

High Tunstall College of Science



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Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy

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Stakeholder Consulted	-	Staffing, Staff Welfare and Finance Committee
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Responsibility for Review	-	Headteacher

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Statement of intent

High Tunstall College of Science takes its responsibility of care for students seriously. We will thoroughly and swiftly investigate allegations of abuse against staff – this will be done applying common sense and judgement, in a fair way that does not prejudice either the student or the member of staff, and with effective protection for the student and support for the person subject to the allegation.

Any investigation of an allegation of abuse will be made in line with this policy and we will provide both the accuser and accused with the support they require during the investigation.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Education Act 2002
- Children Act 2004
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- **[Updated]** DfE (2023) 'Keeping children safe in education 2023'
- DfE (2018) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following college policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy
- **[New]** Positive Handling Policy
- **[New]** Whistleblowing Policy

2. Scope of this policy

NB. 'Child' refers to anyone under the age of 18.

This policy covers the process for dealing with allegations that meet the harms threshold, which are allegations where it is alleged that anyone working in the college, including supply teachers, volunteers and contractors, has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children, including in relation to behaviour that may have happened outside of college that might make the individual unsuitable to work with children.

Procedures for managing allegations that do not meet the harms threshold (also known as 'low-level concerns') are covered in the Low-Level Concerns section of this policy. Low-level concerns will not be viewed as insignificant, but as any concerns that do not meet the harms threshold set out above. A low-level concern is any concern that an adult working in or on behalf of the college may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work
- Does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LA designated officer (LADO).

If the college has any doubt as to whether information which has been shared about a member of staff as a low-level concern meets the harm threshold, the LADO's advice will be consulted.

For the purpose of this policy "allegation" refers to allegations that meet the harms threshold.

3. Low Level Concerns

Staff will ensure that they pay due regard to the fact that:

- They are in a unique position of trust, care, responsibility, authority, and influence in relation to students
- There is a significant power imbalance in the student-staff dynamic
- There are more stringent expectations on their behaviour with regard to students due to their position as a public professional.

Staff will remain aware of the fact that all students under the age of 18, regardless of the phase and year group they are at within the college, are children by law – resultantly, staff will ensure that they do not assume maturity on behalf of a student and do not engage with students as they would with their own peers. Staff will be aware that where there is any doubt regarding whether the behaviour of another adult is appropriate, this should be reported to the DSL/headteacher or deputy DSL in their absence.

Inappropriate behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from inadvertent or thoughtless behaviour to behaviour which is ultimately intended to enable abuse. Examples of inappropriate behaviour that would constitute a low-level concern that should be reported to the DSL include, but are not limited to:

- **Being overly friendly with children** – this could include, but is not limited to, communicating with a child through personal social media or allowing inappropriate conversations or enquiries to occur with students, e.g., conversations that are about a staff member's personal life or are of a sexual nature
- **Having favourites** – this could include, but is not limited to, calling students by pet names or terms of endearment or buying students gifts
- **Taking photographs of children on their personal mobile phones or devices**
- **Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door**
- **Humiliating students.**

Staff will be aware that some of the above low-level concerns may meet the harms threshold depending on certain factors, e.g., the age or needs of the child or the content of exchanged messages, and that some of the above incidents may not be concerns in context, e.g., a pre-approved, one-to-one meeting with a child behind a closed door between the child and a school counsellor who has received all appropriate safety checks.

Staff members will report their concerns to the DSL/headteacher or deputy DSL in their absence verbally, or in writing. When submitting concerns, staff will take care to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of all individuals to which the concern pertains as far as possible.

Staff members may request anonymity when reporting a concern, and the college will endeavour to respect this as far as possible. The college will not, however, promise anonymity to staff members who report concerns in case the situation arises where they must be named, e.g., where it is necessary for a fair disciplinary hearing. In line with the Whistleblowing Policy, staff will be protected from potential repercussions caused by reporting a genuine concern.

Where a low-level concern relates to the headteacher, it should be reported to the chair of governors.

Evaluating Low Level Concerns

Where the DSL/headteacher is notified of a safeguarding concern, they will use their professional judgement to determine if the concern is low-level or if it must be immediately escalated, e.g. where a child is at immediate risk of harm. When deciding if a concern is low-level, the headteacher will discuss the concern with the DSL or the deputy DSL (in the absence of the DSL), and will seek advice from the LADO where there is any doubt about whether the concern in fact meets the harm threshold. When seeking external advice, the headteacher will ensure they adhere to the Data Protection Policy, and the information sharing principles outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, at all times.

To evaluate a concern, the headteacher and DSL (or deputy DSL) will:

- Speak to the individual who raised the concern to determine the facts and obtain any relevant additional information
- Review the information and determine whether the behaviour displayed by the individual about whom the concern was reported is consistent with the Staff Code of Conduct and the law
- Determine whether the concern, when considered alongside any other low-level concerns previously made about the same individual, should be reclassified as an allegation in line with this procedure
- Consult with, and seek advice from, external agencies when in doubt over the course of action to follow

- Speak to the individual about whom the concern has been raised to inform them of the concern and to give them an opportunity to respond to it
- Ensure that accurate and detailed records are kept of all internal and external conversations regarding evaluating the concern, and any actions or decisions taken.

4. Staff covered by this policy

This policy covers allegations against those working in or on behalf of the college in a paid or unpaid capacity, including members of staff, supply teachers, volunteers and contractors.

In some cases, the college will have to deal with an allegation against an individual not directly employed by them, e.g., supply staff provided by an employment agency, where the college's disciplinary procedures do not fully apply because agencies will have their own procedures.

In these cases, the college will ensure allegations are dealt with properly and will often take the lead on dealing with the allegation as it has access to all of the necessary information. Under no circumstances will the college decide to cease to use a supply teacher due to safeguarding concerns without finding out the facts and liaising with LADO to determine a suitable outcome.

Any supply agencies used by the college will be informed of the college's process for managing allegations. The college will also take account of the agency's policies and their duty to refer to the DBS as personnel suppliers.

If an allegation is made against a governor, the college will follow their local procedure. Where an allegation is substantiated, the college will follow the procedures to consider removing the governor from office.

For the purposes of this policy "member of staff" refers to staff, supply staff, volunteers and contractors.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The governing body will be responsible for:

- Ensuring this policy is implemented consistently in the college
- Ensuring welfare support is put in place for staff subject to allegations
- Making the final decision of whether a member of staff subject to an allegation should be suspended.

The chair of governors will be responsible for acting as the case manager for allegations relating to the headteacher.

The headteacher will be responsible for acting as the case manager for allegations unless the allegation relates to them or there would be a conflict of interest if they were the case manager.

The case manager will be responsible for:

- Conducting a basic enquiry as soon as an allegation is reported
- Leading investigations into allegations
- Working with the LADO when dealing with allegations.

The DSL will be responsible for:

- Making referrals to the children's hub and/or the police where necessary
- Looking after the welfare of students involved in an allegation and ensuring they are not at risk.

The LADO will provide advice and guidance to the college when considering allegations. Their role is not to investigate the allegation, but to ensure that an appropriate investigation is carried out.

6. Reporting concerns and allegations

Staff must report allegations without delay, in line with the following reporting lines:

- Allegations regarding another member of staff will be reported to the headteacher/DSL (or the deputy DSL in their absence)
- Allegations regarding the headteacher will be reported to the chair of governors.

Where there is a conflict of interest in reporting the allegation to the headteacher, staff will report the concern directly to the LADO. Information regarding the identity of the LADO can be found on here <https://hsscp.co.uk/>.

Where a student makes a disclosure to a member of staff about the behaviour of another member of staff, staff must follow the reporting lines above.

Once an allegation has been made, a case manager will be assigned to lead the investigation. The case manager will be the headteacher or, where the headteacher is the subject of an allegation, the chair of governors.

7. Initial response

The Children's Hub and, as appropriate, the police will be contacted immediately if a child has been harmed, there is an immediate risk of harm to a child, or the situation is an emergency. These reports will be made in line with the college's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Before contacting the LADO, the case manager will conduct a basic enquiry to establish the facts to help them determine whether there is any foundation to the allegation. During this basic enquiry, the case manager will ensure they collect any information that will be required by the LADO and will be careful not to jeopardise any potential future police investigation.

Once the case manager has conducted the basic enquiry, they will contact the LADO. The case manager and LADO will discuss the nature, content and context of the allegation and decide if:

- No further action is needed
- A strategy discussion should take place
- There should be involvement from the police and/or the Children's Hub.

Where the case manager is concerned about the welfare of other children in the community or the staff member's family, they will discuss these concerns with the DSL and conduct a risk assessment of the situation. Where necessary, the DSL will make a referral to the Children's Hub.

If the allegation is about physical contact, e.g., restraint, the strategy discussion or initial evaluation with the LADO will take into account that teachers and other staff are entitled to use reasonable force to control or restrain children in certain circumstances, including dealing with disruptive behaviour.

Where the allegation includes behaviour outside of college, an assessment of transferable risk to children with whom the person works will be undertaken where appropriate; advice will be sought from the LADO where there is any doubt.

No further action

Where the initial assessment leads to no further action, the case manager and LADO will:

- Record the decision and justification for it
- Agree on what information should be put in writing to the individual concerned and by whom.

[Updated] Strategy discussion

If there is cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a strategy discussion involving the police and/or the Children's Hub will be convened. Strategy discussions will take place in line with the '[Working Together to Safeguarding Children](#)' statutory guidance. For allegations regarding physical contact, e.g., restraint, the right to use reasonable force in line with the college's Positive Handling Policy will be taken into account.

The Children's Hub will convene the meeting to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or

likely to suffer significant harm. A representative of the college may be invited to the meeting.

The discussion will be used to:

- Share available information
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- Decide whether enquires under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken.

Investigation

Where it is clear that an investigation by the police or the Children's Hub is unnecessary, or the strategy discussion or initial assessment decides that this is the case, the LADO will discuss the next steps with the case manager.

Where further enquiries are required to enable a decision about how to proceed, the LADO and case manager will discuss how the investigation will be undertaken and who should conduct the investigation. In most cases, the investigation will be undertaken by a senior member of staff at the college. Where there is a lack of appropriate resources within the college to conduct the investigation, or the nature or complexity of the allegation requires it, the allegation will be conducted by an independent investigator.

The case manager will monitor the progress of the investigation to ensure that it is dealt with thoroughly, fairly and as quickly as possible. The first review will take place no later than four weeks after the initial assessment where possible. Dates of subsequent reviews will be set at the review meeting if the investigation continues and will be conducted at least at fortnightly intervals.

Informing the member of staff

The decision of when to inform will be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis, considering guidance from the LADO as required and The Children's Hub and the police if involved. The member of staff subject to an allegation should be informed of the allegation and given as much information as possible, unless there are good reasons not to. In cases where the allegation needs to be reported to the Children's Hub and/or the police, the case manager will seek advice from the LADO, the Children's Hub and police as appropriate regarding what information can be shared.

Supply staff

Where an allegation relates to a member of supply staff, the agency will be fully involved and cooperate with any enquiries from the college, LADO, police and/or the Children's Hub. In these cases, the college will usually take the lead as the agency will not have direct access to the required information.

The college will not decide to stop using a member of supply staff due to safeguarding concerns without first finding out the facts and liaising with the LADO to determine a suitable outcome.

The allegations management meeting which is often arranged by the LADO should address issues such as information sharing, to ensure that any previous concerns or allegations known to the agency or agencies are taken into account by the college during the investigation.

8. Confidentiality

The case manager and LADO will discuss what information will be shared and with whom, alongside which actions will be taken to manage any possible breaches of confidentiality or press interest.

Reporting restrictions under the Education Act 2022 will be observed. Information regarding an allegation will only be shared with necessary parties. Every effort will be made to protect the privacy of all parties involved in an allegation. Confidentiality will also be maintained to ensure a fair investigation can be undertaken.

All parties involved in an allegation will be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity about any allegations made against teachers whilst investigations are in progress.

In circumstances where the college needs to make parents aware about an allegation, it will ensure parents and others are aware that there are restrictions on publishing information.

Breaches in confidentiality will be taken seriously and may warrant a separate investigation.

The college will not provide the media with any information regarding an allegation.

9. Suspension

Suspension, e.g., remaining under the college's employment but being asked not to attend the college premises, will never be an automatic response when an allegation is reported – all options to avoid suspension will be considered prior to taking that decision.

The case manager will carefully consider whether the circumstances warrant suspension from contact with children at the college, or until the allegation is resolved. Suspension will be considered only in cases where there is cause to suspect a child or other children at the college is/are at risk of harm, or the case is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal.

The case manager will seek advice from the college's HR provider and the LADO, as well as the police and the Children's Hub where they have been involved. The following options will be considered by the case manager before suspending a member of staff:

- Redeploying the member of staff within the college so that they do not have direct contact with the child or children concerned
- Providing an assistant to be present when the individual has contact with children
- Redeploying the member of staff to alternative work in the college so the individual does not have unsupervised access to children
- Moving the child or children to classes where they will not come into contact with the member of staff – this decision will only be made if it is in the best interests of the child or children involved and takes account of their views
- Temporarily redeploying the member of staff to another role in a different location, e.g., to an alternative college, where available.

The governing body will make the final decision on whether the member of staff should be suspended. Where a strategy discussion, or initial assessment, concludes that there should be enquiries by the Children's Hub, and/or an investigation by the police, the LADO will seek the views of the police and the Children's Hub regarding whether the member of staff should be suspended from contact with children. Police involvement does not make it mandatory to suspend a member of staff. The decision to suspend will be made on a case-by-case basis following a risk assessment of whether the person poses a risk of harm to children.

If immediate suspension is considered necessary, the case manager will record the rationale and justification for this decision, alongside the alternatives to suspension that were considered and why they were rejected.

Where suspension is deemed necessary, written confirmation will be given to the member of staff within one working day where possible, which will provide as much detail as appropriate for the reasons for the suspension. The member of staff will be told immediately who their named contact is within the college for the period of their suspension.

Where an allegation relates to a member of supply staff, the governing body will discuss with the supply agency or agencies where the member of staff is working across a number of schools, whether it is appropriate to suspend the individual, or redeploy them to another part of college, whilst an investigation is carried out.

Where the college is made aware that the Secretary of State has made an interim prohibition order, in respect of an individual who works at the college, immediate action will be taken by the college to ensure the individual does not carry out work in contravention of the order, e.g., not carrying out teaching work, pending the findings of the TRA investigation.

While a member of staff is suspended, or an interim prohibition order is in place they will be on normal contractual pay.

10. Supporting those involved

Students and parents

The welfare of the student(s) involved in an allegation will be paramount. Students involved will be fully supported in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

The parents of the student(s) involved in an allegation will be told about the allegation as soon as possible if they do not already know about it, unless notifying the parents would put the student at further risk. The case manager will work with the LADO to agree who should be informed about the allegation.

Parents will be made aware of the requirement to maintain confidentiality and guard against unwanted publicity about any allegations made against staff whilst investigations are in progress.

Parents will be kept informed about the progress of the allegation, including the outcome and any action taken.

Staff who report an allegation

The college will ensure that all staff feel equipped and supported to report any allegations or concerns.

Staff subject to an allegation

Any staff member subject to an allegation will be offered welfare support. The college has a duty of care to all staff and will:

- Manage and minimise the stress caused by the allegation
- Inform the member of staff as soon as possible about the allegation, explaining the likely course of action, guided by the LADO, and the police where necessary
- Advise the member of staff to contact their trade union representative, or a colleague for support
- Appoint a named representative to keep the staff member informed about the progress of the case
- Provide access to counselling or medical advice where appropriate
- Not prevent social contact with work colleagues and friends, when staff are suspended, unless there is evidence to suggest this may prejudice the gathering of evidence.

Any information regarding an allegation is confidential and will not ordinarily be shared with other staff or with students or parents who are not directly involved in the investigation.

11. Outcomes

The following definitions will be used when determining the outcome of an allegation:

- **Substantiated:** There is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation
- **Malicious:** There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive or cause harm to the person subject of the allegation
- **False:** There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation
- **Unsubstantiated:** There is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation
- **Unfounded:** There is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made.

The options available to the college will depend on the nature and circumstances of the allegation and the evidence and information available.

12. Referral to the DBS

If an allegation is found to be substantiated and the member of staff is dismissed, resigns or otherwise ceases to provide their services to the college, or the college ceases to use the person's services, the college has a legal duty to make a referral to the DBS. For members of teaching staff at the college, the case manager will consider whether to refer the matter to the TRA to consider prohibiting the individual from teaching.

The college will also make a referral to the DBS where it is considered an individual has engaged in conduct that harmed, or is likely to harm, a child, or if they otherwise pose a risk of harm to a child.

13. Criminal investigations

Some allegations may result in a criminal investigation taking place. The police will inform the college and the LADO when:

- A criminal investigation and any subsequent trial is complete
- It is decided to close an investigation without charge
- It is decided not to continue to prosecute after the person has been charged.

The case manager and LADO will discuss whether any further action against the member of staff is appropriate, including disciplinary action.

14. Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious allegations

If an allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, the LADO and the case manager will consider whether the student and/or the person who has made the allegation is in need of help or may have been abused by someone else and this is a cry for help. If this is the case, the DSL will decide whether a referral to the Children's Hub needs to be made.

If a report is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the college will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the individual who made it, in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure (for staff reporters) or Behaviour Policy (for student reporters).

Following an allegation concluded to be either unfounded, false, malicious or unsubstantiated, the case manager, in liaison with the LADO if they were involved, will consider the facts and determine whether any lessons can be learnt and if improvements can be made to the school's procedures.

15. Returning to work

Where a member of staff has been suspended and it is decided on conclusion of the case that they can return to work, the case manager will decide on the best course of action to facilitate the return to work and seek advice from the college's HR provider and the LADO where necessary.

The individual's circumstances will be taken into account, and options such as a phased return and the provision of a mentor to provide assistance and support in the short term considered where appropriate.

The case manager will also consider how the staff member's contact with the child who made the allegation can best be managed if they are still attending the college.

The member of staff will be provided with support, including welfare support, during their return to work.

16. Resignations

If the member of staff leaves, resigns or ceases to provide their services during an investigation, the college will not stop the investigation and it will ensure its completion.

The staff member subject to the allegation will be given a full opportunity to answer the allegation and make representations about it. The process of recording the allegation and supporting evidence and reaching a judgement on the allegation will continue even if the member of staff does not cooperate. The member of staff concerned will be notified of the conclusion of the allegation and sanctions that may be posed.

Other than where allegations are false, malicious, unsubstantiated, or unfounded, the outcome will be made clear when providing references to prospective employers.

Settlement agreements

The college will not use settlement agreements (also known as compromise agreements) where there are allegations that indicate a person is a risk or poses a risk of harm to children or is deemed not suitable to work with children. A settlement agreement is an agreement by which a person agrees to resign if the employer agrees to not pursue disciplinary action and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference.

In limited circumstances, it may be appropriate to use settlement agreements to end the employment relationship on agreed terms. Where a settlement agreement is used, this will not prevent the college from:

- Fulfilling its legal duty to refer cases to the DBS where the referral criteria are met
- Providing a fair, accurate and truthful reference that is not misleading to potential employers when requested
- Considering whether to make a referral to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) where the criteria are met.

17. Record keeping

Any details of allegations that are found to be malicious or false will be removed from the staff member's personnel record unless they give their consent for the information to be retained.

For all other allegations, the following information will be kept on the staff member's personnel file:

- A clear and comprehensive summary of the allegation
- Details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved
- Details of any action taken, and decisions reached and the outcome
- A copy provided to the person concerned, where agreed by the Children's Hub or the police
- A declaration on whether the information will be referred to in any future reference.

The college will retain records which contain information about allegations of sexual abuse for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), for the term of the enquiry. All other records will be retained until the staff member subject to the allegation has reached normal pension age or for a period of ten (10) years from the date of the allegation, whichever is longer.

All records will be managed in line with the college's Data Protection Policy.

18. [Updated] References

References will be provided in line with the college's Safer Recruitment Policy.

The college will ensure that any information provided confirms whether they are satisfied with the applicant's suitability to work with children, and only provide the facts of any substantiated safeguarding concerns or allegations that meet the harm threshold within any employment references.

[New] References will not include opinions, and cases will not be included where an allegation was found to be false, unfounded, unsubstantiated or malicious; this applies for repeated concerns or allegations found to be false, unfounded, unsubstantiated or malicious.

19. Non-recent allegations

If a former student makes an allegation to the college that they were abused as a child, they will be advised to report the allegation to the police. Non-recent allegations made by a child will be reported to the LADO in line with the LA's procedures for dealing with non-recent allegations.

All students and staff will be made aware that abuse can be reported no matter how long ago it happened.

20. Monitoring and review

Throughout the process in handling allegations and at conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the LADO will review the circumstances of the case with the case manager to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to the college's procedures to help prevent similar events in the future.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the headteacher and governing body. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all staff and other relevant stakeholders, e.g. supply agencies. The next scheduled review date for this policy is September 2024.