

What to do if you witness bullying or harassment – advice for UCU members

Witnesses are the third party to incidents and may feel vulnerable like the victim, particularly if the person accused of bullying or harassment is employed on a higher grade. It is often difficult to know what to do if the victim appears to be ignoring the bullying or harassment.

If support and advice is needed, approach your UCU representative. In some institutions, with union agreement, there is also a procedure providing for a 'named person', who has volunteered to offer support to staff and students in cases regarding bullying or harassment. They should have been carefully selected and trained to provide information and advice and to offer support in such situations to the complainant or the accused.

There are several steps you could take if you observe someone being bullied or harassed:

- Speak to the person who is being bullied or harassed informally and confidentially and tell them what you have observed.
- Ask if they feel able to discuss the situation. Do not underestimate the effects of the bullying or harassment on them since they may be upset or unable to talk to anyone. Do not press for information.
- If they wish to discuss the incident, listen sympathetically and, if permitted, take notes as these may be useful at a later stage. You must respect the person's privacy and need for confidentiality.
- If they are unable to discuss the matter with you, encourage them to talk to someone they trust, a 'named person' or contact. Offer to contact the person they choose on their behalf and make arrangements for a meeting.
- Remember that if a formal complaint is made, you may be called upon to give evidence.