

Bullying, harassment and sexual harassment at the Bar

A quick guide for chambers



The Bar Council

Introduction

In June 2024 we commissioned an **independent review into bullying, harassment** and sexual harassment at the Bar, chaired by Baroness Harriet Harman KC.

The report, published in September 2025, sets out 36 recommendations. A number of the recommendations are directed towards chambers. We've put this guide together to support chambers in responding to these.

Please note, advice in this guide may be subject to change as recommendations are actioned.

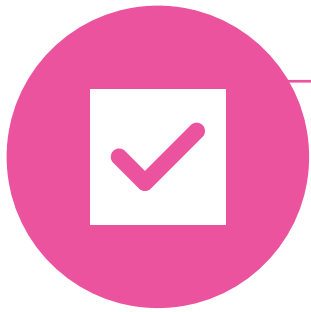


“Bullying, harassment and sexual harassment is a problem at the Bar and on the Bench, within chambers and courtrooms, in open court and behind robing room doors. It needs to be acknowledged and dealt with to protect future victims. But it is also vital to protect the reputation of the Bar from the stain of misconduct.”
Baroness Harman KC.

While everyone working in and around the Bar will need to take some time to digest the detail of the report, there are steps chambers can take straight away to address some of the immediate concerns laid out by the review.

Please note, recommended actions are not all mandated by the Bar Standards Board, or subject to the code of conduct. Some are recommended as good practice by us.

1. Check your anti-harassment policies
2. Ensure everyone refreshes their anti-harassment and bullying training
3. Ensure all members and chambers' staff know behaviour expectations and how to make a complaint
4. Put in place appropriate measures to protect students, mini-pupils and pupils
5. Agree a victim centred process for managing complaints
6. Check your constitution allows for appropriate sanctions
7. Understand the risks and take steps to mitigate them



1.

Check your anti-harassment policies



Check over your policy to ensure it covers:

- Clear standards of behaviour including express prohibitions of bullying, harassment and victimisation
- The prohibition on members and employees engaging in intimate relationships with students, mini-pupils (or others on any type of work experience) or pupils (trainees)
- Clear informal and formal procedures for handling complaints in relation to bullying and harassment
- Provisions for sanctions following a finding of bullying, harassment, or sexual harassment, including suspension and expulsion from chambers, prohibitions on attendance at certain events, and prohibitions on appointments to positions of responsibility
- A list of trained nominated people who can support complainants of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment within chambers



2.

Ensure everyone refreshes their anti-harassment and bullying training

Training won't stop bullying and harassment from ever happening, but it can ensure everyone is clear what the rules are, what the expected codes of behaviour are, what will happen if they fall below expected standards, and how to raise a concern.

Your training should:

- Be specific to those working in and around the Bar
- Be clear on expected behaviours and provide detailed examples of behaviour which is not acceptable
- Set out informal and formal routes to complain or raise an issue
- Reassure everyone, particularly junior colleagues, that complaints will be taken seriously and acted upon
- Be clear on everyone's responsibilities to protect against victimisation of complainants





3.

Ensure all members and chambers' staff know behaviour expectations and how to make a complaint

You can do this in your chambers by:

- Putting discussions about bullying and harassment on the agenda at team meetings to talk about this issue regularly
- Sharing your policy and ensuring everyone knows who to go to if they have an issue or want to make a complaint
- Promoting Talk to Spot to members and colleagues – our confidential tool for recording incidents of harassment. **Download our Talk to Spot posters** and display them in shared areas of chambers
- Developing a code of conduct so everyone working in and around chambers knows exactly what's expected of them





4.

Put in place appropriate measures to protect students, mini-pupils and pupils



Baroness Harman's review highlighted the extent and impact of sexual harassment on students, mini-pupils and pupils, and was clear on the responsibility on every part of the institution to prevent this from happening in the future. In addition to prohibiting sexual relationships with students, mini-pupils or pupils, other measures could include:

- Ensure there is a proper process within chambers for mini-pupillages. There are clear records about who is hosting and participating, and students or mini-pupils are properly looked after
- Mini-pupils, or anyone undertaking any form of work experience, should be given copies of chambers' anti-harassment and safeguarding policies and should be signposted to a trained individual within chambers who is responsible for their pastoral care



5.

Agree a victim centred process for managing complaints

The review highlights the many challenges faced by complainants who try and raise these issues within chambers.

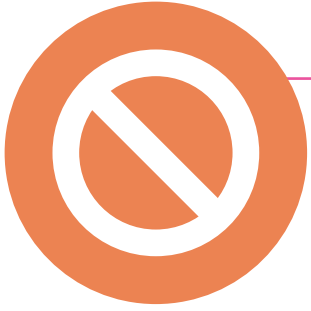
When thinking about how to better support those who make complaints chambers could:

- Read paragraphs 73 – 79 and 136 – 150 of the report – these sections describe the issues in detail
- Ensure a number of colleagues at different levels of seniority and experience are trained and able to support complainants

Independent review of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment at the Bar

Baroness Harriet Harman KC

September 2025



6.

Check your constitution allows for appropriate sanctions



The review sets out the challenges faced by some chambers in dealing with members who have breached their policies. Too often there are constitutional barriers to dealing properly with these issues, and it can be too late to make an amendment once a problem has arisen. The review recommends:

- Chambers' constitutions, and relevant employee policies, should set out clearly the range of sanctions available for findings of serious misconduct
- Constitutions, and relevant employee policies, must require members and employees to comply with policies, procedures, and decisions as to sanctions
- Sanctions provisions must include a power to expel or suspend a member or dismiss an employee where the seriousness of the conduct warrants such action. The power to expel or suspend ought to be exercised by a trusted committee within chambers, which includes members and senior employees
- Chambers must require any applicant for tenancy to disclose whether they are, or have been, subject to any disciplinary investigations or findings whether by any of their previous chambers, Inn or BSB/JCIO, or other regulators and to make provision for expulsion, and reporting to BSB (for dishonesty) in the event of a false declaration



7.

Understand the risks and take steps to mitigate them



The duty to prevent sexual harassment which came into force in 2024 has introduced more preventative safeguarding thinking in workplaces.

Read our 8 steps in this article about the new duty.

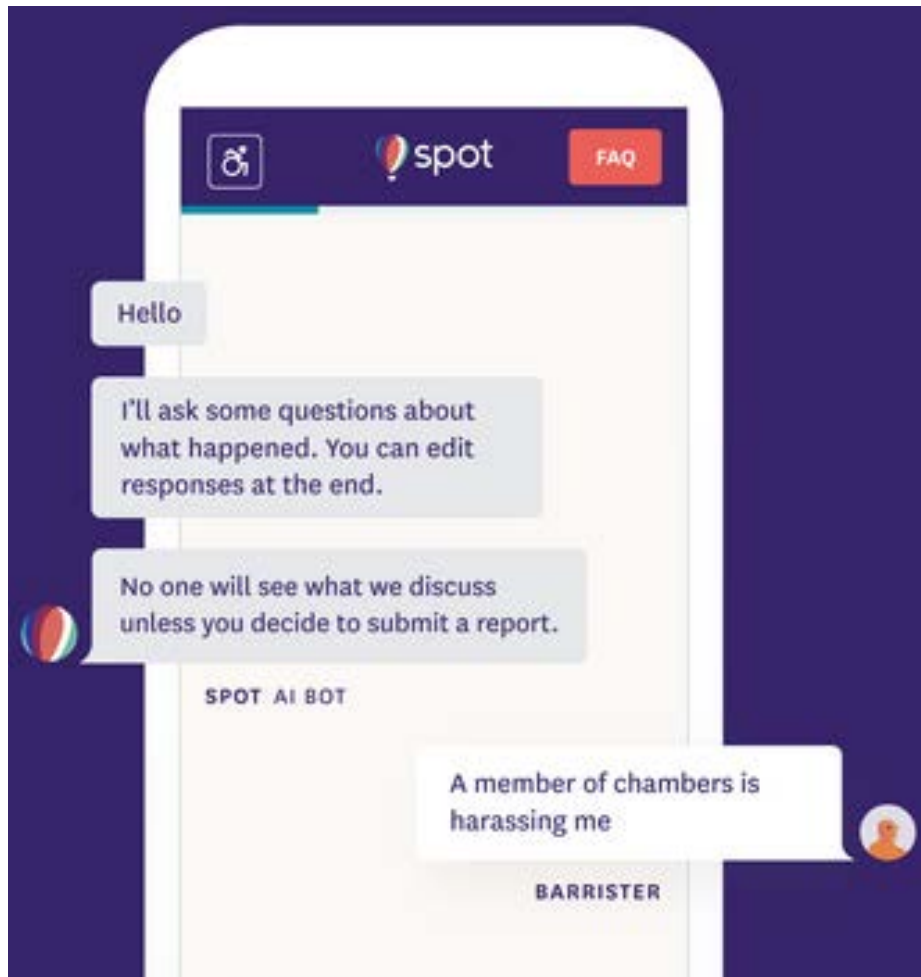
1. Refresh your anti-harassment policy
2. Talk to members and staff about the new duty
3. Assess the risks and take steps to mitigate them
4. Ensure everyone knows how to report an issue
5. Make training available to everyone, and set an expectation that they do it
6. Have a effective process for responding to complaints and handling issues
7. Protect third parties including clients, visitors and contractors
8. Monitor reports and evaluate your actions



What else you can do

If you would like to discuss the Harman report, or an issue in chambers, please contact our Equality team equality@barcouncil.org.uk.

To anonymously and confidentially raise concerns about inappropriate and abusive behaviour use **Talk to Spot**.



barcouncil.org.uk

