



WORCESTER COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Harassment & Bullying Policy

(Applies to all members of the college community, including academic and professional staff)

Introduction

1. Worcester College does not tolerate any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation and expects all members of the College community, its visitors and contractors to treat each other with respect, courtesy and consideration.
2. The College is committed to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all members of the College community are respected.

Purpose and Scope

3. The aims of the College as reflected in this Policy are to:
 - Promote a positive environment in which people are treated fairly and with respect;
 - Make it clear that harassment, bullying and victimisation are unacceptable and that all members of the College have a role to play in creating an environment free from harassment, bullying or victimisation;
 - Provide a framework of support for staff and students who feel they have been subject to harassment; and
 - Provide a mechanism by which complaints can wherever possible be addressed in a timely way.
4. The law requires employers to take reasonable steps to **prevent** sexual harassment of their employees and workers. Worcester College will take action to prevent sexual harassment from occurring and has put in place clear reporting procedures for our staff to make a complaint about sexual harassment.
5. Those in positions of authority within the College, such the Finance & Estates Bursar, and the Dean, have formal responsibilities under this Policy and are expected to familiarise themselves with the Policy and Procedures on appointment.
6. All Fellows of the College, and all senior members of staff have a duty to implement this Policy and to make every effort to ensure that harassment, bullying and victimisation do not occur in the areas for which they are responsible and that, if they do occur, any concerns are investigated promptly and effectively.

7. All members of the College community have the right to expect professional behaviour from others, and a corresponding responsibility to behave professionally towards others. All members of the College community have a personal responsibility for complying with this Policy and Procedure and must comply with and demonstrate active commitment to this Policy by:
 - a. Treating others with dignity and respect;
 - b. Discouraging any form of harassment by making it clear that such behaviour is unacceptable; and
 - c. Supporting any member of the College who feels they have been subject to harassment, bullying or victimisation including supporting them to make a formal complaint if appropriate.
8. This Policy and Procedure is designed to deal with harassment which occurs primarily within the environment of one or more colleges. Incidents of harassment that occur outside the college environment and/or solely within the University environment will normally be dealt with under the appropriate [University Procedure](#). If there is doubt as to whether the College or University procedure applies, you are advised to seek advice from the relevant College officers described in this Procedure, the DSWSS or the University's Harassment Line.
9. This Policy and Procedure should be read alongside other Worcester College policies and procedures, including the College's disciplinary procedures.

Definitions

10. **Harassment** is defined as unwanted conduct meeting one or more of the following criteria:
 - a. a **course of conduct** on at least two occasions that harasses one other person, or a course of conduct that harasses two or more persons at least once each; in this context, harassment includes causing a person alarm or distress where this is not a reasonable course of conduct in the particular circumstances;
 - b. unwanted conduct of a **sexual nature** that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, grading, humiliating, or offensive environment, or;
 - c. unwanted conduct of a **sexual nature** or related to **gender reassignment** or **sex** that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment and because of the alleged victim's **rejection of or submission to** the conduct the alleged perpetrator **treats the alleged victim less favourably** than they would have done had the alleged victim not have rejected or submitted to the conduct;
 - d. unwanted conduct relating to a **protected characteristic** (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or offensive environment. Unwanted conduct in the perception or belief that someone has a protected characteristic or associates with someone with a protect characteristic is included.

11. **Bullying** may be characterised as unwanted behaviour that is either offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, or an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical and emotional harm to someone.
12. When deciding whether harassment or bullying has occurred the intentions of the alleged perpetrator and the perception of the alleged victim, including the extent to which that perception is in all the circumstances reasonable, will be taken into account.
13. **Harassment** and **bullying** can be either face-to-face or through other forms of communication, including but not limited to written communications and communications via any form of digital media. It can be verbal and/or physical. It can be direct to the person concerned or to a third party.
14. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or otherwise intoxicated, is not an excuse for harassment or bullying.
15. The College seeks to protect any member of the College community from **victimisation**, which is a form of misconduct which may itself result in a disciplinary process. The College will regard as victimisation any instance where a person is subjected to detrimental treatment because they have, in good faith:
 - a. made an allegation of harassment, bullying or discrimination, or
 - b. indicated an intention to make such an allegation, or
 - c. assisted or supported another person in bringing forward such an allegation, or
 - d. participated in an investigation of a complaint, or
 - e. participated in any disciplinary hearing arising from an investigation, or
 - f. taken any other steps in connection with this Policy and Procedure, or
 - g. been suspected of having done or having the intent to do any of the actions in a–f above.
16. Freedom of speech and academic freedom are central tenets of College life as set out in our [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#). Exposure to any of the following is unlikely to amount to harassment:
 - a. the content of higher education course materials, including but not limited to books, videos, sound recordings or pictures;
 - b. statements made and views expressed by a person as part of teaching, research or discussions about any subject matter which is connected with the content of a higher education course;

vigorous academic debate when conducted respectfully and without violating the dignity of others or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. However, in some cases otherwise lawful speech can amount to harassment if the time, place, and/or manner of its expression interferes disproportionately with the rights of others. For example, speech which is acceptable as part of a formal debate on a controversial topic might nonetheless constitute harassment if delivered unprompted to a student with a relevant protected characteristic in a social context.
17. Reasonable management/criticism of work or the commencement of internal college procedures are not within themselves a form of bullying or harassment.

18. Harassment and bullying can take a variety of forms. **Appendix A** sets out a non-exhaustive list of examples of such behaviours.

Support

19. Members of the College community who feel that they have been subjected to harassment, bullying or victimisation or have witnessed such behaviour or who are the subject of an allegation of such behaviour can find welfare support and/or support and advice on the options available to them from a variety of different sources. **Appendix B** sets out a list of resources and the various sources of support available.

Application of the Policy

Reporting:

20. **Harassment, bullying and victimisation** are serious forms of misconduct. Any member of the College community who feels they have been subject to harassment, bullying or victimisation or who have witnessed such behaviour can make a **report**. For reports relating to the behaviour of:
- a **student** of the College: report to the **Dean**
 - a **member of College staff**: report to the **HR Manager**
 - a **College Fellow**: report to the **Provost**
 - a **guest** of a student of the College: report to the **Dean** (in the first instance)
 - a **third party**: report to a **Senior Officer/Manager**
 - an **alumnus**: report to the **Provost**

If the report relates to one of the above, report to the **Vice-Provost** or use the College's **Whistleblowing Service** in the first instance.

21. If you have been sexually harassed or you have witnessed sexual harassment, we encourage you to tell Human Resources so that the matter can be dealt with swiftly under the College's Disciplinary Policy.
22. In respect of the implementation and execution of these policies, the College remains mindful of subsisting legal obligations in respect of the welfare of its members and staff alike.
23. When a criminal offence may have been committed, the relevant harassment procedure may not be appropriate. These cases will include, but not be limited to, serious assault or threat of serious assault. Student and staff members can seek advice from the College's Harassment Advisors, HR and/or the Dean and/or approach the Police directly. [Further guidance](#) on dealing with cases of sexual assault or sexual violence is available from the University.

University Procedures:

24. Incidents of harassment that occur within the University environment will normally be dealt with under the appropriate [University policies and procedures](#). This includes alleged harassment by students of a college other than Worcester, in which case a report can be made to the Proctors. Advice and support on how to make a report to the Proctors can be provided by the Dean and/or College Harassment Advisors. For

matters relating to a member of University staff who is not linked to the College please consult the University Harassment Policy/Procedure.

College Procedures:

25. Where the responsible officer or manager judges a report to raise sufficient grounds for investigation, the College will investigate and if necessary, take action. This will take place under the **appropriate College procedure**. For reports relating to the behaviour of:
 - a. a **student** of the College: [Student Disciplinary Procedure](#) (intranet);
 - b. a **member of College staff**: [Disciplinary Procedure](#) (intranet);
 - c. a **College Fellow**: College By-law 7 and Statute XV;
 - d. a **third party**: contact the Complaints Officer.
26. The College will be guided, wherever possible, by the wishes of those who have been subjected to alleged harassment in determining whether or not to begin formal procedures and in general will usually only investigate if they have received a report. However, the College reserves the right to investigate in the absence of a report from the person who has been subject to alleged harassment or where they do not wish any action to be taken in certain circumstances (for example, where the alleged behaviour indicates a risk to others in the College community) and may retain a record of any formal or informal complaints.

Informal Resolution:

27. Where appropriate and where the alleged victim wishes, reports of harassment, bullying or victimisation may be resolved informally without recourse to formal investigation or bullying or other procedures.

Precautionary Measures:

28. Where necessary, the College may also implement precautionary measures to ensure the safety of those involved or others on the College site. These may include (but are not limited to) precautionary measures under the Safeguarding Policy, the Student Disciplinary Procedure or suspension or action short of suspension under the Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

Complaints:

29. A member of the College community who is dissatisfied with the College's actions regarding a report of alleged harassment, bullying or victimisation may:
 - a. make a complaint under the [Student Complaints Procedure](#), if the person who is dissatisfied is a student of the College; or
 - b. raise a grievance under the Grievance Procedure (intranet), if the person who is dissatisfied is a member of College staff; or under the College Statutes, if the person who is dissatisfied is a Fellow of the College.
30. No action will be taken against someone making a report of harassment, bullying or victimisation which proves to be unfounded if the report is judged to have been made in good faith. However, if someone is deemed to have known or to have reasonably been expected to know that a report was unfounded, the allegation of harassment, bullying or victimisation may be judged to be vexatious or malicious, and disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with the relevant procedure.

Confidentiality:

31. All parties involved in a complaint (including any witnesses who may be interviewed as part of any investigation, or other members of the College community, and/or trade union representatives supporting any of the parties) should maintain the confidentiality of the process. Those involved in advising complainants should, where possible, seek the consent of the individual for the onward disclosure of relevant information to those with a clear need to know. Where such consent is not forthcoming, the person entrusted with the information should make it clear that, in exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to disclose the information, taking account of the duty of care which may be owed to the individual and/or others.

Responsibilities

32. Governing Body has overall responsibility for this Policy and for ensuring that the College takes all reasonable steps to promote and maintain an environment where neither harassment, bullying nor victimisation is tolerated.
33. Responsibility for the operation and application of this Policy is delegated to the **Dean** in respect of the conduct of student members; to the **Provost** in respect of the conduct of Fellows of the College; and to the **HR Manager** in respect of the conduct of employees of the College.
34. **People and Culture Committee** is responsible for:
 - a. overseeing the actions in respect of this Policy by delegated persons, and
 - b. receiving assurance and reporting on the application and effectiveness of this Policy, and reporting to Governing Body on this Policy;
 - c. reviewing this policy regularly.
35. All members and employees of College are responsible for familiarising themselves with and adhering to this Policy.

APPENDIX A: Behaviours

This Appendix provides examples of behaviour which are not likely to amount to harassment and bullying as well as examples that may amount to harassment or bullying under this policy.

The following are key points to note:

- The examples of behaviour provided are illustrative only and this list is non-exhaustive.
- Those referring to this list should refer specifically to the policy in the first instance when considering if a matter falls within this policy. The policy sets out the those who the policy applies to, the different means by which the behaviour can take place and other factors that will be taken into account such as the intention of the alleged perpetrator and the perception (and the reasonableness of that perception) of the alleged victim.
- Help, support and guidance can be sought from a variety of sources to assist in determining if a matter falls within the Policy (see **Appendix B**) for further information.

Examples of behaviour that would not amount to harassment or bullying:

The following are unlikely to fall within this policy:

- Receiving constructive and reasonable criticism from your line manager.
- Reasonable criticism by a tutor (or another student in a tutorial context) of a student's work.
- The commencement of an internal college procedure e.g. student or staff disciplinary.

Examples of behaviour that may amount to harassment:

Repeated behaviour:

- Repeatedly making unwanted calls, messages, or emails.
- Sending a threatening message to more than one person.
- Repeatedly sending someone threats of violence or harm.
- Following or watching someone repeatedly, in person or online.
- Repeatedly sending graphic content, such as violent or hateful images, to someone.

Related to protected characteristics:

- Jokes or derogatory comments about someone's disability.
- Verbal and physical threats, or intimidating behaviour linked, for example, to gender reassignment, sex or sexual orientation.
- Sending memes mocking another person's religion to that person.
- Repeatedly questioning an individual's qualifications or right to be on a course or in a position at work based on aspects of their background, such as their gender, ethnic or racial identity.
- Consistently excluding someone from group work due to perceived religious, cultural, or gender differences.

Sexual:

- Standing unnecessarily close to someone or staring at them in a way that feels uncomfortable or intimidating.
- Sending unwanted sexual messages that are humiliating, disrespectful or aggressive.
- Displaying or sharing pornographic or sexual images, or other sexual content.
- Making repeated sexual comments about someone's body or appearance.
- Unwanted physical contact, for example, placing a hand on someone's thigh, lower back, or shoulder.

Less favourable treatment:

- Less favourable treatment could include, for example, being excluded, criticised or ignored e.g: excluding someone from normal work or study related conversations after they have previously rejected an unwanted sexual advance.

Examples of behaviour that may amount to bullying:

- Constantly putting someone down and giving them unfair criticism in a work or study setting.
- Excluding someone from events or study groups.
- Putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments or photos on social media.
- Mocking someone because of their socio-economic background.

APPENDIX B: Support

The following provides examples of sources of support and advice available to members of the College community. Support and advice are available to:

- Those who feel they have been subjected to harassment, bullying or victimisation;
- Those who have witnessed harassment, bullying or victimisation;
- Those who are the subject of an allegation of harassment, bullying or victimisation

Support is available to:

- Provide support and advice on the options available;
- Provide welfare support

Advice & Support for Students

If you feel you have experienced harassment, bullying or victimisation there are a number of people who are available to help and assist you by clarifying the options open to you assisting you throughout the resolution of your concerns, whether formally or informally:

College Tutors, College Welfare Advisors, Harassment Advisors and Dean

- For someone who can listen to concerns, signpost formal or informal routes to resolution and signpost to welfare support contact:

College Tutor or Advisor

[College Dean: Dr Paul Azzopardi](#)

[Head of Student Welfare: Georgina Heywood](#)

[Academic Administrator: Phillipa Tarver](#)

JCR and MCR Welfare Officers

- For welfare support as well as referrals to the University or external sources of welfare advice and support contact:

[Head of Student Welfare: Georgina Heywood](#)

- For advice on how to make a formal complaint under the College's Procedure or under the University Procedure (if the person complained about is from another college) contact:

[College Dean: Dr Paul Azzopardi](#)

[Head of Student Welfare: Georgina Heywood](#)

[Academic Administrator: Phillipa Tarver](#)

Peer Support

- In addition to the above there are options for informal discussion with the following:

[Peer Support](#)

This link to the University Website provides information on how peer support at Oxford works and how you can contact and find different peer supports be that college, departmental, divisional as well as coffee ambassadors, peers of colour, rainbow peers, peers of faith and disability diversity peers.

[Oxford SU Student Advice Service](#)

Advice and information service exclusively available to Oxford Students.

University Harassment Advisors Network

- [Harassment Advisor Network | Equality and Diversity Unit](#)

Oxford University Counselling Service

- [Oxford University Counselling Service](#)

University Sexual Harassment Advice & Support Service

- [Oxford University Sexual Harassment & Violence Support Service](#)

A safe space to be heard, with advisors offering free support and advice to any current student impacted by sexual harassment or violence.

- [Oxford University ISVA Service](#)

Independent of a student's college or department. Can support as an advocate if reporting sexual violence to their college, the Proctors Office or police. Information on the criminal justice process as well as support.

External Resources

- [Further Support | University of Oxford](#)

A number of organisations locally and nationally providing specialist support to individuals affected by sexual harassment.

Advice & Support for Staff:

Professional Staff who feel they have been harassed, bullied or victimised can raise this/seek advice from:

- Line Manager: see organisation chart
- HR Manager: Kelly Haddrell
- Provost (if conflict in reporting to above): David Isaac
- [Staff Harassment Advisers](#)
- [Confidential Sexual Harassment Whistleblowing Service: Health Assured](#)

Academic Staff who feel they have been harassed, bullied or victimised can raise this/seek advice from:

- Senior Tutor: Helen Parish
- HR Manager: Kelly Haddrell
- Provost (if conflict in reporting to above): David Isaac
- [Staff Harassment Advisers](#)
- [Confidential Sexual Harassment Whistleblowing Service: Health Assured](#)

University Harassment Advisors Network

- [Harassment Advisor Network | Equality and Diversity Unit](#)

A network for staff who feel they have been harassed or bullied. Use this to locate your local advisor.

External Resources

- [Further Support | University of Oxford](#)

A number of organisations locally and nationally providing specialist support to individuals affected by sexual harassment.

Information and training on bystander intervention and how to support others safely. No formal steps are needed to speak with someone. [Responsible Bystander | Equality and Diversity Unit](#)

Accused of harassment/bullying/victimisation:

The above resources are all available as well for those accused of harassment, bullying or victimisation.

See also:

- [University Reported Student Support](#)

A confidential specialist support service for students who are subject to an allegation of harassment or sexual misconduct.

NOTE: if both the reporter and the subject of a report both seek welfare support and advise the Welfare Team/HR Manager will make sure that an advisor is available for both people and that confidentiality is preserved.

Change log

Version	Amendments	Status	Version Control	Date
3	Updated to bring into line with the Worker Protection Act 2023.	Approved	HR Manager	18/03/2025
4	Revision of definitions, reversion to disciplinary policies, etc in line with revised University Statute and OfS guidance	Approved by GPC	HR Manager & SGO	31/07/2025

Harassment Policy			
Version #	Date	Responsibility	Version detail
1.0	11/2021	HR Department	Approved
2.0	06/2023	HR Department	Approved
3.0	01/2025	HR Department	Approved
4.0	07/2025	HR & SGO	Approved