

ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE (VIOLENCE)

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

(Version 2)

This Policy and Procedure identifies the College's arrangements for the management of verbal and physical abuse (violence). Each member of staff and student population is entitled to be treated with respect and not be exposed to violent or aggressive behaviour. There is a similar expectation that staff and students will treat others with respect.

The general duties of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and more specific duties of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended) require the College to assess the risks to employees and other persons, and implement arrangements to protect them from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence. This document identifies the measures to be taken where verbal and/or physical abuse may present an identifiable risk.

The College has a Harassment Policy identifying how harassment and bullying is to be managed and the procedures and support available to an individual where they are subject to such behaviour. Where staff are uncertain whether an incident constitutes 'harassment' or 'violence' and, therefore, which College Policy applies, advice should be sought from either the Director of Human Resources or the College Health & Safety Adviser.

This Policy and Procedure is not intended to provide definitive guidance on violence at work. Where any doubt exists as to the action to be taken or advice or assistance being required, contact should be made with the College Health & Safety Adviser.

Section 1 – Defining violence

The Health and Safety Executive define violence as:

'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.

Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident, with physical attacks being comparatively rare. Verbal abuse and threats may indicate a risk of physical injury, while malicious damage to either College or an individual's property may cause distress and fear of attack. Where there is no actual physical injury, such as cases of serious or persistent verbal abuse or threats, considerable emotional injury, including stress and anxiety, may result.

Section 2 – Who is at risk?

Employees whose job requires them to deal with the public can be at risk from violence. Most at risk are those who are engaged in:

- Providing a service
- Caring
- Education
- Cash transactions

- Delivery/collection
- Controlling
- Representing authority

Section 3 – Requirement to manage violence

Staff and students, who are potentially 'at risk' of either verbal or physical abuse, have a right to be assured that all action that is reasonably practicable, is being taken for their protection. To determine whether the potential for violence exists within their area of responsibility, and in order to establish who may be 'at risk', heads of department/school/directors (hereafter referred to as 'managers') will conduct a review to determine its potential. This review will consider the following:

- Whether staff feel threatened – undertake this informally through managers, supervisors and safety representatives
- Whether staff are in a recognised 'at risk' group (see Section 2 above)
- Previous incidents of violence – have there been earlier incidents which indicate that there may be a problem?
- Known patterns of violence linked to certain work situations – do not restrict your review to incidents which have only affected your staff. Articles in local, national and the technical press may highlight relevant incidents and potential problem areas.

Where the above review establishes that either a 'perceived', 'potential' or 'actual' risk of violence exists, managers should undertake a risk assessment in order determine what control measures will be required to protect their staff.

Issues that it may be helpful to take into account, as part of the risk assessment, include:

- The need to identify potentially violent people in advance;
- The physical aspects of the environment;
- The existing physical security measures;
- The design of the job, including working practices and patterns;
- The need for information, instruction and training.

A review of risk assessments should take place at least every two years, or before, should there be a change in the perceived risk, and immediately following a reported incident of either verbal or physical abuse.

Section 4 – Reporting incidents and taking remedial action

While people have different perceptions of what they find threatening or offensive, it is important that each incident is reported, treated seriously, and management act on the information provided. Managers will investigate all incidents brought to their attention and take action to reduce the potential for an incident to re-occur. All incidents of physical violence to a person at work shall be reported using the College Accident/Incident report form.

Security Services staff are in attendance at all times of the day and night. In the event of an individual feeling threatened, Security should be contacted using the internal College Emergency Telephone Number 444 (or 01784 443888 from an outside line or mobile). They should be advised of the incident at the time it is in progress, or where that it is not possible,

at the earliest opportunity thereafter. A member of the Security Staff will be in attendance within minutes of notification.

Note: It is appreciated that personnel may not always wish to lodge a formal complaint, in which case they are still advised to notify their line manager.

Section 5 – Training and support

Staff and students who, as a result of a risk assessment, are identified as being exposed to a threat of violence need to be aware of the risks they face and how to manage them. They must be capable of recognising the possibility for danger, either to themselves or to others, and be aware of how they may diffuse potentially harmful situations. Such staff will, therefore, be provided with training which should include:

- The causes of violent and aggressive behaviour
- The policy and procedure for dealing with violence
- Safe working practices
- What to do when feeling threatened with violence
- Managing confrontation by using positive interpersonal skills
- Methods for attracting the attention of colleagues
- The use of security equipment such as alarms

The College is supportive of those who, even though the above procedures have been implemented, suffer either an assault or verbal abuse. Following such an incident, an offer of counselling support will be made.

As identified in Section 4 above, managers will investigate all cases of violence. Where sufficient evidence exists (normally involving assault) and following discussion with and the approval of the College Secretary, notification will be made to the Police. Where appropriate, a letter will also be sent to the person(s) allegedly responsible for the incident of violence, advising that disciplinary or legal action may be taken against them.

Section 6 – Monitoring compliance with the requirements of this Policy

Each department's compliance with the requirements of this Policy will be reviewed by a member of staff in the College Health and Safety Office during the health and safety audit process.

This Policy forms part of the College's Health and Safety Policy.

Matt Purcell
Deputy Health & Safety Adviser
Version 2
20/06/2011

Signed by the Principal, Professor Paul Layzell on 23rd June 2011.

In accordance with the College's commitment to equality and diversity, this Policy has been written and screened to avoid discrimination and promote a positive approach to race, disability and gender issues. Comments on the content of this document should be directed to the College Health & Safety Adviser.