



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

*Parts of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 came into effect on 1 August 2025. These strengthen the legal duties of universities in relation to free speech and academic freedom. Regulation of the new duties is undertaken by the Office for Students (OfS), which has published regulatory guidance on the topic.*

*The University is fully committed to securing and promoting freedom of speech within the law for staff, students and visiting speakers in all activities relating to academic life. The University's [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) sets out the University's values, approach and associated procedures in detail.*

*This policy/guidance/information is currently being reviewed against the OfS' regulatory guidance. Any amendments arising from the review will be subject to approval being sought through the University's normal governance processes. In the meantime, **this policy/guidance/information is to be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with the Code of Practice; in the case of any perceived conflict, the provisions of the Code of Practice will take precedence insofar as that is lawful and reasonably practicable.***

# Dignity at Work Policy

(2023 edition, revised 1 August 2025)

# Dignity at Work Policy (2023 edition)

*Addressing incidents of harassment, discrimination, bullying, sexual misconduct and victimisation.*

1.	Statement of Policy .....	2
2.	Purpose of this Policy .....	3
3.	Who is this Policy for? .....	4
4.	Roles and responsibilities.....	4
5.	What constitutes inappropriate behaviour? .....	5
6.	Code of Behaviour .....	9
7.	What to do when you have experienced inappropriate behaviour .....	11
	Informal resolution .....	12
	Mediation and facilitated conversations .....	13
	Formal resolution .....	14
	Raising concerns anonymously .....	14
	Raising alleged inappropriate behaviour without making a complaint .....	15
	Raising complaints of serious sexual misconduct .....	15
8.	What to do when you are the subject of concerns being raised .....	16
9.	What happens if you have behaved inappropriately.....	16
10.	How we will support you .....	17
	Support services .....	17
	Confidentiality .....	18
	Victimisation.....	18
	Malicious or vexatious complaints.....	19
11.	Training and development opportunities .....	19
12.	How to raise complaints not directly covered by this Policy.....	20
13.	Associated policies and statements.....	20
14.	Review .....	22

## 1. Statement of Policy

- 1.1. Our community must be one in which we are all able, within the law, to question and test received wisdom, express new ideas and explore controversial or unpopular topics and opinions.

The University is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, welcoming and inclusive community that nurtures a culture in which we treat one another with courtesy and professionalism, even while robustly challenging each other's views and opinions. **There is no place for bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or victimisation in our community** and each of us is responsible for the way we interact with and treat others. By fostering and maintaining a culture of courtesy and professionalism in the workplace, we strengthen academic freedom and freedom of thought and expression by ensuring that all voices can be heard clearly and all views discussed responsibly.

- 1.2. **Bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct and victimisation are referenced collectively throughout this Policy as "inappropriate behaviour"** and wherever this term is used, it refers to the definitions of these behaviours in section 5 ([What constitutes inappropriate behaviour?](#)). The negative actions included in section 6 ([Code of Behaviour](#)) also illustrate the different ways in which inappropriate behaviour may be demonstrated within our community.

- 1.3. **Allegations of inappropriate behaviour, whether by a University employee or worker, a visitor to the University, a third party such as a supplier, or a member of the public, should always be taken seriously. Action should be taken to stop any inappropriate behaviour identified as quickly as possible,** including the use of disciplinary processes where necessary and where such behaviour is found to have taken place.

- 1.4. University staff (both employees and workers) should be able to informally disclose or formally report incidents without fear of repercussions and trust the processes that are in place to address their concerns. The University will not tolerate the victimisation of an individual for raising concerns in good faith or supporting someone to raise such concerns.

- 1.5. **Nothing in this Policy should be interpreted as undermining or compromising the University's commitment to freedom of thought and expression, as stated in the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.** This Policy actively supports the University's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of thought and expression. Maintaining a culture of courtesy and professionalism at the University must not close off debate and topics that some may find disagreeable,

distasteful or even offensive, and we are expected to be tolerant of the views and opinions of others in line with the University's Code of Practice.

## 2. Purpose of this Policy

2.1. **This Policy aims to prevent inappropriate behaviour in the workplace and resolve incidents of such behaviour if they occur.** In support of this aim, this Policy:

- **sets out the standards of behaviour** expected from University employees and workers to ensure a common understanding of how everyone should behave towards all members of the University, including our students
- **ensures that staff are able to disclose inappropriate behaviour** if it does occur and are **supported in the process of resolving it**
- **promotes the early resolution of inappropriate behaviour** wherever possible and appropriate, to prevent the psychological, health, and work-related problems such behaviour can cause
- **refers to what actions can be taken** through the informal and formal resolution processes set out in the University's grievance and disciplinary policies if this Policy's principles are not observed.

2.2. This Policy supports the University in its duty **to provide a safe environment in which to work under the Health and Safety at Work Act.** Experiencing inappropriate behaviour often impacts an individual's physical and mental health and can also affect those who witness it.

2.3. This policy forms part of the University's [single comprehensive source of information](#) (SCSI), which brings together information for current and prospective students and staff about how the University prevents and responds to harassment and sexual misconduct. It includes clear information about the University's policies, how to get support, how to raise concerns, and what to expect from the processes followed by the University. Staff should familiarise themselves with the SCSI so they can help signpost students to appropriate support and resources and understand their responsibilities in creating and maintaining an inclusive community, where students, staff and other persons are able to report behaviour that may amount to harassment and/or sexual misconduct and know this will be taken seriously.

2.4. This Policy replaces the University's previous Dignity at Work Policy and the associated procedures under that Policy. It is not contractual and may be amended from time to time, as necessary, in light of any changes in legislation or operational requirements.

- 2.5. The associated policies and statements referenced in this Policy, along with other sources of information and support, can be accessed through section 13 ([Associated policies and statements](#)).

### 3. Who is this Policy for?

- 3.1. This Policy applies to **all University employees and workers** in the course of their employment or engagement with the University. This includes when work is being undertaken on University premises, at other premises, or in a remote working location. It may also include other circumstances that are outside of, but connected to, work, such as conferences or social gatherings with colleagues.
- 3.2. This Policy does not apply to employees and workers solely engaged by the Colleges, who should refer to their College's policies and procedures on bullying, harassment and other inappropriate behaviour. College employees and workers are expected, however, to behave in a manner that is consistent with the [Code of Behaviour](#) set out in section 6 of this Policy if undertaking their work or services specifically in the University environment.
- 3.3. Academic visitors, University volunteers, retired staff, suppliers and others will be expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with the [Code of Behaviour](#) set out in section 6 of this Policy when engaging in activities related to the University and / or on University premises.
- 3.4. This Policy does not apply to students. Standards of behaviour expected from students are set out in the Rules of Behaviour, as specified in the University's Statutes and Ordinances.
- 3.5. Information about how to make complaints that fall outside of the scope of this Policy is included in section 12 ([How to raise complaints not directly covered by this Policy](#)).

### 4. Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1. **All employees and workers** have a responsibility to act in line with the University's [Code of Behaviour](#) set out in section 6 of this Policy. All employees and workers also have a responsibility for completing any relevant mandatory training courses agreed by the University (see section 11 – [Training and development opportunities](#)).
- 4.2. **All those responsible for leading, managing and supervising people** are in a position of trust and have additional responsibilities in the application of the [Code of Behaviour](#) in their area, which include:

- Setting a positive personal model of behaviour
- Ensuring standards in the Code are established, communicated and understood and that visitors to their area are made aware of these standards
- Assessing risks to the standards in the Code arising from local working arrangements and events, and putting appropriate mitigations in place (see the resources listed in section 13 – [Additional policies, statements and resources](#))
- Taking appropriate action at the earliest opportunity to manage non-compliance with the Code, and to encourage a culture of early conflict resolution
- Ensuring their staff are aware of and able to undertake any relevant mandatory training courses (see section 11 - [Training and development opportunities](#))
- Ensuring their staff are aware of and know how to report inappropriate behaviour through the relevant policies and procedures.

4.3. **Staff responsible for HR in their area** are responsible for providing advice to those alleging they have experienced inappropriate behaviour, those who are alleged to have behaved inappropriately and those supporting both informal and formal resolution processes.

4.4. **Staff responsible for HR in their area** and the [HR Business Partnering Teams](#) are responsible for providing advice and support to institutions.

4.5. [Dignity at Work Contacts](#) are a group of trained volunteers from across the University responsible for providing support to those alleging they have experienced inappropriate behaviour and those who are alleged to have behaved inappropriately.

4.6. All roles involved in providing direct guidance and supporting informal or formal resolution processes are responsible for ensuring that information is handled confidentially. Further information is set out in section 10.2 ([Confidentiality](#)).

## 5. What constitutes inappropriate behaviour?

5.1. All University employees and workers are expected to **behave professionally and appropriately and have the right to expect professional and appropriate behaviour** from others. Inappropriate behaviour for the purposes of this Policy means **bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct and victimisation**.

5.2. When deciding the appropriateness of behaviour, factors that will be taken into consideration include the specific context, the motive or intent of the individual demonstrating the behaviour, the impact on the individual and whether that impact or effect is reasonable in the circumstances and the standards set out in the [Code of](#)

[Behaviour](#). Behaviour constitutes harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (sections 5.5.3 and 5.5.4) only when the individual demonstrating the behaviour knows the conduct amounts to harassment of the other, or a reasonable person in possession of the same information would think the course of conduct amounted to harassment of the other person. The University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech protects the right to express or describe views within the law that others may find offensive; this will be taken into consideration as part of the specific context or circumstances where relevant.

5.3. Inappropriate behaviour may:

- be perpetrated by an individual or a group
- be intentional or unintentional
- take place either on or off University property, via University IT systems, or online via email, the internet or social media
- range from overt and easy to recognise one-off instances, to numerous, small remarks and acts sending denigrating messages to the recipient, linked to an individual's characteristics or status.

Examples, drawn from sources such as the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), are provided to illustrate how each of the individual types of inappropriate behaviour listed in 5.1. may be demonstrated.

5.4. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, the terms "bullying" and "harassment" describe different types of behaviour. Acas defines **bullying** as unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting to the recipient. It may involve an abuse or misuse of power that makes a person feel undermined or humiliated or causes physical or emotional harm. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority but can include personal strength, status and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation. As such, it can also be perpetrated upwards to a manager or senior colleague. Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct. Such behaviour is considered unacceptable in the workplace by the Health and Safety Executive.

Examples of bullying could include:

- Spreading a false rumour about a colleague
- Consistently giving heavier workloads to one particular individual in a team
- Unjustly cutting off or preventing a colleague from reasonably expressing their views in a meeting
- Regularly undermining the authority of a more senior colleague.

5.5. The University defines **harassment** using both the Equality Act 2010 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 to reflect the definition adopted by the Office

for Students. Each of these definitions is set out in more detail in sections 5.5.1 to 5.5.4.

5.5.1. Unlawful **harassment** under the Equality Act 2010 is unwanted conduct that is either related to the protected characteristics set out in section 5.5.2 or is conduct of a sexual nature as set out in section 5.5.5. The Act defines harassment as unwanted conduct that must have either the purpose or the effect (where it is reasonable for it to have that effect) of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Harassment can be physical, verbal or non-verbal. It can be a single incident or repeated behaviour and can include imagery, graffiti, gestures, mimicry, jokes, pranks, and physical behaviour that affects the recipient. It can also include treating someone less favourably because they have previously submitted or refused to submit to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or to unwanted conduct that is related to sex or gender reassignment.

5.5.2. When harassment relates to protected characteristics, it refers to the following characteristics: **age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.**

Examples of harassment relating to protected characteristics could include:

- Using derogatory terms in connection with a team member's race or age
- Belittling a colleague because of their disability
- Disclosing a colleague's transgender status without their permission
- Creating a hostile environment for a team member because they hold a protected philosophical belief.

5.5.3. Unlawful harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 is a course of conduct, occurring on at least two occasions, that causes alarm or distress or puts someone in fear of violence. It is not necessarily related to a protected characteristic and conduct will be non-trivial. This form of harassment can also include when an individual is collectively harassed by two or more people (for example, where one person commits an act personally and arranges for another person to commit another act) and when a single individual commits the course of conduct against two or more people.

5.5.4. To be considered this form of harassment, both the course of conduct must amount to harassment and the person must know or ought to know that it amounts to harassment.

Examples of harassment could include:

- Stalking a student, both in person and online ("cyberstalking")

- Sending unwanted, personal communications, such as letters or messages on social media to a team member
- Purposefully damaging a colleague's property
- Making threats or committing acts of physical violence towards another member of the University.

5.5.5. **Sexual harassment under the Equality Act 2010** is a form of **sexual misconduct**, an umbrella term that describes all types of unwanted, attempted unwanted, and unpermitted behaviour of a sexual nature including **sexual abuse**. The intention or reasonably perceived effect of this type of harassment is to violate the recipient's dignity or create an environment that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive for the recipient. It can happen to and be demonstrated by women, men and people of any gender or sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment includes serious sexual misconduct, such as sexual assault or rape. Other examples of sexual harassment and misconduct could include:

- Emailing, texting or messaging sexual content or making sexually offensive jokes to your team, unless relevant to course content or academic debate
- Unwanted flirting or making sexual remarks about a colleague's body, clothing or appearance
- Touching a colleague or student without their permission, such as hugging them.

The University has a duty under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 to anticipate when sexual harassment may occur and take reasonable steps to prevent it, or, where sexual harassment does take place, taking action to stop it from happening again.

5.6. **Unlawful discrimination** under the Equality Act 2010 is when the recipient is treated unfairly because of any of the following characteristics: **age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation**. Discrimination can be **direct** (when someone is treated less favourably than another person in the same situation - but without the protected characteristic - is or would be treated) or **indirect** (where rules or arrangements apply to a group of employees or job applicants, but in practice are less fair to a certain protected characteristic).

Examples of discrimination could include:

- Not offering a promotion to an individual because of their sex
- Excluding a colleague from team social events because they are close friends with a LGBT person
- Drawing inferences about an applicant's religion because of their name and rejecting that individual for that reason
- Advertising a role and specifying a minimum number of years' experience.

- 5.7. Exposure to research, course material, academic debate and discussion, or speakers' views that may be experienced as offensive, contentious or unacceptable but are nonetheless within the law, are unlikely to be considered unlawful harassment as defined in section 5.5, unlawful discrimination as defined in section 5.6, or bullying as defined in section 5.4, unless they are specifically intended to violate a person's dignity or to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, insulting, malicious or offensive environment for them.
- 5.8. Unlawful **victimisation** under the Equality Act 2010 occurs when a person is subject to a detriment because they made a complaint of unlawful discrimination or provided evidence or information in connection with a complaint of unlawful discrimination, or because someone believes that they have done so or may do so.

## 6. Code of Behaviour

- 6.1. In an environment that encourages and celebrates freedom of thought and expression, it is vital that our behaviour towards one another remains courteous and professional. The following Code, developed in conjunction with the Trade Unions and representatives across the University, sets out the University's expectations around how we should and should not behave towards other members of our community.

This Code is not exhaustive but models both the positive behaviour expected of us in our interactions with one another and the negative behaviours that may lead to informal or formal action being taken. However, no individual will be subjected to disciplinary sanction or other less favourable treatment by or on behalf of the University because of the lawful exercise of freedom of speech or academic freedom.

The negative actions listed in the Code below show how the inappropriate behaviours defined in section 5 may be demonstrated within our community. Understanding this can help each of us appreciate the impact of the way we behave.

### The Code of Behaviour

We are each individually responsible for our own actions and for recognising the impact of our behaviour on others. Acknowledging the University's core values of freedom of thought and expression and freedom from discrimination, we should always strive to:

- Foster a trusting environment that enables honest and supportive working and studying conditions
- Recognise that our actions can impact others and show courtesy and consideration in our interactions with others, even if we disagree with their views
- Discuss views that others may find disagreeable or distasteful in a constructive and lawful way, in line with the University Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech
- Treat each other fairly and without bias
- Recognise and acknowledge the contribution of others to our work
- Honour the need for confidentiality when the nature of our work requires it
- Maintain appropriate and professional relationships with all members of the University, in particular students and those in subordinate positions to us
- Promote a culture where colleagues can speak out about inappropriate behaviour
- Support our colleagues experiencing inappropriate behaviour by intervening, speaking out and helping where we feel able.

In order to maintain a culture of courtesy and professionalism, we must never bully, harass, discriminate, victimise or commit sexual misconduct, by avoiding such behaviour as:

- Talking down to, belittling, gratuitously interrupting or preventing others from speaking
- Directing inappropriate language, such as swearing, towards others or making degrading comments about individuals or groups of individuals
- Making inappropriate derogatory remarks about a colleague's performance in public, whether directly (such as in a meeting) or indirectly (for example, by needlessly copying people into an email)
- Humiliating others by shouting at them, either publicly or privately
- Maliciously ignoring individuals or groups of individuals, or inhibiting the ability of others to perform their roles by withholding information or excluding them from necessary meetings and discussion
- Imposing overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision or management
- Undermining the reputation of others through malicious rumours or false allegations or by breaching confidential conversations
- Making jokes, remarks or gestures relating to race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability or age that are degrading or discriminatory even if this is independent of our intentions

- Mocking, mimicking or belittling a colleague, student or visitor because we perceive them as different to us, or using this difference as a reason to treat them unfairly
- Behaving in a controlling or coercive way, such as placing excessive pressure on others to subscribe to a particular political or religious belief
- Circulating or displaying any type of communication on any form of media that would otherwise constitute a form of inappropriate behaviour contrary to this Policy
- Making unwelcome and unpermitted sexual advances, suggestive behaviour or touching someone against their will or without their consent, even if it is perceived as harmless by the individual behaving this way
- Retaliating to allegations of inappropriate behaviour, including threatening those who have made the allegations, providing unfair or misleading references, or blocking access to career development opportunities.

## 7. What to do when you have experienced inappropriate behaviour

7.1. Allegations should always be taken seriously, and action taken as quickly as possible to stop any inappropriate behaviour identified. This section summarises the procedures available in the University's grievance and disciplinary policies to do this and explains the direct support available to individuals to address inappropriate behaviour. Specific information relating to the procedures for incidents of serious sexual misconduct, such as sexual assault, violence and rape, is included in section 7.10 ([Raising complaints of serious sexual misconduct](#)).

7.2. Both **informal and formal options** are available in the **University's [grievance and disciplinary policies](#)** to resolve issues.

- **[Informal approaches](#)** are intended to help resolve **one-off or minor incidents of inappropriate behaviour**, to stop such behaviour early and to prevent it escalating. They include:
  - [a direct informal resolution process](#)
  - [an informal resolution process with support](#)
  - [mediation and facilitated conversations.](#)

This type of collaborative approach has been found to be the most effective way of resolving conflict, tackling inappropriate behaviour and minimising any negative impact on the individuals involved.

- [Formal grievances](#) are more appropriate for **serious instances or repeated patterns of inappropriate behaviour** where previous informal attempts may have failed.

To explore the appropriate option to use, individuals should speak with their line manager or the person responsible for HR in their area or their central [HR Business Partnering Team](#). The colleague approached may need to discuss the matter and collect further information about the alleged inappropriate behaviour disclosed to provide appropriate guidance. This may involve speaking informally but confidentially with other individuals involved in or witnessing the incident. Any such activity will be undertaken promptly for the purposes of identifying the most appropriate option to resolve the alleged behaviour and will not constitute a formal investigation. This will only be undertaken with the permission of the individual disclosing the incident (see section 7.9 for information on disclosing allegations of inappropriate behaviour but not raising them as a complaint).

Individuals can also discuss the matter and any guidance received on options for resolution with a colleague in confidence, a [Dignity at Work Contact](#) and/or a [trade union](#) representative when considering how to proceed.

- 7.3. **Individuals are encouraged to keep a record of the nature and frequency of the alleged inappropriate behaviour.** This is to support them in raising their concerns and help the other party understand better the issues raised during the course of these discussions and the impact they have had.
- 7.4. If, through the course of raising an issue for resolution, it is identified that the nature of any complaint is instead a matter for a College, the University may refer the issue to the relevant College to be addressed under its policies and procedures.
- 7.5. **Informal resolution**
- 7.5.1. An individual wishing to resolve issues informally should use the informal procedure set out in the grievance policy relevant to their staff category as set out in section 13 ([Associated policies and statements](#)). There are normally both a **direct resolution process** and a **supported informal resolution process** set out in these policies.
- 7.5.2. A **direct informal resolution process** is where the individual experiencing the behaviour directly addresses the issue themselves. It is likely to be most effective when done in the early stages of experiencing the behaviour and in a constructive way, including specific examples of the unwanted behaviour, explaining why this made the individual feel uncomfortable or gave distress, and what the individual feels would resolve the issue.

7.5.3. Support to **help the individual prepare what they want to say** is also available from any of the following:

- the person responsible for HR in their area or their local HR team
- their line manager (or equivalent)
- their [HR Business Partnering Team](#)
- a [Dignity at Work Contact](#)
- a [trade union](#) representative.

7.5.4. The individual raising the concerns may wish to try informal resolution but, understandably, feel unable or reluctant to directly approach the other party on their own. In an **informal resolution process with support**, the individual may ask for support to achieve an informal resolution.

**This approach can particularly help when addressing issues concerning a line manager or a more senior colleague** and help can be requested from:

- their line manager (or equivalent)
- the person responsible for HR in their area or their local HR team
- their [HR Business Partnering Team](#)
- the Head of Institution.

As part of this process, the supporting person **can meet directly** with the individual reported to have demonstrated the inappropriate behaviour to discuss what has happened and how to resolve it, or **they can be part of any meeting between both parties**. Where they are standing in for the individual raising the concerns, they provide regular updates on progress back to the individual.

## 7.6. Mediation and facilitated conversations

7.6.1. It may be appropriate for the matter to be dealt with by way of mediation, depending on the nature of the issue. **Mediation** is a well-established, confidential process for resolving issues between individuals, involving two impartial mediators helping those involved find and agree their own solutions.

7.6.2. Mediation can be used at any time as a means of informal resolution, including before or after an informal or formal process. The mediation process normally takes around a day, including a preliminary meeting with each party. Further information about this option is available from the University [Mediation Service](#).

7.6.3. The Mediation Service is also able to offer a shorter **facilitated conversation** between the two parties, involving an impartial facilitator. After an initial meeting with each party, the facilitator supports both parties in a 2 – 3 hour meeting where

they can discuss the issue and find a way forward that works for them. This option may be preferable for more minor issues or conflict.

- 7.6.4. Provided both parties wish to participate, a request for mediation or a facilitated conversation can be made to the [Mediation Service](#) directly by the parties themselves or through a referral from the Line Manager, the person or team responsible for HR in the area, or the [HR Business Partnering Team](#).
- 7.6.5. Both mediation and facilitated conversations are voluntary, confidential and either party can withdraw from the process at any time. No member of staff is required to use mediation or facilitated conversations before utilising the option of a formal grievance.

## 7.7. **Formal resolution**

- 7.7.1. There will be instances of inappropriate behaviour where an informal resolution process is not successful or is simply not appropriate due to the nature of the allegations. In these situations, the individual experiencing the inappropriate behaviour should raise a complaint using the formal process set out in the relevant **staff grievance procedure** as listed in section 13 ([Associated policies and statements](#)). On review of the formal complaint with the relevant HR Business Partnering Team, a disciplinary process may be initiated instead as appropriate.
- 7.7.2. No member of staff is required to use the informal route before utilising the option of a formal grievance.
- 7.7.3. Where the member of staff wishing to raise a formal complaint is under the age of 18 or is deemed to be an “adult at risk”, please refer to the Children and Adults at Risk Safeguarding Policy.

## 7.8. **Raising concerns anonymously**

- 7.8.1. As well as or instead of raising issues for resolution informally or formally, staff, students and visitors of the University can report any type of bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation to the University using the [anonymous reporting tool](#) for staff and students.
- 7.8.2. This system has been in place since 2017, is completely anonymous and enables the University to understand the prevalence and type of misconduct taking place at the University. As the system cannot collect any information about the identity of the alleged perpetrator or detailed information about the incident, it will not result in any direct action (such as a University-instigated investigation). Instead, the statistical information collected will be used to monitor, plan and support appropriate preventative interventions.

## 7.9. **Raising alleged inappropriate behaviour without making a complaint**

7.9.1. It is the aim of this Policy to ensure all staff feel able to disclose alleged inappropriate behaviour so that it can be resolved. If an individual raises alleged inappropriate behaviour but does not want or feel able to proceed with either an informal resolution or a formal process, the colleague approached will:

- Discuss ideas for how the individual can respond to the behaviour if it happens again
- Encourage the individual to talk to them again after any future repetition of the behaviour
- Make the individual aware that they may have to take action if the nature of what is disclosed invokes the University's duty of care, particularly if the reported behaviour is impacting the individual's mental or physical wellbeing
- Suggest they may wish to report the concern anonymously on the [anonymous reporting tool](#) to enable the University to understand the prevalence and type of inappropriate behaviour taking place.
- Provide information on University [support services](#).
- Check that the individual is aware of the informal and formal options available to resolve the alleged behaviour should they wish to reconsider at any point.

7.9.2. Should there be multiple informal disclosures that give rise to sufficient cause for concern, or the nature of what is disclosed invokes the University's duty of care, the Head of Institution in the area concerned may choose to conduct an investigation into the alleged behaviour (see [section 9.2](#) for further details).

## 7.10. **Raising complaints of serious sexual misconduct**

7.10.1. If an individual has experienced serious sexual violence, such as sexual assault, violence or rape, it is important they feel supported. They also have a choice in what they do next and what is right for them. The University has dedicated information about the reporting options and support available – both within and outside of the University - on its [Breaking the Silence](#) website.

7.10.2. Often a grievance process will not be appropriate in response to a complaint of serious sexual misconduct. When an individual has disclosed an incident of serious sexual misconduct and consented to that disclosure being treated as a complaint, careful consideration will be given to the most appropriate process for dealing with that complaint, whether through the relevant disciplinary or grievance policy.

7.10.3. Information is also available on the Breaking the Silence website for anyone who is approached for advice and support by an individual who experienced serious sexual

misconduct. This includes supporting colleagues who have very recently experienced serious sexual misconduct and may need immediate medical attention, as well supporting those in non-emergency situations.

## 8. What to do when you are the subject of concerns being raised

8.1. It can be a disconcerting and upsetting experience for an individual to be approached and told that their behaviour could be construed as inappropriate. If this is done through an informal process, they should be prepared to listen patiently and calmly and allow the member of staff (or the person supporting them in the process) to express their concerns. If it is possible, they should also try to remedy the situation and allow a positive working relationship to be resumed. The individual should keep a note of what was discussed and, if appropriate, agreed.

8.2. The individual who is the subject of the complaint should also be able to give an account of what happened as part of any informal and formal resolution processes. They can speak with any of the following for general guidance or to discuss any specific questions about the resolution process:

- their line manager (or equivalent)
- the person responsible for HR in their area or their local HR team
- their [HR Business Partnering Team](#)
- a [Dignity at Work Contact](#)
- a [trade union](#) representative.

Individuals may also discuss the matter and any guidance or information received in connection with the resolution process with a colleague in confidence.

8.3. The [support services](#) set out in section 10 are also available to provide support for individuals who are the subject of a complaint.

## 9. What happens if you have behaved inappropriately

9.1. While this Policy emphasises the value of an early, informal resolution process, there will be situations that can only be resolved through a formal grievance. Where a formal grievance is brought and upheld against an individual and the nature of the inappropriate behaviour warrants it, a **separate procedure under the relevant disciplinary policy will be undertaken by the University**. This may result in a formal warning being issued to the person demonstrating the inappropriate behaviour and training or other interventions may also be recommended. In the

case of serious or sustained misconduct, the procedure may result in the termination of employment.

- 9.2. Additionally, where a Head of Institution has become aware of multiple concerns or complaints of inappropriate behaviour in their area, which may not have been formally reported but give rise to sufficient cause for concern, they may choose to conduct an investigation to understand the alleged behaviours in more detail and to determine if support and interventions are needed. Known as a University-instigated investigation, this is intended to ensure the effective resolution of concerns raised and the prevention of future inappropriate behaviours where identified by the investigation. Undertaking a University-instigated investigation should be done in consultation with the HR Business Partnering Team for that area and will involve agreed terms of reference with the relevant Institution and interviews with staff (and, if appropriate, students) to ascertain the key concerns and possible solutions. If the findings indicate, this may lead to a disciplinary process under the relevant procedure.
- 9.3. In line with the University Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, no individual will be subjected to disciplinary sanction or other less favourable treatment by or on behalf of the lawful exercise of freedom of speech or academic freedom.

## 10. How we will support you

### 10.1. Support services

- 10.1.1. The University is committed to providing support for employees and workers affected by these issues. The following support resources are available to **any employee or worker** whether they are considering raising an issue about inappropriate behaviour, actually disclosing an incident, or the subject of a complaint.
- 10.1.2. Confidential support can be accessed from the [Dignity at Work Contacts](#) on issues relating to bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct.
- 10.1.3. Help for any employee or worker who has been subjected to sexual misconduct, including sexual assault or rape, is available through the University's [Breaking the Silence website](#). This includes the details of services provided by both the University and external specialist organisations that support women, men and people of any gender or sexual orientation affected by sexual misconduct.
- 10.1.4. Where appropriate, the University [Mediation Service](#) is available to help find a mutually acceptable resolution as part of an informal, confidential and independent process (see section 7.6 for further details).

- 10.1.5. Talking confidentially to a member of one of the University's [Diversity Networks](#) may also be helpful, particularly if the inappropriate behaviour is perceived to be harassment or discrimination due to a protected characteristic (see sections 5.5 and 5.6).
- 10.1.6. Information about further sources of support is also available on the University [wellbeing pages](#) and includes an extensive list of internal and external providers. These include the University [Staff Counselling Service](#) and the University [Occupational Health Service](#), as well as support for those who have experienced sexual assault and emergency support for staff in distress.
- 10.1.7. [Trade Unions](#) are also a source of guidance for individuals experiencing inappropriate behaviour and can directly support members in the process of resolving these issues.

## 10.2. **Confidentiality**

- 10.2.1. Confidentiality – and trust in that confidentiality – is critical when dealing with allegations of inappropriate behaviour. Details of the complaint (including the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused) must only be disclosed on a 'need-to-know' basis (for example, under the University's duty of care). Breach of confidentiality in either an informal or formal resolution process may give rise to disciplinary action under the relevant disciplinary procedure.
- 10.2.2. Information about a complaint by or about an individual may be placed on their personnel file, along with a record of the outcome and any notes or other documents compiled during the process. Notes and records will be treated as confidential and be kept no longer than necessary in accordance with the data protection principles set out in the relevant data protection legislation.

## 10.3. **Victimisation**

- 10.3.1. The University will not tolerate any form of victimisation against an individual who has raised or supported an informal complaint, co-operated in a formal investigation, challenged inappropriate behaviour, or in each case is believed to have or is believed to be likely to take such steps. This includes behaviour targeting an individual's career progression, such as deliberately providing unbalanced or overly negative references or blocking opportunities for that individual to participate in workshops and other development activities.
- 10.3.2. If a formal complaint of victimisation is made about a member of staff's behaviour it will be fully investigated and, if upheld, will be dealt with in accordance with the relevant disciplinary procedures.

#### 10.4. **Malicious or vexatious complaints**

- 10.4.1. A malicious complaint is one that is made with the intention to intimidate, to lower the reputation of, or otherwise injure or harm a colleague or manager, through knowingly providing false or misleading information or withholding information about an incident or issue.
- 10.4.2. A vexatious complaint is either one that is made with the sole or main intention to harass, annoy or subdue somebody, or one that is unreasonable, without foundation, frivolous, repetitive, deliberately burdensome or unwarranted.
- 10.4.3. If it is found that an individual has made a complaint that is malicious or vexatious, the University may instigate a disciplinary process against them. Disciplinary action will not be taken, however, where a grievance is mistaken or otherwise ill-founded but not malicious or vexatious.

### 11. **Training and development opportunities**

- 11.1. It is everyday interactions that indicate courteous and professional environments, whether in informal social situations, agreeing and allocating work, managing change, supporting development, feedback opportunities, being an active bystander or negotiating difficult conversations. All these require skills, practice and ongoing review and are needed at all stages of employment, from recruitment through to end of contract.
- 11.2. The University provides a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff, managers and leaders to build skills to tackle and prevent bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct. Information about the training and development opportunities currently available can be found on the [Learning and Development website](#).
- 11.3. In meeting its public sector equality duty, the University will also identify any mandatory courses that need to be undertaken by staff and managers when they join the University (and on a periodic basis thereafter), or when preparing to undertake certain activities on behalf of the University (such as recruitment). The content of such courses will be focussed on building awareness of the employment legislation, statutory codes, case law, and other relevant information to achieve the objectives of this duty, namely eliminating conduct prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

11.4. Any courses deemed to be mandatory will be approved by the University Council and communicated accordingly.

## 12. How to raise complaints not directly covered by this Policy

12.1. **University employees or workers who have a complaint against a student** should contact their [HR Business Partnering Team](#) in the first instance who will liaise with the [Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals \(OSCCA\)](#) to agree an appropriate course of action.

12.2. **University employees or workers who have a complaint against an individual about a College matter** (whether or not the person about whom they wish to complain is an employee of the University) should raise their complaint directly with the relevant College in the first instance through the head of department (if known), HR Manager, or Head of House. If the College disagrees that it is a College matter, it may refer the complaint to the University to be addressed under the appropriate grievance procedure or, if appropriate, inform the University about the complaint when addressed under the College's policies and procedures.

12.3. **University employees or workers who have a complaint against any other third party** (such as contractor) or a member of the public should speak with their line manager or Departmental Administrator in the first instance. In order to address the complaint, it may be necessary to notify third parties and use their local complaints procedure or notify University Security and/or the police when complaints involve members of the public.

12.4. In circumstances where **a student has concerns about the behaviour of a University employee or worker**, including sexual misconduct, these should be raised through the [Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals \(OSCCA\)](#) student complaints procedure.

12.5. **All other individuals who are not University employees or workers who have a complaint against a University employee or worker** will be advised to raise the complaint in writing with the relevant head of department (if known) or the Director of Human Resources in the first instance.

## 13. Associated policies, statements and resources

13.1. Links to other related University policies, statements, and sources of support and further information can be found below:

- [University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.](#)

- Grievance policies
  - All Assistant, Unestablished Academic and Academic-related staff (including contract research staff) should refer to the [University Grievance Policy](#)
  - All University Officers or Established members of staff should refer to [Special Ordinances under Statute C\(xii\)](#)
  - University Clinicians (including clinical consultants, junior doctors, nurses, midwives and all allied health professionals) should refer to the [Clinical School HR team](#) in the first instance for the separate clinical grievance guidance
  - UPS workers should refer to the complaint procedure in the University Payment System Handbook for Workers
  - TES workers should refer to the complaint procedure in the [Temporary Workers Handbook](#)
- Disciplinary policies
  - All University Officers or Established members of staff should refer to [Schedule to Statute C, Chapter III](#) and [Special Ordinances under Statute C\(xiii\)](#)
  - [Unestablished Academic and Academic-related Staff \(including contract research staff\)](#)
  - [Assistant Staff](#)
- [Staff and Students Relationship Policy](#)
- [The University's single comprehensive source of information \(SCSI\)](#)
- [Student Complaint Procedures](#)
- [The Rules of Behaviour](#) for students
- Information on the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)
- [Breaking the Silence](#) – the University's website dedicated to the prevention of harassment and sexual misconduct. Includes information about the University's duty to prevent sexual harassment and help and advice for anyone affected by harassment or sexual misconduct. The site has toolkit resources for institutions, including template risk assessments and risk scoring guidance, and Code of Behaviour posters.
- [Alcohol and Substance Misuse Guidance](#), including a template briefing note to remind staff of the expected standards of behaviour at work-related social events held during or outside normal working hours.

## 14. Review

14.1. This Policy will be reviewed 12 months after the implementation date and then every 4 years.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date version came into force</b>	<b>Description of changes</b>
2023 edition	20.06.2023	New edition of Dignity of Work Policy, replacing the previous Dignity at Work Policy and the associated procedures under that Policy.
1 September 2024 revision	01.09.2024	Updated in line with the introduction of the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech (replacing the Statement on Freedom of Speech).
1 August 2025 revision	01.08.2025	Updated in line with the introduction of the condition of registration relating to harassment and sexual misconduct (E6) and the new duty under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023.



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