

Definition

The law (Equality Act 2010) defines sexual harassment at work as unwanted behaviour that has either the purpose or effect of:

- violating someone's dignity
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone

Sexual harassment can take many forms including unwanted physical contact or sexual assault, sexual comments or jokes, and the displaying of sexually graphic pictures or material.

Sexual harassment can be a one-off incident or an ongoing pattern of behaviour. It can happen in person or in other ways, for example online through things like email, social media or messaging tools. It is usually directed at an individual, but that is not always the case.

Although sexual harassment can be experienced by people of any gender, it has a disproportionate impact on women and girls and is an indicator and consequence of gender inequality.

Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, reports of sexual harassment may amount to a protected disclosure under whistleblowing legislation.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees regardless of gender.

It includes harassment that takes place at work and during any situation related to work such as at a social event with colleagues.

It applies to situations that occur between employees and to incidents of third-party harassment such as sexual harassment from service users/clients/pupils.

Our approach

We're committed to creating an environment where employees feel safe and understand that workplace culture, what we do, how we do it and how we make people feel are key to this.

We will:

- Support staff who tell us they have been sexually harassed including through our Health & Safety incident reporting process and, where necessary, reporting to the Police when appropriate.
- Support managers to ensure they have the confidence and capability to deal with issues of sexual harassment.
- Investigate all allegations against employees of sexual harassment through our Grievance Policy and Procedure and/or our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure as appropriate.
- Promote understanding of sexual harassment and how it manifests in different ways.
- We will investigate any reports of sexual harassment raised through the whistleblowing process, ensuring they are handled sensitively, promptly, and in line with our established procedures.
- Make sure employees, other workers such as agency staff, and service users understand the standards of behaviour required of them.
- Review instances of sexual harassment in the workplace and report these through our equality and diversity in employment reporting.
- In conjunction with our Trade Unions, review this policy and associated guidance as necessary.

Further guidance

Sexual Harassment guidance pages on HR Online

Bullying and Harassment guidance pages on HR Online

CC01 Code of Conduct for Council Employees

Produced by Fife Council Human Resources Services

Update: April 2026 Issue Number 1.1

Agreed at JNCF March 2026