

Reporting concerns about wrongdoing at UEA: our approach to Student Whistleblowing

A policy designed to reassure and advise students who want to raise a concern with the university about apparent serious wrongdoing.

What is whistleblowing?

Whistleblowing is the term we are using for situations in which a student raises concerns with the university about any of the following serious issues:

1. That another student is cheating on an assessment, such as colluding with another student, plagiarising, or buying essays.
2. That research misconduct is taking place, such as data being falsified.
3. That another student is behaving in a way that is of serious concern.
4. That a criminal offence is being or is likely to be committed.
5. That financial impropriety is taking place, such as fraud, theft, bribery or misreporting.
6. That a person has failed, is failing, or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation they have, which includes their obligations under the University Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations.
7. That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur.
8. That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being or is likely to be endangered. This should be interpreted widely, to include (for example) harassment.
9. That the environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged.
10. That any of the above has been, is being, or is likely to be deliberately concealed.

As a student, you may want to provide the university with information about one of the above issues, but be concerned about what this means for you. For example, you might be worried that you could be bullied as a result of reporting another student cheating, or be victimised by a member of staff.

Some examples:

- James is a third year science student. He is concerned because another student has told him that she paid for someone else to write her coursework, and suggested James use the same company. James believes that cheating in assessments devalues the degree of everyone who has behaved honestly and worked hard – but he is concerned that if he reports this to his school the student concerned will harass him.
- Abdiya is a first year medical student. She is concerned that a fellow student is using drugs and that this may affect his care of patients. She wants the university to step in, but she doesn't really want her name brought into it.
- Miguel is a PhD student who has become concerned that equipment in his lab is not safe and that he is being asked to work without safety goggles. He has

raised this informally but doesn't feel that he is being taken seriously. He doesn't want his school to see him as a troublemaker, especially as some new teaching positions have become available.

This policy is intended to provide you with reassurance and an explanation of what to expect.

Before we discuss this, there is one important consideration.

An important note

Students who are also workers

There are special legal protections for 'workers' who are reporting certain kinds of concern. UEA has a number of students who are also workers working for UEA, and if you are one of them and your concern relates to numbers 4 to 9 above (or to concealing 4 to 9 above) and your report is made in the public interest, then you may be protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. You should therefore read [UEA's Public Interest Disclosure Policy](#) instead of this document. For more information, see the [Flowchart](#).

It does not matter whether or whether the concern came to your attention in your capacity as a student or as a worker, or whether it is about a student matter or a staff matter.

For example:

- Yousef is a PhD student and also employed by his supervisor as a research assistant. He wishes to report the theft of some equipment by a colleague. He should read and follow [UEA's Public Interest Disclosure Policy](#) because he is a worker.
- Kate is a student who is also a paid ambassador on open days. She is concerned that another student has cheated on a test. Because her disclosure is not covered by numbers 4 to 9 above, she uses this policy even though she is also a worker.

The aims of this policy

We want everyone here at UEA, whether staff or student, to act with integrity. Acts or omissions that are illegal or which affect the reputation of the university or the wellbeing of someone at the university or in the wider community are harmful to us all. UEA is committed to the highest standards of openness and accountability.

The aims of this policy are to encourage you to report suspected wrongdoing to the university as soon as possible, but to feel safe doing so and to know that your concerns will be taken seriously. The university recognises that you may be very worried about what will happen if you do so, and you may feel in a moral dilemma. This document is designed to reassure students who make a report to the university, i.e., an internal

report, but who are concerned that as a result of doing so they might be bullied, victimised, or retaliated against.

You may also be concerned about the wellbeing of, or implications for, any person that you are reporting concerns about. Please rest assured that the university will always strive to be fair, and will be mindful about the wellbeing of everyone involved.

Remember that any time you are worried about another other student's welfare you can speak to someone in the Student Support Service.

Reporting your concerns

There are a number of policies and processes at UEA that may involve the kinds of things listed above, such as:

- Academic and non-academic complaints
- Student harassment and sexual or physical misconduct
- Misconduct in research
- Health and safety policies
- Professional schools' "cause for concern" or "fitness to practise" policies
- Data protection policy

This document applies irrespective of whether there is an applicable policy, and irrespective of whether any policy explicitly provides these kinds of protections. This policy supersedes any weaker protections for students contained in other policies.

Confidentiality and anonymous reports

We strongly encourage you to put your name to any report that you make. Concerns that are anonymous are much less powerful and much harder to verify. Moreover, not putting your name to the report may mean that the behaviour that you are worried about cannot be investigated or that any investigation is fatally undermined. This may allow harmful behaviour to continue.

Where a report is made anonymously, or by students who do not wish their names to be communicated onwards to the relevant parties, the university may consider them at its discretion. Whether it will do so depends on the seriousness of the issues being raised, the credibility of the concern, and the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable (i.e., non-anonymous) sources.

Safeguards for you

There are two key safeguards:

- (1) *Protecting you from formal action by the university.*

Here, we promise that you won't face any disciplinary action for raising a genuine concern as long as:

- you have reported your concern to the university; and
- your concern was raised in good faith

even if it turns out that your concern was mistaken.

However, sometimes a complaint can be made vexatiously, to stir up trouble, or for personal gain. Regulation 10.1.11. of the General Regulations for Students makes it a disciplinary offence to make a complaint against another student or any member of staff or officer of the University that is motivated by malice and/or mischievousness, or which is vexatious or that you know to be untrue. In these situations, the university may take disciplinary action against you.

(2) Protecting you from other forms of retaliation by staff or students

The university takes any allegations of retaliation or victimisation extremely seriously. It has a number of actions that it can take. These can include preventing individuals from contacting you or being in the same place as you, suspending them, expelling or dismissing them, limiting access to certain university spaces, or ensuring the presence of a neutral third party at any meetings.

Who to tell

Raising the concern

You should report your concern under the policy that deals with the type of complaint that you have. Here is some useful guidance:

- For both academic and non-academic matters there are policies and forms that can be found on the Learning and Teaching Service website and the hub can provide information on what to do. See <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching/students/forms>. For PGR students, the Postgraduate Research Service has its own form at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/postgraduate-research/pgr-regulations-and-forms> and will be able to offer you advice.
- If you are concerned about harassment and sexual or physical misconduct, there are experienced advisers in the Student Support Service. Their policy is at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/6816233/Harassment+and+Sexual+or+Physical+Misconduct+Policy+2018+Final.pdf/9cf14e39-b670-ef53-e268-841abf1ea632>.
- For research misconduct, you should contact your Head of School. See <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/rin/research-integrity/research-integrity-primary-contacts>.
- For health and safety, you should speak to your Head of School or, in the case of an issue in accommodation, the Accommodation Office. You can also seek advice and guidance from University Safety Services. Their information is here <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/uss>.

- If your concern relates to a professional school such as MED, SWK, HSC, EDU, and PHA, you will find the “cause for concern” or “fitness to practise” policies in your school handbook. All academic staff in these schools will know what to do, but your school will have a professional fitness to practise lead.
- For data protection issues, the university has a Data Protection Officer who is responsible for how the university uses data including reporting breaches of data. More information and contact information can be found at <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/information-services/strategy-planning-and-compliance/regulations-and-policies/information-regulations-and-policies/data-protection>.

Remember that if you work for the university and if your complaint relates to numbers 4 to 9 on the front page of this policy, you should look at the staff whistleblowing policy instead because you have additional legal protections.

If you're not sure what route to take, you can seek advice from the Advice(SU). They can help you to raise your concerns and guide you through the relevant process. Where you are at all unsure, we strongly recommend this as a first step.

Once you have raised the concern

If you feel that you are being retaliated against as a result of raising a concern, or if you feel that your concerns are being ignored, then you should tell the Director of Student Services. If the Director of Student Services is the person you are concerned about, you should tell the Director of Student and Academic Services. Advice(SU) can help you with this.

The Director of Student Services or the Director of University and Student Services will investigate and refer the matter to the University Disciplinary Officer, Human Resources Division, or another appropriate decision maker to consider whether steps are required to protect you.

Example

Let's go back to James, the third year science student who has now told his school that another student paid for someone else to write her coursework. (This is called 'contract cheating' and you can find more about this [here](#).) Let's say that as a result of telling his school about this, he has received a series of abusive text messages from the other student.

James should report this to this to the Director of Student Services who, through the University Disciplinary Officer, may order the other student not to contact James, and to stay away from James' campus accommodation. As the students have a seminar together, the UDO speaks to James about this and subsequently arranges for one of them to move into a different seminar group.

Outcomes

We will try to tell you what happens as a result of any issues you have raised. Sometimes we may have to be vague about this because of a duty of confidentiality owed to another person. Remember that it's the university's responsibility to investigate that allegation fairly, and you are not responsible for the outcome.