**POLICY STATEMENT**

Bell Group welcomes diversity and believes that each member of staff has a right to work in an environment that encourages harmonious relationships. We are committed to preventing harassment and bullying and it is the responsibility of all managers to ensure that each member of staff is aware of and understands our procedures relating to harassment and bulling.

Every manager should aim to promote a working environment in which harassment and bullying cannot flourish. They should take immediate action if harassment and/or bullying is suspected or identified, whether or not a complaint has been made. Allegations of harassment and bullying received either formally or informally, must be taken seriously and dealt with promptly and sensitively.

In addition to our commitment to equality and diversity, we are fully aware of our legal obligation to ensure that harassment on the grounds of an individual’s race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status or harassment on any other grounds, does not take place at work, on site, on any other location associated with our organisation. We have a duty of care towards each member of staff and any other persons associated with our company (e.g. suppliers, clients, residents, customers, visitors, consultants and subcontractors) under the Health and Safety Act 1974 (and subsequent amendments) and under The Equality Act 2010.

Each member of staff is personally liable under this legislation; allegations of harassment and/or bullying will be treated seriously and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the perpetrator. We will ensure that each member of staff raising a concern is not victimised as a result. We will also treat any allegations proven to be malicious extremely seriously; these allegations are also likely to be the subject of disciplinary action should they be proven. The overriding principles in dealing with allegations or concerns of harassment are that they must be taken seriously, considered carefully and addressed speedily and where possible, in confidence.

**PROCEDURE**

A member of staff who feels s/he is the subject of harassment (either by a colleague, or anyone else who they may come into contact with during the course of their work) may wish to make note of incidents, dates, times and any witnesses, for future reference. Any member of staff who considers themselves, to have been the subject of harassment has the right to be listened to and to be provided with informed advice on how the matter may be resolved. There are usually a number of options; anyone who feels they have been harassed is likely to wish to speak with someone whom they feel they share something in common. For this reason, they should feel comfortable approaching a number of different managers or directors within our organisation.

Should harassment occur in a group situation, the person in authority within the group has the responsibility to recognise the harassment when it occurs and to take speedy action to stop the harassment. It is important that it is made clear to perpetrator that such behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Silence or inaction can be seen as collusion and endorsement of such behaviour. If the person in authority is the harasser, others within the groups should support the individual being harassed in taking action to report the alleged harassment.

In the event that a member of staff considers that they are experiencing harassment, they have a number of options available to them. They may be able to speak to the individual concerned directly or write to him/her expressing their concerns and requesting that the harassing behaviour stops immediately. Alternatively, (or subsequently, if they achieve no success using the aforementioned method of communication) they may wish to talk to someone in order to obtain another perspective on the situation to ensure that someone else knows about the concerns and can take action with them to ensure the harassment does not continue. A final option is to make a formal complaint.

Members of staff wishing to seek advice or discuss concerns relating to harassment, may approach the human resources department, their manager or another manager within our organisation. All personnel involved, will receive briefing on the implementation of our disciplinary procedures and training is provided throughout the course of their employment. As an organisation, we have found that allegations of harassment have usually stemmed from an individual not being aware that their behaviour has constituted as harassment, therefore, we have implemented training sessions throughout the organisation to identify issues relating to equality and diversity and the forms of harassment in the workplace. As mentioned previously, we have recently created a customer care DVD which also covers discrimination, harassment and bullying within the workplace. All members of staff are versed with our procedures relating to equality and diversity, recruitment, harassment and bullying prior to their commencement of work, through their initial company induction. Throughout the course of an individual’s employment, they will be reminded of our procedures and through various in-house training sessions, pre-start meetings, tool box talks, re-issue of the policies annually to all members of staff and through our management meetings (held twice annually).

Any member of staff approached by another member of staff (or other party associated with the company) who wishes to discuss the matter informally should:

* Find a quiet place to discuss the issue confidentially and without interruption
* Listen carefully and ensure they understand they full facts

When they are sure they understand and if they feel confident to do so, they should discuss the option openly to the individual

All meetings should be recorded in writing, should the issue need to be escalated, although paperwork should not be kept in the individuals personnel file, any correspondence or paperwork relating to the allegations should be stored confidentially in a location no other members of staff has access to (preferably a locked filing cabinet or securely electronically)

Confidentiality is paramount in dealing with cases of alleged harassment. As experience shows, they will be much more difficult to resolve informally if the information regarding the matter becomes common knowledge. Any individual approaching a manager for advice may, however, wish to be accompanied by a non-associate work colleague (i.e. a member of staff who was not a witness to the alleged harassment).

If the manager wishes to seek advice on how to deal with the matter in hand after being approached, they should seek the agreement of the individual who has confided in them to that course of action. Managers in such circumstances may consult Bell Group’s Human Resources department. If the manager does not feel able to provide the advice in a particular case, they should explain the reasons to the individual who has approached them and refer them to another advisor or to the HR team.

Having heard the facts about the incident and the context of the action or behaviour that caused concern, there are a number of formal and informal options available. For example, the person who has experienced harassment could talk to the individual on his/her own, or with a colleague accompanying him/her. The purpose of the conversation will be to make the respondent aware of the way his/her behaviour has been perceived and to ask him/her not to repeat this behaviour. Alternatively, the manager or the human resources representative may facilitate a meeting between both parties to provide the complainant with the opportunity to talk to the respondent and explain his/her view of the offending behaviour. Normally, the manager or HR representative advising, should not take action following an informal approach concerning the harassment, without the agreement of the individual concerned.

In some cases, both parties may wish to refer themselves for mediation; the highly skilled human resources department will organise this, if necessary.

The action outlined above will be appropriate in most cases and will often be sufficient to resolve the matter. Where it is possible to resolve the matter by informal means, every effort should be made to do so and as swiftly as possible. A formal complaint should only be submitted as a ‘final option’, where the informal approach has not achieve satisfactory results, or in exceptional circumstances where the nature of the incident(s) warrants a more formal approach.

If an informal approach has failed or is inappropriate, a formal complaint can be made in writing to your Branch Manager. If the complaint is about a senior manager within your branch, your complaint should be addressed in writing to Bell Group’s HR department.

**Formal Complaint**

Once it has been established that an arising issue has not been resolved, a formal complaint must be registered in writing as soon as possible, with the Branch Manager, if appropriate or alternatively the Head of Bell Group’s Human Resources – Paramjit Barry (HR@bellgroup.co.uk). A formal complaint of harassment should include the nature of the complaint, with reference to dates, times and places (where possible) in relation to a specific(s) and any unsuccessful efforts to resolve the matter. The names of any witness (es) to the incident(s) should also be included. Witnesses can request anonymity, and this will be granted if appropriate, but this will not encourage the interest of openness and ‘natural justice’.

While the formal complaint is under investigation, an alternative location, or timetable for the work of the individual making the allegation will be considered where requested. Upon receipt of a formal complaint of harassment, this should be sent under confidential cover to the head of human resources. She will consult with the Managing Director and Company legal team if required, and where informal approaches have been found to be ineffective, or the nature of the allegation warrants a formal investigation, a formal investigation panel will convene to examine the matter formally. The chair of the panel will take responsibility to ensure the meetings take place within the agreed timeframes and issues are resolved within the agreed timeframes.

*(Further information can be found in our Human Resources Handbook, issued to all members of staff upon commencement of their employment, available upon request).*

