Canterbury Christ Church University

YOUR DIGNITY AT WORK

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POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Policy Aims

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Canterbury Christ Church University is committed to maintaining a working environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and unacceptable behaviour is identified and dealt with quickly and fairly. This policy aims to assist staff to identify and address issues related to dignity at work and, in cases where they have broken down, to restore effective working relationships if possible.

What is dignity at work?

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Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work. Workplaces should be places where employees can expect to be protected from treatment which demeans them, or which is unfair or intimidating.

We all have a responsibility to treat colleagues, students and guests with the dignity and respect we expect to receive. You can play your part by being sensitive to the views of others, which may frequently differ from your own, and by ensuring that your own behaviour, language or conduct does not create any offence or misunderstanding. Where misunderstandings do occur, a speedy apology often resolves the situation with no further problems.

Wherever people live, work and study together conflict will arise from time to time. This is not necessarily a bad thing, it can challenge our traditional way of thinking and enable us to develop and learn to appreciate other people's perspectives. What matters is that we treat each other with respect.

Failure to treat each other with respect creates unnecessary conflict, can lead to anxiety, frustration and distress. In its worst forms it can constitute harassment or bullying.

What is bullying and harassment?

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• **Harassment** is generally defined as unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of the recipient. It may be related to sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key element of harassment is that the actions or remarks are regarded as unacceptable by the recipient.

• **Bullying** is a type of harassment. Most bullying behaviour relates to the individual, and includes spreading malicious rumours, or insulting, ridiculing or demeaning someone, singling them out or setting them up to fail. Bullying can also involve isolating someone, victimising them or treating them unfairly, or deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading them or giving constant criticism.

Bullying and harassment can sometimes be hard to recognise and does not necessarily have to be face to face. Bullying may take the form of written or

telephone communications, and may be through email or other forms of electronic communication.

There is an important distinction to be made between bullying and good management. Good management will involve setting demanding performance targets, but these must be fair, achievable and appropriate to the person's job role and level of responsibility. When it is necessary for poor performance to be addressed, this should be done in a fair, supportive and constructive manner, using the institution's appropriate appraisal, performance management and, where necessary, capability procedures.

What happens to those who engage in bullying or harassment?

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Acts of harassment or bullying, substantiated through investigation, will be taken seriously and may constitute grounds for disciplinary action with the possibility of dismissal.

How will I feel if I am not being treated with dignity at work?

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If you are not being treated with dignity, or are subjected to bullying or harassment, you are likely to feel very isolated, anxious and vulnerable. You may feel powerless and believe that you are not in a position to take any action to make things better.

This is perfectly normal – these feelings are common to most people in your situation. You are likely to feel that taking even the first step towards resolving the issue is beyond you and that you are at the mercy of events. However, if you are able to start by talking it over with a trusted friend, family member or colleague, you are on the way to taking control of a situation that is disturbing your current peace of mind and could affect your future career and wellbeing. You may wish to approach your manager, HR, trade union representative or one of the University trained Dignity at Work Volunteers for support and guidance at this stage.

How do I know if I am the target of bullying or harassment?

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You should consider carefully in what ways the treatment you are experiencing may constitute bullying or harassment. You should also think carefully about whether the source of your stress is related to an individual or group of people at work, or if you find yourself under stress for other, more personal reasons. In this situation, you should contact the HR Department, trade union representative or one of the University trained Dignity at Work Volunteers, who will be able to recommend additional sources of advice and assistance for your particular circumstances.

What should I do if I feel my dignity at work is being violated or I am the target of bullying or harassment?

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If you feel that you are in a situation where you are at risk of physical assault or your personal safety is under threat, you should take immediate action by reporting your concerns to your line manager or if you do not feel that is appropriate to one of the support services available.

If the nature of the bullying or harassment is less threatening you should try to be specific about what is causing you distress, and not wait too long before taking action. Prompt action will stop situations from escalating. Although it may seem as though doing nothing is the easiest and least harmful course of action, this rarely helps to resolve the situation and may often make it worse.

Situations where you feel you are being bullied / harassed / undermined by your manager are difficult to deal with. This means you may well find it difficult to speak to the one person in the organisation who you would look to help you in this situation.

Dealing with these situations will be challenging. It will almost always be necessary to have a discussion at some point directly with the person(s) who are causing you concern. Set out below are some of the different ways in which you might approach this. The important thing is that there are other people within the organisation who can help you work through the difficulty.

General advice

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It is important to keep a written record of dates, times and places where the incidents occurred. Where possible this should include the names of any witnesses to the incident(s) and your feelings at the time and afterwards. It is important to record your feelings since in matters where dignity is affected it is important that parties understand the intentional or unintentional impact of their actions on others.

Support and Confidentiality

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In situations such as this, you need to be able to trust in the confidentiality of whoever you speak to. The University places particular importance on staff feeling they are able to discuss matters in a safe and non-threatening way.

Anyone who experiences bullying or harassment should be able to go to their line manager for support and help, although this assumes, of course, that the line management relationship is healthy. You should also not underestimate the support you may get from trusted colleagues or friends.

There is however suport available from staff who will have received some training in how to respond to dignity at work issues. These are, Human Resources staff, trade union representatives or the University trained Dignity at Work Volunteers.

In seeking their guidance and support you can bethat they not discuss any of the issues you raise with any third party without discussing it with you first.

In respect of some issues (complaints alleging race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age discrimination / harassment) if the issues are sufficiently serious, you will be strongly encouraged to take these forward to formal resolution. This will be discussed with you at the time.

Dealing with issues informally

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If you feel able to, the best way forward is often to approach the person(s) concerned and inform them that their behaviour is causing you distress and unhappiness. In some cases, the inappropriate behaviour may be the result of a misunderstanding, and the person(s) concerned may not have realised how you felt about their behaviour. Such behaviour may be a result of lack of interpersonal skills and/or insecurity, and may be resolved by a calm and civilised approach on your part.

However, this is frequently the hardest step for most people to take and why it is useful for you to have support from someone you can trust (see support). If you do not feel able to talk to the other person directly, you may find it easier to compose a suitable letter to explain what your issues are, with perhaps a follow up meeting after time for due reflection.

One of the effects of conflict or lack of respect at work can be feeling isolated, and by talking to others you may discover that you are not alone in finding your situation difficult. This may help you find the necessary support to take appropriate action, as well as making it possible for you to take action together.

Despite the informal approaches, or if you feel, after discussing the issues with others that the conflict is not resolved other options are available to you.

Mediation

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Mediation is a structured conflict resolution procedure in which the parties themselves seek a resolution to their conflict through discussion in a confidential safe environment assisted and facilitated by an impartial, trained mediator. Mediation is a long established and effective way of resolving conflicts which encourages the parties to be open and honest and about the issues that are affecting them and to generate an agreement on how to resolve the conflict and move forward.

It is important to note that mediation is a voluntary process and both parties will need to agree to participate in the process. However if one party feels that mediation may help resolve the situation but is unable to discuss the matter with the other(s) involved, approaches can be made through any of the supporting services/staff. Staff in the Human Resources Department will be able to give you more information about mediation available at the University.

Formal Grievances

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Not all conflicts are suitable for mediation. Sometimes one or both parties are unwilling to participate or, in cases of bullying and harassment, there is the potential for the matter to be dealt with through the disciplinary process.

If you feel that your dignity at work is being violated or that you are the victim of bullying and harassment, and you have been unable to resolve the matter informally or mediation is unsuitable or has been unsuccessful, you should raise the matter though the university grievance procedure.

The grievance procedure is an arbitration process through which a senior member of staff will be asked to hear representations from both sides of the conflict, and where appropriate hear from witnesses or investigate events, and will then provide the parties with their views. Throughout the process you would have the right to be supported by a work place colleague or trade union representative. It would be hoped that through this process it would be possible to resolve the dispute however, if you were to remain unhappy with the outcome there is one final stage of appeal.

If, having heard the representation of both sides the senior manager feels that disciplinary action may be required they can decide that the disciplinary procedure, rather than grievance, is used. If this is the case the process will be fully discussed with you at that time.

False Accusations of Bullying or Harassment

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Making a false accusation about a persons conduct can have a serious impact on their career or employment prospects. Where it is clear and reasonable that a false or malicious allegation has been made it may lead to action under the University's Disciplinary Procedures. However this will only apply in situations where there are clear grounds for believing that an accusation was false or malicious, and not to issues or complaints raised in good faith.

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