

MONEY OFFICE POLITICS

How employers can deal with office lovebirds



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Over half of employers don't mind in-house relationships among their staff

In some instances, you can require that staff disclose a relationship.

Do you know how many people in your office have had an in-house romance? Valentine's Day might have been and gone, but trysts are a staple of the UK workplace. According to research carried out by the Institute of Leadership and Management, 41 per cent of survey

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respondents said that they have enjoyed a workplace romance, with 32 per cent having had a quick fling.

And it goes on: 4 per cent have had a sneaky kiss, and 27 per cent ending up marrying or entering into a civil partnership with their work colleague. And a liberal 60 per cent of managers don't actually mind if their employees start a relationship in the workplace. But are there circumstances when employers can put a stop to romance?



Romance is best left to the restaurant (Source: Giphy)

HOW TO OBJECT

It is very hard for employers to object to workplace relationships. Such things are personal, and any objections would probably be inconsistent with the right to respect for private and family life under Human Rights' law. That said, should the relationship impact either of the employees' work performance, including if and when, for instance, the relationship turned sour, the employer could instigate poor performance procedures. A dismissal, though, would only likely to be considered fair if, in spite of an improvement plan being put in place and warnings being issued, an acceptable level of performance had not subsequently been reached.

LINE MANAGERS FLINGS

Relationships between managers and employees who report to them can be difficult to manage. Favouritism and perceived favouritism can be a real issue for employers. In some cases, it may be appropriate for employers to have policies requiring such a relationship to be disclosed. Breaching such policies could warrant disciplinary action. At the same time, imposing a blanket rule on employees to disclose all relationships would again be likely to interfere with the right to respect for private and family life.



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CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality may also be a problem. Where, for instance, two employees are intimately involved and one of them leaves the organisation to work for a competitor, there may be a risk that the remaining employee could disclose confidential information to their partner.

And of course, if this were then be passed on to the competitor, there could be serious consequences. It would, however, be hard for the employer to take action against the existing employee solely on the basis that there might be a chance of work-related pillow talk.

Generally, it is very difficult for employers to interfere with employees' personal relationships at work. As an employee, if you find yourself in a situation where an employer does try to meddle with a romantic tie, subject to any duty of disclosure, feel free to tell them (politely, of course) that it's none of their business.

Matt Gingell is a partner at law firm Gannons, which specialises in employment and commercial law.