



Dignity and Respect Policy

1. Policy Statement

The University has a strong and long-standing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and to promoting a positive culture which celebrates difference, challenges prejudice and ensures fairness. Our staff and students are our greatest assets and all members of the University community should expect to be able to excel, and to be respected and valued for their unique perspectives and contributions.

Integrity, collegiality and inclusivity are central to the University's values. In accordance with these values the University is committed to providing an environment in which all members of the University community treat each other with dignity and respect, and where bullying, harassment and discrimination are known to be unacceptable. This Policy sets out the expectations placed on all members of the University.

The University regards any incident of bullying, harassment or discrimination as a serious matter and will respond promptly and sensitively to formal complaints, and where appropriate take disciplinary action.

2. Scope and Purpose

This policy applies to all staff and students of the University in relation to both individual and collective activities and dealings with others in the University.

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Foster a positive culture for working and studying which supports freedom of thought and expression within the law, and within a framework of respect for the rights of other people.
- Promote an enabling and inclusive environment where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, free from bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Ensure that occurrences of bullying, harassment and discrimination are taken seriously, and dealt with promptly and with due sensitivity.
- Set out the framework for raising, addressing and resolving concerns about individual and/or organisational behaviour.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Individuals

As members of the University community we have a responsibility to:

- Demonstrate respect and integrity in our interactions with individuals and groups.
- Work and study collaboratively, collegially and effectively in teams within and across organisational units.
- Identify and challenge unacceptable behaviour when it occurs, even if it is not directed at ourselves.
- Address and resolve matters ourselves, where reasonably possible, in a positive and constructive way.
- Raise more serious concerns with relevant University staff and participate positively in approaches to resolve them.
- Modify our behaviour should we become aware that we have behaved unacceptably in relation to this policy, even if no complaint has been made.

3.2 Managers

In addition, managers of staff and others with responsibility for areas of work or study have:

- A responsibility to lead in promoting a culture of dignity and respect, and
- A duty to take timely, relevant action to resolve concerns.

3.3 University

Expectations of the University as an employer and provider of education will be to ensure that:

- It fosters a positive culture for working and studying which permits freedom of thought and expression within a framework of mutual respect.
- It treats staff and students with openness, respect and dignity at all times.
- Complaints of harassment, bullying or discrimination are treated seriously and with discretion.
- Staff and students feel safe and are listened to when raising concerns about behaviour.
- Malicious or vexatious allegations are dealt with in line with University disciplinary procedures.

4. Unacceptable behaviour

The University expects all its members to treat others with dignity and respect and regards bullying, harassment or discrimination as unacceptable behaviour. The University will respond promptly and sensitively to formal complaints, and where appropriate take disciplinary action.

For students, examples of unacceptable behaviour/misconduct are set out in the Code of Student Conduct: [Code of Student Conduct | The University of Edinburgh](#)

For staff, examples of unacceptable behaviours in the workplace can include, but are not limited to:

- Unwelcome physical contact ranging from unnecessary touching to serious assault
- Intimidating or threatening behaviour, or language
- Unwelcome attention or advances of a sexual nature
- Disparaging, ridiculing or insulting behaviour, language or gestures
- Inappropriate communication or visual display of offensive material
- Isolation, non-cooperation, or deliberate exclusion of an individual from a work situation (including work-related social events)
- Undermining of an individual through unfair work allocation or persistent unjustified criticism

5. Resolution

Staff and students are encouraged, where possible, to resolve concerns informally.

Staff may wish to seek advice and support from a manager, HR advisor or Trade Union representative. Additionally, the University has a network of trained **Dignity and Respect Advisors (DRAs)** who can provide advice and appropriate support to staff when they believe they have identified, or been accused of behaviour contrary to this policy. Information on contacting a DRA can be found at [Dignity and Respect Advisors for Staff | The University of Edinburgh](#)

Students may wish to seek advice and support from [The Advice Place](#), or an independent member of staff such as a Student Advisor, Lecturer, or Warden.

5.1 Options for Employees

Where an employee identifies a potential breach of this policy, there are a number of ways they may wish to approach the matter in an attempt to resolve it, as set out below.

5.1.1 Individual Action

Where an employee believes they are being subjected to treatment which is in breach of this policy, they should seek to address this at the earliest possible stage.

Where they feel able to, the employee should make clear to the person causing the offence that such behaviour is unacceptable to them. In many instances, this can be sufficient to bring an end to that behaviour.

5.1.2 Seeking Informal Assistance

If the employee does not feel able to resolve the matter themselves at an early stage, they may wish to seek advice and support from a manager, HR advisor or Trade Union representative.

They may also wish to request a meeting with a [Dignity & Respect Advisor](#) (DRA), who can provide support and advice on how the particular problem could be handled.

The DRA will outline the different ways of dealing with the matter, which for staff, will include:

- Dealing with the situation through discussion or formal mediation.
- Raising the matter with their manager, a more senior manager or a member of their College/Support Group HR Team.
- Accessing staff support services e.g. counselling.

Whilst the DRA can provide impartial advice, the employee concerned will be expected to make the decision about which route to follow and take responsibility for progressing with their desired actions.

5.1.3 Raising a Formal Complaint

If the problem has not been resolved by informal means, or the employee feels it cannot be resolved through informal means, then they may submit a formal complaint.

If the complaint relates to the conduct of a student then this will be taken forward by the University through the Code of Student Conduct. Guidance on reporting allegations of student misconduct can be found at: [Code of Student Conduct | The University of Edinburgh](#)

If the complaint relates to another member of staff then this should be submitted as a grievance in line with the University's Grievance Policy and procedure, which can be found at: [A to Z of HR Policies | The University of Edinburgh](#)

5.1.4 Reporting concerns to Police

Where an employee identifies a breach of this policy which constitutes a criminal offence or an immediate threat to safety, they should report the matter to the Police. Individuals should also

inform the University through the relevant internal route set out in this policy, so that appropriate steps can be taken and support provided.

5.2 Options for Students

Where a student identifies behaviour contrary to this policy, the ways in which they may wish to approach the matter in an attempt to resolve it are set out below.

5.2.1 Individual Action

Where a student believes they are being subjected to treatment which is contrary to this policy, they should seek to address this at the earliest possible stage.

Where they feel able to, the student should make clear to the person causing the offence that such behaviour is unacceptable to them, regardless of whether the person is a student or a member of staff.

5.2.2 Seeking Informal Assistance

If the student does not feel able to resolve the matter themselves at an early stage, they may wish to seek advice and support from [The Advice Place](#) or an independent member of staff.

The Advice Place will outline the different ways of dealing with the matter, such as:

- Dealing with the situation through discussion.
- Raising the matter with an appropriate member of staff, e.g. a Student Adviser, Lecturer, or Warden.
- Accessing student support services e.g. counselling.
- Submitting a complaint through the Complaint Handling Procedure.

Whilst the Advice Place can provide impartial advice, the student concerned will make the decision about which route to follow and take responsibility for progressing with their desired actions.

5.2.3 Raising a Complaint through the Complaint Handling Procedure

If the problem has not been resolved by informal means, or the student feels it cannot be resolved through informal means, then they may submit a complaint through the Complaint Handling Procedure, which can be found at: [Complaint handling procedure | The University of Edinburgh](#). The Advice Place can advise students on submitting a complaint.

5.2.4 Reporting concerns to Police

Where a student identifies behaviour which constitutes a criminal offence or an immediate threat to safety, they should report the matter to the Police. Individuals should also inform the University through the relevant internal route set out in this policy, so that appropriate steps can be taken and support provided.

6. Monitoring

The University will monitor and review its performance on promoting dignity and respect, and the effectiveness of this policy and associated procedures on an ongoing basis. Formal reports will be provided at regular intervals to People Committee and other relevant committees.

7. Policy History and Review

This policy was originally approved by CMG and Court and took effect from 15 February 2010. It was reviewed in 2012, and subsequently incorporated the previous Harassment Codes of Practice for Staff and Students, which ceased to exist from January 2013. A further substantial review was conducted in 2015 in consultation with Academic Services and approved by the CJCNC, with final approval by Court in February 2016. This policy will be reviewed in the event of any significant change to the legal position on equality matters, relevant statutory requirements or any other related matter. In the absence of such change, the policy will be reviewed by April 2023.

| No. | Approval date: | Amendment made: | Approved by: |
|-----|----------------|---|--|
| 1. | December 2011 | Minor amendments to language to bring the Policy in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the University Strategic Plan. Inclusion of Section 6 clarifying procedures for breaches of this Policy. | HR Policy Development Group on behalf of CJCNC. |
| 2. | August 2012 | Addition of Section 5 on Breaches and minor amendments to the wording of the Policy Statement and Scope and Purpose sections. | CMG, Court |
| 3. | January 2013 | This policy now supersedes the Harassment Codes of Practice for Staff and Students. At the same time the Harassment Contact Officer's role title changed to Dignity and Respect Advisor, and a detailed description of this role was added. | E & D Committee |
| 4. | February 2016 | Rephrasing of the Policy Statement to bring it in line with other equality-related documents; simplification of the Scope and Purpose; removal of Guiding Principles section; expansion of the Responsibilities section; inclusion of specific examples of unacceptable behaviour; Addition of Sections 5.1.4 and 5.2.4 (Reporting concerns to Police) and Appendix of definitions. | CJCNC; CMG; Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee; Court |
| 5. | 1 April 2023 | "Personal Tutor" was replaced by "Student Adviser" in the following sections: 5 – Resolution 5.2.2 - Seeking Informal Assistance | Minor Tweaks, noted at Policy Consultation Forum |

Appendix: Definitions

This Appendix provides definitions of the terms 'bullying', 'harassment', and 'discrimination'

Discrimination

Discrimination means treating an individual unfairly because the individual has, or is perceived to have a protected characteristic, or because of their association with someone who has a protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are:

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

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Indirect discrimination can occur when the University has a policy or practice that applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.

Harassment

Harassment is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as:

“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.”

The relevant protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Staff and students need not possess the relevant characteristic themselves but may be subjected to unacceptable behaviour because they are wrongly perceived to have a protected characteristic, or because of their association with a person who has a protected characteristic. In addition, staff and students have the right to complain of behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them.

Victimisation is a type of harassment. This occurs when an individual is treated less favourably because he/she has, in good faith, made an allegation of harassment, or has assisted another person in bringing forward such an allegation, or participated in an investigation of a complaint or disciplinary hearing.

Bullying

Bullying is not defined in law but for the purposes of this policy is defined as:

“Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which intentionally or unintentionally undermines, humiliates, denigrates or injures the recipient.”

Bullying is normally characterised by a pattern of behaviour but a single incident could be considered as bullying behaviour.

Bullying is to be distinguished from the legitimate exercise of managerial responsibilities where these responsibilities are carried out in a respectful, reasonable and appropriate manner.