

## **Student Bullying and Harassment Policy**

Brunel University of London is committed to providing an equitable, safe and inclusive experience and environment where students can study, work, live and socialise free from any bullying or harassment. The University takes all bullying and harassment incidents very seriously in line with its regulatory and legal duties. For further detail, see below.

### **Introduction**

The aim of this policy is to provide a framework for students who feel that they have been the subject of harassment or bullying so that they can access appropriate support and that action can be taken. It will also ensure that all reports are addressed seriously and fairly, upholding the rights and dignity of all those involved.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all students at the University including students, apprentices and doctoral researchers at the University. Note that the term 'student' refers to undergraduate and postgraduate students including those studying on campus or via distance learning, apprentices, short courses and doctoral researchers. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. Incidents of harassment and bullying are not tolerated within the University community. They can happen between students, between students and staff and/or contractors, suppliers or visitors.

This policy provides advice to all current registered students at the University and applies where bullying or harassment takes place within a student's learning or working environment including both face to face and online, in accommodation (on or off campus), work placements and during social activities whether on or off campus where activities are linked to the University community.

There is also a procedure for University colleagues to maintain a healthy working environment where unacceptable behaviour is identified, challenged and stopped. For more information see the Dignity at Work policy - [Dignity at Work Policy \(Bullying and Harassment\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/dignity-at-work-policy-bullying-and-harassment) ([brunel.ac.uk](https://www.brunel.ac.uk)).

Nothing within this policy should be construed in any way as a restriction on academic freedom. Brunel's Royal Charter protects at all times the ability for academic colleagues to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or privileges.

### **Policy Statement**

The University commits to ensuring that:

- All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that the University meets its statutory obligations under the Equality Act (2010) to eliminate and prevent

harassment and bullying by addressing inappropriate behaviours and discussing concerns promptly to prevent issues from escalating.

- No student will be victimised or discriminated against on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation.
- Robust procedures are provided for students in the Non-Academic Misconduct Procedure as provided for by Senate Regulation 6 and for colleagues in the Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures s.3 to deal with any allegations of harassment and bullying fairly, impartially and in a timely fashion.
- As set out in the University's [Freedom of Speech Statement](#), nothing in this policy shall be used as justification for restricting lawful freedom of expression.
- Appropriate support will be provided to those impacted by any complaint made under this policy.
- The whole University community will be made aware of this policy and their responsibilities to which they are expected to comply.
- No member of the University community will be disadvantaged for reporting an incident or making a complaint in good faith. Malicious complaints may, however, lead to separate disciplinary action being taken.
- Awareness sessions will be used as a means of communicating appropriate behaviours under this policy.
- All members of the University will be made aware of the Single Comprehensive Source of Information relating to incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct to comply with the Office for Students' Condition of Registration E6 - ([Condition E6: Harassment and sexual misconduct - Office for Students](#)).

## Understanding bullying and harassment

**Bullying:** is not defined in law but can be described as:

"The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online" (*Anti-Bullying Alliance definition*).

**Harassment:** Brunel has adopted the definitions of 'harassment' used by the Office for Students as set out in its Condition of Registration E:6 Harassment and Sexual Misconduct. See below: (For further detail on sexual misconduct see Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy).

Harassment' is defined as

'Harassment, including sexual harassment, includes unwanted behaviour or conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an

intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment because of, or connected to, one or more of the following protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; race; religion and belief; sex; and sexual orientation.' (As defined in section 26 of the Equality Act 2010)

In the context of section 26 of the Equality Act 2010, to decide whether conduct amounts to unlawful 'harassment,' the following matters are considered:

- the perception of the person who is at the receiving end of conduct;
- the other circumstances of the case; and
- whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have the effect under scrutiny.

and

'a course of conduct conducted on at least two occasions that harasses one other person, or a course of conduct that harasses two or more persons at least once each. References to harassing a person include alarming the person or causing the person distress.' (As defined in section 1 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and interpreted by section 7 of that Act).

Under this definition, an offence is only committed if:

- the person knows the conduct amounts to harassment of the other, or
- a reasonable person in possession of the same information would think the course of conduct amounted to harassment of the other person.

Sexual misconduct is defined as any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. This includes, but is not limited to:

- sexual harassment
- sexual assault; and
- rape

*Examples may include, depending upon wider context:*

- *verbal abuse - including verbal threats, derogatory name calling, insults, ridicule or belittling of another person*
- *physical assault or threats of violence*
- *intrusive behaviour - invasion of personal space, pestering, spying or stalking*
- *persistent, unwelcome contact - including text messages, emails, phone calls, gifts*
- *spreading malicious lies, making insulting comments or bringing a vindictive allegation of unacceptable behaviour*
- *display or circulation of abusive or offensive materials on paper or electronically*
- *sending offensive text messages*
- *using humour to put another person or group of people down e.g. telling jokes that are sexist, racist or about an individual's sexual orientation.*

## Freedom of Speech at Brunel

All staff at Brunel should understand that freedom of speech and academic freedom are both crucial for a healthy academic environment. Although they are protected by law, they also come with responsibilities. Staff should be aware that while they have rights to express ideas and opinions, even controversial ones, within the bounds of the law, the University also has a duty to protect this freedom. They must also recognise the need to be aware of potential restrictions, such as where speech is unlawful, or harmful.

The **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023** amends the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 ('HERA') to strengthen the legal requirements placed on universities relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom. The Act protects free speech within the law. It does not protect unlawful speech. The Act requires universities to take reasonably practicable steps to secure free speech within the law for their students, staff and members and for visiting speakers. It also requires them to maintain a free speech code of practice and to promote the importance of freedom of speech within the law and academic freedom in the provision of higher education.

The Office for Students (OfS) has also published [Regulatory advice 24: Guidance related to freedom of speech](#) which clarifies the legal position for universities.

Key terms relating to Freedom of Speech are:

- **Freedom of Speech:** This protects the right to express opinions and ideas, including in writing and electronically, without interference.
- **Academic Freedom:** This specifically protects the freedom of academic staff to question, test, and put forward new ideas, even if they are controversial, without fear of job loss or other negative consequences.
- **"Within the Law":** Both freedoms are not absolute and are subject to legal limitations, such as those relating to harassment, threats, defamation, and other unlawful activities.

The University has published a statement relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom: [Freedom of speech statement | Brunel University of London](#). This makes clear that the University is committed to upholding freedom of speech within the law whatever people's opinion or beliefs may be. Such views may be controversial or unpopular or may shock, offend or disturb but must not be unlawful speech, which for example, may incite violence, incite hatred on grounds of a protected characteristic, amount to a terrorism related offence or cause harassment, alarm or distress contrary to the law. Free 'speech' includes written materials and other forms of expression. It is not limited to the spoken word.

The University's approach to Freedom of Speech ensures that it upholds its duties to take reasonably practicable steps to secure and promote freedom of speech within the law. This includes placing significant weight on the importance of academic

freedom and tolerance for controversial views in an educational context, such as in classes and lectures, events and debates. This means that students being exposed to any of the following is unlikely to amount to harassment:

- the content of programme materials, including but not limited to books, videos, sound recordings, and pictures; and
- statements made and views expressed by a member of staff, another student, or third party as part of teaching, research or discussions about any subject matter which is connected with the student's programme of study at Brunel.

All University staff, members, students, visiting speakers and people invited or being lawfully present on the university's premises will at all times assist the University in upholding the free speech principles of the Freedom of Speech statement within the University.

### **Seeking Support and Advice**

No student is under any obligation to report an incident of bullying or harassment. However, you are encouraged to get help as soon as you can, to obtain advice about possible options for action and/or access appropriate support.

You are encouraged to act promptly and should not blame yourself or feel that you should wait until the situation is intolerable.

If you believe you are being bullied or harassed, you can get help from one of the following:

- a personal tutor or lecturer, or another member of staff in your department. If you feel your studies have been affected by what has happened, you can consider applying for [Extenuating Circumstances](#), and your Personal Tutor will be able to provide more information.
- reporting via the Report and Support Portal where you can disclose your personal details or make an anonymous report - <https://reportandsupport.brunel.ac.uk/>.
- Contact the Student Welfare Team directly:
  - via phone +44 (0)1895 268268 (option 2)
  - email [studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk)
  - through [Report & Support](#).
- speak to an adviser in the [Union Advice Service](#) in the Union of Brunel Students. You can book an online appointment using the booking form [here](#). Alternatively, you can call on 01895 269169, just leave a voicemail and the team will get back to you.

If you have been impacted by sexual harassment, contact [security-operations@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:security-operations@brunel.ac.uk) or get in touch with the [Student Support and Welfare Team](#) who can refer you.

If another member of the University community witnesses someone being bullied or harassed, they should also be encouraged to ask for help using the same channels.

Measures should also be taken to protect the personal safety of all involved. Where it is considered that there is a real threat to personal safety of any person, this should be reported to Security immediately on **by dialling 66943 internally or 01895 255786**.

There are a number of options available if you are being harassed and / or bullied and each will vary depending on the circumstances including your vulnerabilities, the risks and your wishes. This might be informal resolution, mediation, making a formal complaint or reporting the harassment and bullying to the Police. Some can be achieved relatively simply and quickly whilst others may require a more thorough response which can take some time.

### **Making a formal harassment complaint**

The usual process for raising a formal harassment complaint is via the [Student Complaints Procedure](#) and complaints should be made within 3 months. Information about this procedure can be found at: [Student Complaints - Guidance for Students](#).

Where a complaint of harassment has been raised under the Student Complaints Procedure, the relevant procedure used to investigate the complaint will depend on whether the reported party is a student or staff member and the context of the complaint. For example:

- Where concerns of harassment are raised by students about a member of staff, the Student Complaints Officer will request advice from the University's Human Resources Department about how to handle the concern. This may result in the investigation under the Student Complaints Procedure being paused for a period of time and the matter being referred to Human Resources for consideration under the relevant Human Resources policies and procedures, such as the [Disciplinary Policy and Procedure](#) and [Disciplinary Procedure for Consultants and Job Shop Workers](#). Once action and/or consideration of the matter has concluded under those procedures, Human Resources will notify the Student Complaints Officer. The Student Complaints Officer will then provide the student with an outcome to the complaint. Due to confidentiality, however, it is possible that it may not be appropriate for the Student Complaints Officer to disclose specific details regarding consideration of the matter by Human Resources and/or full details of any action taken in respect of a member, or members of staff, particularly where disciplinary action is taken.
- Investigations into allegations of harassment made by students or staff members against other Brunel students will usually be handled under the [Non-Academic Misconduct Procedure \(October 2024\)](#) in accordance with [Senate Regulation 6](#). Where a student about whom allegations are made is on a Professional Programme at the university, action may also, or alternatively be taken under the [Fitness to Practise Procedure \(October 2024\)](#) in accordance with [Senate Regulation 14 - Fitness to Practise \(October 2024\)](#).



Any incidents of harassment that are reported formally will be investigated within the time limits set out in the relevant procedure, with due consideration to the rights and privacy of the complainant student, the reported party and any other individuals involved. Students will be kept informed about timescales and the procedure being used to consider the complaint by the Office for Student Complaints, Conduct and Appeals (OSCCA).

The University does not have to follow third party outcomes in its own decision making under the [Non-Academic Misconduct Procedure \(October 2024\)](#) as it is an independent process. However, such outcomes may be taken into account if considered relevant. This means that the University may take action under its internal disciplinary procedures if the Police decide not to investigate, or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decides not to prosecute a potential criminal offence, and where a student or staff member is convicted or acquitted in criminal proceedings. This is because under the University's internal disciplinary procedures, a student or staff member is not being charged with a criminal offence, the evidence that can be considered may be different, the standard of proof is different and the penalties available are different. Although the University is not bound by the outcome of any criminal prosecution, it may at its discretion, take any penalty imposed by a criminal court into consideration in determining any outcome under its internal disciplinary procedures.

The University may suspend an investigation into a harassment complaint where, for example, the alleged conduct could also constitute a criminal offence and is being investigated by the Police and dealt with within the criminal process. This is because the University could prejudice the criminal process if it were to start investigating the alleged conduct by interviewing witnesses and drafting witness statements.

## **Confidentiality**

Reports of harassment will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and in accordance with data protection legislation, with information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating the concern or incident further. No third party will be told any more about the incident than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them to conduct a full and fair investigation. The person being investigated is normally asked to respond and full details of the matter will normally be shared with them to ensure transparency and fairness.

Where you have objections to details of the concern raised, or any other personal details being shared with any colleagues, or another student, or a third party, you should make this known to the person who is investigating the matter and they will discuss with you the extent to which they can consider the case fairly, transparently and effectively in these circumstances. Where it is necessary to interview witnesses, the importance of confidentiality will be emphasised. It will be explained to everyone involved in the process that any breach of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action.

## **Anonymity**

The University is not normally able to fully investigate incidents of harassment which are submitted anonymously, or where you are not willing for your details to be known by others, because this may impede the University's ability to investigate the matter effectively, transparently and fairly. Where someone has reported a concern anonymously, they are unlikely to receive an individual, specific outcome regarding the concerns raised, as a full and fair investigation will not have been possible. However, if a concern or incident is reported anonymously, it may be possible to provide general feedback to relevant parties about the issues raised, without disclosing the identity of the person who reported it. This will, however, depend on the specific circumstances of the concern and may not be possible in all cases.

## **Disclosure to third parties**

Where reports of harassment are made to the University, it may, at its discretion and without notifying the individual who reported the matter, discuss or refer the concern to relevant third parties. This may be appropriate, for example, where a student is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, or to prevent a crime taking place. Relevant third parties may include the Police, employers, placement providers, sponsors, grant providers, research funding bodies or Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

The University will only in exceptional circumstances report an alleged crime to the Police contrary to the wishes of the reporting student, but in deciding whether to make such a disclosure and in deciding what information to disclose, the University will consider any potential harm that the unauthorised disclosure may cause to the reporting student.

Any data collected and (possibly) shared with third parties would be held in accordance with the applicable records retention policy.

## **Recording and monitoring harassment complaints**

A record of formal harassment complaints received from students will be held in accordance with our records retention policy and the means of resolution will be kept by the University and reported annually as part of the University's monitoring and quality assurance processes. No information that will identify any individual will be available within the report.

## **Bullying and Harassment Training**

- *Training for students* - As a community, it is important that we all understand what harassment means. Mandatory training is therefore provided to all new students to ensure that they are appropriately informed to understand the university's policies and procedures and the types of behaviour that may constitute harassment or sexual misconduct. For students who may be triggered by the content of the training, they may inform the university and alternatives will be considered, but in the main it will be mandatory.



- *Training for Colleagues* - Training about what harassment means and how to respond appropriately takes a tiered approach at Brunel. For further information, see Appendix B.

(Updated: August 2025)

## Appendix A – Further information, advice and support

The list of useful contacts given below is correct at the time of writing (August 2025). Please check the web for up-to-date contact information. Please note that Brunel University London does not endorse or take responsibility for the information provided by external organisations.

### External services

**Equality and Human Rights Commission** is the statutory body responsible for protecting, enforcing and promoting equality across nine protected characteristics — age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation — [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com) - [Homepage | EHRC](#)

**Advance HE** provides advice and support for students and staff on equality and diversity in higher education — [Home | Advance HE](#)

### Specialist Services

**Ditch the Label** is the international anti-bullying charity who campaigns to end bullying and support young people – [Ditch the Label | Youth Charity | Mental Health, Bullying & Relationships](#)

**National Bullying Helpline** provides help and advice related to bullying or harassment at school or work - <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

**Samaritans** provides free confidential emotional support 24/7 to those experiencing despair, distress or suicidal feelings. Call: 116 123 or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Victim Support** provides free confidential support to those affected by crime including harassment. Call for free on 0808 1689111 or request support online via [Home - Victim Support](#)

### Further information

**Initiations at Universities** is a briefing that raises awareness of the dangers of initiations. For further information see - [Initiations at UK universities](#)

## **Appendix B - Further Information regarding training for colleagues**

This includes:

- *General training for all colleagues* - Mandatory training is provided to all colleagues to raise awareness about what harassment means, as well as the importance of promoting and maintaining freedom of speech and academic freedom at Brunel. Sources of support for students and colleagues affected by harassment and details about how to report incidents is also included in this training.
- *Investigations training* - Colleagues responsible for student and colleague disciplinary investigations arising from complaints about harassment receive training on the University's procedures; including how to ensure a fair, thorough and impartial investigation is conducted and also takes into account the need for sensitivity and an awareness of the impact on all those involved.
- *Decision-maker training* - For those responsible for making decisions on student or colleague disciplinary cases, specific training is provided on how to fairly and impartially consider cases of harassment. How to conduct panel hearings where all those involved may be present, including ensuring all parties are heard and that fair and appropriate questions are asked also forms part of this training. Information about the available penalties and how to determine what may be an appropriate outcome is also provided as part of this training, ensuring informed decisions can be made.

For further information please contact [organisational.development@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:organisational.development@brunel.ac.uk).