



England

Sexual Safety: Protecting Every Woman

Friday 7th March 2025

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Abuse and Sexual Violence

Background

- NHS England launched and signed the first-ever [sexual safety in healthcare charter in September 2023](#). The charter commits to providing staff with clear reporting mechanisms, training, and support across healthcare in relation to sexual misconduct. **All systems across the NHS** have now signed the NHS Sexual Safety Charter.
- The charter and the new national sexual misconduct guidance have been developed in collaboration with **healthcare systems, subject matter experts** and people with **lived experience** to raise awareness of sexual misconduct in our workplaces and provide NHS staff with clear reporting mechanisms, training and support.
- The new [Worker Protection \(Amendment of Equality Act 2010\) Act 2023](#), which comes into effect in October 2024, creates a duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their employees in the workplace.



We're making
the NHS a safer
place to work

Join us in signing the
Sexual Safety Charter

Scan the QR code to find out how your organisation
can sign the charter



Key statistics and testimony

- **1 in 5** women **and 1 in 20** men **will experience sexual violence as adults.**
- Health and social care staff **are more likely to experience sexual harassment.**
- **50-60%** of women **report sexual harassment at work.**
- The **2024 NHS staff survey** showed that **1 in 26** NHS workers reported that they **experienced sexual misconduct at work.**
- Women **aged 18-24** are the group most likely to have **experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.**

Underreporting of these incidents is significant.

“Started as flattery and developed into full stalking and sexual harassment... I kept a diary of events and I went to our line manager... She told me that they knew about his behaviour but that they had grown to accept it. That he was just like this, ... She told me a complaint had been made before so if I was to make a formal complaint then he would lose his job, and was that something I wanted to do?... I left my job.” **Submission to Surviving in Scrubs**

“He is known as inappropriate with female trainees, who are told they will get good operating numbers if... they can cope with his behaviour”. He has never been sanctioned for this, even though everyone in the department knows about it.” **Breaking the Silence (WPSMS)**

“I had been warned about this consultant’s behaviour by other female trainees... All behaviour warned about happened.” **Breaking the Silence (WPSMS)**

Sexual misconduct policy and supporting products

We have developed NHS England's first ever **sexual misconduct policy** in conjunction with staff, including those with lived experience, trade unions, third sector, academic experts, and system leaders.

The policy sets out **standards of behaviour**, **roles** and **responsibilities**, **processes**, and **support structures**. It implements the sexual safety charter and makes clear NHS England's **zero tolerance** for sexual misconduct, and our **duty to prevent sexual harassment**.

It introduces policies and processes to encourage people to report incidents, improve our response to complaints, and increase confidence in the system.

This includes:

- How to respond to a **disclosure of sexual misconduct** (when someone shares that they have experienced or witnessed misconduct, but may not be ready or wish to formally report it)
- All reports of sexual misconduct will be reviewed by a **Screening Panel**
- A process for **reporting** incidents of sexual misconduct, with option for anonymous reporting.
- A reformed **investigations infrastructure**, including access to independent investigators.
- The creation of a **panel of subject matter experts** to advise those considering and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct.
- The creation of a **DASV Ally** role, similar to that of a mental health first aider.
- **Executive Board oversight** and **monitoring of data** on sexual misconduct including staff survey results.

Charter principles

As signatories to this charter, **we commit to a zero-tolerance approach to any unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviours towards our workforce.** We commit to the following principles and actions to achieve this:

1. We will actively work to eradicate sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace.
2. We will promote a culture that fosters openness and transparency, and does not tolerate unwanted, harmful and/or inappropriate sexual behaviours.
3. We will take an intersectional approach to the sexual safety of our workforce, recognising certain groups will experience sexual harassment and abuse at a disproportionate rate.
4. We will provide appropriate support for those in our workforce who experience unwanted, inappropriate and/or harmful sexual behaviours.
5. We will clearly communicate standards of behaviour. This includes expected action for those who witness inappropriate, unwanted and/or harmful sexual behaviour.
6. We will ensure appropriate, specific, and clear policies are in place. They will include appropriate and timely action against alleged perpetrators.
7. We will ensure appropriate, specific, and clear training is in place.
8. We will ensure appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place for those experiencing these behaviours.
9. We will take all reports seriously and appropriate and timely action will be taken in all cases.
10. We will capture and share data on prevalence and staff experience transparently.

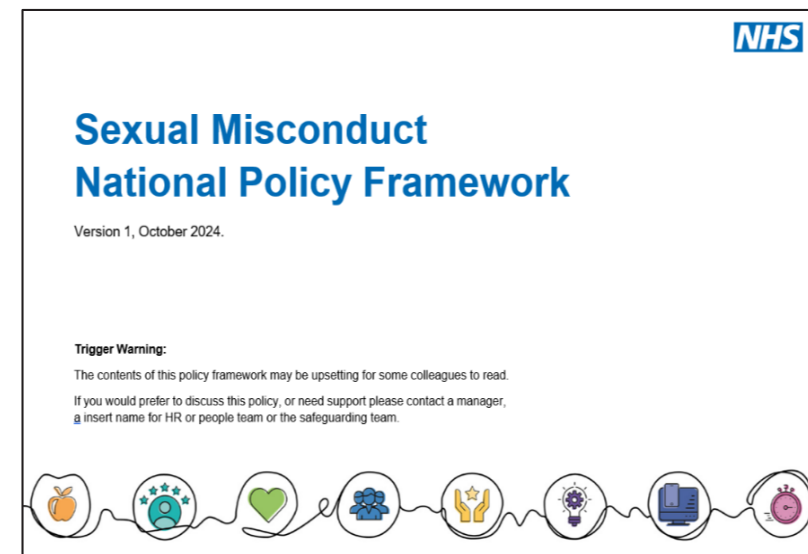
These commitments will apply to everyone in our organisation equally.

Sexual Misconduct National Policy Framework

The new national sexual misconduct policy framework is for NHS organisations to adapt and adopt. It applies to NHS employees, NED's, contractors, secondees, agency staff, volunteers, students, interns, casual and bank workers.

The national policy framework sets out:

- What sexual misconduct is
- What a disclosure is
- A process for **reporting** incidents of sexual misconduct,
- An option and guidance for **anonymous electronic reporting**
- A review of every report of sexual misconduct by a **review group** and the use of **subject matter experts** to advise
- Signposting to e.g. Bullying and Harassment, Grievance, Disciplinary and Maintaining High Professional Standards.
- Proposals for executive Board **oversight and monitoring**
- Guidance for **preventing** sexual misconduct in line with the new 'preventative duty'
- **Practical guidance** e.g. how to **support** those who experience sexual misconduct and how to **respond** to a disclosure or report of sexual misconduct
- **Templates** for recording actions for safety and wellbeing checklist for review group questions to ask when receiving a report





Training & support

The policy is accompanied by a suite of training and support resources.

- 'At a glance' sexual misconduct **policy on a page**
- **e-Learning for Health module** for all NHS staff: Understanding Sexual Misconduct in the Workplace.
- **Sexual safety assurance framework** to support NHS organisations to assure themselves on implementation of the sexual safety charter.
- A **[new resource page](#)** on the NHS England website to support colleagues affected by sexual misconduct.
- A communications toolkit

Sexual Safety Assurance Framework



Charter principle	Action	Outcome
<p>We will take an intersectional approach to the sexual safety of our workforce, recognising certain groups will experience sexual harassment and abuse at a disproportionate rate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use data from NHS staff surveys, cut by EDI metrics, to understand staff experience and inform iterative development of key products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear understanding of the prevalence of sexual misconduct within different workforce groups.• Support is tailored, appropriate and effective in tackling intersectional experience of sexual misconduct.

NHS Staff Survey, National Training & Education Survey (NETS), and Bank 2023 Staff Survey Results

NHS, NHS England, and Bank Staff Survey results

Question asked: In the last 12 months, how many times have you been the target of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace?*

National Training and Education Survey (NETS) results

Questions asked: have you experienced (Q46.1) or witnessed (Q46.2) unwanted, harmful, and/or inappropriate sexual behaviours during your placement/training post?

	% of staff who reported at least 1 incidence of unwanted sexual behaviour in the last 12 months	
	From patients/service users, their relatives, or other members of the public	From staff/colleagues
NHS Staff Survey	8.67% (Q17a)	3.84% (Q17b)
NHS England Staff Survey	0.31%	2.12%
Bank Staff Survey	13.56% (Q22a)	4.80% (Q22b)

Response options: Never, 1-2, 3-5, 6-10, more than 10

	Experienced (Q46.1)	Witnessed (Q46.2)
Total	5.42%	5.82%
Trust	5.95%	6.49%

Response options: Never, Once or twice, Occasionally, Frequently

*this may include offensive or inappropriate unwanted sexualised conversation (including jokes), touching, or assault.

Survey results and intersectionality

- NHS surveys provide clear insight into overall rates of unwanted sexual behaviour
- Unwanted sexual behaviour is proportionately rare but experienced by very large numbers in real terms
- There is clear evidence of poorer experiences amongst, for example:
 - Staff in ambulance trusts – especially in operational roles
 - Nurses and midwives
 - Younger staff
 - Women, non-binary, and people who prefer to self-describe their gender identity
 - Bank staff
- Higher rates of unwanted sexual behaviour from patients and staff are correlated with one another...
- ... and unwanted behaviour from colleagues is less common when more staff feel safe to speak up...
- ... suggesting that organisations should take a rounded approach to dealing with sexual safety, encouraging staff to feel safe in calling out all forms of unwanted sexual behaviour at work

Three practical actions for you...

Work with
your survey
results

Complete
the sexual
misconduct
e-learning

Know your
local policy,
reporting
and
support

Policy and resources links – via NHS England’s website

- [NHS England » NHS England sexual misconduct policy](#)
- [NHS England » National people sexual misconduct policy framework](#)
- [NHS England » Domestic abuse and sexual violence leadership update – launch of NHS England’s sexual misconduct policy](#)
- [NHS England » Sexual safety charter assurance framework](#)
- Website page on employee support
[NHS England » Supporting colleagues affected by sexual misconduct](#)
- [E-learning on sexual misconduct](#)
- Communications toolkit and supporting assets can be found via the [NHS Futures platform](#).

Thank You



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Scan the QR code to join the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (DASV) Programme NHS Futures platform 