

Key Change From Previous Revision:

New policy format

1. STATEMENT

This policy is to give guidance to staff on how to report genuine concerns of wrongdoing or malpractice or inadequacies in the provision of services, and to provide protection for those staff.

This policy will be reviewed by the organisation every two years from the date of implementation.

Any enquiries regarding the application of this procedure should be referred to the NIBTS Human Resources Department.

2. OVERVIEW

The Agency appreciates that at times employees may have concerns about what is happening at work. Usually these concerns are easily resolved. However, when they are about dangers to or ill treatment of service users, staff or the public, issues relating to the quality of care provided, professional misconduct, unlawful conduct, financial malpractice, fraud, health and safety, or dangers to the environment, it can be difficult to know what to do.

You may be worried about raising such issues. You may want to keep the concerns to yourself, perhaps feeling it's none of your business or that it's only a suspicion. You may feel that raising the matter would be disloyal to colleagues, managers or the organisation. You may decide to say something but find you have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next. You may also not be clear how your own professional code of conduct relates to Agency procedures.

3. RESPONSIBILITY**Your responsibilities**

The Agency wishes to encourage you to highlight areas where you are aware of inadequacies in the provision of services. In doing so concerns can be addressed at the earliest opportunity thus ensuring an overall improvement in the level of services provided to service users.

In particular you have a responsibility to:

- report any genuine concern of wrongdoing or malpractice either to your line manager or via one of the options set out in SOP:PE:006 'Whistleblowing Procedure for Raising Concerns at Work'. Proof of wrongdoing is not required, merely a genuine and reasonable concern. At the same time, you have an equal responsibility not to raise issues maliciously, where no potential evidence or indication of malpractice or danger exists.

You must also:

- familiarise yourself with and to understand this policy and associated SOP (PE:006)
- be aware that information given unjustifiably to the media may unreasonably undermine public confidence in the Agency and Health and Social Care generally.

Our Responsibilities

All **managers** contacted by a member of staff, are responsible for:

- ensuring at the earliest opportunity that the appropriate action is taken in line with SOP:PE:006, considering the nature and seriousness of the concern raised, including informing others, responding to concerns quickly and in confidence and taking all concerns seriously. This action will include deciding how any person, against whom an allegation is made, is informed of the matter, ensuring that the investigation is not jeopardised by the disclosure.
- supporting and reassuring those raising concerns - it is recognised that raising concerns can be difficult and stressful
- responding to all concerns without pre-judging
- recording all concerns, including the date the concern was raised, dates of interviews with employees, who was present at each interview and the action agreed
- keeping all records safely and securely

The **Agency's Senior Management Team**, through the Head of Human Resources & Corporate Services is responsible for:

- ensuring that these procedures are explained to all new staff, as part of NIBTS Induction.
- protecting the interests and confidentiality of staff, for treating any concerns raised seriously, and for investigating them fairly and thoroughly.
- The Head of HR & Corporate Services will be responsible for reviewing and updating this policy as appropriate.

4. POLICY

4.1 PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1998

The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 was introduced to protect anyone who raises concerns from detriment and / or dismissal, and this policy encompasses the requirements of that Order.

The 1998 Order has a tiered approach to disclosures which most easily gives workers protection for raising a concern internally. It is intended that this policy and associated procedure provide reassurance to staff who wish to raise such matters internally. Guidance from a range of regulatory / professional bodies encourages registrants to raise their concerns internally to ensure the maximum level of protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act.

Further details of the Order can be found using the following web address:
<http://www.pcaw.co.uk/law/pida.htm>.

4.2 PURPOSE AND AIMS

Purpose

The Agency is committed to developing a culture of responsible openness and constructive criticism and to encouraging all staff to contribute views on all aspects of the Agency's activities including clinical care. It has introduced this policy to enable you to raise any concerns you may have about a range of matters at an early stage and in the right way.

Aims:

- Provide an avenue for you to raise a concern internally as a matter of course, and receive feedback on any action taken;
- Provide for matters to be dealt with quickly and appropriately and ensure that they are taken seriously;
- Reassure you that you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for raising the concern in good faith;
- Allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the Agency's response.

4.3 POLICY STATEMENT

The Agency would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than waiting for proof. It is important to raise any concerns at an early stage, on the basis of any level of concern or relevant information. Indeed, if you have serious suspicions that an offence has been committed, you must report them as soon as possible. We all have a responsibility to protect the Agency, its service users, staff and public. **If in doubt – raise it!**

If something is troubling you that you think the Agency should know about or look into, please use the Procedure for Raising Concerns at Work – see SOP:PE:006.

You should never accuse individuals directly, and telling the wrong person(s) may jeopardise an investigation.

Our assurances to you:

Your safety

The Chairman, Chief Executive, Agency Board & SMT are committed to this Policy. If you raise a genuine concern under this Policy, you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided you are acting in good faith, it does not matter if you are mistaken. Of course, this same assurance is not extended to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know is untrue, and in such cases disciplinary action will be considered.

Your confidence

Confidentiality

The Agency will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern under this Policy. However, we recognise that you may nonetheless wish to raise a concern in confidence. If you ask us to protect your identity by keeping your confidence, we will respect your request and it will not be disclosed without your consent. However a situation may arise where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity (for instance because evidence is needed in court, or the Agency has to act on the information), and this will be discussed with you in advance of any disclosure.

Anonymous allegations

Remember that if you do not tell us who you are, it will be much more difficult for us to look into the matter or to protect your position or to give you feedback. Whilst we will give due consideration to anonymous reports, we cannot follow the procedure set out in SOP:PE:006 for concerns raised anonymously. The Agency endeavours to promote a supportive environment in which you are able to express your concerns in confidence, thereby hopefully negating the need for raising concerns anonymously.

4.4 SCOPE OF POLICY

This Policy applies to you whether you are a permanent, temporary or bank employee. The Agency is also very dependent on a wide range of contractors, suppliers, and others not directly employed by the Agency such as agency staff, trainees, voluntary workers, secondees or anyone on a work experience placement – the policy applies to all individuals in these categories where there are concerns about the activities of the Agency.

4.5 HOW WE WILL HANDLE YOUR CONCERN

Once you have told us of your concern, we will look into it to assess initially what action should be taken. This may involve an internal enquiry or a more formal investigation. We will tell you who is handling the matter, how you can contact him/her, the timescale for action and whether your further assistance may be needed.

When you raise the concern you may be asked how you think the matter might best be resolved. If you do have any personal interest in the matter, we do ask that you tell us at the outset. If your concern falls more properly within the Grievance Procedure we will tell you.

While the purpose of this policy is to enable us to investigate possible malpractice and take appropriate steps to deal with it, we will give you as much feedback as we properly can and confirm our response in writing. Please note that we may not be able to tell you the precise action we take where this would infringe a duty of confidence owed by us to someone else.

5. EQUALITY SCREENING AND ACCESSIBILITY

This policy has been drawn up and reviewed in light of the statutory obligations contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). In line with this statutory duty of equality this policy has been screened against particular criteria. If at any stage of the life of the policy there are any issues within the policy which are perceived by any party as creating adverse impacts on any of the groups under Section 75 that party should bring these to the attention of the Head of HR & Corporate Services.

The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity for staff, donors and service users. We strive to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and that their rights are respected at all times. We believe that it is important that our policy is understood by all those whose literacy is limited, those who do not speak English as a first language or those who face communication barriers because of a disability. On request it may be possible to make this policy available in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, disk, audio file, audio cassette, Easy Read or in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

6. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

All staff are required to make themselves familiar with this policy.