



OWLS Academy Trust

Anti-Fraud Policy

Adopted by The OWLS Academy Trust on	
Next Review Due	

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Applicable to: All Staff
Prepared by: Finance
Date: annually

POLICY STATEMENT

The Academy has a duty to protect public assets; to ensure that management and other practices accord with the standards of probity expected of public sector bodies; and to ensure that the resources available to it are used only in furtherance of the Academy's objectives as an educational body. Fraud, corruption, or any other kind of financial misconduct or irregularity cannot be tolerated.

An irregularity may be defined as any breach of the standards of financial integrity required by the Academy, including a breach of the Financial Regulations. This includes any instance, which has been made possible due to the actions or inactions of a member of staff even if there was no gain to them.

Irregularities fall broadly within the following categories, the first three of which are criminal, as well as disciplinary, offences ('person' includes corporate bodies, including limited companies, local authorities, other employees and students):

Theft: the dishonest taking of property belonging to another with the intention of depriving that person permanently of its possession.

Fraud: the intentional distortion of financial statements or other records by persons external or internal to the Academy, to conceal the misappropriation of assets or otherwise. This includes the distortion of records to conceal losses caused accidentally or by a third party.

Bribery: the receiving of an inducement for an action which is illegal, unethical or in breach of trust.

Corruption: the offering, giving, soliciting or acceptance of an inducement or reward that may influence the actions of any person. Both parties are equally guilty of an offence.

Other irregularity: failure to observe the Academy's Financial Regulations, policies and procedures. This includes failure to take appropriate action after becoming aware of such failure by another person.

The aftermath of financial misconduct is costly, time-consuming, disruptive and unpleasant. The major thrust of the Academy's strategy is therefore, prevention.

1.0 Prevention

1.1 Risks

Examples of common types of internal fraud are documented in the Appendix (Source: CIMA; Appendix 2 of Fraud Risk Management: a guide to good practice). The largest irregularities in educational establishments typically have involved regular misappropriations over a period of years. The three areas most vulnerable to fraud in schools are cash handling, cheque handling and the operation of the purchase ledger. The misuse of information technology is also a major risk and one that is potentially growing in importance with the increase in technology.

1.2 Procedures/Systems to deal with risks

Fraud can be minimised through carefully designed and consistently operated management procedures, in particular, financial policies and procedures and Financial Regulations. The Academy will therefore ensure that management procedures, as described below, are effective and that staff receive training in the operation of them.

- Segregation of duties in use of financial systems is practiced, so, for example, no individual has undue management of payments, income or assets.
- The institution has clear roles and responsibilities, with set levels of authority for authorising transactions
- Systems will be protected with electronic access restrictions to prevent the possible misuse of information technology.

1.3 Leadership

Key determinants of the standards of behaviour in any organisation will be the standards observed by senior members of staff, and the policies and approach to their enforcement promoted from the senior staff.

The Academy's Governing Body and senior managers should therefore ensure that their behaviour is always demonstrably selfless.

Clear policies on commercial ethics, registration and declaration of interests and accepting hospitality and gifts, are part of the purchasing policy and need to be observed, and seen to be observed.

1.4 Prosecution of offenders

The Police advise that prosecution is a particularly effective deterrent because of the risk of a custodial sentence and a criminal record. However, the threat of prosecution only deters if the threat is real. Therefore, the policy is that the Academy reserves the right to report to the Police, irrespective of the status of the individual. The Academy will undertake disciplinary action, and reserves the right to take legal action, in addition to reporting offenders to the Police.

1.5 Employee Screening

Potential new members of staff will be screened before appointment, particularly for posts with financial responsibility. For example:

- references should cover a reasonable, continuous period; and any gaps should be explained;
- an official employer's reference should be obtained;

- offers of appointment to be made subject to receipt of satisfactory references and any doubts about the contents of the reference should be resolved before confirming the appointment. If this is done by telephone, a written record of the discussion should be kept to comply with employment law
- essential qualifications and CRB checks are made

Recruitment procedures require that members of recruitment panels will declare any relationships or connections with candidates prior to their involvement with the process.

1.6 The Role of Auditors

Management would seek to involve the Responsible Officer and/or external audit to advise on building in ways of preventing or detecting fraud when new systems are being designed or existing systems are to be modified. Auditors will have regard to fraud preventative measures as part of its ongoing work.

External audit's reviews of financial checks and balances and validation testing provide further deterrence. Auditors may also wish to assess systems in place to deter corruption.

Both internal and external auditors have a full right of access at all reasonable times to all Academy property, assets, documents and financial and other records. The auditors are also entitled to seek explanations from any member of the Academy's staff.

In addition, the Academy will regard the misleading of auditors, including the withholding of relevant information, as gross misconduct in its own right.

2.0 Detection and Reporting of Suspected Financial Irregularity

2.1 Internal Management Systems

Efficient management systems are imperative if fraud is to be detected rapidly; the systematic review of every transaction minimises the risk of processing an irregular transaction. Detective checks and balances will be designed into all systems and applied consistently. This includes segregation of duties, reconciliation procedures, random checking of transactions, and review of management accounting information, including exception reports.

2.2 Public Interest Disclosure ('Whistleblowing') Procedure

If an individual has reason to suspect that fraud is taking place (or has taken place), they are expected to bring it to the attention of Academy authorities as described in the Academy's Whistleblowing Policy. This describes to whom an individual should report their suspicions, and the protection offered to employees raising such a suspicion.

2.3 Potentially Suspicious Behaviour

Staff members who have committed serious financial irregularities may attempt to conceal this by taking few holidays, regularly working alone late or at weekends,

being resistant to delegation or resenting questions about work. If any suspicions are raised they should be discussed with the Principal or the Finance Director. Any indication that a member of staff may be addicted to drugs, alcohol or gambling should also be discussed with the Principal or the Finance Director. This is both for the welfare of the individual and to minimise the risks to the Academy, which might include fraud. Any action should be taken with an assessment of the scale of risk in mind.

Any suspicion will be investigated and dealt with in accordance with the procedure described in Section 3.

3.0 Investigation of Suspected Irregularity

Once an irregularity is suspected, reported or disclosed, whether it relates to fraud, a whistleblowing disclosure or an ethical issue, it is critical that any investigation is conducted in a professional manner, in accordance with the following procedures.

The Principal or the Finance Director should be informed of a suspected irregularity without delay. At this point, the circumstances and nature of the matter raised and the remedies being sought will be taken into account in determining the course of action to be taken which is likely to be one or more of the following:

- The Principal can immediately refer the matter to another appropriate external authority such as the Police or a professional body.
- The matter can be referred to an individual, an Investigating Officer, appointed by the Principal, who has the appropriate expertise and seniority to decide whether there is a prima facie case to answer. In cases of fraud, this will normally be the Finance Director. The Finance Director, with the Principal, will decide whether an investigation should be conducted and if so, the remit of the investigation, who should undertake the investigation, what form it should take and the scope of the concluding report. Internal investigations will be conducted in a manner which ensures that those involved in the investigation will be different from those who may be required subsequently to conduct any disciplinary proceedings.

Some special investigations may require the use of technical or specialist expertise in which case an external specialist (such as the Responsible Officer or external auditor) may be employed as the Investigating Officer or to contribute to the investigation.

The report of the investigation may conclude that there is no case to answer or that disciplinary procedures should be applied or that there should be some other special investigation, either internal or external. If it is decided that more than one of these means is appropriate, the Finance Director, with the Principal should satisfy themselves that such a course of action is warranted.

- In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Principal to liaise directly or indirectly with the parties involved to seek a resolution. Should a satisfactory resolution not be attainable through these means, one of the alternative courses of action set out above may then be followed.

The Principal will normally inform the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Audit Committee that an investigation is taking place.

At an appropriate point in time, the Principal will (subject to the potential materiality of the irregularity with respect to damage to the reputation of the institution and/or financial loss) consider informing:

- The Academy's Insurers
- The Executive Principal
- The Academy's External Auditors

In the event that it is not appropriate to disclose information to the Principal, concerns will be raised directly with the Chair of the Audit Committee, if the issue falls within the purview of that Committee, or the Chair of the Governing Body.

Should any officer responsible for this procedure be implicated in any way or have or be perceived to have any potential conflict of interest in an allegation of fraud, he or she will not take part in the procedure, the role being taken by an appropriate alternate.

Any investigation will be carried out in accordance with the principles of natural justice, and with due regard to the statutory rights of all individuals involved in the case. The Academy will take all reasonable measures to ensure that an investigation is concluded as quickly as possible. If information was disclosed or reported by an individual(s) initially they will be kept informed of what action, if any, is to be taken. If no action is to be taken the individual concerned will be informed of the reason for this.

If the decision is reached that there is a prima facie case to answer, the person or persons implicated will be informed of this, shown the supporting evidence and be offered an opportunity to respond as part of the investigation.

If the person reporting the irregularity or making the disclosure is dissatisfied with the procedures followed or the outcome of this process, they may take out a plea of grievance.

4.0 Prevention of Further Loss

Where the case is sufficiently serious, an individual who is accused of fraud may be suspended, with or without pay, while an investigation is under way, in accordance with the Academy's disciplinary procedures. The Principal will be consulted before any such action is taken. It should be noted that suspension is a neutral act intended to facilitate enquiries, and does not imply any presumption of guilt.

If the individual under suspicion is to be suspended it may be necessary to plan the timing of suspension to prevent the suspect from destroying or removing evidence that may be needed to support disciplinary or criminal action. The suspect should be approached unannounced. They should be supervised at all times before leaving the Academy's premises. They should be required to reveal relevant computer passwords, and not remove, either on disk or electronically, data from the premises. They should be allowed to collect personal property under supervision, but should

not be able to remove any property belonging to the Academy. Any security passes and keys to premises, offices and furniture should be returned.

The terms of suspension should also bar staff from contacting colleagues about any work related matter without the written consent of the Principal. Should suspended staff breach the terms of suspension, this should be grounds for disciplinary action in its own right.

The ICT Campus Manager should be instructed to immediately withdraw access permissions to the Academy's computer systems.

The Investigating Officer shall consider whether it is necessary to investigate systems other than that which has given rise to suspicion, through which the suspect may have had opportunities to misappropriate the Academy's assets.

5.0 Establishing and securing evidence

The internal auditors and/or management will:

- maintain familiarity with the Academy's disciplinary procedures, to ensure that evidence requirements will be met during any fraud investigation
- establish whether there is a need for audit staff to be trained in the evidence rules for interviews under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984)
- ensure that staff involved in fraud investigations are familiar with and follow rules on the admissibility of documentary and other evidence in criminal proceedings.

Management will establish and maintain contact with the police, where appropriate. The decision will be reported to the Chair of Audit Committee.

6.0 Notifying the EFA

The Academies Financial Handbook (current version) includes a requirement that: "All instances of fraud or theft committed against the AT, whether by employees or governors or third parties, above £5,000 must be reported by the AT to the EFA. Any unusual or systematic fraud, regardless of value, must also be reported."

The EFA reserves the right to conduct or commission its own investigation into actual or potential fraud, theft or irregularity.

7.0 Recovery of losses

The Investigating Officer shall where possible quantify the amount of any loss. The Finance Director, with the Principal, shall consider whether to, and how to go about, seeking repayment of losses.

Where the loss is substantial, legal advice will be obtained without delay about the need to freeze the suspect's assets through the court, pending conclusion of the investigation. Legal advice will also be obtained about prospects for recovering losses through the civil court, or deducting losses from any salary payments

outstanding, where the perpetrator refuses repayment. The Academy would normally expect to recover costs in addition to losses.

8.0 Monitoring and Review

The Audit Committee has the responsibility for implementing, monitoring and reviewing this policy. The Finance Director will make an annual report to the Audit Committee providing a summary of all issues raised and any subsequent actions taken. Any issues, which arise, which do not fall within the remit of the Audit Committee or are relevant to other areas of the Academy, will be brought to the attention of the relevant committees and /or individuals.

9.0 Approval by the Governing Body

This policy has been formally approved and adopted by the Governing Body at a formally convened meeting.

Policy approved: _____Autumn Term
(Chair of Governing Body)

Date: Autumn annually

Date of Policy review: Autumn annually

