



Positive Work Environment

British Union Conference

Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation Policy

Revised
5 December 2024

A. Statement of the Policy

The British Union Conference (BUC) is committed to creating a harmonious and safe working environment, which is free from bullying, harassment and victimisation and in which every employee is treated with respect and dignity. The constituent employing organisations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland will have their own employment handbooks which each contain a section on bullying, harassment and victimisation. These are contractual matters whereas this policy is operational. The BUC strives to ensure that the different experiences, abilities, and skills of each individual are valued by others. Inappropriate behaviour should be challenged. It is the Church's intention to encourage everyone to always behave in a proper manner, in harmony with the BUC's Statement of Ethical Foundations

Bullying, harassment or victimisation causes stress, anxiety, and unhappiness to individuals, creates an unpleasant environment in which to work, and may be unlawful. This can reduce efficiency and may ultimately have an impact on the way in which services are delivered to our members and the wider public. For these reasons it is important that within the BUC , employers, and individual employees, strive to achieve a working environment which is free from this type of behaviour. You may be an individual or part of a group that receives the unwanted attention. The bullying, harassment, or victimisation may be a one-off incident, or it may be a series of incidents. Your dignity at work can be affected by inappropriate behaviour, which causes offence, whether it is intentional, or not.

Employers and employees within the BUC are committed to ensuring that individuals do not feel apprehensive because of their race, religion or belief, disability, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, or age, or as a result of being subjected to any inappropriate behaviour.

All employees can expect to:

- Be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- Be able to work, free from unfair treatment, bullying, harassment or victimisation.
- Be valued for their skills, abilities, and experiences.

All employees are expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with the content of this policy.
- Treat all employees with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- Contribute towards a positive working culture.
- Challenge or report unacceptable behaviour.
- Be mindful of others when expressing views.
- Cooperate with investigations into bullying, harassment and victimisation.

Breaches of this policy will be considered unacceptable behaviour and will be treated as misconduct, which may include gross misconduct warranting dismissal. All employees must comply with this policy.

Employers within the BUC are committed to dealing with any issues quickly, positively, and confidentially when and if they occur.

This policy also applies to work social events, such as a Christmas party, and to social media posts and interactions on social media between employees, which will still be classed as 'work situations'. It is important to remember that while you may make comments outside of work, for example on social networking sites, your employer may use such evidence in investigations on bullying, harassment and victimisation matters. However, information from social media will only be used if it is work related.

B. Definition of Bullying*

Bullying can be repeated inappropriate, offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, which is often an abuse of power or position. It can be direct or indirect, either verbal, physical or non-verbal, conducted by one or more persons against another or others in the course of employment, through means intended to undermine, injure or humiliate the recipient.

The following examples may constitute bullying:

- Threats, abuse, teasing, gossip or practical jokes.
- Humiliation and ridicule either in private, at meetings or in front of customers/clients.
- Name calling, banter, insults, devaluing with reference to age or physical appearance.
- Setting impossible deadlines.
- Imposing excessive workloads.
- Making unjustified criticisms.
- Excessive monitoring.
- Removing responsibilities.
- Allocating menial or pointless tasks.
- Withholding information.
- Refusing requests for leave, holiday or training.
- Removing someone from a team social media group because they have raised a complaint of bullying.

It should be noted that it is the impact of the behaviour which is relevant, and not the motive or intent behind it.

C. Definition of Harassment*

Harassment is a discriminatory act, related to a relevant protected characteristic set out in the Equality Act 2010, that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. The protected characteristics are race, religion or belief, disability, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, and age.

Harassment may take many forms. It can range from extreme forms such as violence to less obvious actions such as persistently ignoring someone. The following, though not an exhaustive list, may constitute harassment:

- Physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault.
- Verbal and written harassment (including via email) through jokes, teasing or banter, offensive language, gossip and slander, or letters.
- Sharing inappropriate images or videos.
- Using racist slang, phrases or nicknames.
- Isolation or non-cooperation, or exclusion from social activities.
- Intrusion by pestering, spying, following etc.
- Consistently using the wrong names and pronouns following a gender identity transition.
- Mimicking or making fun of someone's disability.
- Marginalising someone because they are of a particular race.

Employees may also be subject to harassment from third parties such as clients, customers, suppliers, the general public etc. where interaction with those third parties is a part of their role.

D. Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating a hostile environment for them.

The law requires employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of workers in the course of their employment.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Unwelcome sexual invitations or pressure to meet up socially on a date.
- Displaying sexually explicit material.
- Unwanted physical sexual behaviour, for example caressing or grabbing in a sexual manner.
- Leering or making sexually suggestive gestures.
- Sending pornographic material.

Harassment also includes unwanted sexual conduct, or that is related to sex or gender reassignment, which creates a hostile environment and because of a rejection of, or submission to, the conduct, the harasser treats the person less favourably. For example:

- Threatening that an employee will lose their job because they have refused to enter into a sexual relationship with the manager.
- Spreading malicious rumours about someone's transgender status and then refusing to promote them because they raised a grievance about this.

E. Third Party Harassment

Third-party harassment occurs where a person is harassed by someone who does not work for the same employer, such as a visitor or supplier. We recognise the seriousness of third-party harassment and we have zero tolerance towards this. Employees are encouraged to report any incidents of harassment by third parties which they experience or witness.

F. Victimisation

Victimisation means treating someone badly because they have done, or are suspected of doing or intending to do, any of the following protected acts:

- Bringing proceedings under the Equality Act 2010.
- Giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Equality Act 2010.
- Doing anything else in connection with the Equality Act 2010.
- Alleging that a person has breached the Equality Act 2010.

An example of victimisation may include a manager bringing false disciplinary proceedings against an employee because they complained they were being sexually harassed.

G. Employees' Responsibilities

All employees have a responsibility to help create and maintain a working environment that respects the dignity of employees. You should be aware of the serious and genuine problems which bullying, harassment and victimisation can cause and ensure that your behaviour is beyond question and could not be considered in any way to be bullying, harassment or victimisation. No one should practise or encourage such behaviour and should make it clear to all concerned that you find it unacceptable. You should also support colleagues if they are experiencing bullying, harassment or victimisation and are considering making a complaint. You should alert a director or an officer to any such incidents to enable your employer to deal with the matter.

H. Managerial Responsibility

Line managers and supervisors (usually a director or officer) have a responsibility to ensure that bullying, harassment or victimisation does not occur in work areas for which they are responsible. They are committed to the elimination of bullying, harassment and victimisation and must be vigilant in preventing acts wherever possible.

Managers and supervisors also have a particular duty to set a proper example by treating everyone with dignity and respect and ensuring that their behaviour is beyond question.

Managers also have a responsibility to explain this policy to their staff and take steps to promote it positively. They will be responsive and supportive to any member of staff who

makes a complaint, provide full and clear advice on the procedure to be adopted, maintain confidentiality in all cases, and ensure that there are no further problems or any victimisation after a complaint has been raised or resolved.

Your employer will provide regular training opportunities, including during the induction of new employees, to ensure that all managers, supervisors, and other staff are fully aware of this policy and the procedures for dealing with bullying, harassment and victimisation.

I. Procedure for Dealing with Alleged Bullying, Harassment or Victimisation

If you encounter a problem of this nature, it is vital that you make the person responsible aware that his/her remarks or conduct are offensive to you. This should be done in a simple, straightforward way.

It is recognised that complaints of bullying, harassment or victimisation are often of a sensitive or worrying nature and that it may be difficult to speak directly to the other employee involved. If this is the case, you should put your request in writing and hand it to the bully, harasser or victimiser.

When or if the informal approach fails or if you believe that the bullying, harassment or victimisation is of a very serious nature you must bring the matter to the attention of the employing organisation's Executive Secretary. If possible, you should keep notes of the bullying, harassment or victimisation so that the formal complaint can be investigated, including the date, time and whereabouts of the act.

If you make a formal complaint, it will be dealt with under the grievance procedure and all possible actions will be taken to separate you from the alleged bully, harasser or victimiser.

If you bring a complaint of bullying, harassment or victimisation you will not be victimised for having brought the complaint. However, following a full investigation, if the employer has grounds to believe that the complaint was brought with malicious intent, you will be subject to disciplinary action under the employer's disciplinary procedure.

The employer reserves the right to call on a third party to assist in resolving grievances. In the event that the grievance is against one of the employing organisation's Executive Officers, the grievance shall be referred to the next higher level of the denomination, which, following an investigation will report their findings and recommendations to the employing organisation's Executive Committee.

The employer's appeal procedures apply to appeals against decisions made under the equal opportunities and discrimination policy and this policy.

If, at the conclusion of a formal grievance procedure, a complaint of bullying, harassment or victimisation against an elected officer or director is upheld, the Union, Conference, or Mission Executive Committee should be informed promptly.

You will be protected from intimidation, victimisation or discrimination for filing a complaint or assisting in an investigation. Retaliating against an employee for complaining about bullying, harassment or victimisation is a disciplinary offence.

Whilst this procedure is designed to assist genuine victims of bullying, harassment or victimisation, you should be aware that if you raise complaints which are proven to be deliberately vexatious, you may become subject to proceedings under the disciplinary procedure.

Whilst bullying, harassment and victimisation are unacceptable in any form, this policy should not be used to frustrate routine performance management processes. Employees should expect their employers to evaluate their performance and competence as part of their normal working practice, though this should be done fairly, with similar procedures across the workforce.

J. Procedure for Dealing with Alleged Bullying, Harassment or Victimisation from a Third Party

Any form of bullying, harassment or victimisation towards you from third parties during your dealings with them will not be tolerated by employers within the BUC.

We appreciate that a decision to report bullying, harassment or victimisation from a third party may be difficult, particularly if the third party is a valuable client/customer or has a long-standing business relationship with the employer. However, we encourage you to report any instance of bullying, harassment or victimisation from a third party so that the employer can take appropriate action.

You should follow the procedure set out above if you experience bullying, harassment or victimisation from a third party, after which a meeting with you will be arranged and an investigation undertaken.

Our action, where a complaint is substantiated, will depend on the circumstances of the case and may include:

- Speaking with the bully, harasser or victimiser and warning them that any future occurrence of bullying, harassment or victimisation will result in the employer withdrawing provision of its services to the bully, harasser or victimiser.
- Contacting the business for whom the bully, harasser or victimiser works and making a complaint against them. We will explicitly ask for this conduct to stop and we may require that the bully, harasser or victimiser is removed from our account.
- Refusing to continue to provide our services to the bully, harasser or victimiser.
- Reassigning the provision of the employer's services to the bully, harasser or victimiser to another employee.

*For a fuller definition of bullying, harassment and victimisation see: www.gov.uk/workplace-bullying-and-harassment