy is not intended to apply to individual grievances. Such matters must be raised under the College's Grievance Procedure for Staff or, for Students, the Complaints Procedure in the Student Handbook.

This policy applies where a concern relates to suspected wrongdoing, risk or illegality affecting, usually with implications beyond an individual's personal circumstances.

Where there is uncertainty as to whether an issue falls within the scope of this policy, advice should be sought from the Treasurer (treasurer@oriel.ox.ac.uk).

C. Information Security Classification

This policy represents an important part of the College's satisfaction of its legal obligations, as well as its commitment to openness, accountability, and opposing all prohibited practices. Therefore, the policy will be posted on the College's website. The policy will also be available through the internal SharePoint resource, and copies will be available from the Governance Officer (governance@oriel.ox.ac.uk).

D. Delegated Authority

The Governing Body have delegated responsibility for this policy to the Audit and Risk Committee. The Committee is responsible, under the guidance of the Treasurer, for ensuring that the policy is kept up to date with current Charity Commission guidance and regulation and remains in line with relevant legislation.

The Treasurer is the owner of this policy. The Treasurer will ensure that all within the College community are aware of their obligations under this policy, and will bring to the attention of the Audit and Risk Committee any reported cases of whistleblowing within the College at each termly meeting of the Committee.

This policy is to be reviewed annually or in line with regulatory/ legislative changes (whichever is sooner).

E. Purpose

The aims of this policy are:

- To encourage staff and students to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
- To provide staff and students with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
- To reassure staff and students that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

F. Definition of Terms

'Whistleblowing'

The definition of whistleblowing is set out in **Section B**.

'Protected Disclosure'

A protected disclosure refers to a disclosure of information, which in the reasonable belief of the member of College making the disclosure, tends to show one of the relevant acts identified in Section B.

G. Procedure

Making a Protected Disclosure

Any member of staff who wishes to report alleged wrongdoing by the College under our Whistleblowing Policy should first put it in writing. The individuals you should send your concerns to are detailed below. If you do not wish to raise your concerns internally with the listed individuals, there are mechanisms for external disclosures set out below.

Non-academic staff should in the first instance raise any concerns with their Head of Department. If the individual raising the concerns reasonably believes his or her head of department is involved in the wrongdoing, or if for any reason the worker does not wish to approach his or her head of department, any concerns should be raised with the Treasurer.

Academic staff and students may raise any concerns with the Senior Tutor, or Senior Dean or directly with the Treasurer.

Once a complaint has been received, the College will write to you within 5 working days to acknowledge receipt, and at that stage we will ask you to provide further details so that we can:

- Investigate it thoroughly.
- Ensure that the complaint falls under our Whistleblowing policy. If on balance the College believes that the matter should be dealt with under another policy then you will be informed of this and advised on which policy would apply.

Investigating a protected disclosure

The Head of Department, Senior Tutor, or Senior Dean will refer the matter to the Treasurer who will either investigate the matter themselves or immediately pass the issue to someone who they feel is appropriate to investigate.

The investigation may involve the individual and other individuals involved in giving a written statement. Any investigation will be carried out in accordance with the principles set out above. The individual's statement will be taken into account, and they will be asked to comment on any additional evidence obtained.

The person who carried out the investigation will then report to the Governing Body, which will take any necessary action, including reporting the matter to any appropriate government department or regulatory agency. If disciplinary action is required, the Treasurer will report the matter to Human Resources, and the disciplinary procedure will be invoked.

On conclusion of any investigation, the individual will be told the outcome of the investigation and any action the Governing Body have taken, or will take, to resolve it. If no action is to be taken, the reason will be explained. However, the College will not be able to inform the individual of any matters which would infringe the duty of confidentiality.

If an individual has concerns with the actioning of this process, they should consult **section I** of this policy.

External Disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and remedying any wrongdoing within the College. In most cases, it is recommended that concerns are raised internally in the first instance. However, there may be situations where individuals may prefer to raise concerns externally or wish to seek external advice prior to raising concerns. It will rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media.

The College has partnered with Health Assured Wisdom Wellbeing to offer all employees, academic staff and members of Governing Body access to a free, confidential and independent Speak Up Service. The service is available 24/7, 365 days a year.

When you call, an advisor will listen, record the details securely and pass the disclosure to a named contact in the College, presently the Head of HR, so that the concern may be reviewed and addressed appropriately with a summary provided directly to the Audit and Risk Committee, which contains both internal and external College members. The service also offers counselling support for anyone who finds the process distressing.

To contact the service, call the freephone helpline on **0800 047 4037**. More details about this service are provided at **Appendix 1**. Further details are available from the HR Department.

The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, also operates a confidential helpline open to everyone. They are able to help you understand your options and rights when it comes to raising concerns in the workplace.

If an individual contacts the confidential helpline they should ensure they inform the person they speak to of the contents of this policy. Protect also has a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

Their contact details are given in **section I** of this policy.

Protection

An individual must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a genuine concern. Staff should be aware that they can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the College for detrimental treatment of someone who has reported wrongdoing. Examples of detrimental treatment include:

- Bullying
- Harassing
- Threatening
- Side-lining
- Singling out or unjustifiably disciplining a colleague.

The College will not tolerate reprisals of any kind, and such behaviour will be dealt with under the College's disciplinary procedures.

Confidentiality and Anonymous Allegations

The College hopes that individuals will be able to voice genuine concerns openly under this policy. Completely anonymous disclosures are difficult to investigate. If an individual wants to raise a concern confidentially, the College will make every effort to keep their identity secret and only reveal it where necessary to those involved in investigating the concern.

Malicious or Vexatious Allegation

If a member of the College makes an allegation based upon genuine concern but it is not confirmed by the subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against them.

In the event of a member of the College making a malicious or vexatious allegation, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned.

Data Protection

All concerns raised will be treated with the strictest confidence and every effort will be made to keep the individual's identity secret unless they consent to its disclosure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating the concern to know the individual's identity, then the College will discuss this with them.

When an individual makes a disclosure, the College will process any personal data collected in accordance with its Data Protection Policy. Data collected from the point at which an individual makes the report is held securely, accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of dealing with the disclosure.

H. Training and Responsibilities

Those who are required to respond to a protected disclosure under **Section G** of this policy (that is, the individual's Head of Department, Senior Tutor, Senior Dean, Treasurer and the Provost) should ensure that they have received appropriate training on how to appropriately respond to concerns raised by whistleblowing.

Other staff and students should ensure that they are aware what constitutes an offence which needs to be reported, and should bear in mind that knowingly concealing knowledge of illegal activity is equally as serious as participating in the activity themselves.

I. Internal Help and Raising Concerns

If the individual is concerned that the investigating officer is involved in the wrongdoing, has failed to make a proper investigation or has failed to report the outcome of the investigations to the Governing Body, then they should inform the Treasurer or Provost as appropriate, who will arrange for another senior member of the College to review the investigation carried out, make any necessary enquiries and make their own report to the Governing Body.

If an individual's concerns relate to the actions of the Treasurer, the individual raising the concerns should approach the Provost who will conduct the procedure set out in **Section G**.

If the concerns raised are in relation to the actions of the Provost then the individual raising the concerns should approach the Vice Provost who will discuss the matter with the chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, and take such action as they believe is appropriate, consistent with the Statutes of the College and employment law.

If, on conclusion of the stages set out in **section G**, the individual reasonably believes that the appropriate action has not been taken, they may wish to raise the concern externally. The College encourages individuals in this instance to seek guidance from the Whistleblowing charity, Protect, as to the appropriate person with whom to raise the concern externally.

Protect can be contacted through their advice line, which is available on their website (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/>).

J. Consequences of Non-Observance

The College reserves the right to take whatever action it feels is appropriate upon conclusion of its investigation(s) into a concern raised in a protected disclosure by an individual.

Generally, the College's disciplinary procedure will be followed.

If an individual is dissatisfied with the College's investigation of their concern, they should consult the guidance set out in **section I** of this policy.

K. Further Help

Further questions regarding the stipulations of this policy should be referred to the Treasurer (treasurer@oriel.ox.ac.uk).

L. Reference

The College has in place a number of policies that work in conjunction with this policy. Therefore, College members should ensure they are familiar with the following policies:

- Bullying and Harassment policy
- Grievance (Staff) Procedure
- Disciplinary (Staff) Procedure
- Academic Disciplinary Procedures
- Student Complaints Procedure
- Fraud Policy
- Anti-bribery Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy

This policy also refers to and is drafted in line with the following legislation and guidance:

- Employment Rights Act 1996 as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
- Employment Rights Act 2025
- Charity Commission guidance on charity whistleblowing
- ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018

M. Version Control Table

Version	Owner	Agreed by Audit and Risk Committee	Agreed by Governing Body	Reason for amendment	Amended by	Next review	Further notes
v.1	Treasurer	2015	17 June 2015	This is the original version		TBC	v.1 and v.2 were recommended to the Governing Body by the General Purposes Committee
v.2	Treasurer	28 October 2020	11 November 2020		HR Manager	TBC	
v.3	Treasurer	23 November 2022	30 November 2022	Review cycle.	Governance Officer	TBC	v.3, v.4 and v.5 were all reviewed by the Finance and Estates Committee prior to policy ownership transferring to Audit and Risk Committee.
v.4	Treasurer	31 January 2024	7 February 2024	Reviewed – awaiting review by government. No change currently.	Governance Officer	Hilary Term 2026	
v.5	Treasurer	14 January 2026	21 January 2026	Review cycle.	Governance Officer	Hilary Term 2028	



v.6	Treasurer	28 May 2026	17 June 2026	Implementation of an external Whistleblowing Service and transfer of ownership to ARC in line with their terms of reference.	Governance Officer	Trinity Term 2028	
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N. Appendices

Appendix 1

Speak Up Service with HA | Wisdom Wellbeing

A confidential whistleblowing service available 24/7, 365

Your organisation has partnered with HA | Wisdom Wellbeing to provide a confidential and independent Speak Up Service for all individuals to access.

Our helpline is available 24/7, 365 days a year and allows you to report whistleblowing, bullying, discrimination and other concerns confidentially and without fear, encouraging a culture of openness and transparency in the workplace.

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| ☺ Free, confidential helpline available 24/7, 365 days a year | ☺ Safeguard employee mental health |
| ☺ Independent, impartial and non-judgemental service | ☺ Improve your return-to-work and attrition rates |
| ☺ Speak to a fully trained advisor | ☺ Foster a positive workplace culture |
| | Foster a positive workplace culture |

Free 24-hour confidential helpline:

UK: 0800 047 4037
ROI: 1800 936 071

