

Whistleblowing Policy



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1. What is “whistleblowing”?

Whistleblowing refers to any member who raises concerns about something such as, but not limited to:

- Harassment or bullying of a member or any other person whilst taking part in any Society activity either on or away from the Observatory premises.
- Puts a member or any other person at risk, or is a safeguarding or child protection issue.
- Is unlawful.
- Is a serious breach of the Society’s policies and procedures.
- Is indecent, violent or is inappropriate behaviour towards any person.
- Falls below established standards of practice or legal requirements (e.g. financial regulations).
- Amounts to impropriety (e.g. where a decision is proposed to be taken on the basis of personal friendship rather than merit).
- Places the health and safety of any person at risk.

2. If you make a disclosure in good faith, pursuant to this policy, you will not be subjected to disciplinary action or victimisation. If a member believes that they are being subjected to a detriment as a result of making a disclosure under this policy, then they should inform the Chair or Secretary.

If the Chair or Secretary believes that they are being subjected to a detriment, then they should report their concerns to another Trustee. If the complaint is about the Chair or Secretary, then the concern should be reported to another Trustee. All concerns reported will be acknowledged.

Any member who victimises or retaliates against those who have made a disclosure under this policy, will be subject to disciplinary action.

- ## 3. If you make an allegation in good faith and reasonably believing it to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, we will recognise your concern and you have nothing to fear. If however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, appropriate action that could include disciplinary action, may be taken.
- ## 4. In making an allegation, if the concern is about an ordinary member, then that concern should be reported to either the Chair or the Secretary.

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5. All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if that is your wish. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of your disclosure without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered advice and support.
6. You are encouraged to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for us to address your concerns or to give you feedback.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they may be considered at the discretion of the Trustees. In exercising this discretion the factors to be considered would include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised
- the credibility of the concern, and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources

7. If the whistleblower requires anonymity, then we may only be able to take the investigation so far, as they may be the only witness. We will then need to go back to the whistleblower and explain this. Furthermore, in some cases, we may not be able to guarantee anonymity. Whilst we recognise that this could discourage people from reporting things, if the incident is something that is continuing to put someone at serious risk, we have a duty to act even if it involves disclosing the identity of the whistleblower.
8. We will respond to your concerns as quickly as possible.
9. In order to be fair to all members, including those who may be wrongly or mistakenly accused, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.
10. The investigation may need to be carried out under terms of strict confidentiality, i.e. by not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. In certain cases however, such as allegations of ill treatment of others, suspension from membership may have to be considered immediately. Protection of others is paramount in all cases.

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Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by the Trustees, internal audit, or through the disciplinary/grievance process
- be referred to the police
- be referred and put through established child protection/abuse procedures/safeguarding procedures
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Within five days of a concern being raised, the person investigating your concern will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how the matter will be dealt with
- supplying you with information on support mechanisms
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

11. The amount of contact between you and the persons considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of your information. It is likely that you will be interviewed to ensure that your disclosure is fully understood.

Any meeting can be arranged if you wish, and another member or a friend may accompany you in support.

12. We will do what we can to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are asked to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, we will arrange for you to receive appropriate advice and support.
13. You need to be assured that your disclosure has been properly addressed. Unless there are any legal reasons why this cannot be done, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.
14. This is not a replacement for the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure is still the best route for someone that feels that they have been personally mis-treated. The policy can be found here:
https://www.sherwoodobservatory.org.uk/msas/policies/Compliments_comments_and_complaints.pdf

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The Whistleblowing Policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

Compliments, Comments, and Complaints
Equality, Dignity and Diversity
Settling Differences and Members Conduct Policy
Members Code of Conduct
Safeguarding Policy

These policies, and further policies of the Society, can be found here:

<https://www.sherwood-observatory.org.uk/the-society/society-documents/policies>