



Number of sexual misconduct reports received by SRA more than doubles in five years

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The number of sexual misconduct reports received by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has more than doubled over the last five years to 63* in 2018/19, up from 25 in 2014/15, says GQ|Littler, the London office of the largest global employment law firm for employers.

Reports have increased 16% over the last year alone, up from 54 in 2017/18 (see graph). Lawyers must report incidences of sexual misconduct to the SRA and a failure to do so could be considered a breach of the regulator's Code of Conduct.

GQ|Littler says the growing number of reports reflects a new attitude being taken towards sexual misconduct, as employees across

professional services become increasingly willing to speak out against misconduct in the workplace.

Sophie Vanhegan, Partner at GQ|Littler, says: “More and more law firms are now tackling allegations of sexual misconduct head on. The increases coincide with the growth of the #MeToo movement, and likely reflect broader cultural changes arising from that.”

“Although there has been progress amongst UK law firms in terms of implementing new measures to stamp out sexual misconduct, such as restrictions on alcohol consumption at work events, these figures show that there is still progress to be made here.”

The SRA hold law firms to a high standard in terms of handling incidences of sexual misconduct. The regulator requires firms to have an equality and diversity policy in place which should cover how it deals with complaints of harassment and provides guidance on how this should be put into practice. In 2018, the SRA also issued a warning notice on the improper use of Non-Disclosure Agreements as a means to cover up incidences of misconduct.

GQ|Littler adds that law firms who do not have adequate internal controls and policies in place to handle incidences of sexual misconduct risk being investigated. The SRA has powers to investigate and even fine firms that it believes have breached its standards.

There have been several examples of incidences of sexual misconduct at law firms for example:

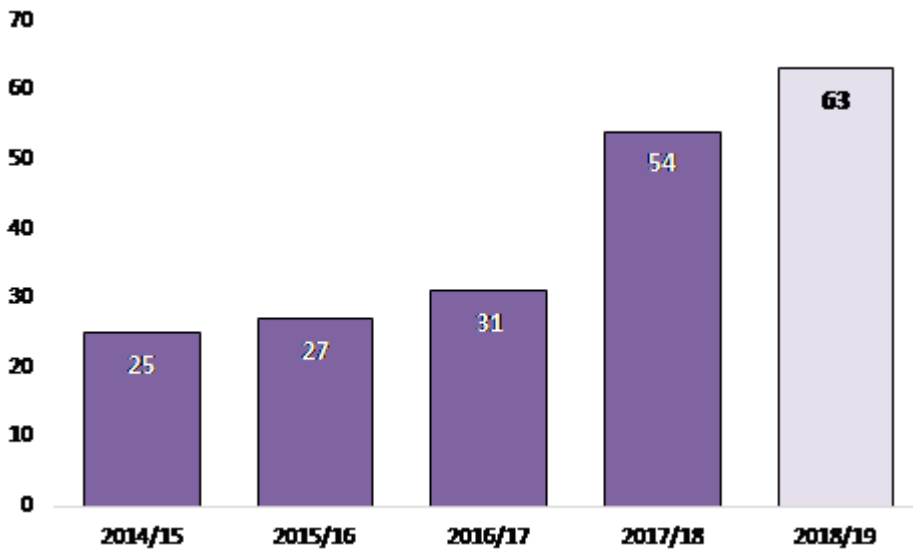
- A former partner at a Magic Circle firm was fined £35,000 and ordered to pay £200,000 in costs by the SRA after a junior lawyer reported sexual misconduct against him
- A former senior partner and London Head at an international law firm is currently being investigated by the SRA over allegations he sexually harassed a junior colleague

Sophie Vanhegan adds: “Sexual harassment is not necessarily more prevalent than it traditionally has been at law firms. What’s changed is that misconduct is more likely to be reported.”

“The SRA is not afraid to take action against employers and any sanctions imposed can be very damaging reputationally. It is therefore very important that law firms have adequate controls in place to not only reduce incidences of misconduct but also to effectively handle a case.”

“Sexual misconduct often goes unreported due to junior colleagues being afraid of the consequences of doing so. Having whistleblowing hotlines and procedures in place can help deal with this.”

The number of sexual misconduct reports received by the SRA has more than doubled over the last five years – number of reports received.



About GQ|Littler

GQ|Littler is the leading specialist law firm for employers in the UK and won the Boutique Law Firm of the Year 2018 award at the Legal Business Awards. Based in the City of London, the firm is part of Littler, the world’s largest employment law firm with over 1,500 lawyers in 80 offices worldwide, offering a single source solution to international businesses. Offering risk-based contentious and non-contentious advice, the firm’s legal expertise includes employment, immigration, employee tax and incentives. Its client base spans a wide range of sectors including financial services, technology, healthcare, professional services and luxury goods. GQ|Littler is recognised as a leader in its field by both Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners, which describes the firm as “a premier outfit”.

For expert insight on the outlook of European employers, please see Littler’s annual Executive Employer Survey Europe 2018 which can be found [here](#).

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