

HARASSMENT POLICY

Since 1947 the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) has existed to awaken and deepen personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to further evangelistic work among students throughout the world. This mission arose from our shared beliefs as expressed in our Doctrinal Basis. The IFES Board has approved this policy in order to ensure that we pursue our mission in a manner that brings honour to God, respecting the legal requirements placed on our organisation and seeking to model good practice to all those with whom we work.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to communicate that we do not tolerate harassment or bullying and that we seek to create a workplace where everyone can work with dignity. The policy also explains how allegations of harassment or bullying are to be dealt with.

The policy applies to all staff within IFES (employees, secondees, consultants, volunteers, temporary workers and contractors), as well as board and committee members. All staff are expected to put this policy into practice.

A copy of this policy will be distributed to all staff and can also be found on the intranet and will be made available to new staff on their engagement. Job seekers and applicants can access the policy via the website and will be sent a copy of the policy on request. In addition, all new and existing staff will receive a briefing on this policy.

Any questions about the policy should be directed to the Head of People and Culture.

This policy is non-contractual and does not form part of an employee's terms and conditions of employment. The policy is regularly reviewed and may be amended at any time.

POLICY STATEMENT

IFES does not tolerate any form of harassment or bullying under any circumstances. While implementing and upholding the policy is the duty of all of our supervisors, all staff have a responsibility to ensure that harassment does not occur and that if it does, it is dealt with in a serious, sensitive and confidential manner so that the matter can be resolved as quickly as possible for all concerned.

IFES will not tolerate harassment or bullying of:

- job applicants
- employees
- secondees
- contractors
- volunteers
- agency workers
- the self-employed
- ex-employees

This policy also applies to work-related functions which are held outside of normal working hours, either on or off IFES' premises, for example Christmas parties, leaving celebrations, working lunches.

WHAT IS HARASSMENT?

Harassment is unwanted behaviour which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. Harassment can stem from inappropriate behaviour that relates to: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex, religious beliefs or sexual orientation.

Harassment may also take a wide range of forms. The following list (which is not exhaustive) gives some examples:

Physical:

- Any unwanted touching (including at work social functions)
- Threat of, or actual assault/ violence
- Potentially offensive gestures
- Sexual advances and requests for sexual activity
- Stalking

Verbal:

- Potentially offensive jokes or remarks
- Abusive, threatening or insulting words or behaviour
- Ridicule
- Lewd comments about appearance
- Threat of dismissal or loss of promotion
- Swearing

Non-verbal:

- Discriminatory or offensive emails, text or other types of messages
- Unfair work allocation
- Isolation, ignoring, deliberate exclusion
- Creation, circulation or publishing material of a sexual or racial context
- Coercion – pressure for sexual favours (for example to get a job or be promoted) and pressure to participate in political, religious or trade union groups, etc
- Isolation or non-cooperation and exclusion from social activities
- Intrusion – for example following, pestering, spying

Harassment at work is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

BULLYING

IFES recognises bullying as a gradual wearing down process comprising a sustained form of psychological abuse that makes victims feel demeaned and inadequate. Bullying is defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power, which has the purpose, or effect of intimidating, belittling and humiliating the recipient, leading to loss of self-esteem for the victim and ultimately self-questioning his or her worth in the workplace and society as a whole.

Workplace bullying can range from extreme forms such as violence and intimidation to less obvious actions, like deliberately ignoring someone at work. These can be split into two categories:

The obvious:

- Shouting or swearing at people in public and private
- Persistent criticism
- Ignoring or deliberately excluding people
- Persecution through threats and instilling fear
- Spreading malicious rumours

- Constantly undervaluing effort
- Dispensing disciplinary action that is totally unjustified
- Spontaneous rages, often over trivial matters

The less obvious:

- Withholding information or supplying incorrect information
- Deliberately sabotaging or impeding work performance
- Constantly changing targets
- Setting individuals up to fail by imposing impossible deadlines
- Levelling unfair criticism about performance the night before an employee goes on holiday
- Removing areas of responsibility and imposing menial tasks
- Blocking applications for holiday, promotion or training

The actions listed must be viewed in terms of the distress they cause the individual. The perception of the person making the claim must be given significant weight in determining whether the matter is bullying.

Some of the above can be considered appropriate if there is a real business or performance reason which can be truly justified. For example, in some circumstances it is appropriate to supervise one individual more than others when a performance standard needs to be raised. The main considerations are whether the action can be justified and how it is perceived by the individual concerned.

IDENTIFYING HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

Different things affect people all in different ways, and therefore what one individual might think of as harmless could be felt to be harassment and bullying by another. It is important to remember that harassment and bullying is defined by the way that someone feels about the behaviour itself, and not by the intentions. For example, someone may tell a joke that they think is funny. Although it was just a bit of fun and there was no intention to upset anyone, one of their colleagues finds it offensive. This individual may have a valid claim that they had been harassed and bullied.

For most people, the 'unwanted' aspect of actions, perceived as harassment, is a key distinction. Friendly, welcome and mutual actions are fine, but extreme care should be taken to distinguish between unwanted and accepted actions when interacting with others.

If sufficiently serious, one action alone can be termed as harassment however it is normally only termed harassment when it persists after the individual has asked the action to stop. As far as IFES is concerned, any action that could be construed as harassment should not occur and individuals do not need to make it clear that certain actions are unacceptable to them in advance. For example, it is certainly not necessary to let someone know in advance that touching in a sexual way is an unwanted action.

It is important to remember that harassment:

- Depends on the view of the individual on the receiving end of the behaviour
- Does not depend on the severity of the behaviour - a joke or a throw-away comment could be perceived as harassment by anyone who hears it
- Can include behaviour that is heard or seen, even if indirectly

PREVENTING HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

Everyone has a responsibility to discourage harassment and bullying and prevent it from taking place by:

- Being aware of the problems which harassment and bullying can cause, and ensuring that personal behaviour does not cause others to feel harassed or bullied
- Making colleagues aware that certain conduct or behaviour is causing concern or offence to others

Supervisors have a particular responsibility to prevent harassment and bullying taking place by:

- Being alert to the possibility that harassment and bullying may be happening in their area
- Using their judgement to correct behaviour that could be considered as offensive, and reminding employees of IFES' policy on this matter
- Taking prompt action to stop harassment and bullying as soon as it is identified
- Dealing with all incidents quickly, seriously, sensitively, and in confidence

DEALING WITH HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

IFES will deal with all complaints of harassment and bullying promptly, sensitively and in confidence. Most people who complain that they are being harassed and bullied simply want the behaviour to stop. Where appropriate, they can be encouraged to take charge of the situation themselves by informing the harasser that his/her behaviour is unacceptable and that it must stop.

If an employee feels unable to deal with a particular situation without support, s/he should ask the supervisor or HR to explain to the person causing offence that their behaviour is unwelcome and must stop.

If this initial approach fails to resolve the problem, then the employee may use the formal Grievance Procedure. Disciplinary action will be considered in all cases where a claim of harassment or bullying is substantiated, and will be taken if the harassment or bullying, once identified, does not stop immediately.

See also our Whistleblowing and Personal Conduct Policies.

Policy prepared by: IFES HR Department

Approved by: IFES Board

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