



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2022

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY
STATEMENT**

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Conference is resolute that sexual harassment, when someone is subjected to unwelcome and unwanted sexual behaviour, has no place in the workplace or in wider society. Sexual harassment persists, despite laws and policies against it. The FBU is implacably opposed to sexual harassment in all its forms. The union is committed to tackling sexual harassment wherever it is found.

Scale of the problem

Conference is appalled by the scale and depth of sexual harassment in all walks of life. We commend those who have spoken out against sexual harassment and fought to ensure that the perpetrators are held to account.

Conference condemns the appalling examples of sexual harassment behaviour reported in the media, ranging from inappropriate jokes, unwanted propositions, right through to serious sexual assault.

Conference notes the enormous range of evidence of sexual harassment at work, including:

- The BBC survey in 2017, which found that half of British women and a fifth of men had been sexually harassed at work or a place of study
- The Fawcett Society's *Sex Discrimination Law Review* (2018), which established that violence against women and girls is "endemic" in the UK
- The TUC's *Still just a bit of banter?* report (2016), when a fifth of respondents said they had been sexually harassed by their boss or someone else with authority over them
- The TUC's *Sexual harassment of LGBT people in the workplace report* (2019), which found that seven out of ten LGBT workers experienced at least one type of sexual harassment at work
- The TUC's *Sexual harassment of disabled women in the workplace* (2021), which also recorded that 7 in 10 disabled women said they have been sexually harassed at work.

Conference underlines that reporting levels for sexual harassment are low. TUC research has shown that four out of five women who said they had experienced sexual harassment did not tell their employer, and only 1% of those polled by the TUC told a union rep about their experience.

Conference notes that even the Westminster government has recognised the scale of sexual harassment at work and consulted on further steps to tackle it. This followed the 2018 Women and Equalities Select Committee report on sexual harassment in the workplace. In 2021, ministers committed to introducing a mandatory duty on employers to protect their staff from sexual harassment at work, explicit protections for employees from harassment by third parties, extending employment tribunal time limits and a statutory code of practice.

Conference acknowledges that sexual harassment has taken place within trade unions and been perpetrated by trade unionists. The Monaghan report into the GMB union, as well as other investigations and legal cases, has highlighted disgraceful behaviour by senior officials and representatives that have no place in our movement or society. The Court of Appeal case, *Unite the Union v Nailard* [2018] IRLR 730 established that trade unions are legally liable for the discriminatory actions of lay representatives. Ensuring that our own house is in order is paramount.

Fire and rescue service

Conference notes that the fire and rescue service workforce does not currently reflect the diversity found across society. Home Office figures for England state that 18% employed by the fire and rescue service are women, only 5% from an ethnic minority and less than 4% are recorded as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Women are 8% of wholetime, 6.5% retained, 76% control and 55% support staff. Although there are some signs of improvement over the last two decades, the situation is still far from satisfactory.

Conference is aware of evidence of sexual harassment in FBU legal work. For example, last year a woman firefighter sought legal help from the FBU after she was bullied and harassed at work, received £110,000 settlement after the union commenced court proceedings. Another female firefighter who was subject to several acts of harassment related to her sex during her employment received £10,000 compensation and a letter of apology.

Conference welcomes the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group, formed through the National Joint Council, which has carried out important equalities monitoring, including on sexual harassment in the fire and rescue service. Its 2021 report found that less than two-thirds (64%) of managers had received adequate training on how to spot and challenge bullying and harassment.

FBU working group on sexual harassment

Conference welcomes the Executive Council's decision to establish a working group to tackle sexual harassment:

- It is convened by the General Secretary and National Officer responsible for equalities
- It involves women members of staff and women officials, including from the National Women's Committee
- It will discuss with all regions and sections
- It has appropriate support from staff, including the Office Manager and will engage with the staff union.
- It shall seek external and/or independent assistance where appropriate

It will permit scrutiny of:

- Staff policies
- FBU policies for members and officials
- Training on policies and implementation
- The role of the leadership in setting tone and expectation within the organisation
- The FBU as an employer
- FBU structures – FBU officials
- FBU events and activities.

The working group will report to conference 2023.

Conference agrees immediately that:

- The Executive Council should identify new training and education provision relating to the issues of preventing and tackling sexual harassment as required.
- The Executive Council will identify what elements of training shall be mandatory on different levels of officials. This should start with members of the Executive Council and Full Time Officials.

Conference reminds all FBU officials of our collective responsibility to uphold the values, principles and policies of our union, including our commitment to equality and to building unity among our diverse membership. All officials have a clear responsibility to oppose and challenge behaviour which breaches the rules of the FBU including behaviour which constitutes sexual harassment.

Conference reminds all members of the object of the union set out in Rule A2 (8): *To support and promote working class unity through the Trade Union and Labour movement and therefore to oppose all forms of discrimination whether on the grounds of race, creed, sex, sexual orientation or otherwise.*