

Protect Impact Report

2024

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Introduction

Nobody goes into work with the intention of becoming a whistleblower. But it happens. They spot something that doesn't seem right, voice their concerns to someone above them and hopefully the wrongdoing comes to an end. End of story.

But we all know that sadly, it doesn't always go that way. As this report demonstrates, too many whistleblowers suffer when they try to speak up to stop harm.

Getting whistleblowing right is a critical part of any employer's good governance, however experiences differ wildly from organisation to organisation. We advise more than three thousand people every year to better understand their legal rights and how to blow the whistle safely. Alongside our campaigning work for legal and policy reform to better protect whistleblowing, we support employers to implement effective whistleblowing arrangements.

With more than 30 years' experience behind us, no one else has our unrivalled expertise in understanding the law and insights into the many challenges whistleblowers face.

We have an ambition that in the future no whistleblower will go unheard or unprotected.

We're here for everyone. We're independent and our advice is completely confidential.



*“Thank you. I am still
battling with my
employer and your
advice came at my
lowest point. Probably
helped to save my life”*

Demand for support continues to rise

Growing demand for Protect's services continued in 2024. The number of calls to our legal advice line increased by 10% on the previous year. Many of those getting in touch are in crisis - more than two thirds of our callers who had reported their concerns told us they were being victimised, bullied, facing dismissal or felt forced into resigning. Being able to receive measured and confidential advice provides a lifeline when they need it most.

From the Post Office Horizon IT scandal, to the Thirlwall Inquiry, examining the circumstances of Lucy Letby's crimes, whistleblowing has never been more present in the public consciousness. We were invited to give evidence to the Thirlwall Inquiry, presenting the whistleblowing lessons the NHS should learn from the case. We also provided evidence for the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into whistleblowing in the Civil Service.

With 2024 bringing a change of government we saw new opportunities to move the dial on whistleblowing protections and improve existing laws. Labour's landmark Employment Rights Bill offers an opportunity to improve whistleblowing law. Our lobbying work through the year galvanised supportive MPs to act and push for whistleblowing clauses into the new legislation.

In July 2024, more people came to our Advice Line than in any other month in the last 4 years.

Demand for support continues to rise

From claims at McDonald's to complaints about the behaviour of high-profile broadcasters and the ongoing allegations of abuse at Harrods, sexual harassment was never far from the headlines. Following the introduction of the Worker Protection Act 2023, which creates a duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment, we were pleased to see the proposal to identify sexual harassment as a specific category of a whistleblower complaint in the Employment Rights Bill.

We intervened in two crucial cases in 2024. The first resulted in a landmark ruling which opened the door to UK charity trustees receiving whistleblowing protections if they suffer adverse treatment for speaking up. The second held off a threat to removing "injury to feelings" compensation - safeguarding this crucial reparation for non-financial losses.

We would like to give a special acknowledgement to our funders: the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, A B Charitable Trust, Souter Charitable Trust and the Joffe Charitable Trust. We are extremely grateful for their ongoing involvement, encouragement and their steadfast belief in creating a world where no whistleblower goes unheard or unprotected.



Our impact in numbers



496,000

Views on our
website



3,336

Total new
cases



18,456

Interactions
(email/phone)



1.5 million

People reached through
our work with employers

Who we helped

In 2024, Protect significantly impacted the lives of thousands of whistleblowers by providing practical and legal advice on how to raise workplace concerns as safely and effectively as possible.

- Whistleblowing law is notoriously complex and difficult to navigate without legal representation, with an extremely low success rate (only 3%) for individuals reaching the tribunal stage.
- There is unprecedented demand for Protect's advice services. 2023 was our busiest year since 2020 during Covid and 2024 was even busier with 3,336 new cases – a rise of 10% on the previous year. Most people getting in touch are in a very vulnerable position, going through significant mental distress, facing financial losses, and in already challenging financial circumstances - in 2024, more than half (51%) of our callers earned less than £30,000 per year.
- The majority of calls came from the public sector (41%) with just over a quarter from the private sector (26%) and a fifth from the charity sector (21%). The remainder of calls (12%) were divided across a range of smaller sectors.
- Calls came from a wide variety of industries with most calls from health and social work (30%), education (13%) and financial services (7%).

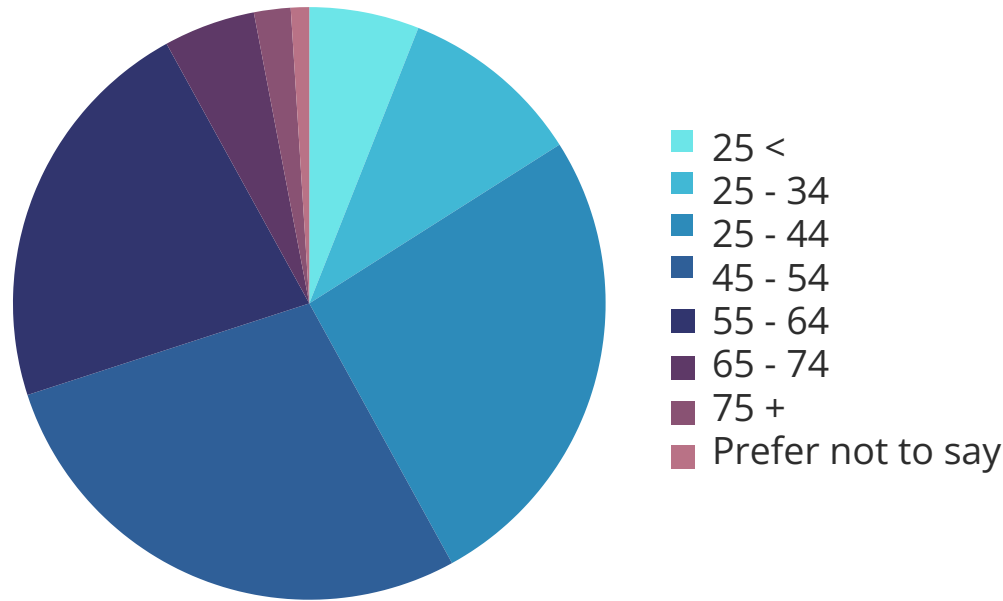
2 in 5 callers (40%) said their whistleblowing concern had been ignored by their employer

Only **1%** of callers said they had been thanked for raising whistleblowing concerns

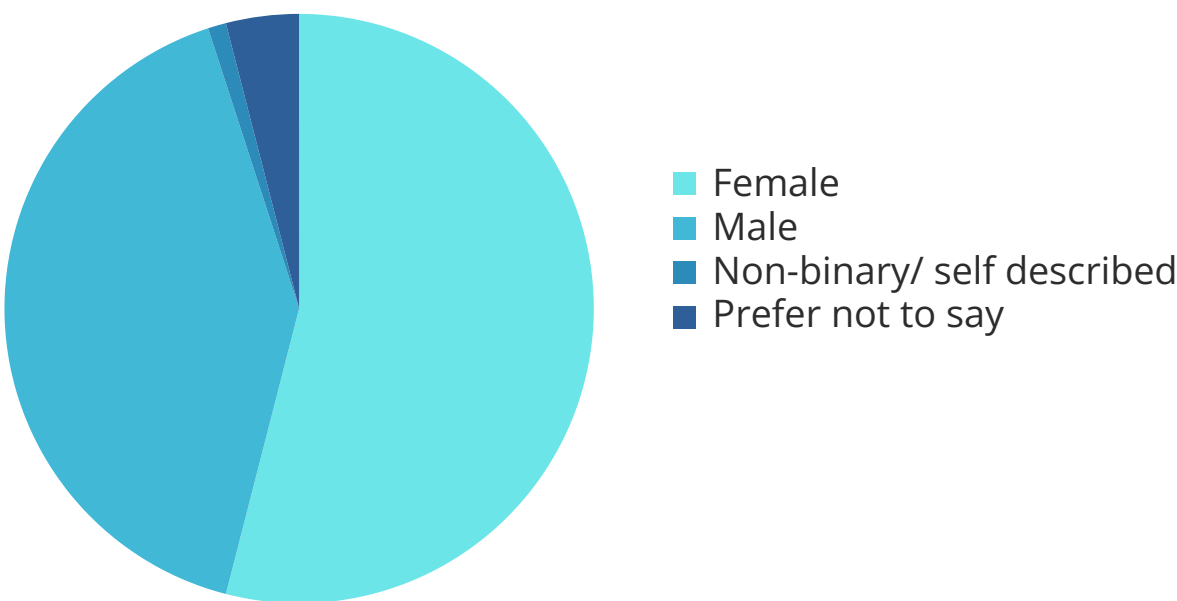
More than two-thirds (68%) said they faced victimisation or felt forced to resign

Who we advised

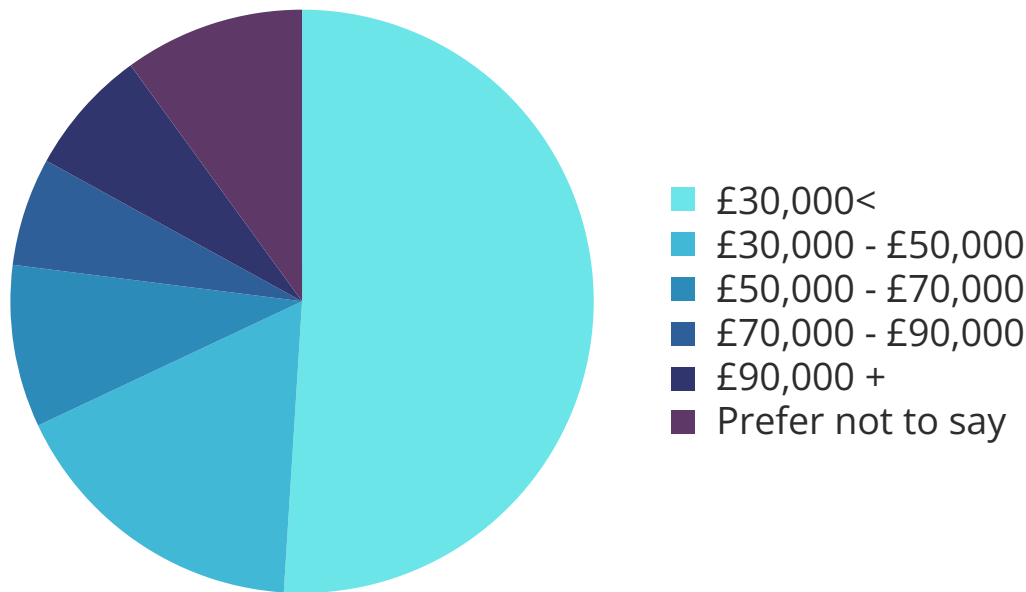
Age



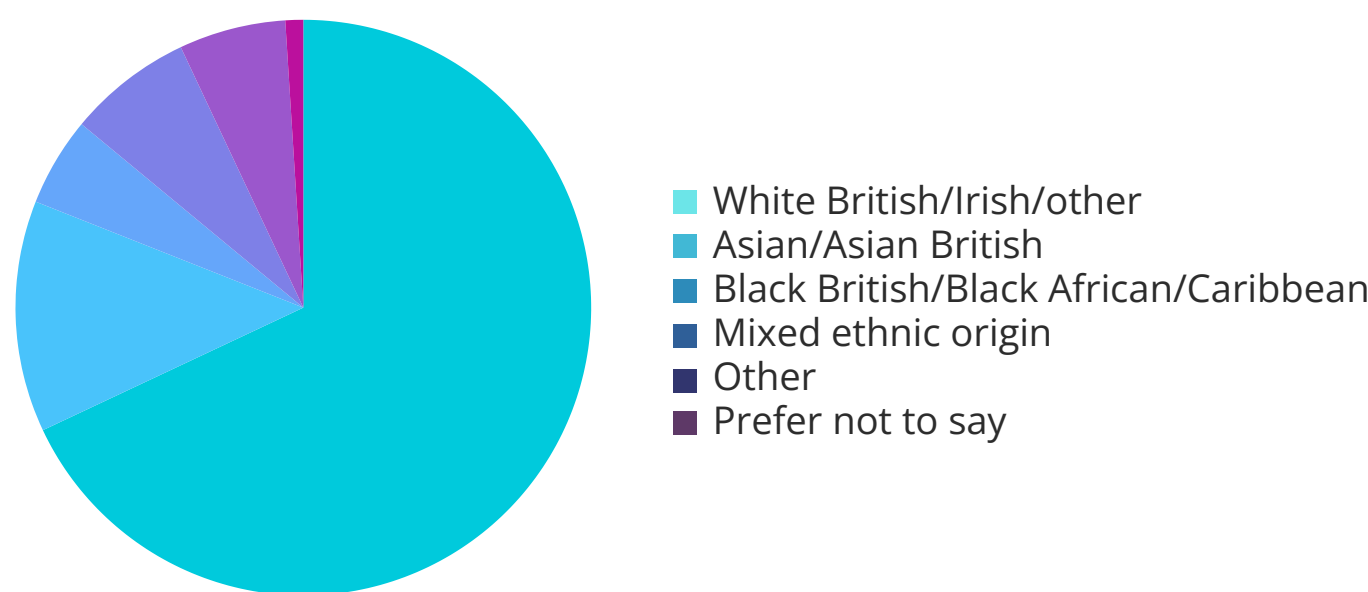
Gender



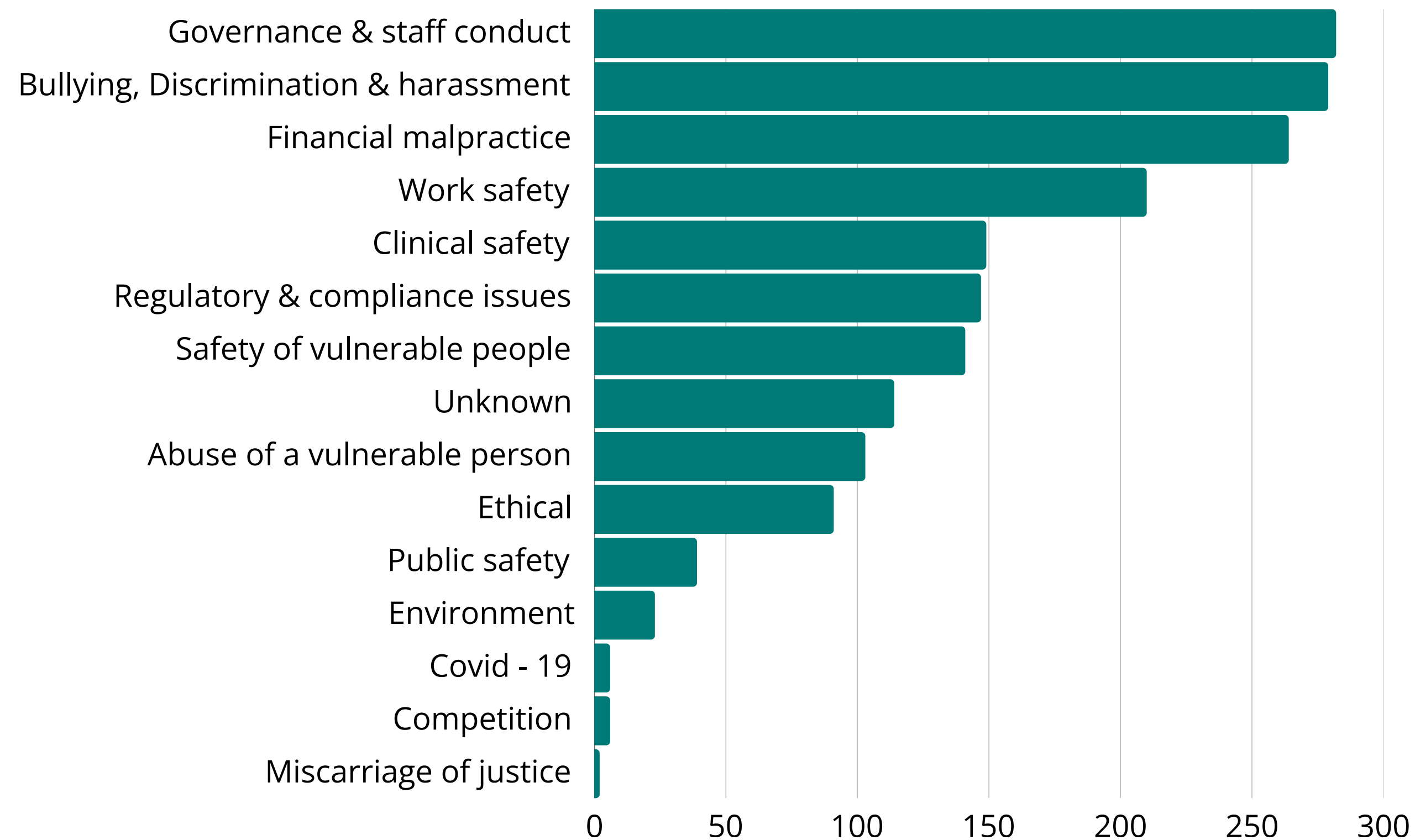
Annual income



Ethnicity

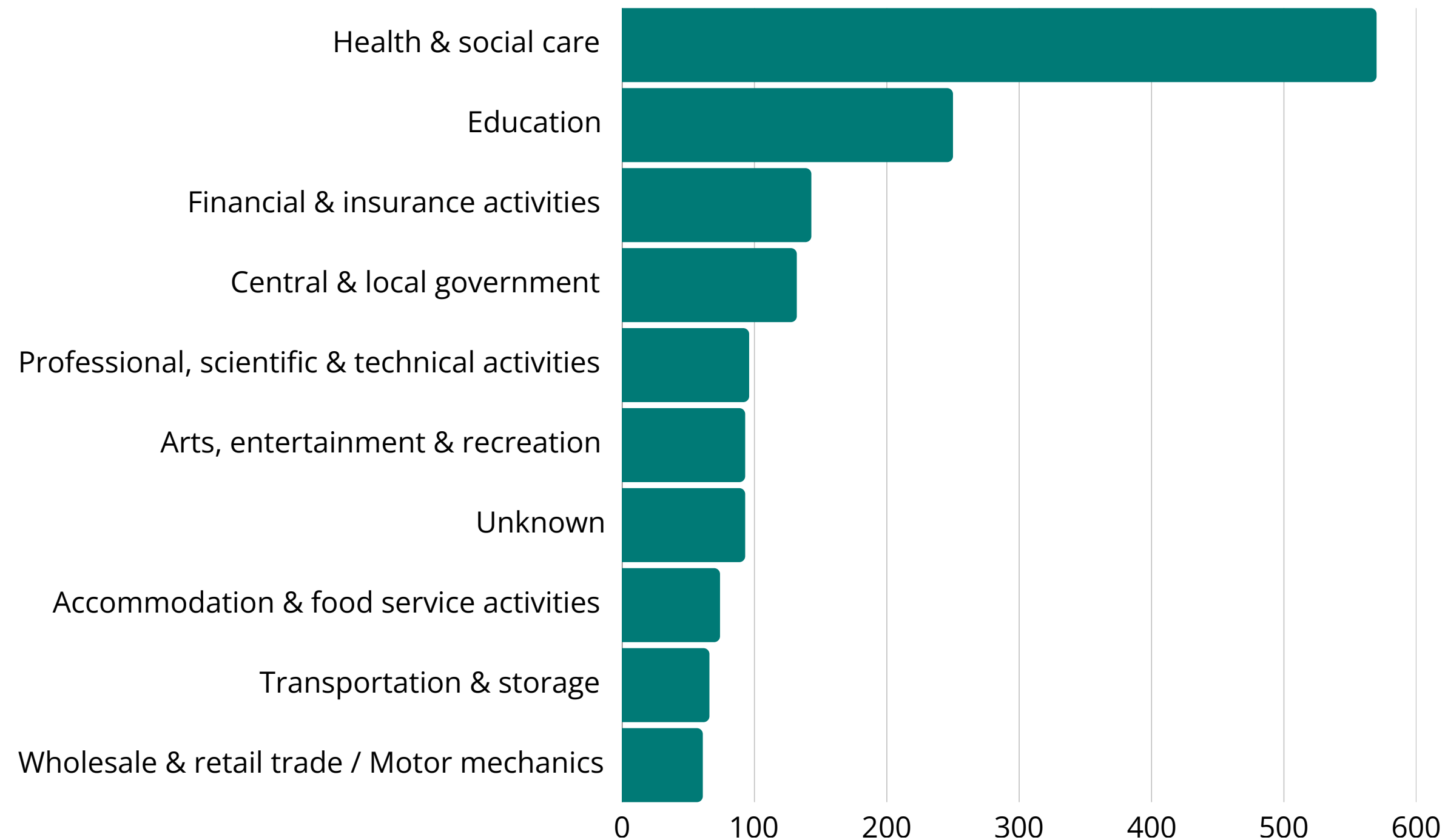


Caller concern



Caller industry

The top ten sectors people came to us from were:



How we helped Tom

Tom* was an experienced ESG consultant within the financial sector responsible for managing risks around environmental claims made by his employer. Working to help his employer understand and improve its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impact he began to worry about some of the statements his company were making.

He initially spoke to his line manager about a range of issues including outdated policies, mis-reporting and regulatory breaches, but was repeatedly ignored. Growing concerned he felt the issues needed to be addressed, so shared a report through the company's internal whistleblowing line. Rather than looking into the concerns he had raised, the firm immediately subjected Tom to disciplinary proceedings. Soon after his employment contract was terminated with immediate effect.

Out of the workplace and feeling despondent Tom contacted Protect's Advice Line for support and after discussing his situation and talking through his options he considered bringing a claim for interim relief.

Following our advice, Tom brought legal action against his former employer and managed to negotiate a generous settlement agreement.

This case is a clear illustration of how companies, even those with an internal whistleblowing policy, can make it difficult for workers to speak up about wrongdoing. Tom was repeatedly ignored which forced him to escalate his concerns internally. He was then poorly treated and subsequently fired. Employers that mistreat whistleblowers can have the effect of scaring others into silence, leaving problems to fester and harm to continue. Fortunately in this case, following Protect's advice, Tom was able to hold his employer to account and secure compensation.

*Name has been changed at the request of the individual.



Caller feedback

In December 2023 we launched our Advice Line Feedback project – a new automated process that enables callers to our advice line to provide suggestions for improving our service. 126 people completed feedback forms in 2024 as part of the project.

How the project works

Three months after a caller's first contact with Protect they are sent an email to check on the status of their case, their experience of speaking to a legal adviser and the quality of the advice and service provided. Callers are specifically asked about their employment status, how helpful they found the advice provided and how we can improve our service for the future.

As a result of feedback received, we have:

- Introduced a more systematic follow-up email when callers require additional support.
- Trained legal advisers on adjustments that may be needed by disabled callers.
- Created and published a new webpage listing important whistleblowing cases that can be used as legal precedents.

97%

of people using our Advice Line said they would recommend the service

92%

of people said they better understood their rights and options after talking to a legal adviser

80%

of people said they found the advice helpful or very helpful

81%

of people said they found the information on the website helpful or very helpful


Voices of our callers

*"It gave me **confidence** and **hope** after going through the most difficult period in my life."*

*"**Responsive, legally sound, strategic advice** that was critical to a successful settlement."*

*"**Fantastic**. I wouldn't have been able to return to my workplace without support provided by Protect."*

*"Essential service and exactly what I needed to **feel safe** to seek confidential expert advice."*



"My adviser has been calm, patient, supportive and informed. She has ... been consistently available to offer a listening ear. I would not have felt able to take the steps towards resolution of my situation without her."

A year of change

2024 was a year of political change with the formation of a new government and the launch of Labour's flagship Employment Rights Bill giving our legal reform campaign a burst of fresh energy.

We galvanised cross-party support to introduce new measures to hold employers to account and accept a duty to investigate whistleblowing concerns. As profiled in The Times three former ministers, the former Labour minister Baroness Hodge of Barking; the Liberal Democrat former cabinet minister Alistair Carmichael MP; and Sir Robert Buckland, the former Conservative justice secretary, argued that introducing a duty to investigate on employers would help to change the culture in many workplaces and make sure risks and problems are identified early. They also presented the case that the amendment will support good business practice and contribute to economic growth. Their rallying call was followed by a group of leading whistleblowers, including the Yorkshire cricket whistleblower Azeem Rafiq, backing our campaign adding their voices to the call to change in the law so employers can no longer ignore whistleblowing.

There is currently no legal obligation on employers to investigate whistleblowing concerns, or even to have whistleblowing processes. Evidence from our Advice Line consistently shows that 40% of whistleblowers are ignored by their employers when they raise issues in the workplace.

Liberal Democrat MPs tabled our amendments to the Employment Rights Bill to extend protection to excluded workers and to simplify the test for dismissal. Recent employment tribunal cases show the power balance is firmly in the employers' corner as workers find it hard to show their dismissal was down to blowing the whistle. These amendments were rejected by the Government but illustrated strong feelings among MPs that reform is needed.



We were delighted to see the Government clarify the law by extending the type of wrongdoing that can be protected under the Employment Rights Act 1996 to include sexual harassment. We met with Labour shadow ministers while in opposition, and argued that this will send a clear message that whistleblowing routes can be used to address sexual harassment. However, while it clarifies existing protections, it doesn't strengthen them and we want to see further changes to improve whistleblowers' legal rights.

A focus on corruption

Thanks to the financial support provided by the [Joffe Charitable Trust](#) our anti-corruption work has made great strides this year. Alongside playing an active role in the [UK Anti-Corruption Coalition](#), our big win of the year was persuading Home Office officials to put whistleblowing front and centre and include a reference to Protect in their [latest statutory guidance](#) on the new offence of failure to prevent fraud. This guidance includes many of our key policy recommendations and expectations on employers including:

- training staff to ensure they are aware of internal whistleblowing procedures and how to respond when whistleblowing concerns are raised,
- carrying out risk assessments,
- keeping whistleblowing systems under review, including, if appropriate, an external assessment of the arrangements.

Under the offence an organisation can be prosecuted if it benefits from fraud committed by its staff and it fails to introduce reasonable fraud prevention procedures. Having effective whistleblowing arrangements is a clear way for organisations to demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps and ensure they don't fall foul of this new law.

In the build up to the 2024 general election we successfully lobbied the influential [All Party Parliamentary Group on Anti-Corruption and Responsible Taxation](#) to include our call for a duty on all employers to investigate whistleblowing concerns in their manifesto. Since engaging with this group several key MPs are now actively supporting our legal reform campaign.

Legal Interventions

We intervened in two crucial cases at the Employment Appeal Tribunal in 2024. We only take the step to submit evidence as an independent third party in cases that have the potential to impact the existing whistleblowing law and when the case gives rise to important issues of public policy.

- In MacLennan vs The British Psychological Society we intervened in a landmark case which allows UK charity trustees to receive whistleblowing protection if they suffer adverse treatment for speaking up. This case directly opens up potential protection to the (approximately) one million trustees in the UK.
- Our action to intervene in another case helped retain the ability for whistleblowers to get compensation for their non-financial losses. In the Employment Appeal Tribunal between Declan Durey and South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust there was a risk that the established “injury to feelings” award for whistleblowers could have been dismantled. Any change to this law would have had serious consequences to future pay-outs. Compensation for the emotional distress caused by acts of victimisation by their employer can be the main compensation claimed for any whistleblower who remains in their job.



Redefining whistleblowing in business

Sitting alongside Protect's aim to improve whistleblowing law is the work we do directly with employers to promote ethical standards of conduct in the workplace. Regulatory differences between sectors mean organisations can have very different approaches to managing whistleblowing and whistleblowers. While working with businesses is key to Protect's income and operating model, it's also essential to engage employers in adopting best-practice whistleblowing arrangements. Only when workers feel safe and supported at work will they be confident in speaking up when they see harm.

2024 was a year of extensive training, consultancy and activity to connect, inform and support organisations motivated to improve and prioritise their whistleblowing systems.

We worked directly with more than 300 organisations over the course of the year, diverse in size and focus, and coming to us for a range of reasons: some as part of their built-in approaches to risk and compliance and others responding to whistleblowing learnings and workplace culture issues.

We estimate that the combined headcount of the organisations in our membership programme amounts to more than 1.5 million staff. Additionally, we provided training and consultancy services to dozens of organisations throughout the year, further extending the reach of our work.

300

Organisations worked with directly

1.5m

Staff impacted by our work

900

Delegates attended training courses

Redefining whistleblowing in business

Our industry-leading benchmark and scanner assessments were completed by 25 organisations, allowing them to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their whistleblowing practices and plot out improvement strategies to address them.

In 2024 we reached a major milestone with our three core training courses: Whistleblowing Essentials, Investigating a Whistleblowing Concern and Preventing Whistleblower Victimisation, plus Financial Services Whistleblower's Champion all awarded CPD (Continued Professional Development) accreditation. This status certifies that both the content and structure of the sessions have been independently assessed and approved for continuing personal and professional development purposes.

We trained just under 900 delegates across more than 60 courses giving them the knowledge and skills to take back into their workplace to improve their whistleblowing systems.

Additionally, we ran a number of webinars and breakfast briefings across the year sharing industry knowledge and legal insights engaging with a wider audience.

"Both the presentation and structure of the course were spot on. I really enjoyed a topic that can otherwise be a little intimidating and scary to talk about. The case studies, the fact that we were split into rooms, and the overall context of the data presented to us was really relatable, accurate and helpful to place it all into perspective. Keep up the great work!"

Diana Elsasser, Finance Systems manager, Trainline

"Both trainers were really effective at communicating the important messages in an easy-to-understand way. It was a safe place to ask questions and develop my knowledge. There were a couple of breakout exercises, and these were a really effective way of working through theoretical challenges with colleagues. It was well worth attending, and also helpful to meet with other colleagues for reassurance that we face similar challenges."

Government Department Delegate

Meaningful partnerships

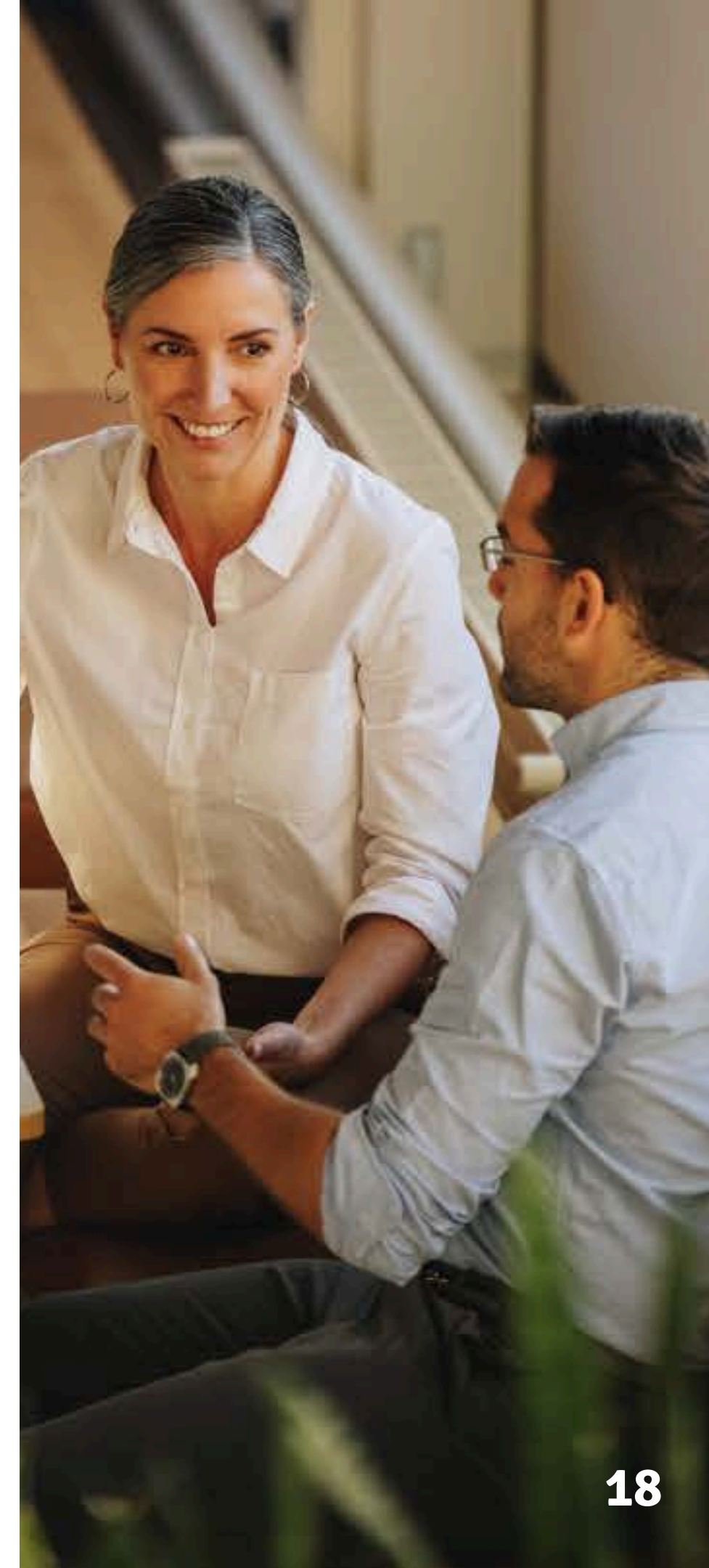
As a small charity working in a niche area of employment law, we are aware we can only achieve so much on our own. That's why partnerships and working with others is so important. Our work would not be possible without the network of partner organisations who share our vision of a world where no whistleblower goes unheard or is unprotected.

- As a founding member of the Whistleblowing International Network (WIN) - a group of whistleblowing advocacy groups - we benefit from sharing whistleblowing expertise across the world. Our Chief Executive sits as a trustee on WIN's board. WIN were signatories to a letter calling for the UK Government to support a resolution at UNCAC (UN Convention against Corruption) which was eventually secured. This was the first time UNCAC passed a resolution requiring all member states to put in place ambitious whistleblowing protections.
- We are a proud member of the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, a collaborative group that works to fight corruption in the UK and address the UK's role in facilitating corruption abroad.
- Established in January 2021, the Anti-SLAPP Coalition works to make the case for structural and meaningful responses to SLAPPs – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. These are abusive lawsuits filed by a private party with the purpose of silencing critical speech. As part of the coalition, we engage with policy-makers, regulators and other organisations to fight the vexatious legal threats deployed by the wealthy and powerful seeking to shutdown scrutiny and democratic accountability.



Meaningful partnerships

- We are hugely thankful to the many law firms and chambers as part of our Legal Support Network, and individual solicitors and barristers, who provide pro bono support for our legal case work. Their insights and perspectives and the work they do to support us with third party interventions are invaluable in our mission to uphold and improve whistleblowing law.
- We are members of Employment Legal Advice Network (ELAN) – a network of advice agencies who meet regularly to share information and training on employment law.
- Since 2019 we have been running the confidential advice line service (0800 055 7214) on behalf of the Charity Commission. As organisations working with some of the most vulnerable people in society its essential charity workers have a trustworthy and safe space to turn to if they see or suspect wrongdoing in the workplace. In 2024 a fifth (21%) of our calls came from the charity sector, and 1 in 10 callers said they'd heard about us via the Charity Commission.



Wider impact

We are regularly approached to contribute to the national conversation about whistleblowing and use our expertise and insight to provide guidance to organisations tackling related issues.

Public Inquiries

- As part of the Thirlwall Inquiry that is examining circumstances surrounding the crimes of Lucy Letby, we submitted evidence drawing on the experience of callers to our whistleblowing advice line and best practice within NHS settings. Our Legal Director presented the evidence at the Inquiry outlining the challenges whistleblowers face.

New research

- We worked with the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) to create a whistleblowing guide for academic researchers. UKRIO is an independent charity, offering support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in academic, scientific and medical research.

Awards

- We won the award for the best In-House Legal team at the inaugural Legal ESG Awards (Environmental, Social and Governance).
- We were Highly Commended in the Sustainability category for our Environmental Whistleblowing project at the 2024 LexisNexis Legal Awards. As one of the 5 finalists, we were celebrated for our "sustained and recognised contribution to promoting the rule of law" and our commitment to "the spread of fair and ordered government, law and justice".



Wider impact

Public profile

- In an unusual collaboration we were invited to help the BBC's Casualty scriptwriters to understand the practicalities of whistleblowing law for a multi-episode storyline. The drama featured the exposing of secretly recorded footage about the hospital, leading to an internal witch-hunt for the whistleblower responsible. The identity of the whistleblower was a closely guarded secret; even the actors involved only learned who it was when they went to film the final scenes. In meetings and correspondence we helped the BBC Casualty team to refine their ideas. We explained how whistleblowing law works using specific case studies and situations from our legal Advice Line.
- Taking our whistleblowing message to a very different audience, our Legal Director was invited to give a TedX talk on the topic of “whistleblowing in the digital age”. Drawing on the learnings from the Post Office Horizon IT scandal the talk promoted the ways to make whistleblowing safe and highlighted the need for change.
- Our media profile continues to grow with a rise in media coverage of 37% on 2023. Specifically targeting the HR and Personnel sectors we have worked to reach more employers with our messages of whistleblowing best practice. Highlights from the year include a Financial Times feature on a rise in whistleblowing cases at the Employment Tribunal, coverage in The Times regarding the fight for whistleblowing protections for charity trustees, and being featured in the Third Sector podcast on our work with BBC Casualty.

BBC Casualty



Protect is the UK's leading whistleblowing charity.

Our aim is to protect the public interest by helping workers to speak up to stop harm and wrongdoing. We support whistleblowers by providing free and confidential legal advice. We support employers to implement effective whistleblowing arrangements. We campaign for legal and policy reform to better protect whistleblowing.



Contact details:

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For business and employer queries email info@protect-advice.org.uk

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