

Whistleblower Policy

Effective from 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia's (UCA WA) is committed to fostering a culture of legal, ethical and moral behaviour and exemplary corporate governance.
- 1.2 UCA WA recognises the value of transparency and accountability in its administrative and management practices and supports the reporting of improper conduct.
- 1.3 This Whistleblower Policy and Procedure has been developed so that people can raise concerns regarding situations where they believe that UCA WA or anybody connected with UCA WA has acted in a way that constitutes serious wrongdoing, including unethical, illegal, corrupt, or other inappropriate conduct, as set out below.
- 1.4 In this Policy the Whistleblowing Protection Officers are The Moderator, the General Secretary and the People and Culture manager.
- 1.5 Please note that since this Policy was approved in 2023, the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Scheme) has been introduced on 1 January 2024 for Religious Organisations. The Scheme aims to prevent harm to children by holding organisations accountable for the conduct of their staff. This means that any allegations concerning harm to children will not be managed under the Whistleblower Policy but in line with the reporting and investigating obligations of the Scheme. Please refer to [Handling Disclosures and Reporting Protocols: Reporting Reportable Conduct Guidelines](#).

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This Policy aims to:
 - a) encourage a person to report improper conduct in good faith if they know or have reasonable grounds to suspect such conduct;
 - b) provide a mechanism to report misconduct or dishonest or illegal activity that has occurred or is suspected within the organisation;
 - c) enable UCA WA to deal with reports from whistleblowers in a way that will protect the identity of the whistleblower and provide for secure storage of the information;
 - d) ensure that any reporting is identified and dealt with appropriately;
 - e) ensure that individuals who disclose and report wrongdoing can do so safely, securely and with confidence that they will be protected and supported; and,
 - f) help to ensure that UCA WA maintains the highest standards of ethical behaviour, and integrity.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all people employed with the Uniting Church Centre. Within this policy all these people are represented by the term "**Workers**".

- 3.2 This Policy also applies to all volunteers, contractors, suppliers and consultants engaged with the Uniting Church Centre.
- 3.3 Although they are under no obligation to do so, any associate, family member or dependant of any person in the above groups of people may also speak up about any misconduct. If they do choose to speak up in line with this Policy, we will extend to them the relevant rights and protections under this Policy.

4. Principles

- 4.1 **Higher standard** – This Policy is designed to comply with UCA WA’s legal obligations. If anything in this Policy is inconsistent with any law imposed on UCA WA, that legal obligation or the “higher standard” will prevail over this Policy.
- 4.2 **Speak up and report it!** – We encourage Workers at UCA WA to report any concerns in line with our policies and procedures.
- 4.3 **Our expectations of Workers** – UCA WA expects Workers to act honestly and ethically, and to make any report on reasonable grounds.
- 4.4 **Our responsibility to Whistleblowers** – Our obligations to Workers are spelled out in this policy, but in particular in section 6 ‘Protection’.
- 4.5 **Confidentiality and consent** - UCA WA will maintain confidentiality of all reports and protect the identity of reporters to the fullest extent possible. While UCA WA encourages Whistleblowers to identify yourself to a Whistleblowing Protection Officer, you may opt to report your concerns anonymously.

5. Reporting Misconduct

5.1 Who can make a report?

- 5.1.1 A Whistleblower is a person who, whether anonymously or not, attempts to report misconduct, dishonest or illegal activity that has occurred in connection with UCA WA, and wishes to avail themselves of protection against reprisal for having made the report.
- 5.1.2 A Whistleblower may be a current or former Worker with UCA WA.

5.2 Reporting Misconduct

- 5.2.1 A person may disclose any information that the person has reasonable grounds to suspect concerns misconduct, or an improper state of affairs or circumstances in relation to:
- UCA WA; or
 - A related body corporate of UCA WA.
- 5.2.2 Misconduct to be reported is any past, present or likely future activity, behaviour or state of affairs considered to be:
- dishonest;
 - corrupt (including soliciting, accepting or offering a bribe, or facilitating payments or other such benefits);
 - fraudulent;
 - illegal (including theft, drug sale or use, violence or threatened violence, or property damage);
 - in breach of regulation, internal policy or code (such as our Code of Conduct);
 - improper conduct relating to accounting, internal controls, compliance, actuarial, audit or other matters of concern to the whistleblower;
 - a serious impropriety or an improper state of affairs or circumstances;

- h) endangering health or safety;
- i) damaging or substantially risking damage to the environment;
- j) a serious mismanagement of UCA WA's resources;
- k) detrimental to UCA WA's financial position or reputation;
- l) maladministration (an act or omission of a serious nature that is negligent, unjust, oppressive, discriminatory or is based on improper motives);
- m) concealing any allegation of misconduct.

5.2.3 These examples of misconduct usually relate to the conduct of employees or directors, but it can also relate to the actions of a third party, such as a funder, customer/client, supplier or service provider.

5.3 What is *not* Misconduct to be reported?

5.3.1 While everybody is encouraged to speak up and report any concerns to UCA WA, not all types of conduct are intended to be covered by this Policy or by the protections under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth). This Policy does not apply to personal work-related grievances (see 5.3.2, 5.3.3 and 5.3.4), unless the grievance includes victimisation due to whistleblowing.

5.3.2 Personal work-related grievances are those that relate to the discloser's current or former employment with UCA WA that might have implications for the discloser personally but do not:

- a) Have any other significant implications for UCA WA (or another entity); or
- b) Relate to any conduct or alleged conduct about a disclosable matter (as set out in 5.2.2).

5.3.3 Personal work-related grievances include grievances such as interpersonal conflicts, decisions about promotions, decisions that do not involve a breach of workplace laws, or terms and conditions of employment.

5.3.4 However, personal work-related grievances may be covered by this policy where they include information about misconduct, an allegation that the entity has breached employment or other laws punishable by imprisonment by a period of 12 months or more, or the grievance includes victimisation due to whistleblowing.

5.4 What information do I need to make a report?

5.4.1 To make a protected report you must know of or have reasonable grounds to suspect the misconduct.

5.4.2 For a report to be investigated, it must contain enough information to form a reasonable basis for investigation. It is important therefore that you provide as much information as possible. This includes any known details about the events underlying the report such as the:

- a) date;
- b) time;
- c) location;
- d) name of person(s) involved;
- e) possible witnesses to the events; and
- f) evidence of the events (e.g. documents, emails).

5.4.3 In your report, include any steps you may have already taken to report the matter elsewhere or to resolve the concern.

5.5 How can I make a report?

5.5.1 A report must be made to:

- a) The Moderator or the General Secretary;

- b) The organisation's auditor, or a member of the audit team;
- c) The Executive Officer: Culture of Safety.

5.5.2 UCA WA will also protect individuals who have made a report in connection with UCA WA:

- a) To the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (**ASIC**) or the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (**APRA**) or another Commonwealth regulatory body prescribed in legislation;
- b) To a legal practitioner for the purposes of obtaining legal advice or legal representation about whistleblower protections; or
- c) That qualifies as an emergency or public interest disclosure under the Corporations Act 2001(Cth). It is important that you understand the criteria for making a public interest or emergency disclosure and you may wish to consult an independent legal adviser before making a public interest or emergency disclosure.

5.5.3 While UCA WA encourages you to identify yourself to a Whistleblowing Protection Officer, you may opt to report your concerns anonymously such as by adopting a pseudonym.

6. Protection

6.1 How will I be protected if I report misconduct?

6.1.1 If you have reasonable grounds to suspect misconduct, even if it turns out your concerns are mistaken, UCA WA will support and protect you and anyone else assisting in the investigation.

6.1.2 UCA WA will not tolerate any detriment inflicted on you because you or somebody else has made, or might make, a report of misconduct. Examples of a detriment include:

- a) retaliation, dismissal, suspension, demotion, or termination of your role;
- b) bullying, harassment, threats or intimidation;
- c) discrimination, subject to current or future bias, or derogatory treatment;
- d) harm or injury;
- e) damage or threats to your property, business, financial position or reputation; or
- f) revealing your identity as a Whistleblower without your consent or contrary to law;
- g) threatening to carry out any of the above actions.

6.1.3 This protection applies regardless of whether any concerns raised in a report are found to be true, provided that you are acting honestly and ethically and made the report on reasonable grounds.

6.1.4 This protection also applies to individuals conducting, assisting or participating in an investigation. You will also be entitled to the protection if you make a report of misconduct to an external body under this Policy.

6.1.5 Anyone found to be victimising or disadvantaging another individual for making a disclosure under this Policy will be disciplined and may be dismissed or subject to criminal or civil penalties.

6.1.6 If you believe you have suffered a detriment in violation of this Policy, we encourage you to report this immediately to the Whistleblowing Protection Officer(s), or an external body under this Policy. Your concerns of being disadvantaged will be treated as a report of misconduct in line with this Policy.

6.1.7 Anyone engaging in detrimental conduct may be subject to serious consequences, including disciplinary action and/or termination of engagements or contracts, as applicable. They may also be subject to civil and criminal penalties.

6.1.8 You may also be entitled to the following legal protections for making a report:

- a) protection from civil, criminal or administrative legal action;

- b) protection from having to give evidence in legal proceedings; and/or
- c) compensation or other legal remedy.

6.2 How will UCA WA ensure confidentiality?

- 6.2.1 A discloser can choose to remain anonymous while making a disclosure, over the course of the investigation and after the investigation is finalised. UCA WA will do all it can to protect confidentiality.
- 6.2.2 However, we encourage all individuals to disclose their identity when raising a concern. This will assist us to gather further information on your report. If you choose to disclose your identity, your details will be treated confidentially to the fullest extent possible in connection with the investigation. UCA WA will take measures to protect your identity such as by redacting your personal information, storing your information and disclosure securely, referring to you in a gender-neutral context and only allowing qualified staff to investigate your disclosures.
- 6.2.3 You may choose to report your concerns anonymously. However, if you choose to disclose your identity, your details will be treated confidentially to the fullest extent possible in connection with the investigation, and your identity will not be disclosed unless:
 - a) you consent in writing to the disclosure;
 - b) the disclosure is made to ASIC, APRA or the Australian Federal Police (AFP);
 - c) the disclosure is made to a Legal Practitioner for the purpose of obtaining advice;
 - d) the disclosure is authorised under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth); and/or
 - e) disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a threat to a person's health, safety or welfare.
- 6.2.4 It is illegal for a person to identify a discloser, or disclose information that is likely to lead to the identification of the discloser unless an exception above applies. If you feel that your confidentiality has been breached, you can lodge a complaint with a regulator, such as ASIC, APRA or the ATO, for investigation. UCA WA may also take disciplinary action against individuals that breach the confidentiality of a discloser, including summary dismissal.

6.3 False reports or disclosures

- 6.3.1 Protected Disclosures must be made on reasonable grounds. Anyone who knowingly makes a false report/disclosure of misconduct may be subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal.
- 6.3.2 The disciplinary action will depend on the severity, nature and circumstance of the false disclosure.

7. Handling and investigating a disclosure

- 7.1.1 Upon receiving a Protected Disclosure, within 7 days, the Whistleblowing Protection Officers will endeavour to assess the disclosure to determine whether:
 - a) It qualifies for protection;
 - b) A formal, in-depth investigation is required.
- 7.1.2 UCA WA will endeavour to provide the discloser with regular updates.
- 7.1.3 UCA WA may not be able to investigate a disclosure if it is unable to contact the discloser.
- 7.1.4 UCA WA will handle and investigate Protected Disclosures in accordance with the related Whistleblowing Procedure.

8. Variations

8.1 UCA WA reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this Policy.

9. Related Documents

- 9.1 Whistleblowing Procedure
- 9.2 Grievance Management Policy
- 9.3 Harassment Discrimination and Workplace Bullying Policy
- 9.4 Code of Conduct
- 9.5 Handling Disclosures and Reporting Protocols: Reporting Reportable Conduct Guidelines