

PERSONNEL SERVICES

University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD
 Director of Human Resources



To: Heads of Department and Faculty Board Chairs, and equivalents in UAS; Departmental Administrators and Heads of Administration and Finance

Ref. EMS/5, EMS/6,
 EMS/33

4 December 2014

cc. Heads of Division and divisional secretaries

Revised University Policy and Procedure on Harassment

A revised University Policy and Procedure on Harassment has been developed and is available at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/policyandprocedure.

From 3 December 2014, this document replaces the current University Policy and Procedure on Harassment and Bullying (circular PERS(10)02).

The revised document includes a new Procedure for student complaints of harassment against other students. New guidance for staff on handling cases of sexual assault or sexual violence has also been developed and is available at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/policyandprocedure/guidance.

The revised Policy and Procedure has had wide consultation and was approved by Council on 1 December 2014.

1. Actions required of departments

Departments are asked to ensure that:

- all staff and students are made aware of the revised Policy and Procedure
- the revised Policy and Procedure are prominently displayed on departmental notice boards and included in departmental communications
- all copies of the previous Policy and Procedure are removed and replaced, including in induction materials and staff handbooks.

A flow-chart detailing the new procedures will be available from HT15 and circulated to departments for display on noticeboards.

2. Key issues

Work to revise the University's Policy and Procedure on Harassment has been undertaken in response to legislative changes and concerns raised by OUSU and others about the University's procedures for handling cases of sexual violence.

Student Procedure

The major change to the new Policy and Procedure is the development of a full Procedure for student complaints of harassment against other students. The document sets out a three stage process, consisting of informal action; seeking support and advice from the office of the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services (DSWSS); and making a formal written complaint to the Proctors.

The Procedure also clarifies the level of support available, both to students who feel that they have been harassed, and to students against whom complaints of harassment have been made. The office of the DSWSS will be a clear, central point of contact for support and advice, to alleviate past concerns that students have been unsure as to where to seek support. The DSWSS will also be able to ensure that relevant members of staff within the collegiate University are informed of the case if appropriate, with the student's consent, and having due regard for obligations of confidentiality owed to others.

When students make a formal written complaint to the Proctors, one of the Proctors or another person appointed by them will investigate the case. If the complainant has not already contacted the office of the DSWSS, the Proctors will normally seek consent to refer him/her, so that s/he can be offered appropriate support from a trained member of staff. Following the outcome of a formal written complaint, the DSWSS will be informed, and will take appropriate action, such as informing others, and arranging for support for all parties.

Potentially criminal misconduct

The revised Policy and Procedure explains that when a criminal offence may have been committed, the relevant harassment Procedure may not be appropriate. In the first instance such allegations will normally be a matter for police investigation and action. Support will be available from the University for student and staff members.

When students are involved, the DSWSS will consider whether it is appropriate to make recommendations regarding arrangements that would have the purpose of limiting contact between the parties involved in a case, for so long as may be considered reasonably necessary, and communicate these recommendations to appropriate bodies. Issues including but not limited to those around teaching, examinations and accommodation/social activity may need to be considered.

Guidance for staff on handling cases of sexual assault or sexual violence

The main concern of female students has been that sexual violence should be handled separately from the Policy and Procedure. This view was reinforced during consultation. The Policy and Procedure therefore now refers to separate guidance which has been developed

for staff on handling cases of sexual assault or sexual violence, attached as Annex D to the Policy.

This guidance provides advice to staff on handling disclosures of sexual assault or sexual violence, and signposts them to sources of support. The University has also provided specialist training to a number of members of staff, in handling such cases: details are available from: harassment@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Staff Procedure

The Procedure for complaints of harassment against University staff has been revised to include information on support for students making a complaint of harassment against a staff member. Students will be able to seek support from the office of the DSWSS when wishing to make a complaint against a member of staff to a head of department, and support will be available to them throughout the complaints process. The DSWSS will be informed and consulted as appropriate in such cases.

The revised Staff Procedure also includes more detail on confidentiality requirements, consistent with those in the Student Procedure.

Sources of advice

The revised Policy and Procedure includes more detail on all sources of advice available, both to students and staff who believe that they have been harassed, and to anyone who has been told that his/her conduct is perceived as harassing, as well as full details on the University's Harassment Advisory Service. Students are also signposted to OUSU's independent Student Advice Service, as well as to the relevant college sources of support.

Relationship with college procedures

While complaints of harassment involving students which arise purely within the college context will continue to be dealt with under college procedures, it is anticipated that colleges may choose to align their procedure with the University Policy and Procedure.

Communication

The changes to the Policy and Procedure on Harassment to students and staff will be widely communicated to staff and students during Hilary Term 2015.

3. Further information

Further information may be obtained from Caroline Kennedy, Harassment Line administrator, on harassment.line@admin.ox.ac.uk or 01865 270760; or the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services: director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk.

JULIAN DUXFIELD
JD/CK

*Replaces existing circular: PERS(10)02
Copy for notice boards: yes*