

Student Bullying & Harassment Policy

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 All students have the right to study and to feel safe in an environment which is free from bullying and/or harassment. This policy has been written to support a learning environment (including online learning) in which bullying and/or harassment are unacceptable and the understanding of this is such that students have the confidence to complain, without fear of reprisal or recrimination, in the knowledge that their concerns will be dealt with seriously, appropriately and fairly.
- 1.2 Durham University is fully committed to the development of policies and procedures to eliminate discrimination and actively promote equality of opportunity for students. The University believes that where respect for diversity and equality of opportunity exist, all students work in a more rewarding and less stressful environment; it will be one where discrimination, prejudice and harassment are not accepted, and one more likely to enhance performance and achievement, allowing all members of the University community to fully demonstrate and use their skills and talents and achieve their full potential.

2. Scope and Purpose

- 2.1 This policy applies to all registered students of the University.
- 2.2 Allegations of bullying and/or harassment will be treated very seriously by the University and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the person who committed unwanted behaviour. As the University views bullying and harassment as serious offences, any individual who makes vexatious, demonstrably false or malicious claims of bullying and/or harassment will be dealt with in accordance with the University's Code of Practice on Student Behaviour in Appeals and Complaints and may be subject to disciplinary procedures as specified in the [Non-Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedure](#).
- 2.3 Where the person accused of bullying and/or harassment is not a student or member of University staff, the reporting party will be offered appropriate support

whilst taking their complaint forward with the relevant authority, e.g. the manager of the placement of work, common room trustees, non-University leader of a volunteering activity.

2.4 In the case where the person accused of bullying and /or harassment is an alumnus attending a Durham event, then this would be treated under the Development & Alumni Relations Office [policy on alumni behaviour at events](#).

2.5 In the event that the individual accused is both a student and member of staff the Student Conduct Office will liaise with the Human Resources and Organisational Development Office to ensure the correct policies and procedures are followed.

2.6 The objectives of the Policy are to:

- Enable students to identify and understand what bullying and harassment are.
- Identify the frameworks used for handling complaints of bullying and/or harassment against students; and
- Ensure all incidents are dealt with in a consistent, fair and appropriate manner.

2.7 As part of its commitment to eliminating bullying and harassment, the University undertakes to:

- Apply the Policy equally to all students registered at the University.
- Ensure an initial acknowledgement to any complaint is normally issued to the Reporting Party within 5 working days of the complaint being received and to keep all parties informed of the progress of the complaint.
- Treat all allegations of bullying and/or harassment seriously, fairly, sensitively, promptly and with appropriate regard to confidentiality.
- Publicise this Policy as widely as possible in order to ensure that students are aware of its existence.
- Provide Bullying and Harassment Advisors who will be available to advise and assist students(details of the advisors are available at [Bullying and Harassment Advisors](#) and,
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Policy.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of every member of the University community to help achieve

an inclusive and supportive environment, free from discrimination and to promote good relations between all people.

3.2 All students are expected to behave in accordance with the [Student Pledge](#).

3.3 All students have a personal responsibility to behave in a way which acknowledges that views and opinions held by others may not always coincide with their own. Such differences of opinion are unlikely to constitute bullying or harassment e.g. [Freedom of Speech](#).

3.4 Where possible, students should actively discourage bullying and harassment by asserting that they find such behaviour unacceptable.

3.5 Students are responsible for ensuring that their own behaviour could not reasonably be considered to constitute bullying or harassment of any individual or group.

3.6 Issues of bullying and/or harassment should be raised promptly and in a timely manner in order that any required action or investigation of such issues can be carried out at the earliest opportunity.

4. Definitions: What are Bullying and Harassment?

4.1 Bullying:

4.1.1 Behaviour, usually repeated over time, where there is a deliberate intention to hurt or humiliate or where intent is absent, there is a reasonable negative impact on an individual's health and well-being as a result, subject to those considerations that protect freedom of speech. It can happen in many forms including but not limited to, in person, written communication e.g. email, phone conversations, social media and supervision methods.

4.1.2 Bullying can include (but is not limited to):

- a) Verbal abuse;
- b) Insulting behaviour or personal insults.
- c) Coercive, intimidating or menacing behaviour which interferes with dignity and privacy or which undermines an individual's self-confidence.
- d) Abusive written or computer-generated material, including the use of email

and social media;

- e) Offensive gestures.
- f) Asserting a position of seniority in an aggressive, abusive or offensive manner e.g. inappropriate or derogatory remark in connection with performance of duties / responsibilities.
- g) Withholding important work-related information.
- h) Ridicule, isolation or non-cooperation, exclusion from everyday social interaction or activities.

4.1.3 Behaviour may be considered bullying as defined in 4.1 if it is related to certain non-protected characteristics. These may include but are not limited to:

- Political affiliation.
- Physical appearance.
- Personality.
- Health.
- Socio-economic background (e.g. class, financial status etc).
- Criminal record.
- Geographic location.
- Gender identity.

4.2 Harassment:

4.2.1 The University adopts the definition of harassment as defined by the Equalities Act 2010¹ and as summarized by the Office for Students:

“Harassment, including sexual harassment, includes unwanted behaviour or conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment because of, or connected to, one or more of the following protected characteristics”²

and that defined by ACAS:

“By law (Equality Act 2010), bullying behaviour can be harassment if it relates to any of the following 'protected characteristics’”³

4.2.2 The relevant protected characteristics, which may be the subject of harassment in this respect, are,

- Age.
- Disability.
- Gender reassignment.
- Marriage and civil partnership.
- Pregnancy and maternity.
- Race.
- Religion or belief.
- Sex.
- Sexual orientation.

4.2.3 Where the harassment is deemed sexual in nature, the Sexual Misconduct and Violence Policy⁴ will be referred to.

4.2.4 Appendix A describes the test for harassment as defined by the Equalities Act 2010¹.

4.3 It is recognised that differences in attitude, background and culture can often mean that what is perceived by one individual as bullying or harassment may not necessarily be perceived in the same way by another. It should be noted therefore, that when deciding whether bullying or harassment has occurred, the impact on the individual and whether the behaviour would be considered by any reasonable person as bullying or harassment, or breaches the values and standards of the University, will be the focus, rather than motive or intent. The values and standards of the University are outlined in the Student Pledge ([Student pledge - Durham University](#)).

4.4 In some instances, bullying and/or harassment may potentially be considered as sexual misconduct and violence. Please also refer to the University's Sexual Misconduct and Violence Policy for students.

4.5 Any difficulty in defining bullying or harassment should not deter students from seeking support or complaining of behaviour which causes them distress. They should also not be deterred because of embarrassment or fear of intimidation.

4.6 The University will respect the sensitivity of complaints of bullying or harassment, and their consequences, and will treat any complaint with the utmost confidentiality within the procedures defined to address complaints of bullying and/or harassment.

4.7 The University draws a distinction between bullying and/or harassment and personal disputes or the right to express freedom of expression where others may find that expression offensive (as opposed to discrimination, which would be considered harassment). Examples of situations that would not be considered under this policy would be household disputes due to differences in living styles, household costs, cleaning responsibilities etc. In these circumstances the University encourages students to engage with '[Living with Friends](#)' guidance from the DSU and mediation accessed through the University's [Concerns, Bullying and Harassment Advisors](#), who act as a first point of contact for those who feel they have experienced, or have been accused of, harassment or bullying. The University would also not be involved in disputes relating to private accommodation tenancy or private financial disputes.

5. Advice and Support

5.1 The University provides a range of support for students who feel they have been subject to bullying or harassment. It is recommended that students seek advice and support in the first instance.

5.2 This can be done in a number of ways:

College Student Support Offices

Staff in College Student Support offices can provide support and guidance for students raising concerns about bullying or harassment.

Report & Support Online Tool.

Students can make reports of bullying and harassment through the [Report and Support](#) tool. This tool covers reports of unwanted behaviour, such as bullying and harassment, hate incidents, sexual misconduct and violence and domestic abuse.

Bullying and Harassment Advisors.

The University operates a network of Bullying and Harassment Support Advisors who can be approached by students. The [Advisors](#) can be contacted directly, or through the Report and Support online tool by making a report.

Students' Union.

Independent support is available to students through [the Durham Students' Union Advice Service](#). They provide one-to-one support, advice and guidance on addressing issues informally or making a complaint under the Non-Academic

Misconduct Procedure and can provide support and advocacy to someone who is accused of a breach of the Policy. The Students' Union can also facilitate mediation between students or student groups where difficulties have arisen.

JCRs, MCRs and GCRs

Student representatives in Common Rooms can provide signposting for students raising concerns about bullying or harassment.

The Counselling & Mental Health Service

The Counselling & Mental Health Service offers a high standard of service in professional counselling and mental health support for any student who finds that their difficulties are hard to manage, and/or their difficulties are affecting their studies. Please see [The Counselling and Mental Health Service](#) for further details.

5.3 The University does not consider it necessary for students to seek independent legal advice in respect of complaints about bullying and harassment. It is entirely at students' discretion and cost if they choose to do so.

6. Reporting

6.1 A student may choose to report an incident of bullying and/or harassment under the Bullying and Harassment Policy with the intention of the University investigating a potential breach of policy. The University will consider the most appropriate action going forward in response to the matters reported.

6.2 Where students consider themselves to be under physical threat or at serious risk of imminent harm, they should always contact the police in the first instance. Support for students in this situation can be provided by those members of the University community set out in the section 'Advice and Support' above.

6.3 Students should raise complaints of harassment or bullying in a timely manner. Unless the University is notified of incidents of harassment or bullying within a reasonable length of time, the University may not be able to adequately investigate or take steps to prevent or eliminate harassment or bullying.

6.4 In the first instance the student should contact their College Assistant Principal who may be able to assist in resolving the difficulties informally: a person may not have

been aware that the actions have been perceived as harassment or bullying and thus once informed, stop the behaviour without the need for further action. Informal resolution of such difficulties may also be addressed as described in the Advice and Support section above, e.g. through mediation.

6.5 Where the behaviour continues or if the behaviour is of a more serious nature, the University may instigate a formal investigation under the principles of the Non-Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedure.

6.6 To make a report of Bullying or Harassment to the University students may submit the [Bullying & Harassment Report Form](#) or they may tell the University about the behaviour through [Report & Support](#)

6.7 Investigations and any disciplinary action resulting from allegations of bullying and/or harassment are conducted according to the principles described in the [Non-Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedure](#).

7. Staff

7.1 Where the report is against a member of staff, then the case will be referred to the [Policy and Procedure for Student Complaints of Harassment and Bullying Against Staff](#)

8. Related Information

8.1 This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Regulations, Policies and Procedures:

- [General Regulation IV – Discipline](#)
- [Non-Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Procedure](#)
- [General Regulation VI – Suspension](#)
- [Student Behaviour in Appeals and Complaints: A Code of Practice](#)
- [Policy and Procedure for Student Complaints of Harassment and Bullying Against Staff](#)
- [Durham University Safeguarding Policies](#)
- [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#).

Further information can be found at [Student Conduct - Durham University](#)

9. Further Information.

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Further University policies are available from the [Policy Zone](#).

Contact for further information: Student Conduct Office (student.cases@durham.ac.uk)

10. References.

1 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

2 <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/student-protection-and-support/harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/definitions/>

3 <https://www.acas.org.uk/bullying-at-work>

4 <https://www.dur.ac.uk/colleges-and-student-experience/student-support-and-wellbeing/student-conduct/sexual-misconduct-violence/policy-procedure/>

Appendix A:

Test for Harassment⁴

- i) A person (A) harasses another (B) if:
 - a) (A) engages in unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, and
 - b) the conduct has the purpose or effect of—
 - violating (B)'s dignity, or
 - creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for (B).
- ii) A person (A) also harasses (B) if:
 - a) (A) engages in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, and
 - b) the conduct has the purpose or effect referred to in subsection i) (b) above.
- iii) A person (A) also harasses (B) if:
 - c) (A) or another person engages in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or that is related to gender reassignment or sex,
 - d) the conduct has the purpose or effect referred to in subsection i) (b) above,

and

- e) because of (B)'s rejection of or submission to the conduct, (A) treats (B) less favourably than (A) would treat (B) if (B) had not rejected or submitted to the conduct.

iv) In deciding whether conduct has the effect referred to in subsection i) (b) above, each of the following will be considered,

- f) the perception of (B);
- g) the other circumstances of the case;
- h) whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have that effect.

4. Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/26>

