

YOUR WEEKLY BULLETIN OF WIT AND WONDER



SAY WHAT?

How can we ever say it right when they keep changing it?!



ONE-NIL BY MOUTH

How the N-Word issue ended in tribunal.



FAB-U-LOUS OPPORTUNITY MISSED

Why Strictly's best pantomime villain should have gone virtual...

AS IN BUNGEE..?

You can't knock Newsround. It was great back in the 80s when I was growing up - with its beepy *Very Important News* music and the concerned but chirpy delivery from John Craven.

Nowadays you can get a little fix of it on the BBC website. I've just done the How Well Do You Know Your Mushrooms? quiz on the Newsround page.

You may have noticed that we're having a fabulous year for fungi. Apparently one of the upsides to climate change and warmer, wetter summers is that we're going to see more and more weird and wonderful mushroom magic, or so says Lee Davis, the curator of Kew Garden's *Fungarium*.

Yes. *Fungarium*. Imagine working at the *fungarium*. It does *sound* like it would be fun and never sporing. (forgive me)

But although there's much to learn about these amazing things, there's one thing nobody seems to know.

How to PRONOUNCE 'fungi'.



I'm sure when I was a kid it was as in 'fun guy'.

But these days more often than not some expert is saying it with a soft g - as in 'bungee'.

And then, just when you think you've managed *that*, another expert pops up saying 'funj-eye'. Which is quite unpleasant and sounds more like a nasty variant of conjunctivitis.

Or is it fun-ghee. As in the clarified butter Indian restaurants use... but *jolly* clarified butter.

Maybe they're *all* wrong and it's one of those words like quinoa and feng-shui which actually should be said so weirdly, it makes a mockery of its spelling.

I'm going to set a new and disturbing trend and start pronouncing it 'foon-jjshee'.

Just to mess with people's minds...

How do you pronounce fungi? Are there any other words that inspire various pronunciations? Do let us know over on our Facebook page.

VERBAL VINDICATION

And speaking of words that are hard to say brings me to the case of *Mr I Stevenson v London Borough of Redbridge 2021* where the tribunal considered whether an employee who used a racial slur was unfairly dismissed.

Mr Stevenson was employed by the borough from November 1988 until his dismissal in July 2020. Prior to the incident that led to his dismissal, he had a clean disciplinary record.

In February 2020, Mr Stevenson attended a workplace training course on preventing radicalisation. The session facilitator said that the session was a “safe space” and that they could ask questions. During the training, Mr Stevenson raised a question about racism. In asking his question he referred to an incident he witnessed many years ago in which the N word was used. In describing this incident, he used the N word in full, after which he then apologised for doing. While no one at the training session reprimanded Mr Stevenson for his use of the word, two other attendees later complained to senior management.

After an investigation, Mr Stevenson was invited to a disciplinary hearing which was conducted by Mr Akinfe. At the hearing, Mr Stevenson was given the opportunity to question the complainants. He also wanted to read a prepared apology for using the N word and causing offence but was told by Mr Akinfe he could not do so under the employer’s procedure for disciplinary hearings. Mr Akinfe apparently thought Mr Stevenson had known since February which employees had made the complaint and so had had ample time to apologise. In reality, Mr Stevenson had only found out who the complainants were when he was invited to the disciplinary hearing in July.

At the hearing, Mr Stevenson said he felt “terrible” about the impact his use of the word had on the individuals present at the training and he accepted that he should not have used the word in full.

After the hearing, Mr Stevenson was dismissed by letter. Mr Akinfe said he had “not been presented with any evidence that [Mr Stevenson] had made any attempts to engage or show remorse to the victims”.

Mr Stevenson appealed his dismissal but was unsuccessful. In upholding his dismissal, the appeal panel took into account that he had worked in the HR department, and that he had shown no remorse for his use of the word.

Mr Steven then filed a claim for unfair dismissal.

The Employment Tribunal (ET) found that Mr Stevenson was unfairly dismissed. It reasoned that the decision to dismiss was materially influenced by incorrect facts, namely:

1. Mr Akinfe mistakenly believed that Mr Stevenson held an HR advisor role when in fact he worked in the HR Department in an IT role and had no real HR experience. This mistake was not corrected at his dismissal appeal hearing.
2. Mr Akinfe’s decision to dismiss was also influenced by his belief that Mr Stevenson showed no remorse for using the N word in full. In reality, Mr Stevenson had apologised right after using the word and prepared a statement of apology. Judge Noons wrote “A reasonable employer would have recognised that these statements and the apology on the day showed some level of remorse on behalf of [Mr Stevenson]. The [employer’s] conclusion that they had no evidence of, and that [Mr Stevenson] had not in fact shown, any remorse was a conclusion that no reasonable employer would have reached.”
3. The ET also took note of the fact that Mr Stevenson had a clean disciplinary record, stating “A reasonable employer would have concluded that 31 years’ service with an entirely clean disciplinary record throughout that period was significant mitigation against imposing the sanction of dismissal”.

Though Mr Stevenson was successful in his unfair dismissal claim, the ET reduced the amount to be awarded by 90% to reflect the fact that he understood the impact of the word and that he should never have used it. The actual amount to be awarded will be determined at a later hearing.

This case reminds employers to be very careful when dismissing an employee without notice for misconduct. Employers must ensure they have all the relevant facts and have taken account of any mitigating circumstances. Employers should also consider whether it would be reasonable to impose any alternatives to dismissal, such as a final written warning, especially where the employee has many years’ service with a clean disciplinary record.

EVENTS SEASON

2021

DEC 15

HR Hangout -
Understanding the
Menopause



MONITORING THE SITUATION



Assuming he could sit up, they should have let him Zoom it in.

It’s a show that’s doing a lot to stay relevant so why not represent those of us stuck working at home?

They could have put his face up on the usual table, on a monitor, and given him paddles to hold up at home. Everyone could’ve shouted “You’re ON MUTE!” right at the start, until he worked out the tech.

Strictly Come Dancing missed a trick this week, with Craig Revel-Horwood isolating as he recovered from Covid-19.

And if he'd started rolling his eyes and carping at Motsi again, she could have reached over and switched him off.

Just sayin'.

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