

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE/WHISTLEBLOWING
POLICY
AT **MARK** BETTS HAIR
EDUCATION

Effective from May 19

Public Disclosure Policy

Public Disclosure Policy - Advice and Instructions

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 aims to promote greater openness in the workplace and, by amending the Employment Protection Act 1996, protects "whistle-blowers" from detrimental treatment, including victimisation or dismissal, for raising concerns about matters in the public interest. In providing this protection, the Act also reinforces the obligations of all persons employed by the organisation not to disclose to external sources any trade secrets or confidential information acquired during the course of their employment unless they fall within the scope of qualifying for protection disclosures.

This statement sets out Mark Betts Hair Education's policy and provides advice and guidance on the scope of the policy. It explains that anyone who has a reasonable belief that there is serious malpractice relating to any of the protected matters specified in the policy may raise a concern under the procedure described in this policy. There is also information about the rights to raise the matter externally if they are not satisfied with Mark Betts Hair Education's response and the protection afforded to them if they choose to do this after the internal procedures have been exhausted.

Introduction

All persons employed by Mark Betts Hair Education are under an obligation implied in their contract of employment to give honest and faithful service to their employer. This includes an obligation not to disclose to external sources any trade secrets or confidential information acquired during the course of employment or act in a manner that will undermine the mutual trust and confidence on which the employment relationship is based.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 complements those obligations by providing protection to employees for disclosure made without malice and in good faith of certain specific confidential information to a third party in defined circumstances.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a means by which employees are enabled to raise concerns with the appropriate authorities if they have reasonable grounds for believing there is serious malpractice within the organisation. Mark Betts Hair Education encourages anyone to raise matters of concern responsibly through the procedures laid down in this policy statement.

Scope of the Policy

The Policy is designed to deal with concerns raised in relation to the specific issues which are in the public interest and are listed below, and which fall outside the scope of other company policies and procedures.

The policy may deal with specific concerns that are in the public interest and may include:

- A criminal offence
- Failure to comply with legal obligations of the company
- Financial or non-financial maladministration/malpractice/impropriety or fraud

- Academic or professional malpractice
- A risk to the health or safety or the safeguarding of any individual
- Environmental damage
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to suppress or conceal any information relating to any of the above

If in the course of investigation any concern raised in relation to the above matters appears to the investigator to relate more appropriately to grievance, bullying or harassment, or discipline, those procedures will be invoked.

Who can raise a concern?

Anyone who has a reasonable belief that there is serious malpractice relating to any of the protected matters may raise a concern following the laid down procedure. Issues raised under the protected list may relate to any other member or members of the team. Concerns must be raised without malice and in good faith, and the individual must reasonably believe that the information disclosed, and any allegations contained in it, are substantially true. The disclosure must not be made for purposes of personal gain, and in all the circumstances it must be reasonable to make the disclosure.

Mark Betts Hair Education will ensure that anyone who makes a disclosure in such circumstances will not be penalised or suffer any adverse treatment for doing so. However, any employee who does not act in good faith or makes an allegation without having reasonable grounds for believing it to be substantially true, or makes it for purposes of personal gain, or makes it maliciously may be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

In view of the protection afforded to any person raising a bona fide concern, it is preferable if that individual puts his/her name to any disclosure. The identity of the person raising the matter will be kept confidential, if so requested, provided the law allows, for as long as possible provided that this is compatible with a proper investigation. Anonymous complaints are not covered by this procedure, but may be reported, investigated or acted upon as the person receiving the complaint sees fit (including the use of this procedure), having regard to the seriousness of the issue raised, the credibility of the complaint, the prospects of being able to investigate the matter, and fairness to any individual mentioned in the complaint.

Procedure

Normally any disclosure about a protected matter should be made in the first instance to the General Manager.

If the disclosure is about this person, concern may be raised with the Managing Director. The person to whom the disclosure is made will decide whether the matter should be dealt with under this procedure. If he or she considers that the matter should be dealt with under a different procedure, s/he will advise the person making the disclosure as to the appropriate steps that should be taken.

Process

The person to whom the disclosure is made will normally consider the information and decide whether there is an apparent case to answer. He or she will decide whether an

investigation should be conducted and what form it should take. This will depend on the nature of the matter raised and may be:

- Investigated internally
- Referred to External Auditors or other authorities
- The subject of independent enquiry

Some matters, following investigation, will need to be referred to the relevant outside body, e.g. the Police, the Skills Funding Agency, etc. If the person to whom the disclosure is made decides not to proceed with an investigation, the decision will be explained as fully as possible to the individual who raised the concern. It is then open to the individual to make the disclosure again either to the General Manager or one of the Managing Director of Mark Betts Hair Education.

Investigation

Any investigation will be conducted as sensitively and speedily as possible. The person making the disclosure will be notified of the intended timetable for the investigation. The person to whom the disclosure is made may authorise an initial investigation to establish the relevant facts. The investigation may be conducted by an internal auditor appointed by the General Manager or Managing Director in the case of a financial irregularity. The investigator will report his or her findings to the person to whom the disclosure was made, who will then decide if there is a case to answer and what procedure to follow. This may include taking steps with the competent authority to set up a special internal independent investigation or reference to some external authority, such as the Police, for further investigation. The decision may be that the matter would be more appropriately handled under existing procedures for grievance, bullying and harassment, or discipline. Where disclosure is made the person or persons against whom it is made will be told at an early stage of it and of the evidence supporting it, and they will be allowed to respond. The individual making the disclosure will be informed of what action is to be taken. Should an investigation or referral lead the person conducting any investigation to conclude there has been a breach of Mark Betts Hair Education's discipline, the person or person's responsible may, in addition to any civil or criminal proceedings, be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the appropriate disciplinary procedures for the relevant category of staff.

Records

A written record will be kept of each stage of the procedure.

Reporting of outcomes

The persons deciding on the issues will make a report of all disclosures and subsequent actions taken. This record should be signed and dated by the person investigating the incident(s) and by the person who made the disclosure. Where appropriate the formal record need not identify the person making the disclosure, but in such a case that person will be required to sign a document confirming that the complaint has been investigated. Such reports will normally be retained for at least five years.

Advice for employees raising a concern

Mark Betts Hair Education acknowledges the difficult choice an employee may have to make in raising a concern. As the issues that prompt the concern are likely to be complex, how the employee proceeds with his or her concern will vary from situation to situation. The following advice is recommended if an employee wishes to make a disclosure:

- Make any objections to illegal, unsafe or unethical practices promptly so as to avoid any misinterpretation of the motives for doing so
- Focus on the issues and proceed in a tactful manner to avoid unnecessary personal antagonism that might distract attention from solving the problem
- Be accurate in his/her observations and claims and keep formal records documenting relevant events.

Mark Betts Hair Education also recognises that any employee raising a concern may also wish to seek independent legal advice.

Complaints of retaliation as a result of disclosure

Mark Betts Hair Education accepts that it has an obligation to ensure that anyone who makes a disclosure without malice and in good faith is protected, regardless of whether or not the concern raised is upheld. An employee who has made a disclosure and who feels that, as a result, he or she has suffered adverse treatment should submit a formal complaint detailing what has been done to him or her. If it appears that there are reasonable grounds for making the complaint, the onus will be on the person against whom the complaint of adverse treatment has been made to show that the actions complained of were not taken in retaliation for the disclosure.

Where it is determined that there is an apparent case that a member of staff has suffered adverse treatment, harassment or victimisation as a result of his or her disclosure, a further investigation may take place and disciplinary action may be taken against the perpetrator in accordance with the relevant procedure.

External disclosure

If, having exhausted this procedure, the person making the disclosure is not satisfied with Mark Betts Hair Education's response and reasonably believes that the information disclosed, and any allegation contained in it, are substantially true, he or she is at liberty to take the matter further by raising it with certain bodies or persons such as

- A legal adviser
- A Member of Parliament
- Other bodies or persons (if any) prescribed by the Secretary of State under Section 43F of the Employment Protection Act 1996, as amended by Section 1 of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Anyone who makes an external complaint in good faith to any prescribed body or person after exhausting Mark Betts Hair Education's procedure will be protected against victimisation or other adverse treatment.