

DIGNITY AT WORK: Statement of Commitment

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1. Introduction

This document provides a statement of King's College London (the university's) commitment to protecting the dignity of its staff and details the support available to staff who feel they are experiencing bullying, harassment or victimisation. Definitions of these terms are provided, as well as examples of bullying and harassment.

This guidance is applicable to all employees of King's College London.

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2. Statement of commitment

The university is committed to protecting the dignity of its staff in their work and their interactions with others. This includes providing a working and learning environment that is free from discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation. It should be noted that discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation do not only take place face to face. They may also occur in written communications, by email, or by phone, for example.

The university recognises its duty of care to staff. Inappropriate behaviour can result in stress and stress-related illness, and potentially resignation. All staff, and especially those who have responsibility for other members of staff, share this duty of care. The university therefore expects all members of the of the institution's community to treat each other with respect, courtesy and consideration. All staff have the right to expect professional behaviour from others, and have a corresponding responsibility to behave professionally towards others.

Vigorous speech and comment, academic debate and legitimate management of performance of staff can be distinguished from bullying behaviour. However, care should be taken to ensure that members of staff are not made to feel intimidated.

Dignity at work can also be an equality issue and UK legislation provides specific protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on a variety of grounds. The university recognises that to work effectively staff need an environment in which they are respected and valued for their contributions, irrespective of their:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment (transgender)
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption or surrogacy
- Race
- Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Membership (or non-membership) of a trade union

[Appendix 1](#) provides definitions of harassment, bullying and victimisation. [Appendix 2](#) provides some forms and examples of harassment and bullying.

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3. Support available for staff

If a member of staff believes they have been treated in a way which compromises their dignity, or they feel uncomfortable as a result of the behaviour of another member of staff, they may wish to have an informal, open and honest discussion with the individual(s) concerned. Frequently all that will be needed is an explanation that the behaviour is damaging or hurtful, followed by an apology.

The university's grievance procedures

Should members of staff wish to raise a grievance, procedures exist for academic and research, teaching and professional services staff. Any complaints made about harassment, bullying or other inappropriate behaviour will be considered thoroughly and without delay, according to the [Grievance Procedure: Non-Academic Staff](#) or [Regulation Pertaining to the Grievance Procedure for Academic Staff](#). Where appropriate, disciplinary action may be taken against instigators of bullying, harassment or victimisation.

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Employment assistance programme

Further support is available from the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP provides independent expert advice on both home and work concerns. Experts can provide practical information, fact sheets and packs, referrals to services in the local area and services such as short-term telephone counselling. This service is entirely independent from the university and is confidential. The EAP is paid for by the university and is free to university employees. For further information and contact details please see the relevant page of the King's [internal website](#).

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Appendix 1: Definitions of Harassment, Bullying and Victimisation

Harassment

[Acas](#) defines harassment as unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual with regard to all the circumstances including the perception of the victim.

Harassment includes behaviour that is offensive, frightening or in any way distressing. It may be intentional bullying which is obvious or violent, but it can also be unintentional or subtle and insidious. It may involve nicknames, teasing, name calling or other behaviour which may not be intended to be malicious but nevertheless is upsetting.

Note that harassment can be based on an actual or perceived characteristic that an individual may have.

Harassment may not be targeted at an individual(s) but consist of a general culture which, for instance, appears to tolerate the telling of racist or sexist jokes.

Bullying

Bullying is a serious form of harassment characterised by [Acas](#) as being offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate denigrate or injure the recipient.

Victimisation

Victimisation is defined as treating people less favourably because of action they have taken (or are suspected to have taken) under or in connection with legislation – for example, if someone made a formal complaint of discrimination or given evidence in a tribunal case.

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Appendix 2: Forms and Examples of Bullying and Harassment

This document is intended to act as a guide illustrating unacceptable behaviour and the examples provided are not exhaustive.

Inappropriate behaviour, particularly bullying, can be obvious, for example:

- abuse of power or authority;
- verbal, written and/or physical intimidation e.g. threats, derisory remarks;
- abusive language;
- physical attack;
- humiliating a member of staff in front of colleagues or in private;
- setting impossible deadlines/objectives or intolerable workload burdens;
- withdrawing responsibilities or decision-making powers without good reason or explanation;
- shouting at a member of staff to get things done;
- picking on one person when there is a common problem;
- consistently undermining someone and their ability to do their job.

However, bullying and harassment can also be subtle or insidious, for example:

- unequal treatment in the application of conditions of employment;
- unreasonable pressure to complete tasks;
- unfair allocation of work;
- professional isolation or alienation;
- continually ignoring or excluding an individual from conversations and normal workplace activities or social events;
- unreasonably withholding permission to attend training or similar events;
- unfair exclusion of individuals from promotion;
- persistent unjustified criticism;
- disproportionate monitoring of timekeeping;
- spreading malicious rumours;
- making threats or comments about job security without foundation.

Note that some forms of bullying and harassment may constitute criminal acts e.g. indecent exposure, physical attack or sexual assault and racism.

The following are some examples of specific types of harassment, but it should be noted that the university's Dignity at Work: Statement of Commitment applies to all forms of harassment.

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Harassment on Grounds of Age

Ageism can affect anybody, regardless of their age. Harassment on grounds of age may include:

- ridiculing or demeaning behaviour based on stereotypical perceptions and prejudices about a person(s) because of their mature age and experience (or lack of, in the case of a younger person);
- offensive remarks;
- exclusion on the basis of age;

Human Resources

- not taking people seriously because of their age;
- the display or circulation of offensive written or visual material;
- offensive, patronising or threatening language or behaviour;
- assumptions regarding the individual's ability to learn or lead.

Harassment on Grounds of Disability

This form of harassment is based on the individual(s) having a physical or sensory impairment, learning difficulties or experiencing mental distress. It may include:

- offensive, patronising or threatening language;
- offensive, patronising or threatening behaviour;
- jokes or inappropriate comments and questions regarding a person's impairment;
- the display or circulation of offensive written or visual material;
- the denial of an individual's identity as a disabled person;
- the consistent or repeated failure to provide clearly identified facilities or requirements in order for a person to perform their duties or receive an adequate service.

Harassment on Grounds of Gender Reassignment

Harassment on grounds of gender reassignment may include:

- unwanted comments on dress and appearance;
- jokes;
- inappropriate comments and questions regarding a person's gender re-assignment;
- the display or circulation of offensive written or visual material;
- threats.

Racial Harassment

Harassment on grounds of an individual(s') race, skin colour, nationality (including citizenship), or ethnic or national origins may include:

- derogatory name calling or ridicule;
- insults and racist jokes;
- display or circulation of racially offensive written or visual material including graffiti;
- abusive language;
- incitement of others to commit any such acts.

Harassment on Grounds of Religion or Belief

This is harassment on grounds of religion, religious belief or other similar philosophical belief (or lack of). It may include behaviour which fails to tolerate or acknowledge the rights or needs of individuals with different and dedicated religious convictions, beliefs and practices. Examples may include:

- offensive jokes;
- ridicule or name-calling;
- display of or circulation of offensive written or visual material;
- derogatory comments;
- intrusive questioning about a person's beliefs;
- incitement of others to commit any such acts.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment may be defined as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment. It may include:

- physical contact;
- invasion of personal space;
- suggestive remarks or sounds;
- unwanted comments on dress and appearance;
- jokes of a sexual or prejudicial nature;
- innuendoes or lewd comments;
- display or circulation of sexually offensive written or visual material;
- inappropriate downloading of pornographic or sexually exploitive and degrading material by computer;
- display or circulation of pornographic or sexually suggestive pictures, objects or written material;
- threats;
- unwelcome and unwanted advances and propositions, or pressure for sexual activity;
- leering or sexually suggestive gestures;
- patronising comments.

It is important to remember that sexual harassment can occur of women by men, men by women, and also between members of the same sex. It can also refer to unwanted conduct that is related to the gender of the other person.

Harassment on Grounds of Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is defined by [Acas](#) as orientation towards people of:

- the same sex (lesbians and gay men)
- the opposite sex (heterosexual)
- the same sex and the opposite sex (bisexual)

Harassment on grounds of sexual orientation may be experienced by any of the groups above. Examples may include:

- offensive jokes;
- ridicule or name calling;
- threats;
- derogatory comments;
- innuendo or lewd comments;
- intrusive questioning about a person's partnership or domestic circumstances;
- gossip;
- physical attack;
- condemnation;
- the display or circulation of offensive written or visual material;
- incitement of others to commit any such acts.

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