

Press release: Government announces new Code of Practice to tackle sexual harassment at work

Government will introduce a new Code of Practice so employers better understand their legal responsibilities to protect their staff as part of a package of commitments to tackle sexual harassment at work.

Responding to the Women and Equalities Select Committee report, the Government Equalities Office also promised to carry out awareness raising work with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), the Equality and Human Rights Commission and employers on how to prevent and address sexual harassment at work; to work with regulators to ensure they are taking action; and commission survey data on the prevalence of sexual harassment at work.

The government will also consult on:

- Non-disclosure agreements
- How to strengthen and clarify the laws in relation to third party harassment
- The evidence base for introducing a new legal duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace

ComRes, in their 2017 research for the BBC, claim that 40% of women (and 18% of men) have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour at work at some point.

Minister for Women Victoria Atkins said:

“Sexual harassment at work is illegal, but sadly that disgusting behaviour is something that many women still experience today.

“We are taking action to make sure employers know what they have to do to protect their staff, and people know their rights at work and what action to take if they feel intimidated or humiliated.

“Everyone has the right to feel safe at work.”

Business Minister Kelly Tolhurst said:

“It continues to disappoint me that in this day and age some women still face discrimination and harassment at work.

“One part of this is the minority of cases where non-disclosure agreements are used unethically, and employees may not be aware of their protections and rights. We will be consulting on these.”

Going beyond the recommendations in the WESC report, the government has also promised to consult on whether additional protections are needed for

volunteers and interns, (looking at all the protections in the Equality Act 2010, not just those on sexual harassment), and to explore the evidence for extending the time limits to bring any workplace discrimination and harassment case under the Equality Act 2010 to an employment tribunal.

Notes to editors:

The government is developing next steps on this package.

The government will:

- Introduce a new statutory code of practice on sexual harassment, which will be developed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission under its Equality Act 2006 powers
- Run awareness raising work with Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), Equality and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) and employers
- Commission a survey to gather regular data on the prevalence of sexual harassment
- Consult on non-disclosure agreements
- Consult on the evidence base for a new legal duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace
- Consult on strengthening and clarifying the laws on third party harassment in the workplace
- Consult on whether further legal protections are required for interns and volunteers
- Consult to explore the evidence for extending employment tribunal time limits for Equality Act 2010 cases
- Ensure the public sector takes action to tackle and prevent sexual harassment
- Work with regulators for whom sexual harassment is particularly relevant to ensure they are taking appropriate action
- Consider whether further learnings can be taken from the criminal justice system to use in the employment tribunal system, to ensure vulnerable claimants have appropriate protection
- Check that the list of organisations who can receive 'whistleblowing' information includes the right bodies

The ComRes research can be found [here](#)