Written submission from a member of the public (SHW0004)

I am submitting evidence as a woman who has faced sexual harassment in public spaces and is concerned about facing sexual harassment at work in the future. I intend to forge a career in biological research, a male dominated field known for its endemic sexism. See the scandal involving comments made by Tim Hunt in 2015 for more detail.

Recommendations for government actions

- Make employers liable for third party harassment at work
- Make it a legal requirement for employers to have a written anti-harassment policy
- Make it a legal requirement for employers of over 20 people (for example) to provide harassment prevention training to supervisors within a certain timeframe
- Make it a legal requirement for employers to investigate claims of harassment within a reasonable time frame
- Make it impossible for future governments to reinstate fees for tribunals, as they were found unlawful by the Supreme Court and may discourage victims of harassment to seek justice
- The government should have a responsibility towards women working for private contractors of government work facing harassment. Reports of harassment at certain firms should be taken into account when giving out government contracts

Parliament must act as an example to other workplaces. This means:

- Setting up a completely independent helpline to report harassment faced by staff working at Westminster. It should be linked to a trained support team who can refer members of staff on to counselling services and encourage reports to senior members of staff and the police where relevant
- Have a written code of contact for ALL employees at Westminster. This would avoid situations as with Mark Garnier, where he did not break Ministerial Code due to not having been a minister at the time of the inappropriate behaviour.
- Training should be compulsory for all MPs, peers and their staff, carried out by trained professionals face-to-face
- MPs should know they face deselection and party membership suspension if they are found to have harassed staff members or accessed pornography at work

Look to the state of California’s legislation (California Government Code section 12940(j)) for guidance and the University of Oxford’s human resources induction programme (including mandatory training in bullying and harassment and unconscious bias) for example of best practice.

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