

Elizabeth Melville

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Overview

Elizabeth has over 25 years' experience as an employment lawyer and, for the last ten years, has specialised in conducting high-level investigatory and internal disciplinary work. Her work involves investigating serious and often sensitive allegations against senior individuals across a wide spectrum of organisations, from high-profile political, sporting and arts organisations to banks, charities, independent schools and universities. Much of her work in recent years has involved allegations of sexual harassment and assault (including historic allegations), as well as allegations of serious bullying and other forms of misconduct. In addition, Elizabeth's work with independent schools often involves issues of safeguarding, and she is familiar with the statutory framework and guidance in this area.

Elizabeth complements her core legal practice with expertise in mental health and wellbeing. She has studied analytical psychology with a London based training organisation, including undertaking a clinical placement within an NHS psychiatric clinic, and has worked one to one with clients therapeutically. She draws on this experience when conducting investigations, interacting sensitively with complainants and accused individuals alike and implementing best practice when dealing with traumatised or distressed witnesses.

Elizabeth's unique qualifications and expertise often see her instructed on investigations that would typically attract a silk appointment.

Elizabeth is also a qualified mediator and conducts workplace mediations, 1:1 coaching and internal training, as well as undertaking large- or small-scale reviews of organisational culture in which she draws on both her legal and psychological expertise.

Investigations

Recent examples of investigations undertaken by Elizabeth include:

Academic institutions and schools

- Investigating parental allegations of bullying and harassment by one child against another over a period of years in a leading independent school, including alleged failure by the Head and others to address the behaviour. The case involved consideration of neurodiversity and there was a background of safeguarding concerns about one of the children;
- Investigating parental allegations over a period of years regarding the treatment by a leading London independent school of two disabled children with Education, Health and Care Plans, one of whom was accessing education remotely. The case involved senior members of staff and members of the Learning Support department, as well as consideration of safeguarding issues;
- Investigating parental complaints against the Deputy Head and other senior staff members of an independent boarding school, concerning their treatment of two girls who had been accused of misbehaviour, including the sharing of semi-nude images online and peer-on-peer abuse. The investigation involved safeguarding considerations, including concerns about the treatment of one set of parents towards their child;
- Investigating allegations of race discrimination and failure to address special educational needs over a 4-year period, made by the parents of

Expertise

- Education & Safeguarding
- Employment & Discrimination
- Health
- Investigations
- Mediation

Recommendations

"Lizzie is absolutely brilliant. Not only is she fantastic to work with, but her manner with clients and witnesses is exceptional. Her attention to detail is excellent, cutting to the core of an issue extremely quickly." Chambers & Partners 2024

"Elizabeth is excellent on workplace investigations. She is diligent and thorough but proportionate, and has an excellent manner with witnesses." Chambers & Partners 2023

"Elizabeth is thorough, practical, and has a good manner with witnesses." The Legal 500 2023

Key contacts

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a black pupil against the Head and several staff members of a leading London independent prep school;

- Investigating allegations of serious sexual harassment and assault by the CEO of a London based national academic body against a female member of staff. Involved interviewing other members of the organisation's senior management team as well as a number of other women who gave evidence of similar experiences with the individual;
- Investigating allegations of bullying and harassment raised by an academic against other academic staff within a UK leading business school. The alleged perpetrator had mental health issues which had affected his perceptions and had to be addressed in the investigation report;
- Investigating safeguarding concerns against the Deputy Head of an independent girls' London day school in relation to his interactions with certain sixth formers, and considering whether the 'harm test' had been met, applying KCSIE paragraph 338 and related guidance;
- Investigating complaints of sexual harassment and bullying against the headmaster of an independent secondary school;
- Investigating wide-ranging allegations of discrimination raised by a PhD student within an Oxbridge school of science against various academics.

Sport

- Investigating allegations of severe bullying and an 'intolerable work environment' against a Director-level employee of a premier league football club, which had contributed to one employee taking their own life. The allegations attracted international press attention, and the investigation involved interviewing 28 witnesses, including other Directors and former employees, many of whom had also suffered poor mental health as a result of the working environment;
- Investigating allegations (including historic allegations) of sexual harassment by various female members of staff against a member of the senior management team of a world-renowned sporting body. Involved interviewing both senior staff members as well as victims of the alleged behaviour.

The Arts

- Investigating allegations of bullying by a head of department against other crew members on the set of an Oscar-winning movie;
- Investigating allegations of sexual harassment going back some 11 years against a senior manager at a national Arts organisation. The allegations were prompted by the revelations against Harvey Weinstein in the US.

Charities

- Instructed by a leading UK charity to review their handling of allegations of sexual assault made by a member of staff against a colleague whilst in the field, including conducting a review of the charity's policies and procedures. This investigation involved working alongside a safeguarding consultant as the complainant was considered to be a vulnerable adult;
- Investigating whistleblowing complaints by three senior employees within a charity against the CEO, including allegations of financial misconduct, alleged manipulation of accounts and inadequate safeguarding.

Politics

- Instructed to investigate complaints of sexual harassment made by three female employees against the acting CEO of a high-profile political advocacy and campaign group. These allegations appeared in the national press;
- Investigating a grievance brought by the Secretary General of an international parliamentary organisation against the chairperson of the Executive Committee. The grievance concerned a contractual dispute as well as alleged race discrimination against the chairperson and a breakdown in relationship, and also raised issues of racial and regional tensions within the organisation. It involved interviewing senior individuals across a number of jurisdictions.

Private sector

- Instructed by a leading industry brand name to investigate its handling and internal investigation of a disclosure by an employee of sexual assault by a fellow employee, in circumstances where the accused had subsequently taken his own life;
- Instructed by a retail and investment bank to conduct a grievance investigation brought by an employee exhibiting signs of poor mental health, including paranoia and bizarre behaviour, and to advise them on how to deal with the employee in light of his health issues;
- Investigating complaints of bullying, harassment and disability

discrimination raised by a lawyer against a partner and colleagues within a department of a leading law firm;

- Investigating allegations of sexual harassment and inappropriate workplace behaviour within a London based investment business;
- Conducting a large-scale 'culture review' of a 6,000-employee business within the energy sector, with a particular focus on bullying and harassment.

Trade unions

- Instructed by the general secretary of a trade union to investigate and determine complaints of breach of the Union's Rule Book against 5 members of the NEC in conduct that amounted to an alleged internal "coup".

Public sector

- Instructed by a local authority to conduct an investigation into the culture within a department which had led to a successful employment tribunal claim by one of its employees with compensation payable of nearly £500,000. The issues concerned allegations of bullying by a single manager over a 3-year period, as well as systemic failings within the organisation in failing to deal with the issues.

Professional Recommendations



"She is methodical and well prepared."

Chambers & Partners 2024

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"Elizabeth is thorough, practical, and has a good manner with witnesses."

The Legal 500 2023

"She is meticulously prepared, she is an effective cross-examiner and she creates a positive feeling of a team between the clients, the solicitor and the barrister."
"She has become something of an investigations specialist who seems to be able to get underneath the surface of the dispute or situation and make a judgement that is entirely fair."

Chambers & Partners 2022

"She is a terrifically strong advocate." "She's fantastic at conducting workplace investigations."

Chambers & Partners 2021

"Excellent, responsive and meticulously thorough, Elizabeth is also very client friendly and always willing to go the extra mile."

The Legal 500 2021

"Her preparation is meticulous and her advocacy is fantastic." "Very user-friendly

and willing to go the extra mile for the client.”

Chambers & Partners 2020

“Meticulous in her preparation for cases. An excellent and thorough advocate.”

Chambers & Partners 2019

“Her preparation is meticulous and her cross-examination is extremely thorough.”

Chambers & Partners 2018