

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

- 1.1 We are committed to conducting our business with honesty and integrity, and we expect all colleagues to maintain high standards. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.
- 1.2 The aims of this policy are:
- (a) To encourage colleagues to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
 - (b) To provide colleagues with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
 - (c) To reassure colleagues that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

What is whistleblowing?

- 1.3 **Whistleblowing** is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:
- (a) criminal activity.
 - (b) miscarriages of justice.
 - (c) danger to health and safety.
 - (d) damage to the environment.
 - (e) failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements.
 - (f) financial fraud or mismanagement.
 - (g) negligence.
- 1.4 A **whistleblower** is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a **whistleblowing concern**) you should report it under this policy.
- 1.5 This policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. Francis James has other policies and procedures in place to support you (Grievance Procedure, Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy, Misconduct and Disciplinary Policy) and you should consult these in the first instance.
- 1.6 If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy you should seek advice from your line manager or human resources (HR) support.

Raising a whistleblowing concern

- 1.7 We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your line manager or HR. You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if you prefer. They may be able to agree on a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases, they may refer the matter to a senior manager.
- 1.8 However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that your line manager or HR has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact a more senior manager if possible.
- 1.9 Wherever the matter is reported, a meeting will be arranged with you as soon as possible to discuss your concern. You may bring a colleague or union representative to any meetings under this policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 1.10 We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

Confidentiality

- 1.11 We hope that colleagues will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.
- 1.12 We do not encourage colleagues to make disclosures anonymously. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible and have been made in good faith. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to their line manager, senior manager or HR and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt, you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline. Their contact details are at the end of this policy.

External disclosures

- 1.13 The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.
- 1.14 The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are at the end of this policy.

- 1.15 Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our colleagues, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a customer, supplier or service provider. The law allows you to raise a concern in good faith with a third party, where you reasonably believe it relates mainly to their actions or something that is legally their responsibility. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first. You should contact your line manager, a senior manager or HR for guidance.

Investigation and outcome

- 1.16 Once you have raised a concern, and we have held an initial meeting with you, we will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings to provide further information.
- 1.17 In some cases, we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including colleagues with relevant experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.
- 1.18 We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.
- 1.19 If we conclude that a whistleblower has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action.

If you are not satisfied

- 1.20 While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this policy, you can help us to achieve this.
- 1.21 If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled, you can raise it with an alternative senior manager if possible.

Protection and support for whistleblowers

- 1.22 It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support colleagues who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 1.23 Colleagues must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.
- 1.24 If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform your line manager, senior manager or HR immediately. If the matter is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our Grievance Procedure.
- 1.25 Colleagues must not threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

Responsibility for the success of this policy

- 1.26 The Board of Francis James has overall responsibility for this policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this policy. The Board may delegate authority for this to a sub-committee of the Board.
- 1.27 We have the day-to-day operational responsibility for this policy and must ensure that all managers and other colleagues who may deal with concerns or investigations under this policy receive regular and appropriate training.
- 1.28 All colleagues are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Colleagues are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to your line manager or HR.

Independent advice on whistleblowing

Protect (whistleblowing charity)

Website: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>

Helpline: 020 3117 2520

Web form: <https://protect.tfaforms.net/f/Contact-the-Advice-Line>

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Karen Tucker	31/12/2024	1	 S Graham	31/12/2025
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