Bullying or Harassment at Work

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the University have an anti-bullying policy?
Yes, the University’s policy on bullying and harassment is called the Dignity and Respect Procedure. The purpose of the Procedure is to promote a working and learning environment and culture in which harassment and bullying are known to be unacceptable and where individuals have the confidence to deal with harassment and bullying without fear of victimisation.

If I feel I am being bullied, do I have to make a formal complaint or can I take informal action first?
The Dignity and Respect Procedure allows you to explore informal resolution to issues without necessarily having to raise a formal complaint or grievance. Issues of bullying or harassment are best resolved if they can be dealt with promptly. Don’t wait until conditions become intolerable, or your personal well-being is being put in jeopardy.

What other support is available to me?
A support network is available to any member of staff who has an issue with bullying or harassment – Just Ask. A Just Ask volunteer can talk about your situation with you and suggest options for dealing with your situation. Even if you just need to get a few issues “off your chest”, Just Ask can act as a sounding board.

How do I contact Just Ask?
The volunteers contact details are available here.

Will my discussions with a Just Ask Volunteer be kept confidential?
The general presumption will always be that discussions with a Just Ask volunteer are confidential; however there may be circumstances where they have a legal obligation to share information with another party. For example, where a Just Ask volunteer learns about something that could seriously affect the wellbeing of an individual or group; they will have a legal obligation to advise a senior manager (usually the Executive Director of Human Resources) even though it may be against the wishes of the employee. This will usually be done through the HR Adviser responsible for Equality and Diversity, and would only be in exceptional circumstances.

Can a Just Ask volunteer come along to meetings with me to give me some moral support?
Unfortunately no, because they are volunteers and are giving up their own time to provide support to colleagues, they will not have time to attend meetings with you. If you feel you need support in any meetings, you should be allowed to bring a work colleague or Trade Union representative.
I’ve been accused of bullying someone in my team. Is there any support available for me?
Being accused of bullying or harassment can be a very painful experience. The Just Ask can also help you if you have been accused of bullying or harassment. They can help you talk through your situation in a non-judgemental manner and discuss your options.

How can I ensure that I’m not perceived as bullying someone?
Consider differences in attitude, culture and the appropriateness of your behaviour. It is important that you consider your style in dealing with others and you behave in a way that would generally be considered to be reasonable. Ensure that any written or verbal communication is objective rather than subjective. Avoid making assumptions or stereotyping a person because of their personal characteristic eg. parental status

What is the formal procedure for making a complaint under the Dignity and Respect Procedure?
Once all informal approaches have been exhausted, complaints can be made by submitting a Dignity and Respect Complaint Form to the Executive Director of Human Resources, who will appoint an investigating officer. The investigating officer will most likely wish to meet with all parties to gather as much information about the complaint as possible. The complainant and accused will be informed of the outcome of the investigation in writing and will have the chance to appeal if they are unhappy with the outcome. The complete procedure is detailed in the Dignity and Respect Procedure.

Should I use the Dignity and Respect Procedure instead of the Grievance Procedure?
This procedure is separate from the Grievance procedure. It is intended to compliment the Grievance and Disciplinary procedures to deal specifically with bullying and harassment. However, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures may still be invoked depending on the seriousness of the incident or as an outcome of investigations.

How can I manage under-performance in my team without being accused of bullying?
All those with the responsibility for managing staff have a responsibility to manage their staff in a reasonable way, issue reasonable instructions and expect them to be carried out. The legitimate supervision of staff and students should be distinguished from harassing and bullying behaviour. However, it is important that you consider your style in dealing with others and you behave in a way that would generally be considered to be reasonable. Ensure that any written or verbal communication regarding performance is objective rather than subjective. Avoid making assumptions or stereotyping a person because of their personal characteristic eg. parental status.
If you are having difficulty managing under-performance in your team, contact your Human Resources or Adviser who may be able to help. It is important to note that being accused of bullying does not automatically indicate guilt.

**What can I do to promote a positive environment in my team?**
Consider your own behaviour and lead by example. Discourage inappropriate exchanges that could violate a person’s dignity. Comments or behaviour that relate to race, ethnic origin, gender, martial or parental status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, political belief or union membership are most likely to be irrelevant in a work context, so avoid making them. Raise awareness of the Dignity and Respect Procedure within your team. This will send out a positive message that you take issues of bullying and harassment seriously.

**Do I need to wait until someone makes a formal complaint before I tackle a suspected issue of bullying within my team?**
Absolutely not. Issues of bullying or harassment are best resolved if they can be dealt with promptly. Don’t wait until conditions become intolerable, or a person’s well being is put in jeopardy. Anyone who sees harassment or bullying happening in their area has a responsibility to take action. Action does not necessary need to be formal; however, it is possible to bring a complaint forward if you witness bullying or harassment but haven’t been directly involved.