

## Royal Holloway, University of London

### Code of Practice on Personal Harassment for Students

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#### Introduction

1. Royal Holloway, University of London (the College) is committed to upholding the dignity of the individual. Personal harassment can seriously harm working, learning and social conditions at the College. Harassment will be regarded seriously and could be grounds for disciplinary action, which may include termination of registration as a student.
2. Harassment can be a source of great stress to an individual. It may be so serious and unrelenting that the person who is being, or has been, harassed feels it necessary to change their course of study, their accommodation or their employment.
3. This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with:
  - The Student Disciplinary Regulations
  - The Student complaints Procedure
4. All members of the College are responsible for helping to create an environment that is free from hostility, for helping to ensure that individuals do not suffer any form of harassment, and for helping and supporting them in any legitimate complaint. The College promotes good relations among students, both in pursuit of its Equal Opportunities Policy and, where relevant, in compliance with current legislation. The College prohibits abusive behaviour by its students towards members of its staff, and by members of its staff towards students. College expects visitors to campus to abide by its harassment policy and those responsible for their presence on campus to take reasonable steps to ensure they do so.

#### What is harassment?

5. Harassment is behaviour that a particular individual or group of individuals finds disturbing. Harassment can take many forms. For an action to constitute harassment it does not necessarily require that the action is deliberately intended to cause offence. If the particular recipient perceives the conduct as offensive of this perception is broadly reasonable, and the perpetrator is likely to be aware of this or has been made aware, the conduct may constitute harassment. Harassment is behaviour that degrades, patronises, humiliates, intimidates or threatens a recipient. It may undermine a person's dignity, health and self-confidence. Harassment is normally characterised by more than one incident of unacceptable behaviour, but one incident may constitute harassment is sufficiently serious. Repeated similar behaviour towards different people may also constitute harassment.
6. People can be subject to harassment on a wide variety of grounds including (but not limited to):
  - Race, ethnic origin, nationality or skin colour;
  - Sex or sexual orientation;
  - Religious or political convictions;
  - Disabilities, sensory impairments or learning difficulties;
  - Age;
  - Real or suspected infection with AIDS/HIV.Harassment can also result from inappropriate attempts to initiate or sustain a personal or sexual relationship: or from the use of inappropriate methods to resolve a perceived grievance or to manage a formal relationship. Someone can also be subject to ongoing victimisation because they have complained about previous harassment.

This list is not exhaustive. Everyone runs the risk of being harassed.

#### Forms of harassment

7. Harassment may also take many forms. It can range from violence and bullying, to jokes and offensive language. Some forms of harassment are criminal offences. Whatever the form of harassment, it will be behaviour that is unwelcome.
8. Harassment includes initiating or being accessory to:
  - Unwanted physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault

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- Jokes, gossip, letters or other comments, either oral, written or posted in electronic form on social media etc., which could reasonably be regarded as offensive or likely to cause distress;
- Displays of pictures, photographs, graffiti or other visual material which could reasonably be regarded as offensive or likely to cause distress, including displays on computer screens and obscene gestures;
- Isolation or non-cooperation at work, study or in classes, inappropriate exclusion of a person in general social activities;
- Coercion, ranging from pressure for sexual favours to pressure to participate in political/ religious groups, or unreasonable pressure to modify personal behaviour;
- Unwanted commentary on personal behaviour;
- Intrusion by pestering, spying, following, the sending of repeated unwanted phone-calls, emails, text or other communication;
- Bullying, e.g. criticising one person for a common failing, criticising in a public and humiliating way or seek to manage behaviour through threat or intimidation rather than by proper procedures.

### Procedure to be followed in cases of harassment by College students

9. College would wish that no College member should be deterred from asking for help because of embarrassment or fear that the process will be taken out of their hands or made public. College will respect the sensitivity of the situation, do everything reasonable to ensure confidentiality, and will seek to give the reporting person as much control as possible over whether to carry the case further. We aim to help those subjected to harassment to feel that it is not their fault and that they have a right to stop it recurring.
10. Where the issue involves students as both the recipient and the alleged perpetrator of the harassment, the Support and Advisory Services of the Registry are the College section with the expertise and authority to deal with the issue.
11. Students concerned about harassment may in the first instance speak to friends, members of their department, their personal advisor, student counsellors, Wardens, other College support workers or Students' Union officers. If possible the recipient may wish to tell the alleged perpetrator that their behaviour is causing offence and request that they desist – although failure of the recipient to do this does not imply consent to the harassment or prevent later action. It is helpful if notes are kept of relevant incidents details and possible witnesses, and offending messages, texts etc. saved. The person affected may approach the Support and Advisory Services at any time for help with the issue. At this informal stage the complainant is welcome to be accompanied by a friend or even to request that an individual from one of the areas above makes an initial contact on their behalf, without revealing their identity if they so wish.

#### Step One

12. In the first instance, the Support and Advisory Services' aim will be to resolve the situation by reconciliatory intervention if appropriate. This may include discussion with the person affected, suggestions for addressing the issue without College intervention and discussion on how to involve other agencies. The college will, if this seems likely to be helpful, also enter into discussion with the student(s) alleged to be causing the offence in the hope of resolving the situation by exploration of the problem and explanation of the College's rules concerning harassment. The College will not explicitly identify the complainant in this process unless this is agreed and will not be obliged to take this step if it seems likely to compromise the disciplinary action in a case of severe harassment.
13. No action taken as part of this advisory stage shall constitute disciplinary action. If the matter is discussed with the alleged perpetrators and they are offered advice, these shall not constitute disciplinary warnings. No facts uncovered during such discussion shall be considered to have proven against a student until they are later presented and properly heard in a formal disciplinary process.

#### Step Two

14. If this stage does not prove effective, or if the matter is too serious to be amendable to an advisory process, consideration can be given to treating the matter as a disciplinary offence, under the Student Disciplinary

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Regulations. In deciding whether to take up an allegation of harassment under these proceedings, the Student Disciplinary Officer will consider to what extent the described harassment:

- Falls within the proper jurisdiction of the College
  - Bears on the goals the College seeks to achieve in its equality policies
  - Is otherwise appropriate for College disciplinary intervention.
15. If it is decided to treat the matter as a disciplinary offence, the Student Disciplinary Regulations will thereafter be followed in all particulars.
  16. If a member of staff consider they are being harassed by a student, a broadly similar process should be followed; the employing Department or Faculty and / or the Personnel Office and / or the College Secretary's Office may be the first point of report; however the issue should then be referred to the Support and Advisory Services to be addressed as a student disciplinary issue.
  17. If a student considered they are being harassed by a member of College staff, the advice described in section 11 is still applicable. However thereafter the student will be advised on how the issues can be addressed through the appropriate Departments of the College responsible for that member of staff.
  18. If a student considers they are being harassed by a visitor to campus, the advice described in section 11 is applicable, but thereafter further action will depend on the precise situation.

### Malicious complaints

19. If complaints of harassment appear to have been made maliciously, procedures may be invoked against the malicious complainant.

### Visitors and occasional guests

20. This Code of Practice was prepared with students' of the College in mind, but similar standards of behaviour are expected to be shown towards, and to be displayed by, all visitors to the College and contractors working at the College. College also expects College students elsewhere on College business or representing the College in other settings to abide by these standards of behaviour.

## Appendix to the Code of Practice on personal Harassment

### Advisers

The following members of staff have indicated they will be willing to offer first stage support and informal advice to students concerned about the issue of harassment.

- Student Support and Advisory Workers (in particular Senior Student Wellbeing Officer)
- College Medical Officer (Health Centre)
- Students' Union Co-President (Welfare and Diversity)

The Student Counselling Service and the Support and Advisory Services can also advice on external agencies that will offer confidential advice on cases of rape of sexual assault.

**March 2008**

(Updated format July 2014)