

Bespoke Student Consultation Forum

CONSULTATION ON THE DIGNITY AND RESPECT POLICY

28 November – 11 December 2022

A complete record of the discussion can be viewed on the [forum](#). Below is a summary of key points made by students.

Record of contributions

In total there were **93** posts by **32** students, with **137** like/favourite ratings. There were at least **276** independent readers of the forum. Below are extracts from most 'liked' posts.

I do think simplified and easy to access clear support for different issues should be a part of a hub that students can access and that is flagged in every module.

Having read the policy, the behaviours considered bullying or harassing are couched in standard language applied to most bullying policies. Some clear examples relevant to students and staff would be useful. What is appropriate and inappropriate challenge is very clear.

It's an incredibly long document for anyone who is looking for support. To make it clearer for someone who may be struggling, a possible visual like a flow chartn of how/what to do may help people navigate.

1. How well does the policy make clear the sorts of behaviour that might be considered bullying and harassing? In particular, the differentiation between an appropriate and inappropriate challenge.

- The language in the policy is standard and applied to most bullying policies.
- Students had the very strong view that that clear examples of appropriate and inappropriate challenges and different types of bullying and harassment would be useful.
- The policy needs to be more visible to students so students can access it easily.

- Some students found the language clear but some students fed back that the policy could be rewritten with plain English throughout to help with accessibility.
- It was pointed out that there are some repetitions within the policy.
- Students felt that that a section on time was missing from the policy. The policy states that a single incident does not justify the accusation of bullying but students wished to know a time-frame that would.
- Section 1.3 needs to be reviewed to ensure that its definitions and characterisations are up to date and relevant. An example given by the student was: the differentiation between the term appropriate and inappropriate challenge are unclear and open to interpretation by the reader of the Policy as the actual terminology is not used throughout the Policy.
- Students fed back that the policy needed reviewing in regards to 'repeated bullying' as bullying can be a one-off instance as much as it can be repeated.
- Students also suggested that the requirement of a power imbalance in bullying is incorrect. It may not necessarily occur to create a power imbalance, but just to make someone feel miserable.
- Students felt that 'spreading rumours or lies' should be listed in the definition of bullying.
- There was a consensus that bullying should not also be defined as, for example, an incidence that occurs after the victim as already asked for the person to change or stop the behaviour.

2. In what ways does the policy successfully set out the expected standard of behaviour towards other students and members of staff? Which areas are less clear?

- Students commented that expected standards of behaviour are clear but not under headings that make them easy to find.
- Although there is clear explanation of what is not acceptable, there could be more positive examples of what is expected behaviour. Students did suggest that the Student Charter does have positive examples of expected behaviour.
- Some students did point out that it is unclear of the definitions of bullying and harassment, and what is, and what is not, considered harassment of protected characteristics by UK law.
- Students commented that there is grey area of debate and discussion in a university setting and bullying and harassment. Students felt that good management of module forums would help with this.
- It may be useful to split the policy into the policy itself and advice and guidance, to help students access the correct sections when they need it most.

- Some students were interested if there was scope to have an interactive version or video of the policy to help students access the information.
- It was suggested that there could be a Open Learn course on the expected behaviour of students at the OU.

3. On reading the policy do you understand the steps to take and feel confident to raise an issues? And understand how an issue would be dealt with?

- Students felt the name of the document does not signify to all that it is a policy relating to bullying and harassment, which is not helpful to someone who is in distress.
- There was a consensus that the steps of the process were described clearly.
- Some students commented that the meeting with both parties needs more information on how this would work in an online environment, compared to a face-to-face meeting.
- Some students suggested that the first step, of the victim discussing the issues with the perpetrator is not always the best cause of action. They felt that a review of this step needs to happen to ensure that if cannot be done, the rest of the process can take place.
- Students fed back that the use of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' should be reviewed to make sure they are line with current UK guidelines.
- Students suggested that the wording in section 4.2 be changed to 'victimisation or retaliation as a result of action being taken *or not taken* under this code', as it is also possible for persons to be harassed due to their refusal to act upon claims of bullying that have not been substantiated.
- Students commented that a flow chart of the process would help students understand what will happen as the document is lengthy.
- It would be a good idea to review both the policy and the Student Charter to ensure they are written in plain English.
- Students felt that the emphasis on informal resolution would put them off reporting and they would drop out in silence. They commented that by the time they have looked for the policy, they would have reached the stage where they have tried everything themselves and now need support from the OU.
- There was a discussion around victims having the responsibility of gathering evidence. The policy needs to outline this as an important step so victims can, for example, take screenshots. It also needs to be outlined how victims can ask for copies of deleted messages in forums (as only staff can see them once they have been deleted).

4. In ways do you think this policy contradicts or supports your general understanding of the Student Charter?

- Students discussed that the name does not describe the contents of the policy.
- However, felt that the policy supports the Student Charter and that it would be worth being more prominent to students.
- The Student Charter is not what the students will be looking at when they are a victim of bullying and harassment but does underline positive behaviour expectations for all in the OU community.
- Students suggested that the Student Charter is shared with all new staff and students at the OU.

Additions to this Summary as Suggested by Students

The students who engaged in this Student Consultation were shown this summary and asked if it summarised the discussion. Several students commented that this summary missed a few comments and did not quite encapsulate the students thoughts in a few areas. All these are listed below:

- Students commented in the Student Consultation that it is traumatic to meet with one's abuser. The students wanted to ensure that it was clear that they felt very strongly about this and that this, would put many people off engaging in the process at all. Students also raised the point that these meetings can be difficult in terms of logistics, such as time zones, being in work, caring responsibilities, etc.
- Students commented that there was a lack of clarification of the disciplinary procedures, and referenced that the policy suggested what may happen in terms of sanctions (to the abuser) but not with certainty. The policy also does not reference what would happen in the case of the complaint not being found to be substantive and the victim disagrees with this.
- Students suggested the Dignity and Respect policy be separated, one for students and one for staff members.
- Not all the students felt the Dignity and Respect policy aligned with the Student Charter.
- Students wanted to clarify that they were not looking for a number to put on the issue of how long does bullying have to take place to be considered bullying, but rather a rewording in the policy that would support students who have been bullied, no matter how long the bullying has been taking place.
- Students raised the point that there is an error in the summary for question, which has now been corrected in above also. The statement now reads:

*There was a consensus that bullying should **not** also be defined as, for example, an incidence that occurs after the victim as already asked for the person to change or stop the behaviour.*

The word not was missed in the original summary, which changed the entire meaning of the sentence. Students felt that asking for the bullying and harassment to stop was not always a necessary step as it could make the situation worse, and therefore, should not be included as a step for victims to take in this policy.

- Students commented that the summary of the Student Consultation doesn't explain all the nuances and strength of feelings as discussed in the Student Consultation. The students who engaged in the Student Consultation spoke with passion in this discussion with the aim of protecting students from bullying and harassment and any further trauma the process may cause when dealing with bullying and harassment. We recommended reading the full discussion of the [Dignity and Respect Student Consultation](#) to fully understand and appreciate the students views on the topic.