



FIRE BRIGADES UNION

CONFERENCE 2024

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY
STATEMENT**

**CHALLENGING SEXUAL HARASSMENT
IN OUR UNION AND OUR SERVICE**

In recent years, the issue of sexual harassment has been identified as a significant concern in reports into other trade unions. The Trade Union Congress has sought to address this challenge through specific initiatives, policies, monitoring and training.

During the last two years, there have been various reports investigating bullying, discrimination and harassment in the fire and rescue service. Such behaviour has no place in our union, in our service or in our profession.

Conference 2023 agreed a renewed agenda to address this issue within UK fire and rescue services, while also looking at behaviour, culture and policy within the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

In September 2023, the FBU launched an independent sexual harassment survey. Laura Harrison and Robbie Wishart were commissioned by the FBU to survey members and report their findings to the Executive Council (EC).

On the 7 February 2024, the FBU published the report and findings, alongside an immediate action plan. Final analysis was based upon the returns provided by 1,128 respondents. The report included alarming findings:

- 30% of women who completed the survey reported having experienced sexual harassment in an FBU context. This compares to 5% of men
- One-quarter (26%) of respondents (men and women) who experienced sexual harassment did so at a 'social occasion' after an FBU event
- One-fifth (20%) of respondents who experienced sexual harassment did so by phone or text message
- 16% of respondents reported that a perpetrator was a brigade/area official, and 13% of respondents reported that a perpetrator was a branch official. The remaining 69% of respondents identified that a perpetrator was an FBU member with no official role.

The EC has agreed to all recommendations made in the report, agreeing that the equalities sub-committee, a group consisting of EC members, sectional and regional reps should scope out their implementation.

Committing to change

Conference agrees that all members and officials of the union shall actively challenge misogynistic attitudes and behaviour. All members and officials should speak out on this frequently and act immediately on any issues brought to their attention. There is no excuse to turning a blind eye or hiding from unacceptable behaviour. We must challenge such behaviour immediately.

Conference agrees that the EC will consider how the FBU builds a deeper understanding of the prevalence and impacts of sexual harassment (in society as well as in the FBU) and faces up to personal biases or prejudices that may result in a default setting towards disbelief of women.

Conference agrees that the EC will review the rules and policies of the union to establish more efficient and effective reporting mechanisms for reports of sexual harassment. This should include a truncated reporting mechanism to build the confidence of members in the rules, policies and processes of the union.

Valuing and increasing the presence of women

Conference agrees that the EC will consider how better the union can support women becoming involved in our trade union. This should include reviewing opportunities for women to develop as workplace union representatives and to progress through the union's structure and where to invest in initiatives to support women members.

Conference and committees of the union should seek to be more representative of women in the union and to overcome any obstacle which prevent the full involvement of women members.

Training and education

The FBU should undertake work to train and educate officials and members on several key points arising from this project including:

1. Sexual harassment is not a 'women's issue.' It is a trade union issue that goes to the heart of the union's aims in terms of justice and fairness at work.
2. What constitutes misogynistic behaviour and sexual harassment, e.g. 'jokes' that belittle, demean, humiliate, or objectify women are not acceptable in any environment.
3. Building understanding and competence in developing and running events and meetings that reflect the experiences of under-represented groups (for example distinguishing equity from equality, making sure that all know that they are valued and belong). This understanding should play directly into how meetings are run, chaired and how agendas are developed.
4. The FBU's policies and processes on sexual harassment.

Conference agrees that the EC will ensure mandatory sexual harassment training is delivered for new and current brigade, regional and national officials.

Creating safe spaces

Conference agrees that the FBU needs to establish and ensure safe spaces for all when attending FBU meetings, events, and education. This must be both in physical and online settings.

The FBU must be an organisation where everyone feels safe and able to contribute without fear of harassment. It is now time we ensure equality really does matter. If you continue to be a perpetrator of harassment, you have no place in our movement. If you are a victim of harassment, we shall ensure our union is a place you feel safe in, full of people you can turn to. If you're a bystander, make sure you stand up and challenge and report harassment. Equality matters.