



## Annual report on whistleblowing 2023–24

<b>Outcome requested:</b>	Audit and Risk Committee is asked:  [a] to <b>consider</b> a summary of disclosures received or investigated under the Whistleblowing Procedure in 2023–24;  [b] to <b>note</b> that a triennial review of the Whistleblowing Procedure will be presented to the Committee at the November meeting.
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	This paper provides a summary of disclosures received or investigated under the Whistleblowing Procedure in 2023–24 and institutional learning from investigating the disclosures.
<b>QMUL Strategy:</b>	The effective management of the Queen Mary’s governance arrangements underpins the ability to achieve the strategic aims.
<b>Internal/External regulatory/statutory reference points:</b>	Whistleblowing Procedure Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
<b>Strategic Risks:</b>	Compliance and reputation
<b>Equality Impact Assessment:</b>	Not required
<b>Subject to prior and onward consideration by:</b>	Considered by the Committee only.
<b>Confidential paper under FOIA/DPA</b>	No
<b>Timing:</b>	Annual report
<b>Author:</b>	Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary
<b>Date:</b>	10 September 2024
<b>Senior Management/External Sponsor:</b>	Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary

## Annual Report on Whistleblowing 2023–24

1. This is a summary of disclosures received or investigated under the Whistleblowing Procedure in 2023–24.
2. In June 2023, a member of the public wrote to members of Council raising unspecific concerns about asbestos management at the Whitechapel Library and pointing to a large volume of email correspondence that was obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. The individual was invited to make specific allegations of malpractice or wrongdoing under the Whistleblowing Procedure, but did not respond. The Director of Health and Safety provided written assurance on asbestos management at the Whitechapel Library to the Audit and Risk Committee in November 2023, on which the Committee concluded ‘that the University had taken appropriate steps to determine the seriousness of any risks’.
3. In July 2023, a researcher at another university wrote to members of Council highlighting an online article raising concerns about research integrity in one of the teams at the William Harvey Research Institute. The Research Integrity Committee was asked to review the material and commissioned research misconduct investigations in relation to two members of staff. One of the investigations found evidence of poor research practice short of misconduct, as a result of which the member of staff was required to undertake mentorship and training and to take appropriate steps to correct their published work. The second investigation has been delayed owing to staff illness and is now nearing a conclusion.
4. In December 2023, a member of staff in the School of Engineering and Materials Science wrote to the University Secretary raising concerns about racially motivated bullying and harassment. The individual was referred to the Head of Employee Relations for support and guidance on using the Grievance Policy and Procedure.
5. In December 2023, a previous employee wrote to the President and Principal raising unspecified concerns about bullying and harassment by their line manager and failings by Human Resources. On initial investigation it came to light that the individual had already raised their concerns via ACAS as part of an Employment Tribunal claim about their adverse probation outcome. The individual was sent a formal response as part of the mediation process, which was reviewed by the University Secretary, saying that the claim was without merit.
6. In February 2024, there was an anonymous disclosure under the Whistleblowing Procedure providing only a name and the statement ‘audit required’. The whistleblower declined to provide further details of their concerns. In discussion with the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee, it was decided not to investigate the disclosure on the basis that the whistleblower had not provided details of the alleged malpractice or wrongdoing, and the name did not correspond to any member of the University in the previous ten years.
7. In March 2024, a member of staff in the Research and Innovation Directorate raised concerns about bullying and inappropriate handling of personal data by their team leader. On initial investigation it came to light that other team members shared the same concerns but were worried about receiving detrimental treatment from their team leader if they filed formal allegations. For these reasons it was decided to investigate the concerns under the Whistleblowing Procedure, rather than the Grievance Policy and Procedure, and to appoint an external investigator with relevant expertise. The investigation found evidence of bullying, cultivating a working environment in which team members were discouraged from raising concerns, and covertly recording meetings without consent. The findings were referred to a disciplinary hearing which concluded that they amounted to serious misconduct. Shortly after the hearing, further concerns were raised about the team leader allegedly discussing the substance of the whistleblowing investigation with a member of their team and making suppositions about the identities of the individuals who gave evidence. The team leader is

currently on precautionary suspension while this is investigated under the Discipline Policy and Procedure. An environmental assessment was also undertaken to identify potential lessons from the case.

- (a) After recent progress to improve the quality and availability of employment data, some of the data points could have been drawn together sooner to identify the issues within the team. The main action going forward is to make the data more readily available with directors and their equivalents as a basis for regular, context-specific conversations with business partners in Human Resources. In relation to bullying and harassment, data have now been collected across three annual staff surveys to identify potential areas of concern and consider targeted action. Consideration is also being given to policies, increasing the visibility of trigger points for action (such as relatively high sickness absence and turnover rates) and triangulation with information from exit interviews, which are now administered via a shared platform. It is proposed to update the Committee on progress via a deep dive later this academic year.
- (b) Following the disciplinary hearing it became apparent that members of the disciplinary panel did not fully understand the hand off between the Whistleblowing Procedure and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. The main action going forward is to strengthen the briefing provided to panel members.

8. Audit and Risk Committee is asked to **consider** this summary.