



Dignity at Work

Prepared by: Bandna Rana

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Confidential

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Name	Position	Viewed / comments
Denise York	Head of People Services	
Karen Orr	Director of People and Engagement	
Bandna Rana	People Advisory Manager	

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1. Introduction

Dignity at work is the principle of maintaining a positive, healthy, safe working environment free from prejudice and socially unacceptable behaviour.

At QA we believe our diversity makes us stronger and we are committed to ensuring a working environment in which all employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, and where bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation are not tolerated.

We expect all employees to recognise their responsibilities and to:

- behave in a way that respects the rights and dignity of others
- treat others fairly
- display courtesy and good manners in every interaction appreciating that individuals have different styles and expectations
- value differences in others and the contribution they make
- work co-operatively with colleagues; and
- demonstrate a commitment to upholding our policies on Equal Opportunities.

This policy outlines unacceptable behaviours and the process for reporting and dealing with inappropriate behaviour. It covers work-related events inside and outside of the workplace, including business trips and work-related social events or functions. This policy applies to employees, agency workers, contractors and self-employed workers.

2. Types of inappropriate behaviour

The Equality Act 2010 outlines the three types of harassment – harassment related to certain “protected characteristics”, sexual harassment and less favourable treatment as a result of harassment. From 26 October 2024, the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 will come into force. This will introduce a new positive obligation on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment this will apply where harassment is related to conduct of a sexual nature, not just to gender.

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. The law (Equality Act 2010) protects people against sexual harassment at work.

Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating someone’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment.

Harassment can be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Any harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of the above categories. If an individual has submitted or refused to submit to harassment

in the past, it is further harassment to treat them less favourably because of this. Harassment will also amount to unlawful discrimination if it relates to any of these personal protected characteristics.

Unlawful discrimination may also occur by perception or by association where a person engages in unwanted conduct towards another because they perceive the recipient has, or is associated with someone who has a relevant, protected characteristic. For example, if a manager denies an employee a new role because they are taking care of a disabled relative, and the manager thinks that the employee will not have any time for new responsibilities, this could amount to associative discrimination as disability is one of the protected characteristics.

Bullying is a form of harassment and is characterised by the Advisory, Conciliation and Advice Service (ACAS) as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure.

A person can be bullied, for example, by someone misusing their power of authority, seniority, strength, information or other power over another individual to coerce through fear or intimidation. Bullying can involve physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct.

Conduct may constitute harassment or bullying whether or not the person behaving inappropriately intends to cause offense. Likewise, harassment of a person can occur even if they were not the subject or intended target. For example, a person may be harassed by racist or sexist jokes regardless of their own race or sex if they feel that the jokes create an offensive environment.

Harassment or bullying may consist of persistent behaviour, although one single act may be considered sufficiently serious to warrant disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Examples of unacceptable behaviours include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Threats of a physical or psychological nature
- Unnecessary or unwanted physical contact
- Demeaning comments about a person's appearance or gender expression
- Displaying material that is likely to cause offence to others
- Ignoring or shunning someone, deliberately excluding them from conversations, communications, activities or events, including social events
- Fostering isolation or non-cooperation at work
- Derogatory name-calling, insults and offensive comments
- Aggressive, disrespectful behaviour and or language
- Unwelcome jokes, comments or remarks that are stereotypical about a particular ethnic or religious group or gender
- Mocking, mimicking, sarcasm or ridicule directed at a person's disability, age, race, sexuality
- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- Homophobic and biphobic bullying/harassment e.g. exclusion from a meeting or social event because of an individual's sexual orientation; joking about someone's sexual preferences

- Incitement of others to commit harassment
- Cyberbullying for example derogatory messages sent via mobiles or posting detrimental images of work colleagues on external websites following work events
- Picking on someone or demonstrably setting them up to fail
- Unfair allocation of work
- Inappropriate and derogatory remarks that can be deemed as intimidation in connection with performance
- Overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision
- Less favourable treatment as a result of how they responded to previous harassment
- An abuse or misuse of power (that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone)
- Putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments or photos on social media

Sexual harassment does not need to be sexually motivated; it only needs to be sexual in nature and may include (this is a non-exhaustive list):

- unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing;
- continued suggestions for sexual activity after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome;
- sending or displaying material that is pornographic or that some people may find offensive (including emails, text messages, video clips and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet);
- unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless);
- intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life, or a person discussing their own sex life;
- sending sexually explicit e-mails or text messages or sexual posts/contact on social media.

Harassment of a person can occur even if they were not the subject or intended target. For example, a person may be harassed by racist or sexist jokes regardless of their own race or sex if the jokes create an offensive environment, or sexually harassed by pornographic images displayed on a colleague's computer in the workplace.

Unwanted behaviour can include:

- a serious one-off incident
- repeated behaviour
- spoken or written words, imagery, graffiti, gestures, mimicry, jokes, pranks, physical behaviour that affects the person

The person being harassed might feel:

- disrespected
- frightened
- humiliated
- insulted
- intimidated
- threatened

Gender Identity

Some individuals encounter discrimination and transphobia as a direct result of their gender identity. A person who identifies as transgender is protected. A transgender person is someone whose gender identity or gender expression does not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Examples of what transphobia can look like (but are not limited to):

- Ignoring people's preferred pronouns. Purposely using a different pronoun to the one a person prefers undermines their gender identity
- Disclosure of Trans status and history
- Inappropriate questioning about any medical treatment
- Comments about people's ability to 'pass' as a trans, telling someone they could be more 'convincing'
- Commenting on the use of facilities such as bathrooms. Trans people should be able to choose which facilities align with their gender identity.

3. Our Responsibilities

Everyone has a role to play in conducting themselves in accordance with this policy and ensuring that bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment) is not tolerated. Every manager has an obligation to prevent bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation and to take immediate action once it has been identified, whether or not a complaint has been made. All managers must set an appropriate standard and ensure that those they manage understand the standards of behaviour expected of them. If harassment has occurred in the workplace, managers should not only deal with that particular incident but must also take steps to stop it from happening again.

Allegations of bullying and harassment received either informally or formally must be dealt with promptly and sensitively or must immediately be raised with the People Team.

It may not always be appropriate for the direct manager to be involved with specific complaints. For example, if the complainant is a man and wishes to speak to a man, but the manager is a woman, or, if the complaint relates to the conduct of the manager.

Every employee has a personal responsibility not to bully, harass, victimise or discriminate against colleagues. An employee who becomes aware of such inappropriate behaviour should bring the matter to the attention of their manager or the People Team.

Developing a culture of respect

Promoting a positive culture at work for everyone based on personal respect and dignity will help to prevent inappropriate behaviour. To re-iterate, QA operates a zero tolerance policy when bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation are found to have occurred.

Stop and Reflect

Could “harmless banter” be causing offence to those around you? If the answer is yes, this can have a negative impact on an individual’s work and their life. Ensure that your jokes are not causing those around you to feel uncomfortable.

Stop and Talk

If you feel uncomfortable with the way someone is talking or acting towards you, talk to them and let them know how they are making you feel. If you do not feel able to talk directly to them, speak to your manager.

Stop and Listen

If someone wishes to discuss an issue with you, stop and listen. Respect the opinions and belief of others. It is not easy to confront a situation and by listening and talking, it may resolve a problem.

It is important to note that there are differences between harassment and/or bullying and assertive management. Harassment and/or bullying is always unfair and may undermine someone’s efforts to perform well. Assertive management, on the other hand, may involve setting demanding – but fair and achievable – targets and standards of behaviour appropriate to someone’s job and level of responsibility. It is important for managers to, when it is necessary, address performance concerns, give constructive feedback, or take disciplinary action in relation to an employee, and to ensure this is done fairly and constructively, and that relevant procedures and guidance are followed.

It is also important for employees to recognise every individual has a responsibility to understand that views and opinions held by others and decisions made by managers may not always coincide with their own; such differences are unlikely to constitute harassment and bullying unless they are raised, or dealt with, in an unfair way.

4. Raising a Concern

If you feel that you are being treated inappropriately, you may feel able to raise the issue informally with the person responsible. Explain clearly that the behaviour is not welcome or makes you feel uncomfortable and ask them to stop.

In some cases, the person upsetting you may not be aware of the effect of their actions, so if you feel able you could try talking to them to put a stop to it.

It's a good idea to:

- explain how their behaviour makes you feel
- be firm, not aggressive
- stick to the facts and
- if you do not feel comfortable talking to the person face to face, you could put your thoughts in an email.

If you do not feel able to raise your concern with the individual responsible you should speak to your manager or the People Team for confidential advice, assistance and support. All matters will be dealt with appropriately and reasonable steps will be taken.

You can also raise your concerns by using our Whistleblowing service Safecall. Safecall provides an independent confidential reporting line where you can raise your concerns and be assured that they will be fully addressed.

The Safecall service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

UK 0800 915 1571

Romania 0372 741 942

Switzerland 00 800 7233 2255

Italy 00 800 7233 2255

Australia 1 800 312 928

South Africa 0 800 990 243

US 1 866 901 3295

Spain 00 800 7233 2255

Alternatively, Safecall can be contacted via their website: [**www.safecall.co.uk/report**](http://www.safecall.co.uk/report)

If informal resolution is not possible or appropriate, or for serious incidents of bullying or harassment, you should raise the matter formally through the Grievance Policy, (details can be found on the People Hub).

Any complaints raised formally under the Grievance Policy will be investigated fully and fairly and, as far as possible, in a timely and confidential manner. We will also consider whether any interim steps or measures are necessary to manage the ongoing relationships between you and the person responsible while the investigation is ongoing.

If bullying or harassment is found to have taken place, then the matter will be dealt with appropriately. An employee accused and found guilty of bullying or harassing may be subject to the Disciplinary Policy and may be issued with a formal sanction for misconduct or gross misconduct, which could merit summary dismissal. If a third party is accused of bullying or harassing any individual, appropriate steps will be taken by the business.

5. Mediation

At QA, a growing number of employees are open to mediation to resolve workplace conflict. Mediation is a voluntary, impartial process and can be used in alleged bullying and harassment cases where both parties are willing to participate. QA may recommend an external consultant/mediator to be present to support the process.

If you make a complaint under this policy, or if you participate in good faith in any investigation (for example as a witness), you should not be subjected to any form of retaliation or victimisation. Anyone who does retaliate against you or victimises you will be subject to the Disciplinary Policy.

If you deliberately make a false allegation in bad faith, this will be regarded as misconduct and dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure. This does not apply to genuine complaints under this policy.

If you are subject to bullying and harassment, there is support available at QA. Please reach out to the People Team and they will signpost you to the most appropriate support available.

We also offer an Employee Assistance Programme, available to support employees during difficult times, information on which can be found on the People Hub.

6. Confidentiality

We will deal with any matter raised sensitively and with due respect for the privacy of any individuals involved. You must keep any information you receive in connection with an investigation of bullying and harassment confidential.