



PROTECTED DISCLOSURES (WHISTLEBLOWING) POLICY

SEPTEMBER 2020

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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PLEASE NOTE: This document was adapted from the Workplace Relations Commission 'Model Whistleblowing Policy.'

1. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

Whistleblowing occurs when a worker raises a concern or discloses information, which relates to wrongdoing, illegal practices or unethical conduct, which has come to his/her attention through work.

Our whistle-blowing policy is intended to encourage and enable workers to raise concerns within our workplace rather than overlooking a problem or “blowing the whistle” externally. Under this policy a worker is entitled to raise concerns or disclose information without fear of penalisation or threat of less favourable treatment, discrimination or disadvantage.

The aims of this policy are:

- To encourage you to feel confident and safe in raising concerns and disclosing information;
- To provide avenues for you to raise concerns in confidence and receive feedback on any action taken;
- To ensure that you receive a response where possible to your concerns and information disclosed;
- To reassure you that you will be protected from penalisation or any threat of penalisation.

2. SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

This policy applies to all of our workers including our employees at all levels to include, fulltime staff, part time staff, sessional staff and CE / TUS staff. (*Volunteers and student placements have redress through procedures outlined in Volunteer Policy / Complaints Policy / Student Placement Guidelines*). This policy applies to current and past employees and at the recruitment stage.

It is important to note that should you have a concern in relation to your own employment or personal circumstances in the workplace it should be dealt with by way of our Grievance Procedure. Likewise, concerns arising in regard to workplace relationships should generally be dealt with through our Dignity At Work policy.

It is also important to note that this policy does not replace any legal reporting or disclosure requirements. Where statutory reporting requirements and procedures exist these must be complied with fully.

3. OUR COMMITMENT

This organisation is committed to maintaining an open culture with the highest standards of honesty and accountability where our workers can report any concerns in confidence.

A worker who makes a disclosure and has a reasonable belief of wrongdoing will not be penalised by this organisation, even if the concerns or disclosure turn out to be unfounded.

Penalisation includes suspension/dismissal, disciplinary action, demotion, discrimination, threats or other unfavourable treatment arising from raising a concern or making a disclosure on the basis of reasonable belief for doing so. If you believe that you are being subjected to penalisation as a result of making a disclosure under this procedure, you should inform your manager/senior manager immediately.

Workers who penalise or retaliate against those who have raised concerns under this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

Workers are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation. However they must have a reasonable belief that there are grounds for their concern. It should be noted that appropriate disciplinary action may be taken against any worker who is found to have raised a concern or raised a disclosure with malicious intent.

4. TYPES OF CONCERNS

4.1 What types of concerns can be raised?

A concern or disclosure should relate to a relevant wrongdoing such as possible fraud, crime, danger or failure to comply with any legal obligation, which has come to your attention in connection with your employment and about which you have a reasonable belief of wrongdoing.

4.2 What types of concerns should not be raised?

A personal concern, for example, a grievance around your own contract of employment would not be regarded as a whistleblowing concern and would be more appropriately processed through our Grievance Procedure.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

5.1 Confidentiality

This organisation is committed to protecting the identity of the worker raising a concern and ensures that relevant disclosures are treated in confidence. The focus will be on the wrongdoing rather than the person making the disclosure. However, there are circumstances, as outlined in the Act, where confidentiality cannot be maintained particularly in a situation where the worker is participating in an investigation into the matter being disclosed. Should such a situation arise, we will make every effort to inform the worker that his/her identity may be disclosed.

5.2 Raising a Concern Anonymously

A concern may be raised anonymously. However on a practical level it may be difficult to investigate such a concern. We would encourage workers to put their names to allegations, with our assurance of confidentiality where possible, in order to facilitate appropriate follow-up. This will make it easier for us to assess the disclosure and take appropriate action including an investigation if necessary.

6. PROCEDURE

6.1 Who should you raise your concern with?

As a first step, appropriate concerns should be raised with your immediate manager or their superior. However, should you not wish to use this route, for example, given the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, you should approach *Glenn Lynch – FRC Manager*- glenn@brillfrc.ie 085-8771772 ; or *Deirdre Collins, Chair VBOM* , deirdre@brillfrc.ie

6.2 How to raise a concern

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Should you raise a concern verbally we will keep a written record of our conversation and provide you with a copy after our meeting. Should you raise a concern in writing we would ask you to give the background and history of the concern, giving relevant details, insofar as is possible, such as dates, sequence of events and description of circumstances.

The earlier you express the concern the easier it will be for us to deal with the matter quickly.

Having raised your concern with us, we will arrange a meeting to discuss the matter with you on a strictly confidential basis. We will need to clarify at this point if the concern is appropriate to this procedure or is a matter more appropriate to our other procedures, for example our Grievance or Dignity at Work procedures. You can choose whether or not you want to be accompanied by a colleague or a trade union representative. In regard to confidentiality, it is important that there should be an awareness of respecting sensitive company information which, while unrelated to the disclosure, may be disclosed in the course of a consultation or investigation process.

6.3 How we will deal with your disclosure

Having met with you in regard to your concern and clarified that the matter is, in fact, appropriate to this procedure, we will carry out an initial assessment to examine what actions we need to take to deal with the matter. This may involve simply clarifying certain matters, clearing up misunderstandings or resolving the matter by agreed action without the need for an investigation.

If, on foot of the initial assessment, we conclude that there are grounds for concern that cannot be dealt with at this point, we will conduct an investigation which will be carried out fairly and objectively. The form and scope of the investigation will depend on the subject matter of the disclosure.

Disclosures may, in the light of the seriousness of the matters raised, be referred immediately to the appropriate authorities. Likewise if urgent action is required (for example to remove a health and safety hazard), this action will be taken.

It is important to us that you feel assured that a disclosure made by you under this policy is taken seriously and that you are kept informed of steps being taken by us in response your disclosure. In this regard we undertake to communicate with you as follows:

- We will acknowledge receipt of your disclosure and arrange to meet with you as outlined above;
- We will inform you of how we propose to investigate the matter and keep you informed of actions, where possible, in that regard including the outcome of any investigation, and, should it be the case, why no further investigation will take place. However, it is important to note that sometimes the need for confidentiality and legal considerations may prevent us from giving you specific details of an investigation;

- We will inform you of the likely time scales in regard to each of the steps being taken but in any event we commit to dealing with the matter as quickly as practicable.

It is possible that in the course of an investigation, you may be asked to clarify certain matters. To maximise confidentiality such a meeting can take place off site and you can choose whether or not to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative.

Where a concern is raised or a disclosure is made in accordance with this policy, but the allegation is subsequently not upheld by an investigation, no action will be taken against the worker making the disclosure and the worker will be protected against any penalisation. It is important to note that if an unfounded allegation is found to have been made with malicious intent, then disciplinary action may be taken.

7. HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER

The aim of this Policy is to provide an avenue within this workplace to deal with concerns or disclosures in regard to wrongdoing. We are confident that issues can be dealt with “in house” and we strongly encourage workers to report such concerns internally.

We acknowledge that there may be circumstances where an employee wants to make a disclosure externally, and the legislation governing disclosures — The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 — provides for a number of avenues in this regard. For further information, contact and advice points, see appendix 1 attached.

It is important to note however that while you need only have a reasonable belief as to wrongdoing to make a disclosure internally, if you are considering an external disclosure, different and potentially more onerous obligations apply depending on to whom the disclosure is made.

8. COMMUNICATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be communicated as appropriate and will be subject to regular monitoring and review in consultation with our workforce and their representatives.

This Policy was discussed and ratified at a meeting of the VBODs on

Signed : _____

Chairperson:

Date: _____

Review History:

- Developed September 2020

APPENDIX 1:

Contact and advice points

1. **The Trade Union(s) contact details**
(Insert as appropriate)
2. **The Protected Disclosures Act 2014**
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2014/a1414.pdf>
3. **List of Prescribed Persons (S.I. No. 339 of 2014)**
<http://www.per.gov.ie/protected-disclosures-i-e-whistleblowing/>
4. **Copy of the Code of Practice:**
Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures in **Organisation name** Staff Handbook
5. **Workplace Relations Service**
<http://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/>
6. **Irish Congress Trade Unions**
<http://www.ictu.ie/>
7. **Transparency International**
<http://transparency.ie/>