

UK Whistleblowing Protections: time for a cultural reset?

UK whistleblowing protections are on the brink of significant reform. [The Public Interest Disclosure Act \(PIDA\)](#) was passed in 1998, was praised globally as an innovative and vital piece of legislation, aiming to protect workers who raised concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace. However, over 25 years later, the Act is seen as outdated and distrusted. As a result, the current framework is being reshaped through new legislative changes and a landmark Private Member's Bill that signals a move towards stronger, more centralised protection for those who speak up.

Do the current UK whistleblowing laws meet their objectives?

The short answer is no. The present laws lack any mechanism for an employer to take any action regarding the concerns that caused workers to speak up. Whistleblowers have often been left frustrated whilst crimes and other forms of wrongdoing continue unabated.

Claims brought by workers in the UK Employment Tribunals are frequently unsuccessful. The current system means that too many people who blow the whistle still suffer. Few whistleblowers report being able to return to their profession, and many report lifelong detriment. As a result, many people with genuine workplace concerns often stay silent.

Whistleblowers who embark upon a legal solution only achieve a less than 10% success rate. The personal cost in financial terms is also beyond the means of most people. Historically, whistleblowing in the UK has often been perceived as a personal risk rather than a civic duty. That is why there is now a strong push to change not just the rules, but the culture. The recent focus on UK whistleblowing protections is not about simply tidying up the law; it is about fixing a system that is no longer fit for purpose.

Why Now? The catalyst for change

Public trust has taken a knock. From Grenfell to the Post Office Horizon scandal, we have seen what happens when people are ignored or afraid to speak up. These were not isolated failures. They were systemic.

They exposed something more profound: a disconnect between frontline concerns and boardroom decisions. When whistleblowers spoke out, they were ignored, silenced, or punished. Their warnings could have saved lives. And that has prompted politicians, campaigners, and employers to ask: how do we make it safer for people to speak up?

New protections for Sanctions disclosures

[New whistleblowing legislation](#) came into force on 26 June 2025, expanding whistleblower protections for those reporting suspected breaches of UK sanctions to designated government bodies. This includes reports made to HM Treasury, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, and the Secretary of State for Transport. These changes aim to strengthen sanctions enforcement within the Government and, at the same time, protect those individuals who come forward and raise serious concerns.

What other future changes might we see in UK whistleblowing protections?

1. [The Whistleblower Bill](#) is currently progressing through parliament. It proposes establishing an independent body to manage whistleblower reports, creating a central watchdog for whistleblowing, and replacing the existing fragmented system of

over 80 regulators. The office would offer legal and financial support to whistleblowers, including compensation for reputational and personal damage. It is also suggested that this might introduce new civil and criminal offences for retaliation and shift the burden of proof in favour of whistleblowers, expanding coverage to include contractors, freelancers, volunteers, and trustees- not just 'core employees'- which reflects the changing nature of the workplace.

2. Legal Duty to Investigate- Employers may soon be required to take 'reasonable steps' to investigate concerns. No longer will issues be dismissed casually. Action will be expected, and employers will be held accountable for their actions.
3. The proposed changes in the Government's key [Employment Rights Bill](#) are also set to strengthen whistleblower protections- particularly in cases involving harassment and discrimination. Employers will have a new obligation to take "all reasonable steps" to prevent mistreatment. This means they will no longer be able to rely on Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) to silence concerns. While confidentiality requests will be respected, they will no longer be mandatory.
4. Broader grounds for protection - Retaliation related to reporting issues, such as sanctions breaches, safety failures, or discrimination, will gain clearer protection, with stricter consequences for employers who ignore them.

What do these changes mean for businesses?

This is not just about compliance. Stronger UK whistleblowing protections create stronger businesses. Here's why:

- Risks are raised early - Whistleblowers are often your best line of defence. They spot problems often before irreparable damage impacts your business.
- Trust builds loyalty- When staff see action, not excuses, they stay, therefore playing a crucial role in the business's sustainability programmes.
- Culture trumps policy - A good whistleblowing policy on paper means nothing if employees do not trust the process. These changes encourage a full culture shift.

UK Whistleblowing Protections: a cultural shift employers cannot ignore?

For years, whistleblowing has carried a stigma with employees often labelled as troublemakers or disloyal to their employers. But that is changing. There is a growing recognition that whistleblowers are acting with integrity and courage when coming forward.

These reforms send a clear signal: we are moving from secrecy to transparency. From fear to fairness. Employers who want to be ahead of the curve need to shift their mindset. It is not about doing the bare minimum. It is about building environments where raising concerns is welcomed, not feared.

How can organisations prepare for stronger UK Whistleblowing Protections?

1. Rethink your policy from the ground up. Include non-employees. Clarify how reports are managed. Show people what 'doing the right thing' looks like in practice.
2. Upskill your managers - they are often the first point of contact. Do they know how to respond to a disclosure in an appropriate manner?

3. Feedback is crucial - Be transparent about disclosing outcomes. You do not need to name names. However, if action was taken, please state so. It shows the process works effectively.
4. Consider an external whistleblowing service - Not everyone feels safe raising concerns internally. That is why more organisations are turning to third-party services. It provides employees with a secure and confidential space to speak up. Building trust, removing bias, and helping businesses respond effectively.

If you have any questions about the proposed changes in whistleblowing legislation, or how AAB's expert whistleblowing service can support your organisation, please do not hesitate to get in contact with [Sean McAuley](#) or your usual [AAB contact](#).