

STAT Policy Statement on Bullying & Harassment

STAT is committed to a working and learning environment that is free from any form of bullying or harassment. Harassment or bullying adversely affects working and social conditions for staff, members, students and visitors and is unacceptable. Any incident of bullying or harassment will be regarded very seriously and may be grounds for disciplinary action. Persistent or gross bullying or harassment and, in particular, sexual or racial harassment will be treated as grounds for disciplinary action including dismissal or expulsion from STAT.

What is Bullying or Harassment?

Harassment tends to have a strong physical component and is usually linked to gender, race, disability or physical violence. Harassment is any form of unwanted and unwelcome behaviour, which may range from mildly unpleasant remarks to physical violence.

Bullying tends to be a large number of incidents (individually trivial) over a long period comprising constant unjustified and unsubstantiated criticism. It is persistent unwelcome behaviour, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault-finding, also exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, having verbal and written warnings imposed, and much more. In the workplace, bullying usually focuses on distorted or fabricated allegations of underperformance.

Harassment or bullying causes distress and anxiety. It interferes with an ability of an individual to work and study and may be so serious and unrelenting that the person being harassed may feel it necessary to change job or course. It is uninvited, may be personally offensive and is always unwelcome; it can be detrimental to all aspects of people's social and working lives.

STAT will therefore take bullying or harassment to include any behaviour that is offensive, intimidating or hostile; which interferes with individuals' working or social environment; or which induces stress, anxiety, fear or sickness on the part of the bullied or harassed person. The defining features are that the behaviour is offensive or intimidating to the recipient and would be so regarded by any reasonable person.

It is important to remember that differences of attitude, background or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as bullying or harassment by one person may not seem so to another. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be admitted as an excuse for bullying or harassment.

Bullying or harassment may take many forms and involve more than one individual both as the bully/harasser and the victim. It can range from extreme forms such as violence to less obvious actions like ignoring someone at work. It may occur where the bully/harasser has a position of authority (e.g. where a teacher, supervisor or administrator is able to affect another person's job, career or grade) and relies upon the fact that the recipient(s) are reluctant to complain for fear of

ridicule or reprisals. Any act of bullying or harassment will be regarded by STAT as more serious if it involves the abuse of the position of authority or trust.

Some general examples of bullying or harassment may include:

- Physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault
- Verbal and written bullying or harassment through jokes, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, letters, etc
- Visual display of posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting and emblems
- Isolation or non co-operation at work, exclusion from social activities
- Coercion ranging from pressure for sexual favours to pressure to participate in political/religious groups
- Intrusion by pestering, spying or following someone

Two important examples, amongst others, are sexual harassment and racial harassment both of which are illegal.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment always involves unwanted attention, which emphasises sexual status over status as an individual, client or colleague. It can occur in a variety of circumstances but always has a distinctive feature: the inappropriate introduction of sexual comments or activities into teaching, learning, administrative working or social situations.

Racial Harassment

Racial harassment is any hostile or offensive act or expression by a person of one racial or ethnic origin against a person of another, or incitement to commit such an act. Those who may be particularly affected are students and staff who are in a small minority within STAT and, for fear of ridicule or reprisals, find it difficult to complain.

Any difficulty in defining what constitutes sexual and racial harassment should not deter anyone from complaining of behaviour that causes them distress. Nor should anyone be deterred from making a complaint because of embarrassment or fear of intimidation or publicity. STAT will respect the particular sensitivity of sexual and racial harassment complaints and their consequences as well as the need for the utmost confidentiality.

Everyone can contribute toward preventing bullying or harassment through an active awareness of the issues involved and also by ensuring that standards of conduct for themselves and for friends and colleagues do not cause offence.

Bullying or Harassment Advisors

Harassment/bullying advisors are concerned members who have volunteered to undertake these duties. They have received special training for this role and have the full support of STAT. They

are available to offer, in confidence, advice and information as required. They are also able to channel complaints and to negotiate between the parties concerned.

These Advisors will not make judgements, recommendations or reports; they will listen to you in an informal atmosphere and they will allow you to decide what action you may want to take and the support you think you may need.

Procedures for Dealing with Bullying or Harassment

If you feel that you are being subjected to sexual or racial harassment in any form, do not feel that it is your fault or that you have to tolerate it. The primary concern is that anyone who is subjected to bullying or harassment should receive support and assistance and, where appropriate, remedy. We also recognise that confidentiality is of the utmost importance.

There are a number of possible courses of action that you can take to deal with bullying or harassment:

1. You are encouraged to talk about the problem with the STAT Lead Director or any of the agencies listed at the end of this document. The STAT Lead Director has received special training and is willing to discuss incidents or problems however large or small they may seem and could advise you on a course of action, take the matter up on your behalf or refer you for specialist advice. They may suggest a way of resolving the problem that you had not thought of. Do not hesitate to contact someone even if an incident occurs only once.

Any discussion will be confidential and further action involving you will not be taken without your express permission; in particular the person about whom you are complaining will not be given your name as a complainant without your express permission.

2. If at all possible you should make it clear to the person causing the offence that such behaviour on that person's part is unacceptable to you and that it interferes with your work, study or social life. You may find it easier to do this by letter (you should keep a copy). Alternatively you may wish to get support from a friend or colleague to help you explain your feelings to the person harassing bullying or you. If you feel unable to confront the person concerned this does not constitute consent to the bullying or harassment.

3. It is important to begin to make a note of the details of any relevant incidents which distress you - particularly if you feel unable to speak to the person concerned or, if having spoken, the behaviour persists. You should include a note of the way in which the incidents cause you to change the pattern of your work or social life.

4. If the bullying or harassment continues (or is of a more serious nature than can be dealt with by means of the above) then you are strongly advised to seek the help of a specialist Adviser if you have not already done so. This will enable you to discuss the nature of your complaint in confidence and thereby to arrive at an acceptable solution on an informal basis.

5. If the bullying or harassment is serious or has not been resolved by the above means then you or someone acting on your behalf has the right to make a formal written complaint to the authorities. You may call upon an Advisor to support you in making this complaint. In some cases

it may be appropriate to use the complaints procedures. Either route may lead to efforts to arrive at an acceptable solution on an informal basis or to the initiation of the appropriate disciplinary procedures.

Cases of sexual, racial or physical assault

1. If you have been attacked, you are advised to seek help immediately. You may decide to report the attack to the police. Any one of the specialist Advisers will willingly give you support and help you decide what to do. If you go to them further action involving you will not be taken without your express permission. If you decide to go to the police you will not have to go alone, unless you so wish.
2. If you have been sexually assaulted or raped you are advised to seek advice and medical help as soon as possible. Information on advice and help for women and men who have been raped or sexually assaulted is included on the list at the end of this document.
3. For your own protection and the protection of others it is important that any attack should be reported to a member of STAT Council. Even if an attack happened some time ago you are encouraged to report it and/or seek advice from one of the Advisers.

Vexatious Complaints

Complaints of bullying or harassment are treated seriously by STAT. It should therefore be noted that anyone making mischievous or malicious complaints might have disciplinary action taken against them, up to and including dismissal or expulsion.

What to do if you are accused of harassment

Harassment or bullying is an issue that must be taken seriously by all of us. An accusation of bullying or harassment does not signify a judgement that you are guilty and there will need to be a discussion with you in order to establish the true nature of the situation. It is possible that there might be a behaviour-at-work problem, which has arisen because you have not realised the effect of your actions and you may not have intended the effects complained of. The perception of the person complaining of bullying or harassment is, however, an important factor in determining whether or not bullying or harassment has taken place.

In many cases the problem will be solved informally through discussion. You will be asked to reflect on your behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not. A simple discussion between you and the person with a complaint may set matters right.

Details relating to the circumstances that gave rise to the complaint, the existence of witnesses and the nature of the professional relationship between the person complaining and yourself will all be taken into account. If the complaint is taken to a formal stage, STAT will ensure that any formal procedures are fairly and properly followed.

Throughout any informal or formal procedures the principal objective is that of identifying the underlying issues and eliminating the cause of offence as quickly as possible and with minimal recrimination

Some useful Helplines:

- ❖ Bullying at work <http://www.bullyingbusiness.com> - 0845 22 55 787
- ❖ Kidscape 08451 205 204
- ❖ Rape Crisis - 0115 900 3560 - <http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/>
- ❖ Women's Aid - 24-hour help line - 08457 023 468- <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>
- ❖ Victim Support - 0845 30 30 900 - <http://www.victimsupport.org.uk>