

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Your Complete Prevention Checklist

The Essential Actions Required

1. Conduct a Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment

Before implementing any measures, assess your workplace risks. Identify vulnerable areas, high-risk interactions, and potential blind spots in your organisation. You can't protect what you haven't evaluated.

2. Demonstrate Strong Leadership from the Top

Senior leadership must visibly and consistently communicate that sexual harassment is unacceptable. Make it clear through words, actions, and resource allocation that this isn't just policy – it's a priority.

3. Commit Real Time and Resources

Allocate proper budget, staff time, and expertise to prevention and response. Half-hearted efforts send the message that harassment isn't truly a priority in your organisation.

4. Establish a Zero-Tolerance Policy

Create a clear, written policy that explicitly prohibits sexual harassment and communicate it to every employee. Make it easily accessible, regularly updated, and consistently enforced.

5. Be Proactive, Not Reactive

Don't wait for problems to emerge. Actively monitor workplace culture, address concerning behaviours early, and prevent escalation through early intervention strategies.

6. Provide Multiple Reporting Channels

Offer various ways to report concerns – internal managers, HR, external helplines, and online reporting. Give employees choice in how they feel most comfortable speaking up.

7. Train Everyone, Including Leadership

Deliver mandatory training for all staff and managers on recognising, preventing, and responding to sexual harassment. Make it relevant, regular, and reinforced with real scenarios.

8. Implement Robust Mitigation Measures

Put physical, procedural, and cultural safeguards in place. This includes proper supervision, clear boundaries, safe spaces, and structured interactions in high-risk situations.

9. Act Immediately on Reports

Respond to every report within 24-48 hours. Acknowledge receipt, ensure confidentiality, and begin preliminary assessment without delay. Speed demonstrates seriousness.

10. Conduct Fair and Thorough Investigations

Use trained, impartial investigators – either internal or external specialists. Follow proper procedures, document everything systematically, and maintain objectivity throughout.

More information

11. Protect Against Retaliation

Monitor for and actively prevent any form of retaliation against those who report concerns. Make protection measures visible, enforceable, and consistently applied.

12. Implement Appropriate Consequences

Take proportionate disciplinary action when harassment is substantiated. Consistency in enforcement demonstrates genuine commitment and deters future incidents.

13. Extend Protection to Third-Parties and Supply Chains

Include contractors, suppliers, visitors, and clients in your harassment policies. Your duty of care extends beyond direct employees to anyone in your workplace environment.

14. Create a Speak-Up Culture

Encourage early reporting of inappropriate behaviour before it escalates. Recognise and reward managers who handle concerns well and create psychological safety for reporters.

15. Monitor Your Workplace Climate Continuously

Regularly survey employees anonymously about workplace culture, conduct, and confidence in reporting systems. Act on insights and track improvements over time.

16. Review and Improve Systematically

Audit your policies, procedures, and outcomes annually. Learn from each case, benchmark against best practice, and strengthen your approach based on what the data tells you.

These actions aren't suggestions

They're your essential defence against legal liability, reputational damage, and workplace harm. The cost of prevention is always less than the cost of crisis response.

The question isn't whether you'll face these challenges, but whether you'll be prepared when you do.

Need more information?

[Tackling Sexual Harassment Training](#)

[Reporting Concerns Training for Employees](#)

[Independent investigation Support](#)

Book a free 15-minute Preventing Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment with one of our team

More information

Tahir v National Grid UK Ltd: £357,000 for "perverse" investigation failures

Case Reference: ET 1803164/2021 and 1803903/2021

Decision Date: July 12, 2023 (Remedy Hearing)

Sector: Energy/Utilities

What happened:

Emma Tahir, a 22-year-old trainee project supervisor, suffered persistent sexual harassment over one year by her 50-something manager and designated mentor, Colin Higgins. He bombarded her with inappropriate texts and emails ("you're my favourite," "I fancy you," "marry me!"), repeatedly asked her to remove her jumper during site visits, invaded her personal space, and asked if they would be "getting it on" if he were younger.

The tribunal ultimately upheld 26 separate acts of sexual harassment.

Employer's prevention failures:

National Grid failed to address the obvious power dynamic between a junior trainee and her senior mentor/manager. When Tahir raised concerns, the company initially rejected her formal grievance – a decision the tribunal called "perverse given the evidence." Only after appeal did they overturn this. Most egregiously, National Grid refused to dismiss Higgins despite substantiating the harassment claims, and the disciplinary process dragged so long that he simply resigned before it concluded. The company ignored Tahir's request for informal resolution through redeployment, instead pressuring her to formalize her complaint. They failed to inform her of the disciplinary investigation's outcome and never apologized.

Award breakdown:

- Injury to feelings: £40,000 (upper Vento band)
- Psychiatric injury: £10,000
- Future loss of earnings: £73,719.47 (5-year recovery period)
- Aggravated damages: £5,000
- ACAS uplift: 15% for procedural failures
- **Total: £357,000**

Tribunal quotes on employer responsibilities:

"For the Company not to dismiss the perpetrator subsequently, when the facts were understood...was a failure to treat the Claimant's complaints with the requisite seriousness." The investigation outcome was "perverse, given the evidence."

The tribunal emphasized that "fundamental to establishing facts is that where allegations are made...the complainant must see what the perpetrator is saying and have the opportunity to address it before conclusions are reached. That is fundamental to fairness."

Why training gaps mattered:

National Grid failed to train managers on recognizing and addressing power dynamics, conducting fair investigations, or following proper grievance procedures. The aggravated damages specifically reflected the company's "high-handed" treatment of Tahir throughout the process.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions/ms-e-tahir-v-national-grid-uk-ltd-1803164-slash-2021-and-1803903-slash-2021>

Hunter v Lidl GB: £50,885 award leads to EHRC enforcement action

Case Reference: Tribunal case 2023

Decision Date: 2023

Sector: Retail (Supermarket)

Subsequent Action: EHRC legal agreement signed August 2024/2025

What happened:

Maddie Hunter, aged 18, started at Lidl's Wallingford in 2019. Within a month, a male co-worker had asked for her number, and made persistent sexual advances. Deputy Store Manager Harding then subjected her to daily harassment: touching her bottom, thighs, and waist; attempting to hug and slap her; making highly sexualised comments including that he wanted to sleep with her and her boyfriend, that she would "look good" in underwear being sold and was "distracting" in uniform. The store had a "laddish" banter culture where male staff ranked female staff by attractiveness.

Explicit training and prevention failures cited by tribunal:

- Managers were NOT AWARE of Lidl's own anti-harassment policy
- NO sexual harassment risk assessments had been conducted
- NO evidence of staff training on equality and harassment
- Lidl relied solely on employees raising complaints before taking action
- Store managers stated they "did not consider it was their role to police harassment"
- Managers used banter to "lighten the atmosphere" instead of maintaining standards
- Managers participated in discussions ranking female staff by attractiveness

What made it worse:

Hunter asked to be moved away from her harasser. Her manager denied the request and told her to "take it as a compliment" saying he "wasn't surprised" by the harassment and made a joke about it. Despite being aware of the situation, senior managers didn't intervene. One manager said he "didn't intend to cause offence" - but the tribunal emphasised "it's the impact on the victim that counts."

Award breakdown:

- Injury to feelings: £22,000 (higher end of middle Vento band)
- Interest on injury to feelings: £7,600+
- Additional compensation for constructive dismissal and other losses
- **Total: £50,884.62**

Tribunal quotes:

"The company did not provide evidence to show it took reasonable steps to prevent harassment." The tribunal found managers "paid no attention to her complaints and closed their eyes and ears to the culture of harassment that existed." The harassment "reflected the culture of the store. Workplace 'banter' was commonplace and used by some managers to 'lighten the atmosphere.'"

EHRC enforcement action:

The EHRC secured a legally binding agreement with Lidl (August 2024/2025) requiring the company to: conduct staff surveys on sexual harassment, develop systems to monitor informal complaints, review 2023-2024 complaints for trends, arrange meetings with DE&I groups, continue monitoring risk assessments, review internal policies and training content, and deliver additional manager training. Baroness Kishwer Falkner stated: "Every employer has a legal duty to prevent sexual harassment and they must be able to prove they've taken reasonable steps to do so."

Bratt v JGQC Solicitors Ltd: Rejecting "harmless banter" in professional services

Case Reference: 2024 (specific reference not published)

Decision Date: 2024

Award: Estimated £20,000-£30,000+

Sector: Professional Services (Law Firm)

What happened:

Junior legal secretary at a law firm faced sustained sexual harassment from the firm owner over a seven-week period. Harassment included inappropriate text messages ("Hi sweetheart, see you in the morning xx"), graphic discussions about his personal life (catching his ex-partner cheating and describing finding used condoms), comments about her appearance, and offensive language with sexual connotations. The workplace had a sexualised culture tolerated by some but unwanted by the claimant.

Employer's prevention failures:

When the claimant raised a grievance, the law firm's handling was "grossly inadequate" and re-victimised her. The grievance panel accused her of "dressing inappropriately," claimed she was "flaunting herself on social media," and one panel member referred to her as a "Love Island reject." The firm defended the inappropriate conduct as "harmless office banter." There was no adequate policy to prevent or address the sexualised workplace culture, and the firm failed to maintain a professional environment despite being a professional services organisation.

Tribunal findings:

The tribunal rejected the "banter" defense, emphasizing that even comments made in a "flippant or light-hearted manner" can constitute sexual harassment. Intent is irrelevant - the effect on the victim is what matters. The tribunal was highly critical of the grievance investigation, noting that inappropriate comments by the investigators themselves supported the claimant's claims about an offensive environment.

Why damages in higher range:

The case involved a pattern of conduct over seven weeks (not an isolated incident), a senior perpetrator (firm owner) who created the culture from the top, a grievance process that re-victimized the claimant, a young junior employee in a vulnerable position, and constructive dismissal after just seven weeks. The case demonstrates that workplace "culture" is not a defense—if conduct creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, or offensive environment, it constitutes harassment regardless of whether some employees accept or participate in such culture.

Key lesson for professional services:

Even law firms—organisations that should understand employment law—face substantial liability when they fail to maintain professional standards, properly investigate complaints, or allow senior staff to create inappropriate workplace cultures. The "banter" defence and victim-blaming during investigations will increase awards.

Source: ESP HR case analysis; employment law databases

More information

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