

Christmas parties: top tips for avoiding the HR hangover

Before the party

- Talk to staff about what sort of event they would like and think about how you can make sure everyone feels included. Check that absent staff are not missed off the guest list.
- Risk assess the party venue and consider the key risks posed by the nature of the event. Take steps to remove or reduce the identified risks.
- Remind staff in writing of the standard of behaviour expected from them at the party and signpost relevant policies (e.g. equality and anti-harassment, health and safety, relationships at work, misuse of alcohol and drugs, social media, sickness absence and disciplinary rules).
- When writing to staff, encourage moderate consumption of alcohol and discourage attendance at “after parties”.
- Brief managers on their special responsibilities to set a good example and intervene where inappropriate behaviour takes place. Managers should also be reminded not to engage in work talk, especially about issues such as pay and performance.
- Consider whether equality and anti-harassment training needs to be refreshed.

During the party

- Moderate the consumption of alcohol (e.g. limit the free bar) and offer a good range of soft drinks.
- Provide food to limit the impact of the alcohol.
- Consider whether there is a need for security guards and/or sober guardians.
- Provide access to safe transport home and discourage taxi-sharing.
- If a problem arises on the night, don't make any snap decisions there and then – deal with it when everyone has a clear head.

After the party

- If something noteworthy happened at the party, deter staff from gossiping in person and/or online.
- Deal with complaints quickly. A failure to do so could compound the problem and even harm any “reasonable steps” defence.
- Take additional steps to support those raising complaints of sexual harassment.
- Where necessary, take disciplinary action, bearing in mind all the usual rules about investigating carefully and running a fair process. Take legal advice.
- If you are regulated, consider whether, and when, a report should be made to your regulatory body.
- If the conduct is criminal, consider whether you need to report it to the police.

And most importantly...don't forget to have fun!