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| <b>Policy name:</b>                 | <b>Whistleblowing (Disclosure in the Public Interest)</b> |
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| <b>Linked to other policies</b>                 | <b>Owner</b>             |
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| Safeguarding                                    | Cross College Policy/ABA |
| Freedom of Information                          | Cross College Policy/AHO |
| Data Protection                                 | Cross College Policy/AHO |
| Fraud & Corruption (including money laundering) | Cross College Policy/DBL |
| Anti-Bribery                                    | Cross College Policy/DBL |
| Hospitality & Gifts                             | Cross College Policy/DBL |

Aquinas College, through its policies and day to day work is committed to promoting equality and fairness. This applies to everyone, regardless of gender, racial or ethnic background, disability, religion, sexual orientation or age and embraces the College’s legal responsibility.

The persons/group responsible for this document reserve the right to amend this document at any time should the need arise. All appropriate staff will be informed should this occur.

## **Whistleblowing (Disclosure in the Public Interest)**

### **1. Introduction**

The College is committed to operating in an ethical and principled way. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide employees and workers (referred to as 'workers' in this policy) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious wrongdoings.

The College encourages workers to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing at the earliest practicable stage. This policy and procedure is intended to provide safeguards to enable members of staff to raise concerns about malpractice in connection with the College.

This policy and procedure also aims to encourage workers to raise genuine concerns through internal College procedures without fear of adverse repercussions in line with the **Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998**. The law allows workers to raise such concerns externally and this policy informs workers how they can do so. However, a failure to raise a concern under this procedure may result in a disclosure losing its protected status under the law.

This policy and procedure also seeks to balance the need to allow a culture of openness against the need to protect other workers against vexatious allegations or allegations which are not well-founded.

The principles of openness and accountability which underpin legislation protecting whistleblowers are reflected in this policy and procedure. The College is also committed to ensuring compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.

Learners at the College are also encouraged to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing by making a complaint through the college's complaints Procedure available from the Principal's PA.

This policy and procedure is designed for the use of workers of the College.

Linked to this Policy are procedures for the following specific areas:

- Fraud and Corruption Policy (including money laundering)
- Hospitality & Gifts
- Anti-Bribery

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following college policies:

- Safeguarding
- Data Protection
- Freedom of Information

Copies of which are available on the college's Google Drive

### **2. Applicability of this policy and procedure**

This policy applies to all employees of the College, including apprentices; and

- Workers which includes any casual workers; home-based casual workers; and employees of subcontractors; and
- Agency workers engaged by the College.

Workers might be unsure whether it is appropriate to raise their concern under this policy and procedure or whether it is a personal grievance, which is more appropriate to raise under the College's grievance procedure. Any worker in this situation is encouraged to approach the Human Resources Department in confidence for advice.

### **3. Protected disclosures**

The law protects workers who, out of a sense of public duty, want to reveal suspected wrongdoing or malpractice. The law allows workers to raise what it defines as a 'protected disclosure'. In order to be a protected disclosure, a disclosure must relate to a specific subject matter (See Section 4 below) and the disclosure must also be made in an appropriate way (See Section 5). A 'protected disclosure' must, in the reasonable belief of the worker making it, also be made in the public interest. A protected disclosure must consist of information and not merely be allegations of suspected malpractice.

### **4. Specific Subject Matter**

If, in the course of employment, a worker becomes aware of information which they reasonably believe tends to show one or more of the following, they must use this policy and procedure:

- That a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
- That an individual has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject;
- That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur;
- That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be, endangered;
- That the environment, has been, is being, or is likely to be, damaged;
- That information tending to show any of the above, is being, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

### **5. Procedure for making a disclosure**

Information which a worker reasonably believes tends to show one or more of the situations given in Section 4 should promptly be disclosed to their line manager so that any appropriate action can be taken.

If it is inappropriate to make such a disclosure to their line manager, a worker can raise the issue with an appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team or directly to the Principal.

If the disclosure relates to the Principal, a worker can raise the issue with the Clerk to the Governing Body. In the event that the disclosure relates to the Clerk to the Governing Body, a worker can raise the issue with the Chair of Governors.

Workers are encouraged to identify themselves when making a disclosure. If an anonymous disclosure is made, the College will not be in a position to notify the individual making the disclosure of the outcome of action taken by the College. Anonymity also means that the College will have difficulty in investigating such a concern. The College reserves the right to determine whether to apply this procedure in respect of an anonymised disclosure in light of the following considerations:

- The seriousness of the issues raised in the disclosure;
- The credibility of the concern; and
- How likely it is that the concern can be confirmed from attributable sources.

For further guidance in relation to this policy and procedure, or concerning the use of the disclosure procedure generally, employees should speak in confidence to the HR Manager.

### **6. Procedure for investigation of a disclosure**

When a worker makes a disclosure, the College will acknowledge its receipt, in writing.

The College will then determine whether or not it believes that the disclosure has sufficient substance or merit. If the College considers that the disclosure does not have sufficient merit to warrant further action, the worker will be notified in writing of the reasons for the College's decision and advised that no further action will be taken by the College under this policy and procedure.

Considerations to be taken into account when making this determination may include the following:

- If the College is satisfied that a worker does not have a reasonable belief that suspected malpractice is occurring; or
- If the matter is already the subject of legal proceedings or appropriate action by an external body; or
- If the matter is already subject to another, appropriate College procedure.

When a worker makes a disclosure which has sufficient substance or merit warranting further action, the College will take action it deems appropriate (including action under any other applicable College policy or procedure). Possible actions could include internal investigation; referral to the College's auditors; or referral to relevant external bodies such as the police, Ofsted, Health and Safety Executive or the Information Commissioner's Office.

If appropriate, any internal investigation would be conducted by a manager of the College without any direct association with the individual to whom the disclosure relates, or by an external investigator appointed by the College as appropriate.

Any recommendations for further action made by the College will be addressed to the Principal or Chair of Governors as appropriate in the circumstances. The recipient will take all steps within their power to ensure the recommendations are implemented unless there are good reasons for not doing so.

The worker making the disclosure will be notified of the outcome of any action taken by the College under this policy and procedure. If the worker is not satisfied that their concern has been appropriately addressed, they can appeal against the outcome by raising the issue with the Principal within 5 working days. The Principal will make a final decision on action to be taken and notify the worker making the disclosure.

## **7. Safeguards for workers making a disclosure**

A worker making a disclosure under this procedure can expect their matter to be treated confidentially by the College and, where applicable, their name will not be disclosed to anyone implicated in the suspected wrongdoing, without their prior approval.

The College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any report of recommendations, or other relevant documentation, produced by the College does not identify the worker making the disclosure without their written consent, or unless the College is legally obliged to do so, or for the purposes of seeking legal advice.

No formal disciplinary action will be taken against a worker on the grounds of making a disclosure made under this policy or procedure. This does not prevent the College from bringing disciplinary action against a worker where the College has grounds to believe that a disclosure was made maliciously or vexatiously, or where a disclosure is made outside the College unreasonably and without first pursuing it under the details of this policy.

A worker will not suffer dismissal or any detrimental action or omission of any type (including informal pressure or any form of victimisation) by the College for making a disclosure in accordance with this policy and procedure. Equally, where a worker is threatened, bullied, pressurised or victimised by a colleague for making a disclosure, disciplinary action will be taken by the College against the colleague in question.

## **8. Disclosure to external bodies**

This policy and procedure has been implemented to allow workers to raise disclosures internally within the College. A worker has the right to make a disclosure outside the College where there are reasonable grounds to do so and in accordance with the law.

If, on conclusion of the above stages, you reasonably believe that appropriate action has not been taken, you may then report the matter externally to the proper authority in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The Act sets out a number of prescribed external bodies or persons to which qualifying disclosures may be made and you can access these at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>. However, the College always encourages all employees, workers, agency workers, consultants and contractors to raise their concerns directly in the first instance, rather than externally. This enables issues to be dealt with promptly and speedily.

Workers can also make disclosures on a confidential basis to a practising solicitor or barrister. If a worker seeks advice outside the College, they must be careful not to breach any confidentiality obligations or damage the College's reputation in so doing.

## **9. Accountability**

The College will keep a record of all concerns raised under this policy and procedure (including cases where the College deems that there is no case to answer and therefore that no action should be taken) and will report to the Governing Body on an annual basis as appropriate.

## **10. Further assistance for workers**

The College will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of workers who make disclosures. If, at any stage of this procedure a worker feels that they are being subject to informal pressures, bullying or harassment due to making a disclosure, they should raise this matter, in writing, to the Principal.

A worker making a disclosure may want to confidentially request counselling or other support from the College's occupational health service. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to the HR Manager. Such a request would be made in confidence.

Workers can also contact the charity Public Concern at Work for confidential advice on whistleblowing issues. Contact details are as follows:

3rd Floor, Bank Chambers  
6 - 10 Borough High Street  
London SE1 9QQ

Whistleblowing Advice Line: 020 7404 6609 <http://www.pcaw.org.uk>