



Whistle Blowing Policy

Purpose	
Acorn Training is committed to maintaining the highest standards of openness, integrity and accountability. This policy enables employees, workers, learners, contractors, volunteers and stakeholders to raise concerns about wrongdoing or risk without fear of detriment. Whistleblowing allows individuals to disclose concerns that are in the public interest, ensuring Acorn continues to operate safely, lawfully and ethically.	
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Review	20/03/2026 Full review and update

1. Policy Statement

Acorn encourages a culture where people feel able to speak up. We will:

- Treat all disclosures seriously and sensitively
- Investigate concerns promptly, fairly and objectively
- Protect whistleblowers from dismissal, detriment or victimisation
- Comply with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013
- Ensure confidentiality is maintained wherever possible

Retaliation against a whistleblower is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Employees
- Agency workers
- Contractors and consultants
- Self-employed individuals working under Acorn supervision
- Apprentices and learners
- Volunteers
- Stakeholders engaged in Acorn's commissioned contracts

This policy is **not** intended for personal grievances, which should be raised through the Grievance Policy.

3. What is a Whistleblowing Concern?

A whistleblowing disclosure is a concern raised in the public interest about wrongdoing that has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur. Qualifying disclosures include:

- Criminal offences
- Failure to comply with legal or regulatory obligations
- Miscarriages of justice
- Risks to health and safety
- Environmental damage
- Deliberate concealment or cover-up of wrongdoing

The whistleblower must reasonably believe the information is true and disclosed in the public interest.

4. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Acorn will protect the identity of whistleblowers as far as reasonably possible. Information will only be shared where:

- Required to investigate the concern
- Required by law
- Necessary to protect individuals from harm

Anonymous disclosures will be accepted; however, they may limit the ability to investigate fully.

5. How to Make a Disclosure

Internal Reporting Routes

Individuals can raise concerns with:

- Line manager
- Any senior manager
- HR
- Group Chief Executive Officer
- Group Chief Operating Officer
- Group Assistant Director of Governance

Disclosures may be raised verbally or in writing. Individuals are encouraged to provide as much detail as possible, including dates, people involved and supporting evidence.

If You Feel Unable to Raise a Concern Internally

If the individual believes:

- The matter may be covered up
- They may face unfair treatment
- No action has been taken after raising the concern
- The issue relates to a commissioner or regulator

They may contact an external prescribed person or body.

6. Prescribed Persons and External Bodies

National Regulators

- **Department for Education (DfE)** – issues relating to education funding, safeguarding or regulatory compliance
- **Ofsted** – safeguarding, quality of education and learner welfare
- **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)** – data protection and information governance concerns
- **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** – workplace health and safety breaches
- **The Police** – criminal offences

Commissioners and Funding Bodies

Where concerns relate to the delivery, quality, integrity or contractual compliance of commissioned services, disclosures may be made to:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Ministry of Justice (MOJ)
- Combined Authorities (e.g., Greater Manchester, West Midlands, East Midlands, South Yorkshire etc.)
- Local Authorities responsible for commissioning or contract management

These bodies operate independent whistleblowing or contract-compliance routes.

Full List of Prescribed Persons

A full and current list is available on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>

7. Investigation Process

Acorn will ensure all disclosures are handled consistently. Investigations typically involve:

1. Acknowledgement of the disclosure
2. Initial assessment to determine whether the matter falls under whistleblowing
3. Appointment of an appropriate investigator
4. Collection of evidence, including interviews and documentation
5. Findings and recommendations
6. Outcome provided to the whistleblower, where appropriate

Acorn aims to provide an initial response within **10 working days**, though complex cases may take longer.

8. Protection from Detriment

Individuals raising genuine concerns will not suffer:

- Dismissal
- Loss of opportunities or training
- Disciplinary action
- Bullying, harassment or victimisation
- Any other detrimental treatment

Employees are protected by PIDA from unfair dismissal.

Non-employees (including apprentices, volunteers and contractors) are protected from detrimental treatment.

Any retaliation will result in disciplinary action.

9. Malicious or Vexatious Allegations

Knowingly false or malicious allegations are unacceptable and may lead to disciplinary action.

However, no action will be taken against individuals who raise concerns in good faith, even if they are not upheld.

10. Monitoring and Oversight

- The Executive Management Team oversees adherence to this policy
- Governance maintains the whistleblowing register
- Aggregated data is reviewed to identify patterns, learning and improvement
- Lessons learned will inform improvements to safeguarding, compliance and organisational culture

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required by legislative or regulatory change.