

### Finding out about violence at work

**The advice line has had a number of requests for information about violent issues in both HE and FE institutions during 2008, and about standards that the employer should adopt. For example, we have been told of one case where a member of staff shot another with an airgun; he was dismissed following a disciplinary hearing, but was then subsequently re-employed some years later in the department where his original victim still worked!**

The potential for violence is also always a risk where public meets provider in any setting. There is no reason to suppose that tertiary education is any different. There are complex relationships between staff and students, and a whole raft of student expectations that come with the marketisation and commodification of education. There is already some evidence of an increase in student complaints that the grades awarded by lecturers and exam boards are not good enough. If you pay for your tuition and get a number of loans to help you through the study period to get your good second, or even first; or a good certificate or diploma, then it become problematic when you don't get what you may feel you have paid for.

Violence takes many forms – UCU takes the prevailing view that it includes racial and sexual harassment, verbal threats and physical intimidation; threats with a weapon; and actual violence or assault causing minor or more serious injury.

UCU also takes the view that violence *per se* is unacceptable, and demands that employers adopt a “zero tolerance” approach, as in the health service. Employer policies on workplace violence should be the strongest possible in this respect, and both staff and students should understand what is acceptable behaviour, and what procedures are in place for them to raise what they define as problems. Staff and students should also understand clearly the consequences of violent behaviour.

All employers should include the potential for violence against staff as an ever-present hazard, and risk assess it accordingly. The precautionary measures that are adopted to ensure staff safety need to be carefully considered – there are many actions that can be taken, from draconian security measures involving constant security surveillance and monitoring, heavy security staff presence and restricted access to buildings and the campus, to relative benign measures such as occasional identity card checks and other low-key measures. Staff training in techniques to defuse potentially risky confrontations can be useful, but should be in support other measures, not the primary control method.

There needs to be clear procedures in place to enable staff to raise concerns before incidents occur, and a reporting procedure when an incident does occur. Joint union/management monitoring and review needs to be part of the policy and procedures.

### **Further sources of information**

There is HSE guidance available: ask your employer to provide you with a copy of "Violence in the Education Sector" (HSE Books 1997 ISBN 0 7176 1293 7, price £6.95)

A free HSE general violence at work leaflet at

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf> emphasises the risk assessment approach, and the importance of involving union safety representatives.

The HSE site at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/information.htm> has other sources.

The TUC Hazards at Work Manual has a useful chapter on workplace violence at [http://www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s/violence.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/violence.cfm)

Detailed guidance on practical steps on school security is on Teachernet - although aimed primarily at schools, this document contains advice applicable across the education sectors, covers general legal provisions on security and has references to further education. [http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/9232/SchoolSecurity.doc](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/9232/SchoolSecurity.doc)

There is also a useful document on the UNISON website at <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A4107.doc>.

UCU has prepared a draft questionnaire below. Use this as part of a workplace inspection to find out what or if there is a problem that needs to be addressed. You can modify it to meet your specific needs; please send [healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk) a copy if you do.

**Draft survey on violence in the college or university** (delete as appropriate) -  
**Twenty questions.**

UCU is concerned about violent incidents to our members and staff in the college or university. Violence includes threats, verbal abuse and harassment as well as actual attacks and injury to staff by clients and members of the public. It's **not** part of our job to put up with violence; it **is** the employer's duty to identify the risks and take appropriate action to ensure staff safety at work.

To try to find out more about the occurrence and causes of violent incidents and the risks to members of staff, UCU is conducting a confidential survey. We will use the information we collect to raise the issue with management to see what we can do to improve the situation.

Please help us develop our knowledge by completing this confidential questionnaire and return it to your UCU representative. It should only take a few minutes. If you want to speak to one of the Branch safety reps, contact details are listed at the end of this questionnaire.

1. Which site do you work at?.....

2. Which department or school?.....

3. How worried or concerned are you about violence in the college? (Circle one below 1 = not at all; 5 = very concerned)

1            2            3            4            5

4. Have you suffered violence in relation to your work in the last year? (Circle Yes or No. If more than once, please state how many times)

a) Injury requiring medical assistance	Yes	No	How often.....
b) Minor injury – requiring first aid	Yes	No	How often.....
c) Threatened with a weapon	Yes	No	How often.....
d) Verbal threats or abuse	Yes	No	How often.....
e) Racial harassment	Yes	No	How often.....
f) Sexual harassment	Yes	No	How often.....

5. Please give brief details of any incident – when, where, and what happened?

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6. Did you report the incident(s)    Yes                                  No                                  Don't recall

7. If Yes, Who to?.....

8. If not, why not? .....  
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9. What, if any, action resulted to prevent a recurrence? .....  
 .....  
 .....

10. Did you get any help to recover after the event? If so, what was it? .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

11. Was it useful/did it help you recover?    Yes                                  No

12. Have you witnessed a violent incident against another person    Yes                                  No

13. Can you briefly describe details of any incident you witnessed – who was involved and what happened?

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 .....  
 .....

14. Are you aware of any college policy or procedure on violence?    Yes                                  No

15. Have you been told to report violent incidents and how to do that?    Yes                                  No

16. Are you aware of any procedure for investigating violent incidents?    Yes                                  No

17. Are you aware of any measures that management have taken to deal with violence such as changes in staffing, security arrangements, etc? Yes No

If Yes, can you give brief details?.....  
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18. Have you been given training on how to deal with violent situations? Yes No

19. Do you think management take concerns about violence seriously? Yes No

20. What do you think can be done to deal with incidents of violence in the college? If you have any suggestions, please note them below.

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Thank you for helping with this survey. Please return forms to (**insert name here**). We'll let everyone know what we find out and what we intend to take up with management if that is necessary.

If you want to discuss this further with one of our safety reps, contact details are listed below.

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|----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|
| UCU Safety Rep | Building location | e-mail address | Telephone No: |
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