

The Skylark Partnership

Anti-Fraud Policy

Version and Date	Action/Notes
1.0	03.09.2019 Reviewed by Finance board Approved by Finance Trustees at meeting 7.11.2019.
2	26.2.20 Reviewed by CK.

1. Introduction

The Skylark Partnership (TSP) is committed to ensuring that it acts with integrity and has high standards. Everyone involved with TSP has a responsibility in respect of preventing and detecting fraud. All staff, trustees and local advisory board members have a role to play. TSP also recognises the role of others in alerting them to areas where there is suspicion of fraud.

TSP has many measures to ensure proper administration and prevent and detect fraud and corruption. Recognising a potential fraud and being able to report it is just as important as the measures to prevent and detect.

The Academies Financial Handbook (AFH) states that '*Academy trusts must be aware of the risk of fraud, theft and irregularity occurring and address it by putting in place proportionate controls. Trusts **must** take appropriate action when fraud, theft or irregularity is suspected or identified.*' (Section 6.10)

2. Definitions

Fraud

Fraud is a general term covering theft, deliberate misuse or misappropriation of assets or anything that leads to a financial advantage to the perpetrator or others upon whose behalf he or she acts, even if these "others" are in ignorance of the fraud. Fraud is intentional deceit and for this reason it cannot include negligence.

Fraud incorporates – theft, larceny, embezzlement, fraudulent conversion, false pretences, forgery, corrupt practices and falsification of accounts.

Corruption

The term 'corrupt practices' is defined for the purpose of this code as the offering, giving, soliciting or acceptance of an inducement or reward which may influence the actions taken by TSP, its staff, directors or local governors.

It is the duty of TSP and its staff, Trustees and local advisory board members to take reasonable steps to limit the possibility of corrupt practices. It is the responsibility of our internal audit process to review the adequacy of the measure taken by TSP, to test compliance and to draw attention to any weaknesses or omissions.

Examples of what could constitute fraud and corruption are:

- theft of cash or property;
- non-receipt of income into bank accounts under the control of the Trust;
- 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/supply claims;
- payment of invoices for goods received by an individual rather than the Trust
- unauthorised borrowing of equipment;
- 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.
- manipulation of financial returns to conceal the misappropriation of assets or otherwise for gain

3. Principal Roles

Staff, Trustees and Local Advisory Board Members

To the public, The Skylark Partnership can be judged by the conduct of its staff, trustees and local advisory board members. TSP has adopted the following measures to demonstrate its commitment:

- All staff, trustees and local advisory board members are made aware of the Trust's Code of Conduct for Employees, trustees and local advisory board members ;
- Internal audit work carried out on behalf of the finance committee, reported back at each meeting and action taken
- A requirement for all staff, trustees and local advisory board members to declare all business and pecuniary interests;
- A gifts, hospitality and anti-bribery policy which is made available to all staff, trustees and local advisory board members. A register of gifts and hospitality is kept;
- Robust recruitment and selection policies and procedures;
- A Financial Scheme of Delegation which allows all staff, trustees and local advisory board members to be aware of the level of financial decision making they are empowered to make

Staff, trustees and local advisory board members have a duty to report another member of staff, trustees and local advisory board members whose conduct is reasonably believed to represent a failure to comply with the above.

Trustees

The trustees of TSP are bound by the requirements of Company Law, The Charities Commission and the latest version of the Academies Financial Handbook . They are responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Trust and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. Trustees must approve a written scheme of financial delegation that maintains robust internal control arrangements.

Accounting Officer

The Accounting Officer has a specific responsibility for ensuring value for money, regularity and probity under the provisions in the Academies Financial Handbook. This includes a personal responsibility to Parliament for the financial resources under the Trust's control. The Accounting Officer must sign a statement on regularity, propriety and compliance each year and submit this to the ESFA.

In respect of fraud it is therefore the responsibility of the Accounting Officer to ensure internal controls prevent and detect any fraud promptly. This includes:

- Proper procedures and financial systems;
- Effective management and financial information;

Chief Financial Officer

The Chief Financial Officer carries out the role of the Trust's Finance Director and plays a technical and leadership role, ensuring sound and appropriate financial governance.

Internal Audit

The Internal audit function consists of an external accountancy company who visits at least once a year and has a clear remit to undertake work to prevent and detect potentially fraudulent acts. This is in line with best practice. This work concentrates on areas of highest risk but also on areas which, although small, are subject to fraud. TSP has responsibility for:

- Investigating fraud;
- Establishing the extent of any fraud;
- Correcting accounting records if necessary;
- Recommending improvements in internal control;
- Advising on action to take to resolve the matter arising.

External Audit

The Trust's Annual Report and Financial Statements include an Independent Auditors' Report. 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 Academies Handbook.

ESFA

The Trust must notify the ESFA of any instances of fraud, theft and/or irregularity exceeding £5,000 individually or £5,000 cumulatively in any academy financial year. Unusual or systematic fraud, regardless of value, must also be reported (see AFH section 6.10). They may commission their own investigation into this and involve other authorities, including the police as appropriate. They may also publish information in line with its own policy.

4. Principal Anti-Fraud Measures

TSP has taken a number of measures that will prevent or detect any attempted or actual fraud. No system of control can prevent all cases, and TSP must minimize the risks to which it is exposed. At the highest level TSP will:

- Regularly review and improve key internal control systems;
- Regularly review measures to minimize the risk of fraud;
- Involve staff in such reviews;
- Adopt formal procedures to investigate fraud when it is suspected and where detected, strengthen controls to prevent reoccurrence;
- Provide mechanisms for employees to voice their genuine concerns
- Have no hesitation in referring cases of suspected financial irregularity to the attention of the Police;
- Work closely with the Police and the other appropriate agencies to combat fraud.

TSP has introduced corporate standards that should ensure proper administration. These include:

Staff Contracts and Annual Review of;

- Codes of Conduct for trustees and local advisory board members ;
- Measures to implement new legislation correctly;
- Clear roles for the trustees of TSP;
- Training administration issues;
- Disciplinary Procedures; and
- Complaints Procedures.
- Whistleblowing policy

These measures, and others, provide a framework supported by detailed procedure manuals for all key functions of TSP. Other key principle internal controls that are adopted include wherever possible:

- Adequate separation of duties;
- Proper authorisation procedures;
- A proper audit trail;
- Independent monitoring and checking;
- Training of employees in their duties;
- Appropriate supervision;
- Effective managements structures and organisation;
- Physical controls over highly portable assets;
- Effective IT and other security measures;
- A proper accounting and budgetary control system;
- Effective Internal Audit review systems.

Responsibility for effective implementation of these principles on internal control rests with the Trustees & Heads Teachers and involves every member of staff and the local advisory body.

5. Reporting a Suspected Fraud

Response to Alleged Frauds

TSP requires suspected fraud and irregularities to be referred to the Headteacher of the academy and the CEO of the Trust, unless this individual is involved in the irregularity in which case the Chair of Finance Trustees should be informed. If the concern is at this level then reporting should be to the Accounting Officer or ultimately the Chair of the Trustees.

Staff with suspicions of fraud should not confront the suspect or try to investigate the matter themselves. They should not discuss their suspicions with anyone other than their Headteacher or the CEO. All reported irregularities will be thoroughly investigated. (Please see Whistleblowing Policy)

Steps that would normally be taken are:

- If an employee suspects a fraud has occurred (or is likely to) they should report this to their Headeacher unless the suspicion relates to that individual. In this instance the employee should report to the CFO of the Trust.
- The Head of School will inform the CFO who will take further action.
- If suspicions stem from an Internal Audit visit, the CFO and Accounting Officer or the Chair of the Board of Trustees need to be informed.
- Members of the public can report any concerns, either to the CEO Headteacher of the academy, Chair of Local Advisory Board, or via the Complaints Procedure
- The CEO will decide on the level of any investigation having taken advice from the CFO. If necessary the CEO will take any appropriate legal advice. Any investigation will be carried out by an appropriate independent person or company;
- If the investigation shows a fraud has occurred this will be reported to the Board of Trustees. The perpetrator will be dealt with in accordance with TSP's Disciplinary Policy;
- If investigations indicate a criminal offence may have occurred, the Accounting Officer will decide, in consultation with the CFO and taking appropriate legal advice, whether to involve the Police;
- In all cases where the fraud exceed £5,000 individually or £5,000 cumulatively in any financial year, the ESFA will be informed as soon as is operationally practical;

- Recommendations to improve controls and prevent any reoccurrence will be made following the investigation. The Accounting Officer and CFO in consultation with the Board of Trustees, will decide on the implementation of the recommendations.

6. Reporting Suspicions

General

Employees are vital to the successful implementation of measures against fraud. TSP therefore considers that employees have a duty to report any legitimate concerns they may have and must do so as outlined above.

If it is subsequently established that an employee knowingly withholds information of a concern or allegation it may be dealt with as a disciplinary matter in itself.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (a copy of which can be found at www.opsi.gov.uk) provides employees with statutory protection when disclosing such information.

If possible concerns are better raised in writing, you need to set out the background, provide names, dates and places and reasons for bringing the matter to the attention of TSP. However, if an individual feels unable to put their concern into writing, arrangements can be made to meet with an appropriate officer to discuss the concerns.

TSP recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the alleged malpractice. TSP will not tolerate harassment of victimisation and will do what it lawfully can to protect an individual when a concern is raised in good faith.

This does not mean that, if the person raising the concern is already the subject of a disciplinary, redundancy or other procedure, that those procedures will be halted as a result of the concern being reported.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in the strictest confidence. TSP will do its best to protect the identity of individuals who raise concerns and do not want their name to be revealed. However, it must be appreciated that during an investigation, a statement may be required as part of the evidence gathering process, particularly if the Police become involved. In order to take effective action, TSP will need proper evidence that may be required to stand up to examination in Courts or Tribunals.

This Policy encourages individuals to put a name to allegations whenever possible, as concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but will be considered at the discretion of TSP in terms of;

- Seriousness of the issues raised;
- The credibility of the concern;
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributed sources.

Whilst TSP will always do its best to protect individuals, it is more difficult to protect an individual from harassment, intimidation or other detrimental conduct where an allegation or disclosure is made anonymously.

Safeguards

There is a need to ensure that the process is not misused. Therefore, any abuse, such as raising malicious allegations may also be dealt with as a disciplinary matter. All such reports must be genuine and honest as, if otherwise, would go against the principle of integrity.

This should not deter employees from raising legitimate and genuine concerns, (even if subsequently unfounded but made with good intent) as, in doing so they will be supported in every possible way.

All genuine concerns reported will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. If a suspicion is reported and results in a prosecution or disciplinary hearing, employees involvement, as a witness, in this process may be necessary, unless other substantial reliable evidence is available. Employees taking such a route will be notified quickly and any action taken.

TSP accepts that the person reporting the suspicion needs to be assured that the matter is being properly addressed. Therefore, where possible, and subject to legal constraints (including Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act) feedback regarding the outcome of the investigation will be provided.

Employees must also report other abuses which may be of concern including unethical behaviour, falsification of records, sexual discrimination or harassment, abuse of drugs or alcohol, bullying and non-compliance with Health and Safety.

7. Key Risk Areas

The following are key risk areas that the Finance Committee will review over time:

- Cyber risk Fraud
- Grants
- Contracting and Contract Payments
- Traveling and Subsistence or specific expense claims
- Cash Handling & Income Collection Procedures
- Assets
- Gifts and Hospitality
- Loans and Investments
- Creditor Payments
- Payroll