DIGNITY AT WORK

Final Project Report

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Contents

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Background and Introduction

1. Research into bullying and harassment issues has a relatively recent history in the UK. Studies have tended to focus on bullying in schools, and to emphasise the impact on children rather than adults. However, more recent work, initially led by researchers from Scandinavia and the USA, has highlighted the impact of workplace bullying and the need for organisations to take a more proactive stance in dealing with it.

2. Higher education has not been at the forefront of research into bullying and harassment within its own sector, perhaps because of a tendency to assume that the flexible, ostensibly democratic nature of higher education militates against bullying. This is belied by research undertaken by Petra Boynton, which demonstrates that many academic staff have suffered both physical and psychological abuse in the course of their work.[1] The research found that although 45% of incidents took place when targets were alone, a significant proportion of bullying happened in meetings (18%) and communal areas (22%), leading to cultures in which those experiencing bullying felt isolated and unsupported.

3. Helge Hoel conducted a survey of 5000 UNISON members in 1997,[2] which included higher education support staff. He found that two-thirds of members had either witnessed or experienced bullying, and that three-quarters of those being bullied had reported some damage to their health. The most common psychological problems were stress, depression and reduced self-confidence.

4. These findings were supported by research undertaken for the Higher Education Funding Councils for England (HEFCE), Wales (HEFCW) and Scotland (SHEFC). According to the May 2005 report *Non-disclosure and hidden discrimination in higher education*:[3]

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[1] Cited by Lipsett, A. (2005) Bullying rife across campus. *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 16 September.

[2] UNISON (1997) *UNISON Members' Experience of Bullying at Work*. London: UNISON.

[3] www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/divers/equal.asp

- seventeen per cent of respondents had personally experienced some form of harassment at work in the previous 12 months;

- the most common form of harassment involved unwelcome comments and verbal assault, which were most likely to come from senior managers;

- other colleagues were the most usual source of abusive e-mails and offensive jokes;

- reporting levels were low – of those who had experienced unwelcome comments, abusive e-mails/memos, verbal or physical assault, only 33% had reported the harassment;

- reporting levels were even lower for other types of harassment such as offensive jokes and unwelcome sexual advances;

- the primary reasons given for not reporting incidents were firstly, a fear that it would make matters worse, and secondly, a belief that any complaint would not be taken seriously.

5. The higher education sector is not alone in experiencing serious issues in relation to bullying and harassment. In *The Workplace Bullying – 2005 Survey of HR Professionals*,[4] 14% of respondents said that, over the past year, there had been an increase in the number of incidents of bullying in their organisation, compared with 16% who believed that the number of incidents had reduced; 32% said it had remained the same and nearly 37% did not know.

6. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents had a specific bullying and harassment policy, while 36% relied on their normal grievance procedures. The majority of respondents believed that the introduction of a formal policy had little impact on the number of cases that came forward.

7. Although more than half (55%) believed their procedures enabled their organisation to resolve incidents satisfactorily, 23% said they did not. The primary reasons for failing to address the issues effectively were identified as management's unwillingness to acknowledge a problem, and prevailing management style (the culture of the organisation).

8. There was a wide range of timescales in relation to resolving cases. Whereas 40% of respondents said the average time taken to resolve an issue was between 1 and 3 months, 8% said they took more than a year. Training on dealing with bullying and harassment was available

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[4] **www.digitalopinion.co.uk/bullying-hrmanagers.html**

in 96% of organisations. However, a much smaller number (41%) provided training for the targets of bullying.

9.   Respondents were divided over how significant the issue was. Although 46% said that workplace bullying had become a higher priority for them since last year, just over 54% said it had not.

10.   The University of Portsmouth, working in partnership with the public service union Amicus, undertook a major research project in 2006.[5] The project reported on the prevalence of pressured and target-driven environments, and the ways in which competition had influenced the culture of organisations. This could, if unchecked, lead to a situation in which results were achieved whatever the cost, and people became casualties of an outcome-driven environment (a 'command-and-control culture').

11.   A study undertaken by the Chartered Management Institute in 2005[6] suggested that problems with bullying and harassment were becoming more widespread and organisations were failing to address the issues. In a survey of 500 people, 60% of respondents felt workplace bullying had become increasingly common, and 36% believed their organisation was ineffective in tackling bullying behaviour.

[5] www.port.ac.uk/research/workplacebullying/filetodownload,52783,en.pdf
[6] www.managers.org.uk/client_files/user_files/Woodman_31/Research%20files/Bullying_at_work_Sept05.pdf

Business Case

12. There are many reasons why organisations should consider taking a strategic approach to dignity-at-work initiatives and to tackling bullying and harassment. The benefits can be wide-ranging and long-lasting, as well as providing short-term solutions.

13. The Health and Safety Executive estimates that bullying accounts for up to 50% of stress-related workplace illnesses, which means that every year bullying costs UK employers 80 million lost working days and up to £2 billion in lost revenue. This is in addition to the human cost to the targets, and the risk to employers that employees will take legal action resulting in adverse judgements, heavy costs and damages, and negative publicity.

14. Investing in the wellbeing of employees makes good business sense, not only in terms of improving performance, raising morale and reducing stress, but also in making the organisation a more attractive place to work and study, aiding retention and improving overall performance.

15. Allowing a culture of bullying and harassment to develop unchecked can have the following outcomes:

    • damage to morale;
    • negative impact on individuals, teams and the whole organisation (which may include people not directly affected);
    • poor performance/low productivity;
    • loss of respect for management;
    • increased absence and ill health (particularly stress related);
    • increase in number of resignations;
    • poor customer service;
    • conflict with trades unions;
    • damage to institution's reputation;
    • potential legal claims.

16. Treating dignity at work as a serious issue is likely to have the following benefits:

- higher morale, which has a discernible impact on productivity and performance;
- reduced levels of absence;
- reduced turnover and better staff-retention rates;
- improved customer service;
- better industrial relations;
- more effective use of management time.

Cultural Change

17.   Eliminating bullying and harassment will usually require a cultural shift within an organisation. Figure 1 illustrates the different stages an institution may go through before bullying and harassment cultures are eliminated.

18.   Initially, *ad hoc* measures are introduced, which are subsequently bolstered to comply with legislation and minimise financial risk. Then dignity-at-work initiatives are implemented but are not effectively evaluated; and finally dignity at work becomes a core value within the organisation.

Stage 1 – ad hoc	Stage 2 – Human Resources	Stage 3 – Culture Change	Stage 4 – Integrated Core Values
Focus is on dealing with particular incidents identified by individuals. Primary motivation is to demonstrate that bullying and harassment are not serious issues for the institution. Dignity at work is regarded as a relatively marginal issue within the institution.	Issues are identified and addressed more systematically. Initiatives are developed and the focus broadens. Usually led by HR, with support of senior management. Focus is on retention and financial savings, driven by legislative compliance.	Recognition that innovative policies are effective only in a supportive workplace and study culture. Focus shifts and broadens to embrace concerns of the institution as a whole Aim is to win support from staff at all levels, raise morale and promote staff development.	Awareness of how workplace culture and communication are related to the institution's strategic goals leads to focus on the total working environment and wider community. Institution adopts dignity at work as a core value and develops systems, processes and procedures that reinforce this message at every opportunity.

Figure 1: Cultural change model

19. A more effective model for the development of a comprehensive approach to dignity at work/study on campus for all members of the institution is Bristol University's Positive Working Environment (PWE) initiative[7], which is listed as one of the University's resource strategies in the *University Plan 2006–2009*.[8]

'*Positive Work Environment
Continued action to establish a positive work environment for all staff, including equal opportunities and diversity, dignity at work, working hours, fitness to work, communication, participation and partnership and improvements in the physical and social environment.*'

20. The initiative was informed by a survey of all 5500 staff working at the University that was undertaken in 2003.

[7]. **www.bris.ac.uk/pwe**
[8]. **www.bris.ac.uk/planning/uniplan/up2006.doc**

University of Bristol – Case Study

Details of provision	• Integral part of the University's strategic development – Bristol regards dealing with dignity-at-work issues as fundamental to its values and strategic plan • Initiatives are under one umbrella, administered by one senior manager within the personnel department with links to all other sections of the University • High profile and supported by senior management – PWE agenda recognised as 'the most important thing that the University is doing' by Vice-Chancellor and Director of Personnel • Initiative includes Dignity at Work and Study Advisers and a mediation service • Appropriate resource allocation
Key features	• High-profile, well publicised initiative • PWE week of activities highlighting available services, with special events etc. • Range of training and support available, including management development • Programme (includes bullying and harassment, stress and diversity training) • Drama workshops available for staff (run internally so costs controlled) • Links with other key concepts such as stress and effective leadership • Specific website promoting range of PWE activities and services • Annual key performance indicators of staff satisfaction are built into faculty/division quality assessment processes • Results available to all staff in a PWE annual report

Research Findings

21. This report is based on a baseline survey that was sent to all higher education institutions (HEIs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; case study interviews with 22 HEIs that identified themselves as having good practice in tackling bullying and harassment; and focus group interviews with harassment advisers, trades union representatives and HR personnel. The research was undertaken from March to October 2006.

22. There was a 44% completion rate for the survey, and an additional 11 HEIs agreed to take part in case study interviews and/or focus groups.

23. Where problems or difficult issues are raised, the institution concerned is not identified.

24. The findings are presented as General Issues that arose from the research, including some aspects of the higher education environment that facilitate or militate against effective handling of bullying and harassment issues; and Initiatives, such as policy development, support mechanisms and communication, that are utilised to greater or lesser effect in institutions.

General Issues

Reporting Levels

25. A small number of institutions have made strenuous efforts to develop an open culture in which staff are encouraged to report incidents of bullying and harassment so that they can be dealt with appropriately and promptly. These institutions tend to have a good policy, strong leadership and a range of support mechanisms for dealing with complaints at both informal and formal levels. They also tend to prioritise diversity issues in general, and encourage a democratic, participatory style of decision making that enables staff to feel valued and to have their views heard.
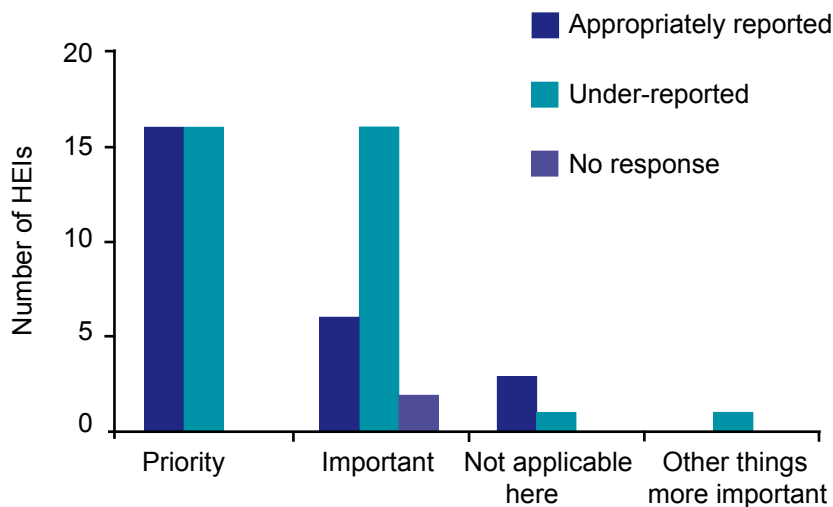
Figure 2: How important are bullying and harrassment in your HEI, and are they reported?

Formal Policies

26. Nearly every HEI (93%) that responded to the baseline survey has a specific policy on dignity at work/bullying and harassment; 3.5% include bullying and harassment in their grievance procedure; and 53% have a staff code of conduct as well as, or instead of; a bullying and harassment policy. However, having a specific policy does not always mean that incidents of bullying and harassment are reported – over half (56%) of respondents in HEIs with a specific policy believed that cases of bullying and harassment were under-reported.

Causes of Bullying and Harassment Complaints

27. While the majority of respondents agreed that their institution did not necessarily have a general issue with bullying and harassment, there were 'pockets in which inappropriate behaviour was part of the culture'. The baseline survey found that the most common source of complaints was colleagues (62%) and line managers (61%). The interviews found that, even where managers were not themselves responsible for bullying and harassment, they had a role to play in ensuring they did not happen within their area of responsibility. At the extremes, 'macho' management was identified as something that could easily develop into, or be perceived as, bullying, while respondents were also critical of *laissez faire* management styles that allowed incidents that should have been dealt with to pass

unchallenged. Some respondents felt that more training was the solution, particularly for senior and line managers; others believed the culture of the organisation was not conducive to making the aspirations of its policy a reality. In particular, departmental cultures that ignored or condoned incidents of bullying and harassment were identified in a few institutions. Where senior managers failed to address these issues, they gave the impression that they did not take them seriously and that the policy itself was toothless.

28. Many of the cases of bullying that had been reported to respondents were not intentional. They involved managers who were not skilled in managing teams, and had little awareness of how their **behaviour** was interpreted. In the majority of cases there was no intent to cause distress – rather a lack of awareness about how behaviour might be perceived. Inappropriate behaviour by managers was the most frequently cited cause for complaint.

29. Some elements of the structure of certain HEIs caused concern for respondents. Several respondents mentioned the difficulties created by rotating heads of department. In some institutions the departmental head was selected from all senior staff, and held the post for a fixed period (usually 3 years). One problem with this arrangement was that it used inappropriate selection criteria (academic status rather than leadership capability), and meant that basic management training had to undertaken every 3 years. It also created a difficult and complex power relationship between staff who were currently in a leadership position and those who either had been, or would be in the future. Most participants in the research agreed that the complexity of higher education management was such that a more permanent arrangement was desirable, which would enable more effective departmental management.

30. The pressures created by the research assessment exercise (RAE), and the perceived potential for high-performing researchers to stipulate their own terms and conditions, were also mentioned. Some respondents felt the RAE had created a super-class of academic from whom any amount of inappropriate behaviour would be tolerated because of their value to the organisation. The RAE was also recognised as a pressure in its own right, leading to high levels of stress and anxiety among researchers.

Senior-level Support

30. Respondents were very clear that senior-level support was probably the most vital element in the successful delivery of initiatives. Many of the institutions that identified themselves as implementers of good practice were keen to use the example set by their institutional head as a key feature in their success in promoting dignity at work. Some of the most proactive institutions were from the post-92 university sector, where resources were often more limited, but diversity and equal opportunities issues were seen as priorities by the senior management team.

32. Through a repositioning of the HR function, the Director and HR Director of Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication demonstrated how equality and diversity and dignity at work can be mainstreamed within a (small) HEI. The HR Department's resources were increased to enable it to deal with both strategic and operational issues, including dignity at work, and compulsory training was introduced. Governors of the College were involved in a variety of activities, including chairing the Diversity Committee, and external expertise was bought in when required, for example to conduct mediation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

33. Some respondents were able to highlight areas of concern by using their monitoring data, and could therefore target additional resources, such as training, to these problem areas. Analyses of cases ranged from basic statistical, through the disaggregation of figures by (for example) gender, race and disability. The best practice institutions monitored both quantitative and qualitative data across a range of indicators.

34. Exit interviews were considered one of the most effective ways of ascertaining if the institution had unresolved issues with bullying and harassment. Respondents confirmed that many staff leave the organisation rather than invoking institutional proceedings. There was, however, some concern about the current tendency to outsource activities such as the administration of exit interviews, as this means it is more difficult to use the information obtained for monitoring purposes.

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication – Case Study

Details of provision	• Appropriate resource allocation • Leading by example (compulsory training for senior people, etc.) • Flexibility according to circumstances – senior-level appointment initially to promote diversity initiatives; structure revised when embedded in culture • Compulsory diversity training – follow-up letter from Director sent to non-attendees • Use of a variety of techniques, including mediation, according to situation
Key features	• Diversity Committee chaired by Board member • Compulsory diversity training for all staff and governors • Buying in external expertise where required (informed by staff opinion) • Undertaking joint initiatives with other colleges to maximise resource usage

35.   Staff surveys were found to be extremely useful in identifying any potential and actual issues in relation to dignity at work. They were used by some institutions as evidence that their approach to bullying and harassment was effective, and were also considered important in allowing all staff to feel involved and consulted about the institution's operational and strategic focus. Institutions also found them useful for identifying areas for development – one institution identified the need for better communication of the policy, as well as the need to identify potential perpetrators of bullying and harassment through its Management Development Programme.

Conducting Investigations

36.   This research project did not specifically look at investigations, but issues relating to investigations were mentioned in both focus groups and case studies. The time taken to investigate complaints

was a cause of concern for several respondents, while others were concerned that some staff who came forward with complaints did not always receive sympathetic treatment. There was a general consensus that some staff within most institutions still asked complainants if they were being over-sensitive or making a fuss about nothing, creating a view in the minds of staff that complaints would not be investigated appropriately (or, in some cases, at all).

37. Other things caused dissatisfaction but were mentioned less frequently. For example, some respondents:

   •   believed there was no satisfactory system in place;
   •   felt that complaining made the situation worse;
   •   were told to be quiet;
   •   felt that complaints were not managed sensitively.

38. The way in which investigations were conducted was considered a key element in the success of a dignity-at-work strategy. Respondents reported that the success of most bullying and harassment policies turned on the delivery of good, fair and transparent procedures for conducting investigations into complaints. Good practice institutions developed separate procedures for investigations and paid due regard to the sensitivity of the issues involved, using people who were trained to investigate bullying and harassment complaints, and considered to be impartial and fair. Respondents noted that HR staff were often perceived automatically to protect the *status quo*, which staff interpreted as defending the institution against potential tribunal claims and taking the part of the accused, particularly if he or she was a member of the management team. When external investigators were used, anxiety was reduced and there was more belief in the fairness of the process, although external expertise obviously had resource implications.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

39. Undertaking a cost/benefit analysis of dignity-at-work initiatives was problematic, for a number of reasons. Many institutions had difficulty in identifying the benefits of the initiatives they introduced, not least because monitoring and evaluation processes were frequently inadequate. Another consideration was that this was an area where confidentiality was of primary importance, and this did not always sit

easily with effective evaluation or assessment of cost. Third, because so much of the input in good practice institutions was in resolving issues at an informal level, it was often difficult or impossible to evaluate the potential costs and benefits.

40. However, institutions were able to quantify some elements. Direct costs for initiatives such as training, employee assistance programmes and counselling services were built into respondents' budgets and were easy to identify. Most of those involved in delivering services were employed by the institution, but harassment advisers were generally volunteers and therefore the costs for this service were more difficult to define. The cost of training varied depending on whether the institution brought in external experts or used in-house resources.

41. Respondents reported an improvement in retention and a reduction in sickness absence rates as a result of successful bullying and harassment initiatives, although few were able to supply statistics to back this up. Higher education institutions in general were poor at measuring retention, sickness and the associated costs, and therefore were frequently unable to appreciate fully the business case for implementing dignity-at-work initiatives. Measuring sickness was regarded as particularly problematic, due to the varying degrees of accuracy with which this was reported.

42. Institutions were aware of the costs in relation to tribunal cases – these included not only the amount of any settlement awarded, but also staff time in preparing and presenting cases. Respondents were aware of the damage to institutional reputation that negative publicity could cause, and were anxious to avoid it if at all possible. There was also a feeling among some institutions that one reason for not implementing a dignity-at-work initiative was the fear that this would lead to an increase in complaints, and that this, in turn, would result in bad publicity. It is important that those who are making an effort to improve the position of their own institution feel supported by funding councils, trades unions and the Equality Challenge Unit, and do not feel they will be subjected to unfair public criticism if they are trying to make positive changes.

Policy Development

43. Most institutions involved in the research agreed that it was vital to have a comprehensive, user-friendly policy in relation to bullying and harassment. Many also had a code of conduct, which outlined appropriate standards of behaviour. This was highly desirable, as bullying and harassment were frequently perceived to be as much about what people had *not* done as about things they had done. Excluding colleagues, and failing to pass on important information deliberately to create difficulties for them, are significant issues that can be addressed in a code of conduct.

44. One of the key issues in relation to the dignity-at-work or bullying/ harassment policy was what function it fulfils. Institutions need to be clear about their objectives and the way in which the policy links with other policies, such as disciplinary and grievance procedures, to avoid confusing staff and making the separate policy unworkable.

45. Respondents agreed that the policy should be clear about what action should be taken by those who witnessed others being bullied or harassed – one of the important issues identified by many of them was the impact of bullying on the extended team and the institution as a whole. Although this could be addressed within training sessions and by good communication, it was also identified as a vital area for any policy to consider.

46. The policy needs to include information about the process to be followed as well as clarifying the procedures, and needs to ensure that available sources of help and support for both the alleged perpetrator and the complainant are clearly identified.

47. In general, there was a clear distinction between informal and formal procedures, and all respondents were convinced that the institution should aim to resolve issues informally, if at all possible. This was usually the complainants' preferred initial course of action, enabling resolution with as little long-term damage as possible. However, it is important to ensure that informality does not mean that the complaint is perceived to be treated lightly – one of the findings of the Funding Councils' research was that targets did not complain because they thought it would make matters worse, or because they would not be taken seriously, and this view was reinforced here.

48. Any policy needs to be developed jointly with the recognised trades unions. Most institutions involve the unions at the consultation stage, but best practice suggests that working in partnership throughout the development of the policy ensures the optimum outcome. Then the unions are not only committed to making it work, but are able to offer helpful insights from their perspective of the institution. It is also useful to have input from as wide a range of users as possible, including managers, staff at all levels, and those with specialist expertise. Respondents used harassment advisers, student counsellors and mediators to good effect when revising their dignity-at-work policies, because they were able to ensure that important issues arising from their direct experiences of working with complainants were addressed.

49. In order to be useful, the policy needs to be comprehensible and easy to read, and made available using a variety of mechanisms, including staff induction sessions, electronically and in staff handbooks and other printed media. Almost all the institutions responding to the baseline survey made their policies available in at least two of these ways (only one used intranet only), and most used three or more.

Initiatives

50. One of the encouraging aspects of the research was the number of institutions seeking to find more positive approaches to conflict resolution in the workplace. Respondents had a variety of support mechanisms in place and were considering the introduction of new ways of promoting dignity at work. One of the most recent approaches was the use of mediation.

Mediation

51. Mediation, a process whereby a trained facilitator assists people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable solution to an identified problem, has become increasing popular within higher education. The aim of mediation is to resolve conflict through consensus. Achieving a win/win solution is not always possible, but the mediator will seek to develop an outcome where neither party feels they are the loser, making it a more positive approach than the traditional grievance procedure.

52. Mediation can be used in a variety of circumstances, and has been introduced into a number of HEIs by participants in this research to facilitate in the following situations:

    - a confidential, first-stage dispute resolution option in specific policies such as grievance or dignity at work/bullying and harassment;
    - interpersonal conflicts between individuals at work, particularly between colleagues and peers;
    - disputes between managers or team leaders and their staff;
    - conflicts between teams or departments.

53. In general, mediation was found to be effective in enabling colleagues to bring creative, problem-solving approaches to issues, and thus was considered extremely valuable in creating a no-blame culture in which differences were handled in a positive way.

54. Mediation, like all other support mechanisms, was not suitable for all cases, but provided a very useful additional facility, particularly when dealing with issues between peers and when early intervention was possible. Mediation was most successful when undertaken on a voluntary basis, and where all concerned agreed to keep the process and outcome confidential. Mediation was not a suitable option where there was a serious power imbalance, or where one party was afraid of the other. Conflicts with a long, entrenched history were also rarely considered suitable for mediation, and when attempted the outcome was often unsatisfactory.

55. One of the disadvantages of mediation is the cost of implementation. Institutions are required to use external consultations for the initial training programme (and several respondents also used external mediators for difficult cases, particularly where senior staff were involved) or for group mediation. However, the benefits of enabling staff to continue working together after the dispute had been settled were believed to make such expenditure worthwhile.

Harassment Advisers/Networks

56. Harassment networks were the most popular type of support. They are available in 72% of institutions that responded to the baseline survey. However, during the case study interviews some issues emerged about the establishment and running of these networks.

University of Sunderland – Case Study

Details of provision	• University identified a need for a conflict-resolution process that was less adversarial • Mediation service available to all staff on a self-referral basis, or by their line manager (with individual's agreement) • Mediators have certificated training and have dealt with 11 cases over an 18-month period
Key features	• Additional to, not replacement for, harassment advisory network • Trades unions involved in development of scheme via Joint Consultative Committee • Trades unions reps also involved as advisers and/or mediators • Mediation scheme piloted before being formally launched

57.	The recruitment and selection of advisers was problematic for a number of respondents. Some reported that advisers were appointed because of their seniority within the institution, and others were expected to undertake advisory duties as a normal part of their institutional role. Some arrangements created conflicts of interest, as harassment advisers were, in some cases, also involved in investigations and other aspects of the complaints procedure. This led to some networks being regarded as 'window dressing' because they were viewed by staff as part of the HR establishment.

58.	Other networks did not have a clear remit, and had experienced problems with advisers exceeding their responsibilities, becoming too involved with cases or not knowing what they could or could not do. A job description and person specification were provided for the most effective networks. Adviser positions were advertised across the whole institution and all grades of staff were encouraged to apply. There needs to be a clear distinction between the harassment adviser role and those of both HR and the trades union representative, with defined boundaries, clear remits and recognised responsibilities.

59. Training for harassment advisers was usually good when the network was first established. Most institutions bought in external trainers, although some had specialist expertise in-house. However, ongoing support tended to be less satisfactory, except in a minority of institutions. Best practice institutions provided regular review-and-discussion meetings, refresher training and, in one case, access to counselling on a confidential basis for advisers working on difficult cases.

60. Monitoring and feedback were problematic for many networks. Although institutions recognised the need for monitoring, obtaining user feedback was difficult due to the confidential nature of the service. This was sometimes exacerbated by the way in which the feedback was sought, with users either being asked to complete the form with the adviser, or send it back to them. When the process was more anonymous and confidential, better feedback was obtained and more forms were returned.

61. Participants in the study were divided on the rewards that advisers should receive. In most institutions the role was unpaid, but advisers received some form of remission for time to see clients and attend meetings. However, in a small number of institutions advisers either received direct payment, or financial transfer was made to their department. Respondents recognised that some advisers contributed a considerable amount of time and effort for no reward, but there was a general feeling that financial incentives would encourage people to undertake the role for inappropriate reasons. Most advisers themselves said that they would not wish to be paid for undertaking their duties as they were interested not in the money, but in helping people.

Support Networks

62. Some institutions have introduced support networks for particular groups such as women; black and ethnic minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT); international students, etc. Although these groups might not have been established with any direct reference to the institution's dignity-at-work initiatives, they provide a useful source of information and support for staff, particularly where harassment is concerned.

University of Essex – Case Study

Details of provision	• Harassment Advisory Network
	• Service available to staff and students, but uses staff only in an advisory role
	• Advisers are recruited via normal recruitment procedure using a job description and person specification
	• Advisers are not paid, but the time needed for the role is recognised by the University
	• Sabbaticals of variable duration are available for advisers who are going through a busy time (e.g. new parents, high-pressure work period)
Key features	• Scheme developed in consultation with Law Department and trades unions
	• Role of harassment advisers clearly defined
	• Training for advisers involves a selection element to ensure only suitable people are used
	• Advisers have regular meetings, refresher training and access to an external counselling service for supervision purposes
	• Dedicated phone line with distinctive ring-tone available for initial contact
	• Scheme widely publicised using a variety of methods – posters, promotional materials (key-rings, etc.), briefings to student groups, regular e-mails, payslip attachments, adverts on PC opening screens in open-access areas and labs, staff induction sessions

University of Southampton – Case Study

Details of provision	• A variety of support networks open to both staff and students in the University • Current networks support LGBT people, carers, women in science, engineering and technology, disabled people, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds • Remit of networks – to act as a consultation forum and to raise current issues
Key features	• Networks established in response to user demand • Supported by the Equal Opportunities Office, but essentially self-sustaining by users themselves • Networks are very proactive at raising awareness of issues and feeding back to the University in respect of any particular problems identified by members – good source of qualitative information and ready-made consultation forum for key issues • Source of informal support for members with similar issues, so people feel more secure about approaching them with problems

Equal Opportunities Co-ordinators

63. As with support networks, equal opportunities co-ordinators were not established specifically to support dignity-at-work initiatives, but offered a very helpful first point of contact for staff. The advantage of using co-ordinators is that they are based in specific departments and are therefore already familiar with the issues relating to that area. They are also able to advise both managers and staff on issues relating to bullying and harassment. The disadvantage is that sometimes staff are reluctant to consult someone associated with their own department, and prefer to deal with a relative outsider. Both Liverpool John Moores University and the Institute of Education, London use this representative system and find it beneficial. It is important that the representative involved has sufficient status and credibility within the department to be an effective advocate for the individuals concerned, and for diversity and equal opportunities issues in general.

Counselling

64. Participants supported research findings suggesting strong positive associations for workplaces that provide a staff counselling service. Respondents reported that counselling reduced levels of distress for many users of the service. Although the provision of counsellors appeared to be an expensive option, the outcomes were frequently so positive that they were considered to be at least cost-neutral.

65. Although HEIs routinely offer a counselling service for students, they do not always offer the same facility to staff. Participants agreed not only that such provision would have a beneficial impact on the psychological wellbeing of significant numbers of employees, but also that the associated reduction in absenteeism and improved productivity would be beneficial to employers.

University of Hertfordshire – Case Study

Details of provision	• Life skills coaching – working with individuals to improve their personal effectiveness in any situation • Helpful with harassment or bullying cases: - improved individuals' confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness and communication - reframed experience, enabling individuals to take responsibility and move from victim to equal mode
Key features	• Coaching identifies life skills that the individual wishes to improve or develop • Strategies include challenging and changing limiting beliefs that are blocking the individual, and developing alternative behaviours that focus on achieving a specific outcome • Highly effective method of challenging limiting self-beliefs and changing behaviour within a short period

Employee Assistance Programmes

66.   Employee assistance programmes (EAPs) have flourished in response to concerns about the effectiveness of harassment networks, and as institutions seek to meet their legal obligations in relation to their duty of care to employees. Those respondents whose institutions made EAPs available usually did so to ensure they were making adequate provision to defend any tribunal claims successfully. There were mixed views about the fact that EAPs were usually outsourced to an independent company. Some respondents felt this was a significant advantage in encouraging staff to seek help in dealing with bullying and harassment issues. Others felt the somewhat impersonal nature of the provision was a turn-off for staff, and did not adequately address the sensitive nature of the issue. The major advantage of EAPs was that the accused and the complainant in bullying/harassment cases could be advised by different counsellors within a secure, safe environment. The major difficulty with EAPs was that not all staff felt comfortable discussing personal

issues by telephone – many preferred face-to-face communication, particularly when taking the first difficult step of raising a bullying or harassment issue.

67. Employee assistance programmes were considered most likely to be effective as one of a range of integrated support services available, so that staff could use them according to their own personal preferences. They seem to work less well when introduced as a 'one-size-fits-all', or as a stand-alone option not linked to any other provision offered by the institution.

Trades Union Representatives

68. Trades unions played a crucial role in the development of initiatives to tackle bullying and harassment in the workplace, and local branch representatives continued to be the first point of contact for many staff members who were experiencing difficulties at work. Several institutions had good working relationships with the recognised trades unions, and had undertaken partnership working to develop strategies for tackling work-related stress and promoting dignity at work. In some cases union representatives were harassment advisers, and in others they participated in joint training.

69. Unions were frequently very proactive in raising awareness of bullying and harassment issues in general, and in identifying 'hot spots' within the institution that required special attention, or staff who would benefit from training.

Training

70. Training in dealing with bullying and harassment was deemed essential for the effective promotion of a dignity-at-work policy. All good practice institutions had a comprehensive training programme available, covering a variety of issues including general diversity awareness, dignity at work/bullying and harassment and, where relevant, training for harassment advisers and/or mediators. Some had also offered training to enable staff to deal with bullying and/or assertiveness training, and a few had also made training available for members of the institution's governing body. Respondents agreed that proactive use of training could prevent issues from developing and minimise the need for dealing with bullying and harassment complaints.

71. Although some institutions had focused strongly on the use of online and other electronic training, other forms of training were sometimes seen to be more effective. Dignity at work is a sensitive and personal issue, and participants felt it was particularly important to allow staff to discuss their concerns and potential problems face-to-face. Although there were specific training packages available to promote dignity at work, they largely failed to address the difficulties encountered by those seeking to make a complaint, and concentrated on the mechanics.

72. Good practice institutions tended to include references to their dignity-at-work policy in staff induction, as well as making the policy widely available via electronic and printed media.

73. Some groups of staff who were believed to be particularly likely to benefit from training included the following:
    - line managers, who need to understand the legal obligations of the institution and their potential personal liability, as well as understanding how to implement the relevant policies and procedures;
    - senior managers and members of the governing body, who also need to appreciate the impact of their decision making and behaviour on the culture of the organisation;
    - professional HR staff, who need to understand how to implement relevant policies effectively, and how they interact with the institution's existing disciplinary and grievance procedures;
    - trades union representatives, the first point of contact for a significant number of staff in relation to dignity-at-work issues;
    - harassment advisers, who need to be fully trained to support complainants and alleged harassers effectively;
    - members of any panel investigating allegations of bullying or harassment;
    - specific groups of staff with a particular need to understand how policies and procedures work, such as frontline staff (security, accommodation office, etc.).

Staffordshire University provides diversity training for all staff, but also offers a range of tailored programmes for particular staff groups, focusing on those with management responsibilities. Diversity training is seen as a priority activity and is strongly supported by the Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team, who not only attend relevant sessions, but also contribute to all diversity inductions. On

a broader front, the University has instituted an annual Celebrating Diversity programme and operates a diversity award scheme (since 2003). Specific training is provided on behaviour at work, but the general diversity training programme has a strong emphasis on the need to promote diversity and respect for all.

Staffordshire University – Case Study

Details of provision	• Compulsory half-day diversity induction for all new members of staff, including Behaviour at Work Policy and Code of Conduct • Diversity workbook – hard copy distributed to all staff including telephone check for understanding • Comprehensive training programme on all aspects of diversity for line managers • Various activities, e.g. drama and open sessions on specific topics, available to a range of staff • General awareness-raising through annual diversity awards and the Celebrating Diversity week, at which performances and activities are showcased across a range of diversity themes
Key features	• Range of types of training available – short leaflets, face-to-face sessions, diversity workbook, online training, open programme across a range of diversity activities • Training available for all staff • Training tailored to target group – concise briefings and presentations for governors, individual sessions on each diversity strand, plus behaviour at work and stress management for senior-level management group, etc. • Additional support (such as group activities, telephone helpline) available for staff for whom such training was not the norm • Diversity induction, including participation by the Vice-Chancellor and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Diversity • Activities often organised jointly with Students' Union, UNISON and University and College Union

Communication

74. To ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the institution's stance in respect of bullying and harassment, and know where to obtain information and support if they need it, many institutions used a variety of different communication channels to publicise their dignity-at-work initiatives. Some focus on electronic communication such as the internet, intranet, use of shared drives and e-mail. The disadvantage of this approach is that it limits the distribution of material to staff who have easy computer access – manual and part-time staff, who may be most in need of support, could be excluded. Several institutions regularly produce articles in internal newsletters and publications, but this is most likely to be when the policy or a new initiative is introduced. Posters can be effective, as they are visible for a long period and reinforce the message. Some respondents were very creative in their publicity, various types of promotional material (key-rings, coasters, calendars, etc.) providing a constant reminder of important contact details and keeping the issue of dignity at work at the forefront of people's minds.

75. Staff induction and general equality and diversity training sessions provide opportunities for institutions to include information about the bullying and harassment policy and how it is applied, monitored and evaluated. They also enable institutions to be proactive in raising the profile of dignity at work and ensuring staff are familiar with this aspect of the institutional culture at the onset of their employment.

76. Poor communication between individuals is a frequent cause of problems, and is responsible for a significant proportion of bullying and harassment complaints. Respondents identified a recent trend involving the inappropriate use of e-mail rather than face-to-face contact, and the use of unacceptable language in electronic communications, as particular problems. Failure to communicate expectations effectively on the part of line managers was also a cause of bullying complaints. There was some confusion about the distinction between bullying and firm management, and this created difficulties for HR staff when problems arose.

77. Although participants recognised the need to have good policies and procedures in place to tackle issues of bullying and harassment, this was just one element of the process necessary to eliminate the problems. Employers who genuinely wished to achieve dignity

at work need to strive to develop an appropriate culture within their institution. If senior managers are supportive and proactive, and recognise that conflict is inevitable in a large and complex organisation, rather than treating it as a symptom of dysfunction or pretending it does not exist, they will be better equipped to deal with it effectively. Conflict can be either destructive or a learning experience, depending on how it is handled – at best, it offers an opportunity to learn more about the different needs of employees and colleagues, and can lead to a better understanding of each other. With appropriate measures in place, different views, opinions and approaches can be regarded as strengths rather than weaknesses, and dignity at work for all becomes a genuine reality.

78. As the HEFCE Research Report (2005) notes, respondents who have experienced harassment are more negative about:

- the way their performance is managed;
- their belief that they work for a caring institution;
- the amount of stress they experience;
- the level of communication.

79. This indicates that institutions in which bullying and harassment are tolerated are likely to perpetuate negative attitudes in a significant proportion of the workforce. Dignity-at-work issues should not be considered in isolation – much bullying and harassment is the result of poor interpersonal skills and misunderstandings, which can be resolved with good training and communication between the parties concerned. Firm action also needs to be taken in situations where bullying has become an integral part of the culture.

Conclusions

In large, complex organisations such as HEIs, conflict between staff, students and visitors will inevitably occur from time to time. The key is for organisations to recognise this and to take steps to deal with issues that arise in an appropriate and timely manner. This research has identified a number of important criteria for tackling bullying and harassment in the workplace effectively.

- Senior management support is vital – those institutions that promote dignity at work most effectively have a proactive and committed senior management team.

- The business case for tackling bullying and harassment must be articulated effectively and understood within the institution. Institutions need to be more effective at identifying the costs and benefits, both of introducing dignity-at-work initiatives and of failing to do so. A 'virtuous circle' of continuous improvement in relation to dignity at work should be developed and promoted.

- Dignity at work must be established as a core value of the organisation and thus become a basic right for all. It should form part of the institution's strategic objectives, and should become embedded in all its strategic developments.

- Organisational factors can create problems in relation to dignity at work; bullying and harassment do not always occur because of personal differences between individuals.

- Working in partnership with trades unions to develop a culture in which bullying and harassment are treated seriously and tackled effectively can be beneficial.

- Dignity-at-work policies should be comprehensive, but easily understood and accessed by all staff within the organisation.

- Institutions should emphasise the importance of early intervention and the use of informal dispute-resolution procedures to minimise damage for all concerned, and should explore less adversarial routes of conflict resolution such as mediation.

- Services such as harassment networks and mediation should be supported by effective communication and rigorous training.

- Institutions need to develop good monitoring and evaluation systems for such services. Provision should be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be appropriate.

- Institutions should make every effort to provide a range of support services for staff, to ensure they meet the needs of people from a range of backgrounds and with different needs.

- Managers should be well trained, and encouraged to seek support if they are encountering difficulties with staff management issues. A blame culture, and one that encourages reward by results, by whatever means, will be detrimental to the institution's efforts in tackling bullying and harassment.

- Finally, institutions should be encouraged to work towards becoming a model workplace in which all staff are treated fairly, and dignity at work is effectively and continually promoted.

Appendix 1 – *The Acas Model Workplace*

www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/g/e/Model_Workplace.pdf

The Acas Model Workplace (2005) provides a straightforward model for employers to develop the right culture and environment for all employees to flourish and be more productive at work.

The model has three stages:

- put systems and procedures in place;
- develop relationships;
- work together.

The Acas Model Workplace is based on the promotion of a more inclusive and open culture. Acas suggests a number of compelling arguments for establishing proper workplace procedures, effectively communicating plans, rewarding fairly and working safely. The introduction of a dignity-at-work/bullying and harassment policy is an essential first step in this process.

The 'Developing relationships' section considers fostering good working relationships between staff at all levels of the organisation, and advises that organisations must be prepared to tackle conflict in a mature and measured way when it arises. This approach is based on a culture in which everyone is treated fairly, differences are respected, individuals feel valued and their achievements are recognised. Managers need to acknowledge the desire of employees to achieve a good balance between their personal and business objectives, which could result in a win–win situation for all concerned.

In the 'Work together' section, Acas suggests that trust is a key element in the model workplace. However, this does not happen overnight, nor is it easy to achieve. Acas recommends a focus on issues rather than personalities, and highlights the need for employer and employee to take account of each other's legitimate concerns and interests. While there is a recognition that these principles are not easy to put into practice, they

provide an excellent framework for those institutions genuinely wanting to tackle dignity at work to make real progress. The premise is that if an open, inclusive workplace culture is developed – supported by the right policies and appropriate mechanisms to resolve issues – dignity at work would become the norm, and bullying and harassment would be much less common and easier to tackle effectively.

Appendix 2 – Further Reading and Resources

Online resources

All links accessed 30 March 2007.

The Equality Challenge Unit website has a wealth of information and guidance material: **www.ecu.ac.uk**

UCEA includes stress management as one of its specific areas of interest in its Health and Safety Reports (published annually): **www.ucea.ac.uk/index.cfm/pcms/site.Publications.Health_and_Safety**

The BBC has a useful website: **www.bbc.co.uk/health/healthy_living/health_at_work/index.shtml** (go to Emotional wellbeing; Bullying at work)

A regularly updated guide to the relevant legislation can be found at: **www.harassment-law.co.uk**

Acas has a guide for managers and employers on bullying and harassment, and a guide for employees. A pdf version of *The Acas Model Workplace* can be found at: **www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/g/e/Model_Workplace.pdf**

The Andrea Adams Trust is a charity dealing specifically with workplace bullying: **www.andreaadamstrust.org**

Bully Online is a website on bullying in the workplace and related issues: **www.bullyonline.org**

Business Link, in relationship with the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI), has guidance on bullying and harassment: **www.businesslink.gov.uk** (go to Employing people; Disciplinary problems; Bullying and harassment)

Aspects of human rights legislation are explained by Liberty:
www.yourrights.org.uk

Trades Unions

Amicus is working in conjunction with the DTI and Portsmouth University on a large-scale project researching bullying and harassment: www.dignityatwork.org. A report has been published on the project's initial findings:
www.port.ac.uk/research/workplacebullying/filetodownload,52783,en.pdf

The TUC has produced a series of helpful documents and information on bullying and harassment issues:
www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/rights_bullyatwork.cfm

The Association of University Teachers (AUT)'s stress survey publication (2004) states that one respondent in five reported having experienced bullying or intimidatory management behaviour:
www.aut.org.uk/media/pdf/4/7/workingtothelimit.pdf

The University and College Union (UCU) has a model policy with a number of additional references on specific areas of interest:
www.natfhe.org.uk/?entityType=Document&id=150
The UCU's website (**www.ucu.org.uk**) has sections on
Equality News: **www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1742**
Health and Safety News: **www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1739**

UNISON's website has a wide range of useful resources, including a checklist of what a harassment/bullying policy should include, which can be downloaded from the Higher Education Resources (type 'bullying' into the site search engine): **www.unison.org.uk/education/higher/index.asp**

This website also includes a toolkit and research previously undertaken by UNISON, all of which can be downloaded:
Draft Branch Bullying Survey: **www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B842.pdf**
Draft Bullying Agreement:
www.unison.org.uk/safety/doc_view.asp?did=943

Other useful information is available from the UNISON health and safety web pages: **www.unison.org.uk/safety/index.asp**

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