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## Dignity at Work – Guiding Principles

The University of Sheffield is committed to protecting the dignity of staff in their work. The University expects all members of staff to treat each other with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times.

The University of Sheffield is fully committed to sustaining a positive and mutually supportive working environment free from harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation where staff can work collaboratively and productively together, and where all staff are equally valued and respected.

The University of Sheffield is a talented and diverse community, where staff and students have a right to expect high standards from each other and to work together to maximise the benefits of difference.

These principles are complemented by the University's existing provisions: Equality and Diversity; Workplace Health and Wellbeing; Disability Network, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Network.

### Scope

All University of Sheffield staff.

**Please note:** If you are a student at the University of Sheffield you can find more guidance on addressing concerns regarding harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation at: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/harassment/home](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/harassment/home)

### Key Principles:

1. The University expects all members of the University to recognise their responsibilities and:
  - behave in a way that respects the rights and dignity of others
  - treat others fairly
  - value differences in others and the contribution they make
  - be open and constructive in our communications
  - demonstrate a commitment to upholding the University's policies on equality and diversity
2. The University will not tolerate bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation and so far as possible, complaints will be managed speedily, confidentially and communicated effectively.



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3. The University will promote an environment in which people who are subject to inappropriate behaviour or witness it feel able to raise complaints without fear of victimisation.
4. All staff are encouraged to bring to the attention of managers any examples of any unfair treatment they have witnessed or strongly suspect is taking place.
5. The University encourages staff to deal with any harassment, discrimination, bullying or victimisation through informal resolution where appropriate. Seeking to address the situation informally can lead to a quicker resolution that causes minimal disruption to relationships.
6. On occasion, individual perceptions of behaviour may differ, perhaps due to differences in attitude, values, experience or culture, and what one person would consider acceptable behaviour may be unacceptable to another. The defining factor in determining if behaviour amounts to harassment is that the behaviour is unacceptable to the recipient and could 'reasonably be considered' to amount to harassment. When considering allegations of harassment, the University will therefore apply a test of 'reasonableness' to determine if harassment has taken place.
7. If, at any time, there is evidence that allegations of harassment, discrimination or bullying have been made vexatiously or maliciously, or that false information has been provided or that the complainant has otherwise acted in bad faith then disciplinary action may be taken.
8. Any allegation of harassment, discrimination, bullying or victimisation will be treated seriously and anyone found to have behaved unacceptably will be investigated and may be the subject of disciplinary action.
9. The University ensures that Academic Staff, Teaching Staff and Research Staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and this will not be considered to be bullying or harassment provided that those involved are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy.

### Links to other policies

- Where problems have arisen with a staff member's work performance or conduct, the manager will take a fair and reasonable course of informal and/or formal action to resolve issues and aid improvement through the Capability or Disciplinary Policy [www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/pcc](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/pcc).
- Fair and reasonable management of performance or conduct will not be considered to be bullying. However where a member of staff considers that their management



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contravenes their dignity at work they are encouraged to consider the options for the resolution at the earliest opportunity.

- Whistleblowing Procedure – this should be used where bullying or harassment is witnessed and there are concerns about the interests of others or of the University itself is at risk. ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/contracts/pid](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/contracts/pid)).

## Definitions

### Definition of Harassment

Harassment is “unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual” (Equality Act 2010).

The behaviour or treatment may relate to a person’s gender, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or any other protected characteristic.

Harassment may consist of persistent behaviour, although one single act may be considered sufficiently serious to warrant formal or informal reporting.

### Definition of Discrimination:

Unlawful discrimination takes place when an individual or a group of people is treated less favourably than others based on a protected characteristic such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity (including treating a woman less favourably because she is breastfeeding), race, religion or belief sex or sexual orientation and in relation to direct discrimination only.

“Direct discrimination occurs where someone is treated less favourably because of one of the protected characteristics set out above; this can include association with or a perception of a particular characteristic” (The Equality Act 2010).

“Indirect discrimination occurs where someone is disadvantaged by an unjustified provision, criteria or practice that puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not share that characteristic” (The Equality Act 2010).

### Definition of Victimisation:

“Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act; or because they are suspected of doing so. An employee is not protected from victimisation if they have maliciously made or supported an untrue complaint.” (The Equality Act 2010).

### Definition of Bullying:

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.



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In addition the University recognises that bullying does not need to be deliberate; someone may demonstrate bullying behaviour, without intending to. Bullying may be obvious or it may be more covert. Whichever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual and will often cause embarrassment, fear, humiliation or distress to an individual or group of individuals.

### **Electronic Bullying and the Use of Social Networking Sites**

Electronic harassment can take place through electronic media, for example, email, instant messaging, social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs), or text messages. When sending emails, all members of staff should consider the content, language and appropriateness of such communications

If instances of what might be online harassment or bullying are reported they will be dealt with in the same way as if they had taken place in a face-to-face setting. Guidance on the appropriate use of social media can be found through: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/az/socialmedia](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/az/socialmedia).

## **Informal Procedure**

The University of Sheffield recognises that it can be difficult to raise a complaint of harassment, discrimination, bullying or victimisation whether on an informal or formal basis and encourages staff to access the appropriate sources of support available. The University seeks to ensure that people who feel that they have been the subject of harassment, discrimination, bullying or victimisation are able to raise their concerns, and to have them addressed appropriately.

Advice and support can be sought from a trained specialist through the Dignity at Work network, Human Resources and the Trade Unions at any time.

An informal approach may effectively address the unwanted behaviour without recourse to formal procedures. However, there are some circumstances where the alleged behaviour is deemed to be sufficiently serious to warrant an immediate formal investigation such as where there has been discrimination, assault or a prolonged abuse of power.

Unacceptable behaviour should in the first instance be raised by the individual who perceives that they are the recipient of unacceptable behaviour with the person involved if they feel comfortable. It is recommended that issues are raised at the earliest opportunity.

### **Talking to the person concerned**

- This response is most appropriate when the working relationship is still reasonably positive and when the unwanted behaviour is recent.
- A mutual willingness to discuss the issues and to work for a win-win solution is a good indicator of success.
- Before speaking to the other person, it is important to identify the behaviours that are being experienced as unpleasant or bullying.



- It is helpful to make sure that the specific incidents are clearly defined in terms of the time, content and frequency of behaviours.

### **Writing to the person concerned**

- If it is more suitable, the individual who perceives that they are the recipient of unacceptable behaviour should put their concerns in writing.
- This will create a written record of the issue that has been raised and is useful when a meeting is not possible due to distance or timing.
- It is important to prepare by thinking about what behaviours are causing the problem and how they could be changed. The letter/email should clearly describe the negative behaviours and explain why the behaviours are unwanted. The desired alternative behaviours should be described and a suggestion made as to how the situation could be resolved.
- The letter/email should be short and to the point. Care should be taken to avoid any blaming statements or emotive language.

### **Talking to a manager**

- Where a staff member perceives that concerns relate to an immediate manager, the staff member may wish to discuss this informally with the next level of manager if they feel that they are unable to approach the named manager directly.
- The focus of the meeting is to explore whether the issue can be resolved through discussion/informal intervention and in particular on ways of avoiding similar matters arising in the future.
- A line manager has a responsibility to advise and support an individual to try and resolve the concern raised.

### **Seeking support from the Dignity at Work Network**

- The staff member can contact a Dignity at Work Adviser to receive advice by phone or by email [www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/harassment/network](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/harassment/network)
- A Dignity at Work Adviser can assist the staff member to explore options for informal resolution of the issue and indicate whether the matter is so serious that it warrants consideration under the formal procedure.
- A Dignity at Work Adviser can provide confidential advice and support to University staff.
- A Dignity at Work Adviser will be familiar with the appropriate procedures and are available to help the staff make a decision on how they want to handle their concern by presenting all the options.

### **Involving a third party**

- If approaching the person directly does not resolve the situation, or is inappropriate, it may be appropriate to ask a third party to assist. Ideally, the alleged harasser should be approached at the earliest opportunity.



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- Cessation of the behaviour and an apology (if there has been any unacceptable behaviour) may be sufficient to bring the matter to a close. The individual making the complaint may ask for someone to accompany them, this maybe a trade union representative or a colleague.

### **Seeking advice from Human Resources**

- Confidential advice and support on how to address issues and a strategy for resolution can be sought through your Faculty/Professional Services HR Manager:  
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/aboutus/howweare/ops](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/aboutus/howweare/ops).
- An HR Adviser can assist the staff member to explore options for informal resolution and indicate whether the matter is so serious that it warrants consideration under the formal procedure.

### **Seeking advice from the Trade Union**

- If you are a member of a Trade Union confidential advice and support on how to address, issues and a strategy for resolution can be sought at any point during the process: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/tu](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/tu).
- A Trade Union representative can assist the staff member to explore options for informal resolution and indicate whether the matter is so serious that it warrants consideration under the formal procedure.

### **Investigating options for Formal Mediation**

- Mediation is an important consideration for resolving issues at an early stage. It is a voluntary process where an impartial third party enables two or more people to work through conflict or disagreement, with a view to improving their working relationship.
- Sometimes certain behaviours can be perceived as discrimination, harassment or bullying, when that is not how they were intended. Mediation can be a good way to help see the other person's perspective and help the other side see how their behaviour is affecting their colleagues.
- Guidance about formal mediation with a trained mediator and whether it would be appropriate should be sought through your Faculty HR Manager:  
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/aboutus/howweare/ops](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/aboutus/howweare/ops). More information on mediation can be found at [www.shf.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/mediation](http://www.shf.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/mediation).

### **Workplace Health and Wellbeing - Juice**

- Workplace Health and Wellbeing provide a wide range of professional advisory services to protect and enhance the physical and psychological health and wellbeing of all staff.
- For guidance on how to access counselling, the online health portal and lists of health information and guidance offered by the University and external sources:  
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workplace](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workplace).



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Whilst many situations can be resolved at an informal level, formal action can be taken if the above stages fail to be effective in stopping the harassment or where the behaviour is of such a serious nature that informal measures would be inappropriate.

### **Formal Procedure**

If attempts to resolve any unacceptable behaviour informally prove unsuccessful or if the matter is sufficiently serious to address formally it will be dealt with through the formal grievance procedure for staff:

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/disputeresolution/proceduresp](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/disputeresolution/proceduresp).

### **Support Available**

The University provides a number of services which are available to support staff experiencing any of the issues identified in the Guiding Principles.

There is also guidance for staff who have a complaint of harassment, discrimination, victimisation or bullying made against them.

You can find a comprehensive list of this support at:

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/dignityatwork/support](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/guidance/eamp/dignityatwork/support) .

### **Document Control**

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