

Focus on sexual harassment

In the know

The recent news of sexual harassment within Hollywood has refocused the attention on this important area. With a number of allegations, “unequivocal denials” and dismissals, employers may be assessing how to protect their business from the significant liability, and attention, that sexual harassment can bring.

Zero tolerance policy

- Businesses must clearly, and explicitly, set out the rules on employee behaviour within the workplace and during events or occasions that are linked to employment;
- Setting out what behaviour is prohibited in an anti-harassment policy will clarify what acts are classed as sexual harassment;
- This should include a non-exhaustive list to cover the variety of forms sexual harassment can take place including speech, touch, emails, other written communication and in jokes or ‘banter’;
- In addition, the consequences for breaching the policy should also be set out as a deterrent to those who may carry out sexual harassment. This will also make it easier to take disciplinary action when required.

Training on policy implementation

- Training should be provided to all staff on acceptable conduct and how to raise a complaint of sexual harassment. This training should be provided early on in the induction process to ensure harassment is not taking place at any stage of employment;
- Repeating the training periodically, or in response to any incidents, will reinforce the company’s stance against sexual harassment and reduce the possibility of future instances occurring;
- Managers should also receive additional training on how to spot incidents at work, how to handle complaints received and how to make decisions without being influenced by sexual harassment issues. How senior managers consider

issues such as sexual harassment will often affect how these are perceived by the rest of the workforce so it’s vital they are properly trained to implement their employer’s zero tolerance stance.

Creating an open-door culture

- One of the most worrying aspects for employers that has come out of recent stories is the culture of silence; where those who were subject to the harassment, or knew about the allegations, but felt unable to raise their concerns;
- Employers themselves are crucial towards creating a culture where employees feel they can raise concerns or complaints about incidents of sexual harassment. One important step to cultivate this culture is to take each and every disclosure seriously and not ignore any concerns or underestimate any incidents based on their own beliefs.

Croner Tips

- **Having an allocated person to make complaints to will also encourage the disclosure of sexual harassment concerns. This is often a sensitive, fearful and worrying situation for individuals to be in and having a named person to talk to will often remove any uncertainty, or worries, about raising concerns.**
- **The allocated person should receive training on how to handle these difficult conversations to ensure they are responding in a sensitive and constructive manner.**

The content of this briefing is correct at the time of publishing.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this article