



17 August 2016

PRESS RELEASE

Belfast Sisters Settle Harassment Cases for £30k

Kirstie and Courtney McKeever, two sisters from Belfast, have settled sexual harassment claims against Herbel Restaurants (trading as KFC) for £14,000 and £16,000 respectively. The sisters, who alleged they had suffered harassment by a male co-worker at KFC on the Boucher Road, Belfast, were assisted in taking their case by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

The two young women alleged that the co-worker touched and pinched them despite being asked to stop, used overtly sexual language and exposed himself. The women alleged they reported the incidents to supervisors and managers but the behaviour continued. The McKeever sisters felt that, in the end, they had no choice but to resign their jobs.

Kirstie McKeever said: "I was studying for my A-Levels when I started working in KFC. Initially I enjoyed my job and it was only when I began to work the same shifts as this particular guy that the issues started. He would touch my face and pinch me under the arms. It made me feel really uncomfortable and I told him to stop. He also began to ask me inappropriate questions of a sexual nature. I asked him to stop it and then complained to supervisors but it continued. His behaviour made me ill and led to me resigning from my job."

Courtney McKeever said: "I was really pleased to get a job in KFC with my sister. I was still at school and it was great to be earning some money. When the guy started nipping me, I told him to stop. Throughout the time I was there he made what I felt were insulting and threatening remarks to me and inappropriate sexual remarks. I complained to supervisors who said they would speak to him but nothing changed. In the end I felt I had to resign from my job. It was a tough time but I'm glad it is all behind me now and I would encourage anyone else facing treatment like this to come forward."

In settling the case, Herbel Restaurants trading as KFC has reaffirmed its commitment to equality of opportunity in the workplace and agreed to meet with the Equality Commission to review its equal opportunities policies, practices and procedures to ensure they are fully compliant with its legal obligations.

Dr Evelyn Collins, CBE, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission said: “It is unacceptable that, decades after it was established that sexual harassment constitutes unlawful sex discrimination, we are still witnessing cases such as Kirstie’s and Courtney’s. Here were two young women who simply wanted a part-time job to earn some money like so many other teenagers. What should have given these young women useful experience of the workplace instead became an ordeal that caused them great distress.”

“All employees are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. When complaints of the type of behaviour described arise, they have to be investigated and dealt with immediately and appropriate action taken. Employers should ensure that they have appropriate procedures in place to ensure harassment does not occur; they should not wait until an issue arises before considering how they might deal with it. Both sisters alleged that they complained to their superiors about the treatment they experienced but their complaints were not effectively dealt with.”

“It is essential that employers make sure that all their staff are aware of and understand their equal opportunities policies and that their managers and supervisory staff know the importance of acting on them. The Company has, as part of the settlement, been meeting the Commission to review its policies and practices and to arrange training for its staff, managers and supervisors so that these matters are properly addressed in the future,” Dr. Collins concluded.

Notes to Editor:

- Kirstie and Courtney McKeever were referred to the Equality Commission by Donard King Solicitors.
- The male co-worker against whom the complaints were made against was dismissed from his post at KFC, Boucher Road.

Useful publications:

- [Sex discrimination - a short guide](#) (pdf, 252kb)
- [Promoting a good and harmonious workplace](#) (pdf, 444kb)
- [Harassment and Bullying in the workplace](#) (pdf, 512kb)
- Download our template [Harassment & Bullying policy](#) (word doc, 64kb)