



# HR, Employment and EDI 2024

## 8 areas HR teams & Operational Managers need to keep on their radar.

### 1. The Worker Protection Act 2023 - The Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment Discrimination

This amendment to the equality act places a specific duty on employers to prevent their employees being sexually harassed at work. The EHRC is due to publish a code of practice that employers will need to adhere to. This is expected to include the need for robust “not acceptable here” policies coupled with training for all staff and detailed record keeping. In the event of a sexual harassment case going to tribunal the employer will need to evidence compliance with the code. The expected live date is October 2024, which means employers need to act now. Sexual Harassment compensation payments can be uplifted by 25% and where discrimination is proven there is no upper limit.

Download Concrew Training’s fee guide, from the free guides section of our website, (under courses)

### 2. Menopause Policies

Accepting the impact that the menopause can have on employees is becoming increasingly important, with women aged 50 to 64 being the fastest-growing, economically active demographic in the UK. UK statistics reveal that 60% of women have taken time off work due to menopause symptoms, 900,000 women have left their jobs due to menopause, and 67% of women with experience of menopausal symptoms say they have had a ‘mostly negative’ effect on them at work, according to data from CIPD.

Employers who neglect these concerns risk alienating a significant portion of their talent pool and losing high-performing, experienced staff. The dramatic rise in employment tribunals citing menopause shows the law is being used to a greater extent than before.

Offering menopause leave is not only a compassionate response but also a strategic move to support a diverse workforce. And it’s not hard: It can be as simple as allowing home or hybrid. Firms can also consider menopause a health-related issue and allow employees experiencing symptoms to go through the reasonable adjustments route. By doing so organisations can help safeguard their staff’s health and wellbeing and in addition gain their loyalty and retain these talented employees for many more years.

Concrew Trainings free guide of Menopause and training courses help, see our website for more information.

### 3. Employee Representation - Consultative Forums and Schemes

People Forums, Employee Committees and Works Councils are on the increase. Workplace democracy is not a political slogan but a proven method of sustaining meaning and purpose in work for many employees. Joint ownership of business decisions to mutually improve performance, productivity and morale can come about through well maintained consultative structures representative of the whole workforce.

Creative ideas and constructive problem solving often springs from those undertaking actual work at the sharp end of everyday work practice. Good schemes bring benefits to the representatives with transferable skills in communication, influencing and team building as well as basic technical legal knowledge. These in turn help an employer.

And we have seen, through our employee representation training courses, an ever increasing understanding and acceptance that management’s right to manage is more easily facilitated through schemes based on dialogue rather than monologue!

Recognising the individual and varied nature of employees' purposes is crucial. In order to bridge the gap between executives and front-line workers, organisations should look towards creating opportunities for everyone in the organisation to connect with the company's purpose, personally. A constructive proactive approach helps create a sense of shared mission, crucial for building an inclusive workplace that aligns with the aspirations of a purpose-driven workforce. Employers who fail to align their values with staff aspirations may find themselves struggling with recruitment and retention in the competitive job market, while those that embrace the shift can look forward to benefiting from a more motivated and committed workforce that continues to attract top talent.

Concrew Training's course on employee representation help employers set up effective forums and help reps perform better in role.

Check out our courses and the free guides that are published on our web site

#### **4. Neurodiversity**

Recent studies suggest that 1 in 10 people in the UK are neurodivergent, meaning that companies that fail to meet the needs of their neurodivergent staff, customers and service users are neglecting a significant demographic.

Neglecting neurodiversity not only risks legal consequences but also means missing out on the unique skills and perspectives neurodivergent thinkers bring to the table. 'Diversity of thought' is increasingly being recognised as key to innovation and creative problem-solving. Employers who are able to attract and support neurodivergent employees can tap into a uniquely skilled talent pool who quite literally 'think differently'.

2024 is likely to see a much greater emphasis on what happens when not enough is done on neurodiversity. Last year in the UK, over 100 cases of neurodiversity discrimination were taken to employment tribunals, a staggering increase from next to none in years past. One common link among these cases is the perception that neurodivergent employees' performance or behaviour in the workplace is unfairly assessed due to their condition. This has raised concerns about whether employers are adequately equipped to accommodate and support neurodiverse individuals, or if they are inadvertently contributing to an environment where discrimination claims thrive. Although employers are becoming increasingly aware of neurodiversity, this awareness has not yet translated into effective strategies. Setting clear policies, training managers, and effective communication across the organisation, from hiring to performance reviews, will help to ensure neurodiversity doesn't become a risk in 2024

#### **5. Gender Identity**

Creating an inclusive workplace for individuals of all gender identities is critical. Employers who don't implement supportive policies and create a safe environment for gender diversity risk damaging their reputation and losing top talent. Public awareness of this topic is rapidly growing: a recent study by Survey Monkey revealed that surveys with over two gender options have climbed from 16.4 percent to 64 percent. Staying informed about the latest trends and addressing gender diversity issues in the workplace is not just a compliance matter; it is an essential priority.

By engaging with these discussions sensitively and with a genuine desire to understand and support employees, businesses contribute not only to a more inclusive workplace but also to their overall success and positive public perception. And have the best chance of staying clear of tribunals.

Sexual orientation discrimination and gender reassignment discrimination are both illegal, and listed as protected characteristics in the UK Equality Act 2010.

## 6. Support for Unpaid Carers

Support for unpaid carers can no longer be ignored. There are around 7 million unpaid carers in the UK. And more than one in seven people in any workplace is a carer. Without unpaid carers, many unwell, vulnerable and elderly people would have no lifeline. Researchers at Sheffield University have estimated that the total value of unpaid care in England and Wales comes to £162bn a year, or the equivalent of the entire NHS budget in England. The work that unpaid carers do is often painful and exhausting, but until now, there was no statutory leave for carers. In the past, those with caring responsibilities had to either take a sick day or use a day of their annual leave when they needed to take time off as a result of their caring responsibilities.

The UK's Carers Leave Act, which will come into force in 2024, will give employees a statutory right to a weeks' unpaid leave to care for a dependant. Under the new rules, employees who are unpaid carers will be able to take one week of unpaid leave a year to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need.

Progressive leaders are adopting flexible working arrangements, providing caregiver-friendly leave options, and fostering a culture of understanding to ensure that unpaid carers can fulfil their responsibilities without compromising their own mental and physical wellbeing, not to mention their professional growth. The business case for doing so is strong as well: supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities is essential for retaining a diverse and experienced workforce. Companies that do so will benefit from greater staff engagement, improved retention and increased productivity and this will ultimately boost their bottom line. Those that do not provide adequate support risk losing valuable talent and may face legal challenges.

## 7. Hybrid Working

Hybrid work is in a constant state of change, with a delicate balance needed between employee preferences and employer expectations. On the one hand staff urge new ways of working with continued flexibility of remote work, citing increased flexibility and better work-life balance. But some employers are pushing to reintegrate teams into physical office spaces, arguing it strengthens employee culture and collaboration. This tension is underscored by compelling statistics: an overwhelming 98% of remote workers express a desire to persist in remote arrangements, contrasting with 90% of companies planning a return to the office by the end of 2024.

This tug of war is not merely symbolic, evidenced by the raw revelation that 28% of employers would contemplate terminating employees resisting the return to the office, while 39% of employees would consider leaving their jobs if forced to give up remote work. Forward thinking organisations must navigate this intricate balance, refining policies and leveraging technology to harmonise the desires of both employers and employees. The hybrid work model has emerged as a potentially happy middle ground, blending the sought-after flexibility of remote work with the undeniable benefits of in-person collaboration. The successful implementation of a hybrid work environment rests on comprehensive training for managers, emphasising empathy, communication, and performance management in leading both remote and in-office teams. COVID 19 has reshaped work expectations, turning the once-static landscape into a dynamic arena, challenging organisations to embrace a blend of flexibility and collaboration for sustained success in 2024 and beyond.

## 8. The 4 Generation Workforce and EDI

Four generations now occupy the workplace simultaneously. By 2030, Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) will occupy a third of the workforce. But they'll have lots of company in the three generations that preceded them. Across the globe, baby boomers are living longer than previous generations and they're retiring later in life—in 10 years, the youngest of them will be in their late 60s and likely still working. New ways of working with new skills will be more easily grasped and accepted, by some more than others. Sensitivity in working relationships across the generational divide and re skilling, have to be constantly under review.

As the youngest generation enters the workforce, organisations need to adapt to their expectations and preferences. Generation Z, marked by its remarkable ethnic diversity, with over 50% hailing from non-white backgrounds.

Having grown up amidst technological advancements, Gen Z is tech-savvy, viewing AI tools, social media, and technology as integral to career advancement. Their inclination towards embracing the gig economy, side hustles, and multi-job approaches reflects a pragmatic response to economic uncertainties, a feature that sets them apart from their older counterparts.

In addition, for this generation, equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the workplace is not simply a “nice-to-have”, but an expectation, pushing companies to re-evaluate and enhance their EDI initiatives.

Gen Z's entry into the workforce necessitates a paradigm shift for both Millennials and older generations. The workplace must be ready to harness the innovative skill sets this generation brings while addressing potential gaps in soft skills. Simultaneously, organisations can help Gen Z polish their personal work relationship skills by offering skill development programs and mentorship from older generations. As Gen Z takes the reins, the collaborative exchange of knowledge and skills between generations will be instrumental in shaping a thriving and inclusive workplace culture for the future.

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