

# WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY



## POLICY STATEMENT

Bell Group UK is committed to achieving and maintaining high standards with regard to behaviour in all our working practices. Employees are expected to conduct themselves with integrity, impartiality and honesty. Bell Group UK (The Company) seeks to develop a culture where inappropriate behaviour at all levels is challenged. To achieve this the Company encourages the reporting of genuine concerns about malpractice, misconduct, illegal acts or failures to comply with recognised standards of work without fear of reprisal or victimisation.

Bell Group has established ways and procedures by which you can raise issues which concern you at work and these can be acted upon. At the same time striving to reassure you that in raising concerns you will not be opening yourself to victimisation, detriment, or risking your job security. In addition to what the Company regards as open management, you also enjoy statutory protection if concerns are raised in the right way.

The Bell Group UK Whistleblowing Policy is intended to complement statutory protection rather than detract from it. For the avoidance of doubt, your statutory rights will not be affected in any way by the Whistleblowing Policy.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (see below) provides employees with protection against victimisation or being penalised should they reasonably report concerns.

This policy is accompanied by a procedure that should be followed when "blowing the whistle". The policy is designed to give you that opportunity and protection.

Bell Group UK will not tolerate harassment or victimisation of a genuine whistle blower (including informal pressures) and will treat such conduct as gross misconduct, which if proven, may result in dismissal.

This policy is non contractual and Bell Group UK reserves the right to amend or withdraw the policy and procedure at any time.

If there is anything which you think the Company should know about, please use the procedure. By knowing about malpractice at an early stage the company stands a good chance of taking necessary steps to safeguard the interests of others and protect the organisation. In short, please do not hesitate to "blow the whistle" on wrongdoing.

## WHAT IS WHISTLEBLOWING?

This policy is designed to deal with concerns raised in relation to specific issues which are in the public interest and detailed below.

Bell Group UK has other policies and procedures that deal with other complaints, critical or constructive comments, and appeals. Disciplinary, Grievance, Harassment and Equal Opportunities policies also

address standards of behaviour at work. The relevant policy should be followed where appropriate. If you are uncertain which policy is appropriate, you should speak to the National Quality Manager, Tracy Brescia.

Whistleblowing is specific and means a disclosure of information in the interest of the public, made by both employees and non-direct employees, such as subcontractors and suppliers, where they reasonably believe that one or more of the following matters is; happening now, took place in the past or is likely to happen in the future:

Whistleblowing issues:-

- a criminal offence;
- a failure to comply with a legal obligation (e.g. breach of a contractual or other common law obligation, statutory duty or requirement or administrative requirement, including suspected fraud, malpractice or breach of a code of conduct);
- a miscarriage of justice;
- a danger to the health and safety of any individual;
- damage to the environment;
- a deliberate concealment of information tending to show any of the above.

Only genuine concerns should be reported. Whistleblowers must hold a reasonable belief that any information and/or allegation is substantially true, and the disclosure should not be made primarily or solely for personal gain. Malicious or false allegations will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

## WHO DOES THE POLICY APPLY TO?

This policy applies to all employees, including whether full time, part time or temporaries (regardless of length of service), of Bell Group UK and its associated companies.

Agents, contractors, sub-contractors, consultants, suppliers, customers, or external bodies or agencies not covered above who have genuine concerns about malpractice or suspected wrongdoing are encouraged to report their concerns.

Please note that whistleblowing is specific to the issues listed above and matters relating to a complaint about your own personal circumstances or an appeal against a decision should be addressed through the Bell Group UK Grievance Policy and Procedure.

## THE PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE ACT 1998

This policy seeks to implement the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 ("the Act"), which protects employees making disclosures about certain matters of concern, where those disclosures are made in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

The Act applies to those making a 'protected disclosure' in respect of the specific types of malpractice outlined above. For a concern to be a "protected disclosure" it should wherever possible be made in accordance with this procedure.

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## THE BELL GROUP UK WHISTLEBLOWING PROCEDURE

### Employees raising a concern

In order to encourage employees to report suspected wrongdoing, our aim is to create a culture of openness and accountability and an environment in which individuals feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously.

You should first raise your concern with your line manager either verbally or in writing. Your line manager may be able to address your concern quickly and effectively or may decide to refer the matter to another person within the organisation. If your concern relates to the conduct of your line manager or you feel that your line manager has not resolved your concern, you should report the matter to your Branch Manager.

Alternatively, you may wish to discuss your concerns, in confidence, with:

**Bell Group's Human Resources Manager, Paramjit Barry (HR@bellgroup.co.uk)** who is the nominated manager with responsibility for dealing with concerns raised under this policy and where appropriate ensuring that an investigation is conducted

Anonymous allegations can be harder to investigate than those from named individuals. All concerns raised will be dealt with confidentially and individuals are urged to avoid making anonymous allegations.

If your disclosure is about a director or senior executive you should report your concerns directly to the Managing Director of Bell Group UK who will decide how the investigation should proceed.

If you are unhappy with the way in which a concern you have raised has been dealt with, you may refer to the process for the 'right to appeal'.

### NETWORK RAIL WHISTLEBLOWING

CIRAS, the confidential incident reporting and analysis system, as adopted by Network Rail, provides a corporate safety net that ensures safety, health or other concerns are captured within Organisations and with CIRAS' help, such concerns are investigated to a successful and satisfactory conclusion.

For any Bell Group employee working on a Network Rail project, on any site on behalf of Abellio Scotrail or other transport projects, any concerns outlined above, categorised as 'whistleblowing issues, should be raised in the first instance with your Contract manager and may also be reported to CIRAS.

There are a number of ways to get in touch with CIRAS:

POST: The Helicon, One South Place, London, EC2M 2RB

PHONE: General Enquiries: 0203 142 5369 / Report hotline: 0800 4 101 101 / Report Text line: 07507 285887 Phone: 020 3142 5367

EMAIL: enquiries@ciras.org.uk

## Others wishing to report a concern

Agents, contractors, sub-contractors, consultants, suppliers, customers, members of the public and external organisations are encouraged to raise a genuine concern about Bell Group UK relating to the areas outlined in the 'whistleblowing issues' listed above.

You should report the matter to the National Quality Manager, Tracy Brescia, who is the nominated executive with responsibility for dealing with concerns raised under this policy and where appropriate ensuring that an investigation is conducted.

## The investigation

The Company will decide how to respond in a responsible and appropriate manner under this policy and through our Human Resources Department. An investigation will be conducted as speedily and sensitively as possible. An official written record will be kept at each stage of the procedure. Further details relative to each potential scenario are outlined within our Human Resources Policy. In any instance, our **H.R. Manager, Paramjit Barry** would be the principal person responsible for managing all whistleblowing issues and investigation from start to finish. She can be contacted at our Head Office on **012367 66878; HR@bellgroup.co.uk**

Incidents of whistleblowing or misconduct arising through our work with Network Rail or Abellio Scotrail shall be reported through CIRAS. Any such instance, together with root cause, lessons learned and corrective action would be managed by Bell Safety Services, led by our the Director of Health and Safety and Environment, Richard Wilks ([r.wilks@bellgroup.co.uk](mailto:r.wilks@bellgroup.co.uk)). The process shall be overseen by our Human Resources Manager to ensure investigations are in line with legislation and Bell Group Policy, especially where the issues concern a grievance, disciplinary, employee wellbeing or otherwise.

A decision as to whether a preliminary investigation should be carried out will be made within two weeks of the complaint having been received. Where this is not possible, the person making the complaint will receive an explanation of the delay.

You are entitled to be accompanied by your union representative (if any) or a work colleague throughout the procedure when reporting your concerns.

Your line manager or the person to whom you have raised the concern will investigate your concern/s as follows:

- Arrange an initial interview with you within 7 days of complaint to ascertain your area/s of concern. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
- The notes taken during the interview will be sent to you to approve as an accurate record of what was discussed.
- Where necessary, you will be asked whether you are comfortable having your identity disclosed and will be reassured about protection from possible victimisation or being penalised.
- You will be asked to provide a verbal or written statement (if you have not already done so).

- Your manager or a more senior director will subsequently conduct further investigations. The investigation may be conducted by the internal auditors, for example in the case of financial irregularity or suspected fraud. They will aim to complete the investigation within 7 working days of the initial interview with you although in serious or complicated cases, this may not be possible.
- The person against whom the disclosure is made will normally be told at an early stage, provided with supporting evidence and allowed to respond. However, it may be necessary to conduct the investigation in confidence (i.e. without informing the subject of your allegation/s) until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. Alternatively, depending on the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the person/s against whom the allegation/s are made may be suspended while investigations are undertaken.

If it is not possible to comply with the timescale set out above, you will be informed.

## Outcome of the Investigation

If there is a case to answer, the investigating officer will consider how to deal with the matter. If potential disciplinary offences are uncovered during the investigation, then it may be that Bell Group UK will commence disciplinary proceedings.

You will be informed of the outcome of the investigation within 5 working days of completion of the investigation (including any disciplinary investigation). The exact nature of any disciplinary action taken against any person will remain confidential.

Whether there was a case to answer or not, and provided that your disclosure was made because you reasonably believed it to be true, the Company will ensure that you are protected from reprisal or victimisation as a result of your complaint.

Only where it is established that your allegations were false and made maliciously will disciplinary action be taken against you. Such disclosures will be treated as gross misconduct and may result in your dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

If, as a result of investigations you are implicated in some way in any wrong doings disciplinary action may be taken against you. The fact that you have blown the whistle will be taken into account if an action is considered.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, you may consider informing other bodies and BELL GROUP UK recognises that workers have a right to make a disclosure about certain matters of concern, as set out in the Whistleblowing issues listed above, to prescribed external bodies such as regulators. However, this will only be appropriate where certain strict conditions have been met. Bell Group UK encourages employees to seek advice before reporting a concern externally. An external disclosure in inappropriate circumstances may lead to disciplinary action against you.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Bell Group UK understands that usually individuals wish to keep the fact they have reported a whistleblowing concern confidential and, as far as possible, confidentiality will be maintained. However, there may be circumstances in which a fair investigation would not be possible without disclosing the identity of the whistle-blower. In those circumstances, your identity would only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis and the people to whom your identity was disclosed would be told that they must keep the information confidential. If a person then breaches confidentiality, that may be a matter for us to deal with under the Disciplinary Policy. Bell Group UK would also inform you of who we anticipate disclosing your identity to in advance of the disclosure being made.

You should treat all information relating to the investigation as confidential. If you are accompanied by a colleague or a trade union representative at any meeting referred to in this policy, that individual must also maintain confidentiality.

## PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

You should not be concerned about being victimised or penalised because you have told us about a concern you have. That is the case even if you turn out to be mistaken in your suspicion.

The law protects individuals from being treated detrimentally because they have raised a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any detrimental treatment, you should inform The National Quality Manager, Tracy Brescia, immediately. If the matter is not remedied you should raise it formally using the procedure contained in the Grievance Policy

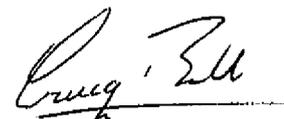
If an employee is found to have treated an individual detrimentally because they have raised a whistleblowing concern, for example, by threatening them, treating them unfavourably or retaliating against them, that will be investigated and Bell Group UK will deal with it in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy.

The Group Chief Executive has lead responsibility for policy implementation within the company and this policy is signed by the CEO to demonstrate the Board's commitment.

**For and on behalf of Bell Group UK –**

CEO, Craig Bell

(BELL GROUP UK AND BELL DECORATING GROUP LIMITED)



Reviewed: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020

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