

Sexual Harassment Policy

Introduction

All members of staff are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect in our place of work. This means freedom from sexual harassment, feeling safe and supported and having access to support if such behaviour does arise.

Sexual harassment takes many forms, but whatever form it takes it is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010 as amended and will not be tolerated.

The law requires employers to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their workers. We take action to prevent sexual harassment from occurring and have clear reporting procedures for our staff to make a complaint about sexual harassment. If you have been sexually harassed, or you have witnessed sexual harassment, we encourage you to tell us so that we can deal with the matter swiftly.

Ravinder Clair, HR Manager, has overall responsibility for the operation of this policy but may delegate elements of implementation or decision-making to any other member of the senior management team. Our managers will maintain an open-door policy and we encourage all staff to come forward with any concerns in relation to sexual harassment. All our staff have a responsibility to behave in line with the requirements of this policy.

Instances of sexual harassment or victimisation may lead to disciplinary action up to, and including, dismissal.

This policy is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains up to date and in order to monitor its effectiveness. Any required changes will be implemented and communicated.

Scope

We deplore all forms of sexual harassment and seek to ensure that the working environment is safe and supportive to all those who work for us. This includes employees, workers, agency workers, volunteers and contractors in all areas of our company.

Definitions

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. It also covers treating someone less favourably because they have submitted to, or refused to submit to, unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or in relation to gender reassignment or sex.

Sexual harassment may be committed by a fellow worker, an agent of an organisation, or a third party. It does not need to occur in person. It can occur via digital means, including social media sites or channels (e.g. WhatsApp). Someone may be sexually harassed even if they were not the target of the behaviour.

Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- sexual comments or jokes, which may be referred to as “banter”.
- displaying sexually graphic pictures, posters or photos.
- suggestive looks, staring or leering.
- propositions and sexual advances.
- making promises in return for sexual favours.
- sexual gestures.
- intrusive questions about a person’s private or sex life or a person discussing their own sex life.
- sexual posts or contact in online communications, including on social media.
- spreading sexual rumours about a person.
- sending sexually explicit emails, text messages or messages via other social media.
- unwelcome touching, hugging, massaging or kissing.

Victimisation is subjecting someone to detriment because they have done, are suspected of doing, or intend to do, an act which is protected under discrimination and harassment laws. These are outlined below. It is not necessary for the person to have done the protected act for detrimental treatment to be considered as victimisation.

The protected acts are:

- making a claim or complaint for discrimination or harassment.
- helping someone else to make such a claim by giving evidence or information.
- making an allegation that someone has breached the Equality Act.
- doing anything else in connection with the Equality Act.

Examples of victimisation may include:

- failing to consider someone for promotion because they have previously made a sexual harassment complaint.
- dismissing someone because they accompanied a colleague to a meeting about a sexual harassment complaint.
- excluding someone from work meetings because they gave evidence as a witness for another employee as part of an employment tribunal claim about harassment.

Circumstances which are covered

This policy covers behaviour which occurs in the following situations:

- a work situation.
- a situation occurring outside of the normal workplace or normal working hours which is related to work, e.g. a working lunch, a business trip or social functions.
- outside of a work situation but involving a colleague or other person connected to the Company, including on social media.
- against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to your suitability to carry out the role.

What to do if you are subject to sexual harassment or victimisation

We are committed to ensuring that there is no sexual harassment or victimisation in our workplace. Allegations of sexual harassment and victimisation will be treated as a disciplinary matter, although every situation will be considered on an individual basis and in accordance with the principles of our disciplinary policy.

Informal complaint

We recognise that complaints of sexual harassment or victimisation can be of a sensitive or intimate nature and that it may not be appropriate for you to raise the issue through our normal grievance procedure. In these circumstances, you are encouraged to raise such issues with a senior colleague of your choice (whether or not that person has a direct supervisory responsibility for you) as a confidential helper. This person cannot be the same person who will be responsible for investigating the matter if it becomes a formal complaint.

If you experience sexual harassment and you feel comfortable to do so, you should make it clear to the harasser on an informal basis that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask the harasser to stop. If you feel unable to do this verbally then you should hand a written request to the harasser, and your confidential helper can assist you in this.

In addition, you may also choose to raise concerns during your regular communication with your manager, e.g. in a one-to-one meeting. Your manager will listen to you and take your concerns seriously if you do this but may encourage you to follow the reporting procedures set out below. If you don't have a one-to-one meeting scheduled with your manager, you can ask to meet with them to discuss any concerns that you may have.

Formal complaint

Where the informal approach fails or if the sexual harassment or victimisation is more serious, you should bring the matter to the attention of Ravinder Clair, HR Manager, ideally as a formal written complaint and again your confidential helper can assist you in this.

Alternatively, you can report instances by emailing hr@conistonltd.co.uk. This mailbox is regularly monitored.

If possible, you should keep notes of what happened so that the written complaint can include:

- the name of the alleged harasser.
- the nature of the alleged harassment.
- the dates and times when the alleged harassment occurred.
- the names of any witnesses.
- any action already taken by you to stop the alleged harassment.

On receipt of a formal complaint, we will take action to separate you from the alleged harasser to enable an uninterrupted investigation to take place. This may involve a temporary transfer of the alleged harasser to another work area or suspension with contractual pay until the matter has been resolved.

The person dealing with the complaint will invite you to attend a meeting, at a reasonable time and location, to discuss the matter and carry out a thorough investigation. The meeting will normally be held within 7 working days of receipt of your complaint.

You have the right to be accompanied at the meeting by a work colleague. You and your accompanying person must take all reasonable steps to attend this meeting. Those involved in the investigation will be expected to act in confidence and any breach of confidence may be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

On conclusion of the investigation, which will normally be within 10 working days of the meeting with you, the decision of the investigator, detailing the findings, will be sent in writing to you.

You have the right to appeal against the findings of the investigation and details of how to appeal will be provided to you. You will then be invited to a further meeting. As far as is reasonably practicable, the meeting will be attended by a senior manager who has had no prior involvement in the complaint.

Following the appeal meeting, you will be informed of the final decision, normally within 10 working days, which will be confirmed in writing.

Regardless of the outcome of the procedure, we are committed to providing the support you may need. This may involve mediation between you and the other party or some other measure to manage the ongoing working relationship.

You will not be victimised for having brought a complaint.

What to do if you witness sexual harassment or victimisation

If you witness sexual harassment or victimisation, you are encouraged to take appropriate action to address it. You should not take any action that may put you at risk of sexual harassment or other harm. If you feel able, you should intervene to prevent the matter continuing. If you are not able to do this, your action may include offering support to the person who has been sexually harassed and encouraging them to report the incident or reporting the incident yourself.

If reporting the incident, you should bring the matter to the attention of Ravinder Clair, HR Manager, ideally in writing. Alternatively, you can report instances of sexual harassment by emailing hr@conistonltd.co.uk.

Your concerns will be handled sensitively and the person who has experienced sexual harassment will be consulted to determine how they want the matter to be handled.

Third-party sexual harassment

Third-party sexual harassment occurs when a member of our workforce is subjected to sexual harassment by someone who is not part of our workforce but who is encountered in connection with work. This includes our suppliers, subcontractors, clients and their representatives, architects and members of the public.

Third-party sexual harassment of our workforce is unlawful and will not be tolerated. The law requires employers to take steps to prevent sexual harassment by third parties and we are committed to doing so.

The law does not provide a mechanism for individuals to bring a claim of third-party harassment alone. However, failure for an employer to take reasonable steps to prevent third-party sexual harassment may result in legal liability in other types of claim.

In order to prevent third-party sexual harassment from occurring, we will:

- attach signage to the walls of the areas within the workplace where third parties are present to warn that sexual harassment of our staff is not acceptable.
- inform third parties of our zero-tolerance sexual harassment policy within our tender and contract documentation.

If you have been subjected to third-party sexual harassment, you are encouraged to report this as soon as possible to Ravinder Clair, HR Manager. Alternatively, you can report instances of third-party sexual harassment by emailing hr@conistonltd.co.uk.

Should a third party sexually harass a member of our workforce on our premises including our sites, they will be removed from our premises and will be reported to their employers. Any criminal acts will be reported to the police.

We will not tolerate sexual harassment by any member of our workforce against a third party. Instances of sexual harassment of this kind may lead to disciplinary action, including termination of employment.

Disciplinary action

If the decision is that the allegation of sexual harassment or victimisation is well founded, the harasser/victimiser will be liable to disciplinary action in accordance with our disciplinary procedure up to, and including, summary dismissal. An employee who receives a formal warning or who is dismissed for sexual harassment/victimisation may appeal by using our disciplinary appeal procedure.

When deciding on the level of disciplinary sanction to be applied, we will take into consideration any aggravating factors affecting the case. One example of aggravating factors is an abuse of power over a more junior colleague.

If, due to the investigation, it is concluded that your complaint is both untrue and has been brought with malicious intent, disciplinary action will be taken against you.

Training

We provide training to all our staff on sexual harassment to ensure there is a clear understanding of:

- what sexual harassment is, how it may occur and that it will not be tolerated.
- expected levels of behaviour.
- how they can report any incidents of having been sexually harassed or having witnessed it.
- how acts of harassment will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure, which can potentially result in dismissal.

We ensure that all levels of management are trained on implementing this policy, including preventing and managing sexual harassment in the workplace and the procedure to follow if an allegation is reported.

We will regularly review the effectiveness of our training and provide refresher training as appropriate.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually or at other intervals deemed appropriate by statutory changes Any alterations to this policy will be recorded below.

Revision	Date	Owner	Changes Made
0.1	01/10/2025	Ravinder Clair	Draft
1.0	01/10/2025	Ravinder Clair	Approved and published
1.1	19/06/2026	Ravinder Clair	Updated to reflect ERA 2025 changes – requirement to take ‘all’ reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. Addition of the word ‘all’ in paragraph 3.