



## A new shape of lawyer

**I run a business employing 20 people and our office Christmas party is coming up soon. In light of all the recent news coverage about sexual harassment, I'm a bit worried. Any suggestions?**



Simon Crack

**The flurry of allegations about inappropriate behaviour in Hollywood and, more recently, at Westminster, has focused minds about sexual harassment.**

Indeed, a recent survey suggested that half of women and around one in five men had been the victim of inappropriate behaviour either at work or in their place of study.

As an employer, it is sensible to bear in mind the possible risks attached to your Christmas party. As an employer, you have a responsibility for employees' actions at a social event you have organised, even if it is outside working hours and not on your premises.

The Christmas party would be considered an extension of the workplace in these circumstances and if a member of staff was to make an unwanted pass at a colleague or perhaps even just an off-colour remark, you could be held liable.

It is important to have a policy in place which spells out the standards of behaviour which will be expected. This will leave staff in no doubt as to what is and isn't considered appropriate. It is vital to make clear that any misdemeanours will be dealt with under your normal disciplinary procedures.

In practical terms, an abundance of alcohol increases the risk of problems so you should consider limiting the amount of free alcohol available.

As the boss, it's sensible for you to remain sober so that you can deal with any issues that arise. You should also consider arrangements for staff to get home safely after the event and, if your event involves an entertainer, be careful not to choose one who may cause offence!

Obviously you want your employees to have a good time, but taking precautions will reduce the risk of an incident which could have serious implications for both staff and your business.

**For further information or advice please call our employment team on 01904 528 200 and speak to Jo Yeates or David Scott.**