

URSULINE COLLEGE, SLIGO

SCHOOL POLICY ON DIGNITY AT WORK

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Ursuline education is based on the writings of St. Angela Merici who founded the Ursuline Congregation in 1535.

In her writings, St Angela speaks of the dignity that each person possesses; Angela herself modelled respect, courtesy and gentleness in all her relationships.

Ursuline education tries to nurture a community where Christian values are respected, lived and taught, and places great emphasis on

- ◆ The dignity and uniqueness of each person
- ◆ The fostering of courage and confidence to live in justice and peace
- ◆ The fostering of a caring and respectful attitude towards self and others.

Within the context of the school's philosophy and mission statements, the Board of Management of Ursuline College is committed to providing all employees with an environment that is free from any form of workplace bullying, where each one can be expected to be treated with dignity both by management and work colleagues.

The purpose of this document is to outline the Board's policy and procedures in relation to workplace bullying.

In approving this policy, the Board has agreed that

- ◆ The policy is brought to the attention of all staff members
- ◆ All staff members be asked to co-operate in its implementation

POLICY

The creation and maintenance of a positive working environment enables individuals to work to their potential in the workplace. Integral to the principle of mutual respect is the commitment to provide a workplace free from bullying.

The Board of Management of Ursuline College, therefore, is committed to providing a working environment free of harassment, bullying or intimidation of any kind for all staff.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY

The objective of the Board's policy is

- ◆ to create and maintain a positive working environment in Ursuline College where the right of each individual to dignity at work is recognised and protected
- ◆ to ensure that all staff members are aware of and committed to the principles set out in the policy
- ◆ to provide an effective procedure for dealing with allegations of bullying or intimidation should these arise

The policy guarantees that all complaints will be taken seriously and investigated promptly, and that all parties will be treated with respect.

Staff will be protected from victimisation or discrimination for assisting in an investigation.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING/HARASSMENT

Workplace bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or psychological, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work. An isolated incident may be an affront to dignity at work but as a once off incident is not considered to be bullying. Harassment is defined as any act or conduct which is offensive or intimidating on discriminatory grounds including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material. Harassment will not be tolerated at any level.

Bullying may take any of the following forms:

- ◆ Pushing or jostling a person
- ◆ Sudden rages often over trivial matters
- ◆ Humiliating a person
- ◆ Persistently ridiculing or picking on a person as the butt of jokes even when the person has made it clear that s/he finds such behaviour offensive
- ◆ Mocking and belittling new ideas and the enthusiasm of others
- ◆ Derogatory jokes
- ◆ Being mimicked in one's absence before students and/or colleagues
- ◆ Malicious tricks
- ◆ Not sharing/minding/returning resources
- ◆ Shouting at a colleague or speaking down to them in front of other colleagues
- ◆ Showing hostility through sustained unfriendly contact or exclusion
- ◆ Persistent negative attacks on a colleague's personal or professional performance
- ◆ Persistently challenging or undermining a person's authority
- ◆ Persistently finding fault with a person's work and using this as an excuse to humiliate rather than trying to improve performance
- ◆ Setting objectives with impossible deadlines or unachievable tasks
- ◆ Constantly picking on a person when things go wrong even when s/he is not responsible

This is not an exhaustive list.

Any one of the above behaviours may occur in isolation and may be out of character for the person who engages in such behaviour. Bullying behaviour, however, involves persistently engaging in certain forms of behaviour which intimidate and humiliate another person.

EFFECTS OF BULLYING

Bullying can affect the emotional and physical health of its victims. These effects can be serious if the exposure is sustained. Symptoms can include loss of confidence, low self-esteem, severe anxiety, loss of concentration, etc. It can have a dramatic influence on an individual's overt behaviour and can change a happy confident person into a withdrawn, demotivated individual. There can also be physical manifestations of illness, e.g. heart disease and raised blood pressure, disturbed sleep, tearfulness, loss of energy, etc.

Personal and family life can be disrupted and livelihood could ultimately be affected through forced resignation from employment.

It should be noted that where bullying exists, the whole school atmosphere may be affected resulting in a climate of fear and intimidation, low morale and consequently damaging to the fabric of the whole school community.

Why might a staff member not take action

- ◆ The particular workplace culture passively supports bullying i.e. staff in general are unaware of the seriousness of bullying
- ◆ Fear that the complaint will not be taken seriously
- ◆ There are no witnesses to the bullying and it would be one person's word against another
- ◆ If the alleged bully is a manager, there may be fear that more senior management will support the manager
- ◆ Fear of not being believed
- ◆ Fear that s/he might be lacking in credibility
- ◆ Fear that s/he may be seen as unable for the job
- ◆ Fear that s/he may be seen as disloyal
- ◆ Difficulty in overcoming the shame and humiliation of criticisms and false allegations of under-performance.

Again this is not an exhaustive list.

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF BULLYING

There are two stages for dealing with cases of alleged workplace bullying: Stage One: Informal and Stage Two: Formal. If the decision is to follow Stage One and the problem persists, the complaint can then be dealt with under Stage Two.

Sometimes individuals may be unaware of the negative effects of their behaviour on other adults in the workplace. Such individuals may simply need to be told. Thus at times, incidents of bullying can be handled effectively in an informal way under Stage One. If an incident occurs that is offensive, it may be sufficient to explain clearly to the offender that the behaviour is unacceptable. If the circumstances are too difficult or embarrassing for an individual, support may be sought from another colleague, staff representative, Principal, Deputy Principal.

STAGE ONE: INFORMAL PROCEDURE

Staff should be advised that if possible, they should attempt to resolve the problem informally in the first instance. It may be possible and sufficient for the person concerned to explain clearly to the person engaging in the unwanted behaviour that it is not welcome, that it is offensive or makes the person uncomfortable, and that it interferes with his/her work.

Where an individual cannot do this on his/her own behalf, an approach may be made to a contact person.

The role of the contact person is to listen and support an individual. A contact person does not advise. The contact person must ensure that the individual is aware of the school's Dignity at Work policy.

It is very important for the recipient of the bullying/harassment behaviour to keep notes detailing times and dates of incidents of bullying/harassment and request witnesses, if any, to note them also.

Attempts should be made to resolve the matter informally, if appropriate. Counselling and support services will be made available.

If it is not possible to resolve the matter informally, a formal complaints procedure (Stage Two) shall be applied incorporating the following steps:

STAGE TWO: FORMAL PROCEDURE

Staff members subjected to bullying/harassment shall make a formal complaint to the Principal who will be responsible on behalf of management for investigating such complaints and recommending action. Ultimate disciplinary action as at d) below should take account of contractual arrangements applying in given situations. Prior to the commencement of Stage Two of the investigation, the alleged harasser will be given a copy of the formal written complaint and advised that an investigation will ensue which may lead to disciplinary action. Depending on the severity of the

alleged bullying/harassment, the alleged perpetrator may be suspended with pay pending the investigation. Both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator will be advised of their right to be accompanied and/or represented by their Union representative or a colleague.

- (a) A written report should be made by the complainant and signed by the complainant. The complaint should be confined to precise details of actual incidents of bullying/harassment
- (b) The complaint will be investigated with minimum delay as confidentially as possible by two individuals, one of whom shall be the same sex of the complainant if so requested. Due respect shall be had for the rights of the complainant and the alleged perpetrator
- (c) Both parties may be accompanied/represented at all meetings/interviews held and these shall be recorded
- (d) Where a complaint is found to be substantiated, the extent and nature of the bullying/harassment will determine the form of the disciplinary action to be taken.
- (e) Where an employee is victimised as a result of invoking or participating in any aspect of the complaints procedure, including acting as a witness for another employee, such behaviour will also be subject to disciplinary action
- (f) The decision taken on the conclusion of the investigation will be communicated in writing to all parties

No record of any complaint will be registered on an employee's file unless the formal procedure outlined above has been invoked.

It is the opinion of the school that issues of bullying are best dealt with within the school. However, no aspect of this Policy affects employees' legal rights to take their complaint outside of the school.

Where a staff member does not find it appropriate to report to the Principal as above, s/he may report to the Deputy Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Management. The list of personnel available for reporting should reflect gender balance.

Investigations of any complaint will be handled with sensitivity and with due respect for the rights of both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator. The normal grievance procedure or existing practice will be the mechanism for resolving such complaints. It is understood that all complaints will be investigated with the minimum of delay consistent with fairness to both parties.

If it is found that the alleged perpetrator's behaviour had been misinterpreted or s/he was genuinely unaware of the effect of his/her actions, further procedures may not be necessary as the investigation may come to an end.

If a complaint is not upheld and it emerges that it was malicious, it will be viewed as serious misconduct and appropriate disciplinary action may be taken against the complainant.

Where a complaint is upheld, the extent and nature of the bullying/harassment will determine the form of the disciplinary action to be taken. These actions may include a verbal warning, a written warning, suspension from duties with or without pay, or dismissal.

Where there has been a conflict of evidence it may be difficult, if not impossible, to establish as fact the full details of the complaint. However, it may be possible to establish that in the Board of Management's opinion, unacceptable behaviour has taken place.

The final conclusions and sanctions if any, may be appealed by either party.

The policy is subject to periodic review.

This Policy is a requirement under Health and Safety Legislation, Section 6