

WARWICK ROAD UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

POLICY ON HARASSMENT AT WORK

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We believe, as an equal opportunity employer (see Equal Opportunities Policy), that all staff have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to work in an environment free of harassment and intimidation.
- 1.2 Accordingly, standards of behaviour in any member of staff, which constitutes harassment whether sexual, racial, or for other reason, will not be tolerated.
- 1.3 Each member of staff and every visitor has the right not to be harassed and the right to complain (see Complaints Policy) should it occur. When a complaint is made it will be taken seriously, and prompt corrective action will be taken, which may include disciplinary action against any member of staff who is found guilty of harassment.
- 1.4 There is no single, simple definition of harassment. It can take many forms, occur on a variety of grounds and may be directed against an individual or group of individuals. It is most usually behaviour that is unsolicited, personally offensive and fails to respect the rights of others. It is not the intention of the harasser, but the deed itself and its impact on the recipient that determines what constitutes harassment.

2 REASONS FOR HARASSMENT

- 2.1 Harassment may occur for many reasons, including:
 - race, ethnic origin, nationality or skin colour
 - sex or sexual orientation
 - presentation or clothing
 - religious or political orientation or dress
 - status
 - membership or non-membership of a trade union
 - physical disabilities, sensory impairment or learning disability
 - status as an ex-offender
 - age
 - willingness to challenge harassment which can lead to victimisation.

3 FORMS OF HARASSMENT

- 3.1 Harassment can range from extreme forms such as violence and bullying to less obvious actions such as ignoring someone at work. Whatever form it takes, harassment is unwanted behaviour which is unwelcome and unpleasant to the recipient, and in the case of sexual harassment, unreciprocated. This distinguishes sexual harassment from friendly or romantic behaviour, which is welcome and mutual.

- 3.2 Forms of harassment may include:
- physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault
 - verbal and written harassment through jokes, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, letters etc
 - non-verbal conduct which just falls short of physical contact e.g. standing unnecessarily close to someone, looking at them in such a way as to make them feel uncomfortable, e.g. staring
 - visual displays of posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting and emblems
 - isolation or non co-operation at work, exclusion from social activities.
- 3.3 It should be noted that some of this behaviour is unlawful, for example some forms of physical contact, sexual harassment, racial harassment and the distribution of racist literature.

4 EFFECTS OF HARASSMENT

- 4.1 Harassment can:
- cause a person to feel threatened or humiliated
 - create a threatening or intimidating work environment
 - interfere with job performance
 - undermine job security
 - impact on overall health and well-being.

5 RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL STAFF (PAID OR VOLUNTEER)

- 5.1 All staff have a responsibility to treat work colleagues in a professional manner and with respect for their dignity, integrity and privacy.
- 5.2 All staff also have a responsibility not to encourage or collude with sexual, racial or any other form of harassment. This may include being silent when the abuse is occurring as this could be interpreted as encouragement, or failing to report an incident you know has occurred.
- 5.3 All staff have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality during investigations or allegations of harassment.

6 RESPONSIBILITIES OF LINE MANAGERS AND SERVICE ORGANISERS

- 6.1 Line managers and service organisers have a responsibility to maintain a standard of professional conduct by all staff, and to investigate any complaints made either by a member of staff or a visitor.
- 6.2 In particular they will:
- take prompt action to stop harassment once it is identified
 - ensure that offensive or potentially offensive material is not displayed in the workplace
 - make clear to staff that this type of behaviour is not acceptable and where appropriate it will be treated as a disciplinary matter
 - document all details of the investigations regardless of whether action is taken and retain for not more than one year
 - ensure that investigation of the matter is handled with sensitivity and due respect for the rights of all concerned.

7 PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH HARASSMENT

- 7.1 What is perceived as harassment can vary from one individual to another, so in the first instance the harasser should be asked to stop and it made clear that the behaviour is unwelcome.
- 7.2 If the issue remains unresolved, it should be raised with the Line Manager or Service Organiser.
- 7.3 It is recognised that this could be embarrassing or difficult. To help in this situation, the Chair of the Trustees or Trustee with responsibility for Personnel Issues may be contacted for advice and support in total confidence, and without any obligation to take the complaint further. Should it be deemed advisable and by mutual agreement, the Chair or Trustee responsible for Personnel Issues may be accompanied by one other Trustee. The Chair or Trustee responsible for Personnel Issues, as confidential advisor, will help by:
- offering guidance on resolving the problem
 - offering to help resolve the problem informally by seeking a confidential and voluntary interview with the alleged harasser, to pursue a solution without recourse to the formal disciplinary or grievance procedure.
- 7.4 In the first instance the victim may feel more comfortable talking to someone of their own choice, and every effort will be made to ensure that they are able to do so.
- 7.5 Union members also have the right to consult their representative, without obligation to take the matter further.

8 TAKING FURTHER ACTION

- 8.1 If informal procedures have been exhausted or are not considered an appropriate form of action, a formal complaint may be made through the Grievance Procedure.
- 8.2 There may be circumstances when, because of the position of the person against whom a complaint is being made, or for other reasons, it is inappropriate to follow normal grievance procedures. In these circumstances the Chairman of the Trustees should be contacted who, in consultation with the Church Secretary or the Minister, will advise on the appropriate course of action.
- 8.3 When investigating complaints every care will be taken to ensure that the careers and reputations of neither party are unjustly affected.
- 8.4 Throughout the process the support of a trade union representative or a friend is permitted.
- 8.5 All allegations will be treated seriously. Victimisation of anyone who has made an allegation or is supporting someone who has made an allegation, or the alleged harasser, will be a disciplinary offence.
- 8.6 Nothing in this policy prevents reporting an incident to the Police if a crime may have been committed.