



Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee

Document Cover Sheet

Title: **Guidance for actions in the event of bullying while on placement**

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Guidance for actions in the event of bullying while on placement

This guidance is based on the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) (RCN, 2005) guidance on bullying and harassment. This guidance does not replace the University of Hull's existing prevention of harassment policy, but it reinforces the procedures that students must take in the event of experiencing bullying while on placement.

This guidance applies to all students as far as possible and tries to use words and language which everyone can understand. Students are involved in many settings with different models of supervision and support. In respect of this guidance, a student is defined as a student studying on a healthcare or social work programme and includes nurses, midwives, ODPs and Social Work students. In the practice placement learners are provided with a named member of staff who will oversee their learning on placement and is usually responsible for the assessment of the learner's practice. The title of this person varies according to each profession and as such we have used a generic term of placement supervisor in this guidance.

At all times the University's prevention of harassment policy must be adhered to and this policy has been used to inform this guidance document. This policy can be accessed on the University of Hull's *SharePoint* site.

Students are sometimes afraid that if they make a fuss, it will prejudice the character reference they need to progress on their course. This should not be a problem if your case is dealt with properly through the appropriate university or workplace bullying and harassment policies. The fact remains that, until you do something about it, then it is unlikely that the behaviour will stop. It is far better for your own wellbeing, to take action and to help others in the future, by showing that bullying will not be tolerated. Don't feel that you have to wait until you are at breaking point to take action. Please be assured that your issue will always be taken seriously.

Many health and social care organisations recognise the importance of taking a proactive approach to dealing with workplace harassment and bullying. Its effects are harmful to all concerned – the people directly involved in a complaint, team members and the whole organisation. The aim is to encourage a workplace culture in which everybody treats their colleagues with dignity and respect, and where all

steps are taken to minimise the occurrence of bullying and harassment. Many placement providers will already have in place excellent written bullying and harassment policies.

We would encourage you to familiarise yourself with the individual organisation's policy for bullying each time you go out on placement, how to access it and what actions you would take in the event that this occurs in that clinical area. Information about the policy should also be given to students as part of their induction / orientation to the placement.

Professional bodies

Both the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) make it clear their expectations of how a registered professional should behave and that bullying or harassment carried out by a registered professional is in breach of their professional codes and standards. Please access the professional regulatory bodies' standards on the links below:

HCPC - Standards of conduct, performance and ethics:

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/>

NMC – The Code Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/nmc-publications/nmc-code.pdf>

This guidance outlines the key actions you should take if bullying occurs while on placement to ensure that the organisation's policies, procedures and responsibilities are followed effectively. The actions that students should take are summarised in Appendix 1.

Definitions

The terms bullying and harassment are used interchangeably by most people, and many definitions include bullying as a form of harassment.

Harassment – is defined 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. And which affects your dignity and well-being at work or in your place

of study. This conduct can be directed towards you for many reasons, including age, disability, domestic circumstances, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, colour, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, or association with a minority (Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998).

Behaviour can be harassment if:

- It is unwanted, unreasonable and offensive
- It is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions
- It creates a hostile or ineffective study or work environment.

Harassment can include:

- Repeated events or a single serious incident
- Physical abuse such as unwanted physical contact
- Verbal abuse such as name calling or spreading malicious rumours, anonymous answerphone messages, using offensive language or innuendo, telling offensive jokes
- Written abuse such as letters, faxes, emails or graffiti, and displaying offensive pictures or posters
- Obvious abuse that others see, such as mimicking the effect of a disability or making threats
- Covert abuse such as excluding you socially, non-co-operation, implicit threats, pressure for sexual favours
- Abuse that occurs either in the college/workplace or outside it – like stalking – but which stems from a problem inside the college/workplace.

Bullying – may be characterised as:

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power or position through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

It can include:

- Sadistic or aggressive behaviour over a period of time
- Humiliation or ridiculing
- Criticism in public designed to humiliate
- Persistent, unwarranted criticism in private
- Exclusion from opportunities or privileges offered to others

- Exclusion from decision-making
- Treating colleagues or students as if they were incompetent
- Changing work responsibilities or academic assignments unreasonably or without justification, and altering deadlines or work guidelines without warning
- Deliberately withholding information which will affect a colleague or student's performance
- The withholding of support in the academic or workplace environment.

Recognising the problem

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority such as a manager or supervisor) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Bullying and harassment are not necessarily face to face. They may also occur in written communications, email, or phone. Bullying and harassment can make someone feel anxious and humiliated. Feelings of anger and frustration at being unable to cope may be triggered. Some people may try to retaliate in some way. Others may become frightened and de-motivated. Stress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to illness and/or absence from placement/work, and almost always job performance is affected.

Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual. How you experience bullying and harassment is unique to you. It is up to you to decide if you are being bullied or harassed because you find the behaviour unacceptable.

Procedure in the event of bullying and/or harassment on placement

The options for action:

Informal

If you feel you're being harassed or bullied by others: If at all possible, tell the person to stop whatever it is they are doing that is causing you distress, otherwise they may be unaware of the effect of their actions and make it clear to the person causing offence that such behaviour is unacceptable to you.

If you feel unable to confront the person directly or if talking to them has no effect:

Seek a confidential interview with any one of the following persons:

- Your placement supervisor

- Organisation Placement Learning Facilitator (PLF)/Clinical Support Tutor (CST)/Practice Education Facilitator (PEF)
- Link Lecturer
- Ward manager
- Your Academic Support Tutor (AST)
- Union Rep
- Equality and Diversity Advisor (University of Hull)

Or

Talk the problem through with a friend and/or with a member of staff in your Faculty or Department:

- Your placement supervisor
- Organisation Placement Learning Facilitator (PLF)/Clinical Support Tutor (CST)/Practice Education Facilitator (PEF)
- Link Lecturer
- Ward manager
- Your Academic Support Tutor (AST)
- Union Rep
- Equality and Diversity Advisor (University of Hull)

Formal

The University requires all students, staff and persons associated with University activities which include staff providing practice placements to students of the university to respect the rights and dignity of others. They are required to refrain from unwanted physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct, bullying and any other conduct which denigrates, ridicules, intimidates or is physically abusive of an individual or group. Harassment will not be permitted or condoned by the University. The University of Hull treat all allegations of bullying and/or harassment seriously.

Students who experience bullying or harassment on placement should try as far as possible, in the first instance, to make it clear to the person concerned, either directly or through another person, that the conduct in question is unwelcome and offensive. Other people you may wish to involve would include: your placement supervisor, link lecturer, ward manager, placement learning facilitator/clinical support tutor, Academic Support Tutor (AST), Equality and Diversity Advisor and/or union representative. Many cases *can* be resolved without recourse to formal proceedings, often by

giving the perpetrators advice on how to change their behaviour. Students should keep a record of the incidents and dates of the perceived harassment, how it affected them, any response they may have made including complaints and the immediate outcome. Students who experience harassment should inform their personal tutor (AST) of this. The AST will provide advice and assistance in the resolution of problems. This will include, if appropriate, advising the perpetrators on how to change their behaviour. Staff in the Counselling Service and in the Students' Union Advice Centre can also provide advice and support on a confidential basis.

If the harassment persists or is felt to be serious students should make a formal complaint to their AST. While on placement students must follow the individual organisation's policy on bullying and harassment which may include completing DATIX or writing a formal statement. Please note that each organisation's policies and procedures in relation to this may be different. Students may have a friend or representative with them when they speak with their tutor or other responsible person. The person complaining should state the name of the person complained about, the nature of the alleged harassment, the dates, times and places the alleged harassment took place, the names of any witnesses to the incidents and details of the action already taken by the person complaining to stop the harassment. The AST should bring the matter to the attention of a senior academic member of staff (depending on programme and availability this could be: programme lead, subject lead, lead midwife for education) who will see that it is investigated as soon as possible using the University of Hull Prevention of Harassment Policy.

Reporting of Outcome

Students will be informed of the outcome of any formal investigation by the Academic Lead, relevant Programme Director, Lead Midwife for Education and/or their Academic Support Tutor who will also make sure that the ward manager and Placement Learning Facilitator (PLF), Practice Education Facilitator (PEF) or Clinical Support Tutor (CST) have been updated. Ongoing monitoring of allegations and their outcomes will be the responsibility of the Director of Student Experience.

References

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service [ACAS] (2013) *Bullying and harassment at work. A guide for employees* London: ACAS Available online <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/c/Bullying-and-harassment-at-work-a-guide-for-employees.pdf> [Accessed 13.10.16]

Equality Act (2010) Chapter 15. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office. Available online http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf [Accessed 25.10.16]

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Royal College of Nursing (2005) *Bullying and harassment at work: a good practice guide for RCN negotiators and health care managers*. London: RCN.

Actions in the event of bullying while on placement flowchart

