

Dignity at Work and Study Guidance Note

What to do if you are accused of bullying - Students

I have been accused of bullying – what do I do?

General

If someone approaches you informally about your behaviour, do not dismiss the complaint out of hand because you were only joking or think the complainant is being too sensitive. Remember that different people find different things acceptable. Everyone has the right to decide what behaviour is acceptable to them and to have their feelings respected by others. You may have offended someone without intending to. If that is the case, the person concerned may be content with an explanation and an apology from you and an assurance that you will be careful in future not to behave in a way that you now know may cause offence. Provided that you do not repeat the behaviour that has caused offence, that may well be the end of the matter.

If someone has contacted you in relation to your behaviour, you should consider whether undertaking some training may be beneficial to help you understand what went wrong. For more information on possible training that you could access, please reach out to the Student Support Team.

The Process

If a formal complaint is made about your behaviour, this will be investigated by the University and this may bring disciplinary proceedings, if appropriate. The Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Non-Academic) will be followed and you will have the rights set out in that procedure. You will have the right to be informed of the allegations against you, to put across your side of the story and to be accompanied to meetings by one person of your choice.

The University will treat complaints of bullying and harassment sensitively and maintain confidentiality to the maximum extent possible. Investigation of allegations and the future management of risk, if complaints are upheld, will normally require limited disclosure on a "need to know" basis. For example, some details may have to be given to potential witnesses but this will be limited as far as possible, while ensuring a fair and sufficiently thorough investigation. The importance of confidentiality will be emphasised to witnesses.

Wherever possible, the University will try to ensure that you and the complainant are not required to interact formally while the complaint is under investigation.

If the complaint against you is upheld, on a balance of probabilities, a disciplinary penalty may be imposed up to and including expulsion, having regard to the seriousness of the offence and all relevant circumstances.

You must not victimise a person who has made a complaint in good faith against you or anyone who has supported them in making the complaint or given evidence in relation to such a complaint. Disciplinary action will be taken against you if we have a good reason to think that you may have victimised the complainant or someone else.

Some types of bullying or harassment may constitute unlawful discrimination and allegations may give rise to the possibility of other civil claims or criminal proceedings against you, which would proceed independently of the organisation's disciplinary proceedings. You could be personally liable to pay compensation to the complainant if a successful claim was brought against you. Criminal proceedings could lead to conviction and criminal penalties.