

## Are Whistleblowers being treated fairly?

Whistleblowers are being victimised when they go back to work. A recent government report found that whistleblowers were often victimised and bullied after exposing misconduct in companies and public services in the UK. As the expenditure of public money is often shrouded in a cloud of secrecy, a whistleblower can give us an insider's perspective – divulging valuable information that lies within the public interest.

### **Legally protected**

The act of whistle blowing is covered, in law, by the 1998 Public Disclosure Act. For information to be leaked legally, it must be proven to relate to malpractice or criminality. Atrocities such as the police cover up of the Hillsborough disaster have been revealed because of whistleblowers and it remains an important way to uncover wrong doing.

The second section of the law states that whistleblowers have the “right not to suffer detriment”. This rule is more difficult to enact because the public body or company, and fellow employees, often suffer as a result of the whistleblowing.

Upon returning to the workplace, whistleblowers are often treated with disdain. They are harassed and bullied and although covered legally, it is difficult to reprimand those who are singling them out.

The report says that: “the whistleblowers fears of reprisal are often justified, and such experiences are likely to deter other employees from raising a concern”.

### **How is it possible to fairly treat whistleblowers?**

If whistleblowers do not feel like they are protected then they are less likely to reveal important evidence. It is thus important that we push for those who victimise whistleblowers to be given harsher punishments.

Although the law currently protects whistleblowers, punishments for harassment are not nearly heavy enough. Companies and public services should be forced to do everything in their power to make sure that this consistent problem does not occur.

### **Conclusion**

The report states that: “Where the identity of whistleblowers is known, departments must ensure that they are protected, supported and have their welfare monitored”. It also offers three suggestions to how companies should work with whistleblowers:

1. “Ownership from the top by assigning a board member who is accountable for the proper treatment of whistleblowers”.
2. “Providing whistleblowers with appropriate support and advice, such as access to legal and counselling services”.
3. “Appropriate and swift sanctions against employees, at all levels in the organisation, if they victimise whistleblowers”.

All of these suggestions, especially the third recommendation, would help to make the life of a whistleblower easier. In turn, this would make it more likely for people to come forward and expose issues which are of great importance to us all.