

King's Group Academies

Fraud Policy and Procedures

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1. Introduction

The Trust seeks to eliminate fraud by the way it conducts its business. This document sets out the Trust's policy and procedures for dealing with the risk of significant fraud or corruption. In order to minimise the risk and impact of fraud, the Trust's objectives are, firstly, to create a culture which deters fraudulent activity, encourages its prevention and promotes its detection and reporting and, secondly, to identify and document its response to cases of fraud and corrupt practices.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Trust has taken the following steps:

1. The development and publication of a formal statement of its expectations on standards of personal conduct, propriety and accountability;
2. The establishment of adequate and effective systems of internal financial and management control (and a clear requirement to comply with them), and a Finance & HR Committee and Audit & Risk Committee with an ongoing responsibility to review and report on these systems;
3. The development and publication of a formal statement of the procedures to be followed by employees who have a suspicion of, or concern about, possible or actual malpractice within the Trust and a fraud response plan which sets out the Trust's policies and procedures to be invoked following the reporting of possible fraud or the discovery of actual fraud.
4. An independent auditor completes an annual audit in order to provide the Independent Auditors' report which is included with the Trust's annual report and financial statements. This report includes a view as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view and whether proper accounting records have been kept by the Trust throughout the financial year. In addition, it reports on compliance with the accounting requirements of the relevant Companies Act and confirms compliance with the financial reporting and annual accounting requirements issued by the Dept of Education.

Points 1-3 are described in greater detail in the following sections.

2 Examples of Fraud

- theft of cash;
- non-receipt of income;
- substitution of personal cheques for cash;
- travelling and subsistence claims for non-existent journeys/events;
- travelling and subsistence claims inflated;
- manipulating documentation to increase salaries/wages received, e.g. false overtime claims;
- payment of invoices for goods received by an individual rather than the Trust;
- failure to observe, or breaches of, regulations and/or other associated legislation laid down by the Trust;
- unauthorised borrowing of equipment;
- breaches of confidentiality regarding information;
- failure to declare a direct pecuniary or otherwise conflicting interest;
- concealing a generous gift or reward;
- unfairly influencing the award of a contract;
- creation of false documents;
- deception;
- using position for personal reward.

3 Personal Conduct

The Trust aims to promote an organisational culture which encourages the prevention of fraud by raising awareness of the need for high standards of personal conduct. To help ensure that all employees are fully aware of the Trust's expectations regarding standards of personal conduct, appropriate guidance is provided by the following key statements:

- These regulations are binding on all trustees, members of staff and volunteers of the Trust. Refusal to observe them will be grounds for disciplinary action.
- In disbursing and accounting for all funds, the Trust must demonstrate that it is adopting high standards of financial probity. Implicit within this regime is the requirement that trustees and employees of the Trust must at all times conduct financial affairs in an ethical manner.
- All members of staff and trustees of Trust are responsible for disclosing any personal, financial or beneficial interest in any transaction with respect to the Trust.
- Any person who is responsible for placing an order with a supplier (whether a contractor or not) with whom he/she has a personal interest must disclose this to the CEO or the Deputy CEO.
- Trustees or employees of the Trust shall never use their office or employment for personal gain and must at all times act in good faith with regard to the Trust's interests.

- Budget Holders are expected to adhere to the Finance Policy at all times and to use their best efforts to prevent misuse or misappropriation of funds and other Trust property.

Taken together, these represent a statement of the framework within which trustees and employees are expected to conduct themselves.

4 Systems of Internal Control

The next line of defence against fraud is the establishment of operational systems which incorporate adequate and effective internal controls designed to minimise the incidence of fraud, limit its impact and ensure its prompt detection. These controls include high level management controls such as budgetary control (designed to identify fraud which results in shortfalls in income or overspendings against expenditure) and organisational controls such as separation of duties, internal check and staff supervision. Personnel policies are also a key part of setting the culture and deterring fraud. This includes seeking to reduce the risk of employing dishonest staff by checking information supplied by employees and references obtained during the course of the recruitment process, including DBS checks.

The general framework of responsibilities for financial management and the policies relating to the broad control and management of the Trust are documented in the Finance Policy. The Finance Policy is issued and updated annually by the Deputy CEO, with reference to and the adoption of regulations included in the Academy Trust Handbook which is updated annually by the ESFA. This policy is binding on all trustees and members of staff.

The Trust has also established a Finance & HR Committee and Audit & Risk Committee which provides advice to management in respect of control matters and which conducts a cyclical programme of reviews of the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems which have been put in place (including those intended to minimise the potential exposure to fraud and corruption).

5 Fraud Response

The Fraud Response Plan sets out the Trust's policies and procedures for ensuring that all allegations and reports of fraud or dishonesty are properly followed-up, are considered in a consistent and fair manner and that prompt and effective action is taken to:

- minimise the risk of any subsequent losses;
- reduce any adverse operational effects;
- improve the likelihood and scale of recoveries;
- demonstrate that the Trust retains control of its affairs in a crisis; and
- make a clear statement to employees and others that it is not a soft target for attempted fraud.

The plan includes both statements of general policy and specific steps to be taken when circumstances dictate and is necessary in order to reduce the following risks:

- inadequate communication so that action is late or inappropriate;
- lack of leadership and control so that investigators are not properly directed and waste time and effort;
- failure to react fast enough so that further losses are incurred or the evidence required for successful recovery or prosecution is lost;
- adverse publicity which could affect confidence in the Trust; and
- creation of an environment which, because it is perceived as being ill-prepared, increases the risk of fraud.

The main elements of the Trust's plan are in line with the Whistleblowing Policy and are outlined below:

1. All trustees and members of staff are required to immediately notify the CEO (Chair of Trustees if CEO is implicated) and/or the Deputy CEO of any financial irregularity, or any circumstance suggesting the possibility of irregularity, affecting the financial procedures, cash, stores or other property of the Trust. The CEO and/or the Deputy CEO should bring this to the attention of the Chair of Trustees immediately.
2. The CEO/Deputy CEO will ascertain whether or not the suspicions aroused have substance. He/She will if appropriate, conduct a preliminary investigation to gather factual information and reach an initial view as to whether further action is required. The findings, conclusions and any recommendations arising from the preliminary investigation will be reported to the Chairs of the Finance & HR Committee and Audit & Risk Committee and the Chair of Trustees.
3. The CEO will have the initial responsibility for co-ordinating the Trust's response. In doing this he/she will consult with the Trust's Director of People and Legal Advisors regarding potential employment and litigation issues before taking any further action.
4. The CEO is required to notify the Board of Trustees of any serious financial irregularity. This action will be taken at the first opportunity following the completion of the initial investigations and will involve, inter alia, keeping the Finance & HR Committee and Audit & Risk Committee and the Chair of Trustees fully informed between committee meetings of any developments relating to serious control weaknesses, fraud or major accounting breakdowns.
5. If evidence of a fraud is forthcoming then the Board of Trustees will inform the DfE as required by the Funding Agreement and will consider whether or not to refer the matter to the Police.