

DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is committed to providing a working and learning environment which promotes respect and dignity in all aspects of RVC life and activity, and to be a community which is safe, supportive and free of intimidation, victimisation, discrimination, bullying or harassment.
- 1.2 The RVC operates a number of policies, toolkits, procedures and practices to support this inclusive environment including: the Equality and Diversity Policy, the RVC Equality Objectives and Action Plan, the Social Media Policy, IT Acceptable Use Policy, the RVC Behaviours Framework, Athena SWAN Action Plan, Management toolkits, Staff Training and Development Policy, the online Equality and Diversity Training, Managing Diversity Training and Public Interest Disclosure (commonly referred to as Whistleblowing Policy).
- 1.3 This Policy applies to all staff. For the purposes of this Policy “staff” includes full and part-time employees, fixed-term employees, officers, consultants, self-employed contractors, casual and agency staff, apprentices, and volunteers. RVC’s obligations and your duties under this Policy also extend to job applicants and former employees.

2 RELATED STUDENT PROCEDURES

- 2.1 Students and staff are encouraged to access the [RVC Student Misconduct Procedure](#) and [Reporting Form](#) if they experience or witness any behaviours against students outlined in this procedure or witness a breach of student behaviours outlined in the RVC Charter.
- 2.2 These reports should be emailed directly to the Student Resolution and Compliance (SRC) team at studentconduct@rvc.ac.uk via the submission of a [Student Misconduct Report Form](#). Any students who participate in a formal SRC process will be signposted to the Advice Centre so they can seek wellbeing support and advice.
- 2.3 Students who wish to raise a complaint about the level of service received or feel they have been unreasonably treated by the RVC should refer to the [RVC Student Complaint and Resolution Procedure](#). All complaints should be emailed to studentcomplaints@rvc.ac.uk via the submission of a [Student Complaint Form](#). The remainder of this document applies to staff.

3 PURPOSE

- 3.1 The purpose of this Policy is to:
- create a climate in which harassment (including sexual harassment), discrimination, victimisation and bullying are unacceptable behaviours which will not be tolerated;
 - in line with the RVC behaviours framework ‘*ensure own behaviour, words and actions support a commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity*’ we wish to promote an ethos and culture that is inclusive and safeguards the dignity and wellbeing of everyone;

- give individuals the confidence that any concerns they may have will be considered fairly and appropriately and that complaints can be brought in good faith without fear of detriment or victimisation.

3.2 This Policy is non contractual and may after consultation with the recognised Trade Unions be amended at any time by the RVC. This Policy covers harassment or bullying which occurs on site and off site, such as on business trips or at work-related events or social functions. It covers bullying and harassment by staff and students and also by third parties such as clients, suppliers or visitors to RVC premises.

3.3 All staff and students should be treated with courtesy, fairness and respect and are expected to treat others in the same way. This Policy applies to all RVC premises, and all RVC staff working at other premises.

3.4 Employees who make complaints, or who participate in any investigation, in good faith under this Policy must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result. Anyone found to have retaliated against or victimised someone in this way will be subject to disciplinary action under the relevant Disciplinary Procedure. If an employee believes they have suffered any such treatment they should inform Human Resources. If the matter is not remedied it should be raised formally in accordance with this procedure.

3.5 The RVC will seek to prevent harassment and bullying by publicising and communicating this Policy widely; by providing training for those involved in advising on or dealing with complaints of harassment and bullying; and in any other ways appropriate to the circumstances. The Policy and its implementation will be reviewed regularly in the light of developments both at RVC and externally.

3.6 Nothing in this Policy is intended to restrict or undermine the right to academic freedom as set out in statute 15 (b) of the RVC statutes or to freedom of speech within the law (see the RVC's [Policy and Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#)).

4 DEFINITIONS

4.1 The effects of harassment and bullying can be very damaging to the physical and/or emotional wellbeing of the recipient, and, if unaddressed, can have longer term implications for the individual's career prospects and health. Some forms of unacceptable behaviour such as victimisation or harassment are unlawful. There are many definitions of harassment and bullying, but for the purposes of this document, the following definitions will apply:

4.2 **Harassment** is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past. Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories. Harassment may be persistent or a single incident. If sufficiently serious, harassment can be a criminal offence.

4.3 Harassment may include, for example: offensive remarks (including offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content), gossip, racist, sexist, homophobic or ageist jokes, or derogatory or stereotypical remarks about a particular ethnic or religious group or gender; obscene gestures or language; spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone; the display or electronic transmission of offensive material, sending or displaying material that is pornographic or that some people may find offensive (including

e-mails, text messages, video clips and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet); pictures or graffiti; speculation about a person's sexuality; disclosing or threatening to disclose someone's sexual orientation or gender identity against their wishes; mocking, mimicking or belittling a person's disability; and isolation or exclusion from social activities. Harassment may also occur even if the individual was not the intended 'target'. For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment.

- 4.4** Sexual harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to sexual harassment. It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or that is related to gender reassignment or sex, in the past. Sexual harassment may include, for example: unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing; continued suggestions for sexual activity after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome. Sending or displaying material that is pornographic or that some people may find offensive (including emails, text messages, video clips and images sent by mobile phone or posted on the internet) unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless); or offensive emails, text messages or social media content. A person may be sexually harassed even if they were not the intended target. For example, a person may be sexually harassed by pornographic images displayed on a colleague's computer in the workplace.
- 4.5** **Victimisation** includes subjecting a person to a detriment 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 any other thing for the purposes of or in connection with the Equality Act 2010; alleging that a person has contravened the Equality Act 2010. Victimisation may include, for example: denying someone an opportunity because it is suspected that they intend to make a complaint about harassment; excluding someone because they have raised a grievance about harassment; failing to promote someone because they accompanied another staff member to a grievance meeting; or dismissing someone because they gave evidence on behalf of another staff member at an employment tribunal hearing.
- 4.6** Harassment and victimisation are unlawful and will not be tolerated. They may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal if they are committed, for example: in a work situation; during any situation related to work such as at a social event with colleagues; against a colleague or other person connected to the RVC outside of a work situation, including on social media and against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to suitability to carry out the person's role.
- 4.7** We will take into account any aggravating factors, such as abuse of power, when deciding the appropriate disciplinary action to take.
- 4.8** **Third-party harassment** occurs where a person is harassed by someone who does not work for, and who is not an agent of, the same employer, but with whom they have come into contact during the course of their employment. Third-party harassment could include, for example: derogatory comments about a person's age, disability, pregnancy, colour, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, from a client, customer or supplier visiting the RVC's premises, or where a person is visiting a client, customer or supplier's premises or other location in the course of their employment; or unwelcome sexual advances from a client, customer or supplier visiting the RVC's premises, or where a person is visiting a client, customer or supplier's premises or other location in the course of their employment.
- 4.9** Third-party harassment can result in legal liability and will not be tolerated. Although a member of staff cannot bring a claim for third-party harassment alone, it can still result in legal liability for the RVC

when raised in other types of claims. All staff are encouraged to report any third-party harassment they are a victim of, or witness, in accordance with this Policy.

- 4.10 Any harassment by a member of staff against a third-party may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- 4.11 We will take active steps to try to prevent third-party harassment of staff. If any third-party harassment of staff occurs, we will take steps to remedy any complaints and to prevent it happening again.
- 4.12 **Bullying** is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the abuse or misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.
- 4.13 Bullying may include overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision or inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance. However, legitimate, reasonable and constructive criticism of a member of staff's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to employees in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying on their own.
- 4.14 Examples of bullying may include: public reprimand, ridicule, sarcasm or humiliation; verbal or physical intimidation which undermines a person's confidence or competence; unnecessary or unreasonable shouting; repeated or constant unreasonable criticism; inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance, making threats about job security, expulsion; or ostracism.

5 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 The RVC recognises that harassment and bullying can affect working, learning and social conditions for employees and students. RVC's position is that no-one should experience bullying or harassment, and the RVC will therefore treat any complaints extremely seriously and deal with them fairly, confidentially and sensitively. Although the decision whether to progress a complaint is generally up to the individual making the complaint, the RVC has a duty to protect all staff and students and may pursue the matter independently if, in all the circumstances, it considers it appropriate to do so.
- 5.2 Staff who witness harassment, victimisation or bullying are encouraged to take appropriate steps to address it. Depending on the circumstances, this could include: intervening where you feel able to do so; supporting the victim to report it or reporting it on their behalf; reporting the incident where you feel there may be a continuing risk if you do not report it; co-operating in any investigation into the incident. All witnesses will be provided with appropriate support and will be protected from victimisation.
- 5.3 The RVC is committed to achieving informal resolution of complaints relating to harassment and bullying wherever possible. Most people who experience harassment or bullying just want it to stop. Informal approaches can often be effective in achieving this, particularly where the person being complained about is genuinely unaware of the effect of their behaviour and wants to re-establish a good relationship with the complainant. However, where the incident is more serious, or an informal approach has not succeeded in resolving the situation, then a formal complaint may be appropriate. Such complaints may lead to formal disciplinary action, which in some cases may result in dismissal.
- 5.4 The RVC understands that individuals who experience or witness incidences of harassment or bullying may be reluctant to make their concerns known or to take any action for a variety of reasons. For example, they may be embarrassed, worried that they will be accused of overreacting and will not be believed, or anxious that they may be victimised or isolated as a result of reporting incidents or making

a complaint. The RVC's [Report and Support](#) site allows students, staff, visitors and third parties to report a concern on behalf of themselves or someone else, either anonymously or to report and get support and advice from the institution. In addition to the [Report and Support](#) site this procedure provides a variety of measures (see Appendix A) to support employees. This support will be offered to complainants, those individuals being complained about and witnesses.

- 5.5** The RVC recognises its equal duty of care both to the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made, and allegations will not be presumed proven until properly investigated using the appropriate procedures. All complaints will be handled with consideration to both sides, regardless of status.
- 5.6** Confidentiality will be respected and maintained by anyone dealing with a complaint of harassment or bullying, unless this would create an unacceptable risk to the complainant, another person or the RVC. It should be recognised that a satisfactory outcome is more likely if the complainant also maintains confidentiality and does not discuss the situation widely with colleagues. In the conduct of investigations, the RVC will be mindful of the need to balance respect for confidentiality with the need to preserve natural justice and to ensure that a full and fair investigation is carried out.
- 5.7** If either of the parties involved is unable to maintain the usual work relationship, the RVC will seek to address this in a way which causes minimum distress or disruption. In cases which appear to involve serious misconduct and there is a necessity to separate the parties, a short period of suspension of the alleged bully/harasser may need to be considered as a neutral measure while the complaint is being investigated. Formal complaints will be investigated objectively and as promptly as possible within an agreed timescale.

Where a complaint is about someone other than an employee, such as a client, supplier or visitor, the RVC will consider what action may be appropriate to protect the complainant and anyone involved pending the outcome of the investigation, bearing in mind the reasonable needs of the RVC and the rights of that person. Where appropriate, the RVC will attempt to discuss the matter with the third party.

- 5.8** Both the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made have the right to be accompanied at any formal meeting (including an investigatory meeting) by a trade union representative or work colleague. Investigations into alleged harassment or bullying are internal proceedings, therefore solicitors, family members and all other external representatives will be excluded from any formal meeting held in connection with the investigation.
- 5.9** All disciplinary hearings arising from a formal complaint of harassment or bullying will be conducted in accordance with the RVC Disciplinary Procedure.
- 5.10** Any allegations proven to be malicious, mischievous, vexatious or frivolous will lead to the invoking of the RVC Disciplinary Procedure.
- 5.11** Employees who feel that they are being subjected to any form of harassment or bullying should use the procedure set out in Section 6 below. Guidance notes are set out in Appendix B.
- 5.12** Employees accused of harassment or bullying have the right to be informed of the basis of the complaint within a reasonable timescale. They will also be given the opportunity to state their own case. Guidance notes are set out in Appendix C.

6 PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

6.1 The working environment encompasses a range of diverse people who must all co-exist and are co-dependent on each other. Whilst the way in which a person behaves and interacts with other people is something which is very personal to them, no employee is working entirely on their own, and it is incumbent on each individual to treat others reasonably and with respect. It is usually most productive if incidents of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with firmly but informally whenever possible.

6.2 Anyone who finds themselves in a situation of apparent harassment or bullying is advised to keep a record of the incident(s), to seek support and information from an appropriate person (see list of [Dignity at Work and Study Ambassadors](#) who are trained for this purpose). The ambassador will provide support and information on the various options available in dealing with the problem and can be consulted at any stage during this process. Seeking support and information does not oblige the individual to take any action, but it does provide an opportunity to discuss their perception of events and the effects of these and to consider the options available:

- To do nothing at this stage; or
- To try and deal with it informally – personally, either (i) alone or (ii) accompanied; or
- To try and resolve it informally through a facilitated approach involving a third-party conciliator/mediator¹;
- To bring a formal complaint (either because an informal approach has been tried but proven unsuccessful, or the alleged incident may be so serious that informal resolution is inappropriate) (see Section 9).

6.3 In any event, the complainant should keep a written note of the incident(s). This should detail the particular behaviour(s) encountered; dates, times and any witnesses; their feelings and/or responses at the time, as appropriate.

7 INFORMAL ACTION – PERSONAL RESOLUTION

7.1 Some people are not aware that their behaviour in some circumstances is causing offence or distress, and, if this is clearly pointed out to them, then they will stop and the problem can be resolved.

7.2 If the employee feels able to, they should:

- (i) explain directly to the person responsible for the behaviour: that they find it unacceptable, the effect it is having on them and make it clear that they want it to stop. This approach could be face- to-face (in which case, the person is strongly advised to be accompanied by a work colleague or Dignity at Work & Study Ambassador) or, if this is too difficult, then expressed in writing;
- (ii) be clear to the person that if it continues then they will make a formal complaint.

7.3 If the direct personal approach results in the person being aggressive or threatening, then the employee should be prepared to walk away making it clear that they do not wish to be spoken to in that way. They should then, seek further support from a Dignity at Work and Study Ambassador/HR/follow the formal procedure section 9 below.

¹ Mediators have been specially trained to facilitate informal outcomes where possible between those who have raised concerns and the person(s) that they have concerns about. Mediators will normally be sourced from outside the RVC to ensure impartiality, but on occasion, and with the agreement of all parties, may be drawn from Human Resources or trade unions. In such cases, HR or trade union mediators will operate in confidence and independently of their normal roles. Where an external mediator is appointed, HR is responsible for the negotiation and management of such provision.

8 INFORMAL ACTION – FACILITATED BY A MEDIATOR

- 8.1** If the situation does not improve following an attempt at personal resolution, or this is unrealistic, then, as part of the informal procedure, the person will be encouraged to use informal conciliation via a third party as a way of settling the matter. The RVC expects, wherever possible, that this route will be followed. Employees choosing not to do so will be expected to say why, and this may be taken into account during the investigation of any formal complaint (see section 9 below).
- 8.2** The Mediation process is aimed at resolving a difficult situation through the intervention of a neutral third party, who is trained to work with both parties (i.e. the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made) in order to facilitate communication between them that is geared towards reaching an agreed and a lasting outcome. Both parties must agree to enter into the process to resolve their difficulties in good faith.
- 8.3** The Mediator, a person who would need to be identified, would normally meet with both parties separately before advising on the steps of the mediation process. It would then usually involve a meeting between both parties, facilitated by the Mediator, where both sides can discuss the situation from their different perspectives, with the aim of achieving a resolution (perhaps an apology) and agreement about future behaviour. Mediation often works well when both parties can speak privately with each other under the supervision of the mediator, however if agreed by all parties it is also possible to be accompanied by a Dignity at Work and Study Ambassador, trade union representative or work colleague if that is preferred.
- 8.4** Any discussions and/or resolution at this stage will usually be confidential. The Mediator will make a record of the outcome, with each party receiving a copy of this.
- 8.5** The mediation process will not in itself result in any further informal internal investigation or in any disciplinary action. All parties are expected to participate in a professional, respectful and courteous manner.
- 8.6** Where, however, having tried an informal approach – directly or through mediation - the person feels dissatisfied that their complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may wish to consider taking formal action.

9 FORMAL COMPLAINT

- 9.1** Where informal resolution is not appropriate (for example because of the seriousness of the allegations) or if informal attempts to resolve the situation have not been successful, an individual may bring a formal complaint.
- 9.2** Formal complaints must be made using the Complaint Form (Appendix D) and lodged with the individual's Manager or Head of Department, (i.e. the Recipient), as appropriate, and be copied to the Director of HR.
- 9.3** The Recipient of the formal complaint will, as appropriate and before taking any informal action, take advice through the Director of HR as appropriate.
- 9.4** The Recipient or member of HR will meet with the complainant to discuss the complaint and explore the scope for any informal resolution or other appropriate action.

- 9.5** The Recipient will decide if a formal investigation should be undertaken. If this is deemed appropriate, the Recipient will appoint an investigating officer who will conduct an independent and impartial investigation.
- 9.6** Where the complaint is about an employee, the employee may be suspended on full pay, or other temporary changes to working arrangements may be made, pending the outcome of the investigation, if circumstances require. Consideration will also be given to what additional action may be appropriate to protect the complainant and other staff pending the outcome of the investigation.
- 9.7** Where the complaint is about someone other than an employee, such as a customer, supplier or visitor, we will consider what action may be appropriate to protect the complainant and other staff pending the outcome of the investigation, bearing in mind the reasonable needs of the RVC and the rights of that person. Where appropriate, we will attempt to discuss the matter with the third party.
- 9.8** We will also seriously consider any request the complainant makes for changes to their own working arrangements during the investigation. For example, the complainant may ask for changes to their duties or working hours to avoid or minimise contact with the alleged harasser or bully.
- 9.9** The investigation will comply with the principles set out in Section 5 to ensure swift, objective and appropriate consideration of the circumstances and will focus on the facts of the complaint. Investigations should normally be completed and a report prepared for the Recipient of the complaint within twenty (20) working days of the date on which the formal complaint was lodged. Where longer time scales are necessary – perhaps because of the availability of those involved, or the complexity of the matters to be investigated – these will be notified to both parties to the complaint.
- 9.10** The Investigating Officer(s) will submit a formal written report to the Recipient. This will set out the extent of the investigation, their findings and their assessment as to whether or not there are reasonable or sufficient grounds, on the balance of probabilities, to believe that harassment or bullying occurred.
- 9.11** The Recipient will use the investigators' report to reach a decision and inform the parties to the complaint in writing of the decision. The Recipient will give the reason for the decision and will normally give a copy of the Investigator(s)' report to the individual raising the complaint and the person(s) complained about.
- 9.12** If the Recipient regards the complaint as well-founded, the matter will be dealt with as a case of possible misconduct or gross misconduct under the RVC's Disciplinary Procedure. The investigation into the complaint will usually constitute the investigation required under the RVC's disciplinary procedures, although further investigation may be required in some cases. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the disciplinary hearing (e.g. that the allegations were upheld/not upheld) and any recommendations made which may affect them (e.g. mediation). Any disciplinary sanction issued will remain confidential and will not be shared with the complainant. Third parties will only be notified of disciplinary action taken if required by statute or regulation. If the alleged harasser or bully is a third party such as a client or other visitor, the RVC will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem.

10 APPEALS

- 10.1** If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation they may appeal in writing, stating their full grounds of appeal, within 5 working days of the date on which the decision was given to the complainant.

- 10.2** An appeal meeting will normally be held within twenty working days of receiving the written appeal. Where practicable, the appeal hearing will be conducted by a senior manager who has not been previously involved in the case. They may ask anyone previously involved to be present.
- 10.3** The outcome of the appeal will be confirmed in writing, usually within one week of the appeal hearing. This is the end of the procedure and there is no further appeal.
- 10.4** If the Recipient considers that the allegations were malicious, mischievous, vexatious, or frivolous, the relevant disciplinary procedure will be invoked against the complainant.

11 EQUALITY MONITORING

- 11.1** The application of this policy and procedure will be monitored and reported on annually to Council as part of the Equality Monitoring Report.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Initial Implementation	
Policy Version:	1.0
Policy Review Interval:	2 years
Author:	Rebecca Costello
Authorised By:	CEC and JNCC
Authorisation Date:	2021
Equality Impact Assessed:	Yes
Review & amendments	
Date of review:	January 2023
Amendments:	Removal of reference to 'College' and replaced with 'RVC' 6.3 – Insertion of 'where agreed by both parties' in reference to being accompanied at a mediation session. 7.9 – Clarification that the complainant will only receive the outcome of any disciplinary hearing and not information relating to potential sanctions.
Policy Version:	2.0
Revised by:	Rebecca Costello
Re-authorised By:	
Re-authorisation Date:	
Date of review:	January 2025
Amendments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title – Have renamed this policy 'Dignity at Work Policy' and removed reference to 'study' • Included reference to victimisation in 1.1 and 3.1 • Inserted 'obligations and your duties under this Policy also extend to job applicants and former employees' in 1.3 • Inserted new section 2 'Related Student Procedures' • All reference to students when referring to this policy or procedures have been removed after para 2.3 • Section 3 – created new title 'Purpose' • Included reference to 'sexual harassment' in 3.1 • Replaced 'Employees, students, visitors, consultants, clients and contractors' with 'all staff and students' in para 3.3 • Inserted '...and in any other ways appropriate to the circumstances' when referencing ways to prevent harassment and bullying in para 3.5 • Inserted '...reviewed regularly in the light of developments both at the RVC and externally' Para 3.5 • Updated reference to Statutes to read section 15 (b) and included reference to 'freedom of speech' Para 3.6 • Included 'disclosing or threatening to disclose someone's sexual orientation or

	<p>gender identity against their wishes; mocking, mimicking or belittling a person's disability' Para 4.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inserted an expanded definition of sexual harassment together with examples. Para 4.4 • Reference to taking into account any aggravating factors, such as abuse of power, when deciding the appropriate disciplinary action to take. Para 4.7 • Included expanded definitions of 'Victimisation' para 4.5 and 'third party harassment' para 4.8 • Revised definition and examples of Bullying Para 4.12 • New paragraph which identifies different steps to take to address Bullying and Harassment Para 5.2 • Included reference to HR in addition to recipient who may meet with the complainant para 9.4 • New paragraph that provides details of what action might be taken to protect the complainant during the investigation when the complaint relates to a member of staff para 9.6 • Consideration of appropriate action when complaint relates to someone that is not an employee para 9.7 • New paragraph that considers the complainants request to adjust working practices during the investigation. Para 9.8 • New reference to 'the complexity of the matter' when considering timescales para 9.9 • Inserted specific reference 'to a case of possible misconduct or gross misconduct' when a complaint is deemed to be well founded. Para 9.12 • More detail on the appeal process is now included in section 10
Policy Version:	3.0
Revised by:	Rebecca Costello
Date of review:	
Amendments:	
Policy Version:	
Revised by:	

SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND ADVICE

- I. The RVC is committed to achieving informal resolution of complaints relating to harassment and bullying wherever possible. In line with this approach, the RVC has in place a variety of measures to provide support. This support will be provided to complainants, those persons against whom complaints have been made and any witnesses.

External organisations can also prove a useful source of information and support. A list of organisations is provided at the end of this section. This list provides some suggestions but is not exhaustive.

INTERNAL SOURCES

II. Managers

All managers have a responsibility to implement the RVC's Dignity at Work Policy and to bring it to the attention of employees in their work area in order to create and maintain a work environment where harassment and bullying are not tolerated.

All complaints will be treated seriously and dealt with promptly and confidentially.

Dignity at Work and Study Ambassadors ([List of Dignity at Work and Study Ambassadors](#))

Dignity at Work and Study Ambassadors are drawn from a wide range of roles across the institution and have been provided with specialist training. They are an independent and confidential resource and can be relied upon to provide support and assistance to employees and students who raise with them concerns about harassment and bullying. Their role is to explain how the procedures operate both informally and formally. They can provide support throughout the process.

III. HR

The HR Department has a responsibility for seeing that the policy and procedures are followed fairly and consistently. HR Advisors, as part of their professional remit:

- advise managers (i.e. in their capacity as recipients of complaints) on the application of the policy;
- give advice to employees where individuals feel that they are being harassed or bullied in the course of their employment.
- Provide support/advice on the process to those who are accused of harassment/bullying.

The HR Department monitors the incidence of formal harassment and bullying complaints and is responsible for annually reviewing and amending the policy in the light of experience and within the context of legal and best practice developments outside the institution.

Report and Support

The RVC is committed to promoting a safe, inclusive and respectful environment for every member of its community. There may be times whilst at the RVC where you (or someone else) need support or that you notice or experience something that you wish to report to the institution. To help with this the ['Report and Support'](#) site allows students, staff, visitors and third parties to report a concern on behalf of themselves or someone else anonymously or speak to an advisor so that we can offer support.

IV. Counselling

The RVC offers a free, impartial, confidential Counselling Service, provided by Care First. This service provides unlimited free-phone access 24 hours a day, every day of the year for personal and work-related issues. The service is available via telephone. To use the Counselling Service call 0800 174 319 (Freephone) Quote "Royal Vet College" and ask for the counselling service. Care First also provides a free advice and information service, which can also be accessed on the same free phone number. For further information, visit the [Care First page](#) on the HR website.

V. Togetherall

[Togetherall](#) is a digital mental health and wellbeing support service available to staff and students which is available online, 24/7 via computer, tablet or smartphone. It provides an anonymous community where members can support each, professionally trained guides to keep the community safe and a range of resources such as self-guided courses, self-assessments and creative tools to help express how you are feeling.

VI. Occupational Health Service

If a manager is concerned about the health of an employee, they should consider referring the person concerned to the [Occupational Health Service](#). Alternatively, if an employee believes their health is being adversely affected by their work, they should discuss this with their line manager in the first instance and can then request a referral to Occupational Health. Further information on the Occupational Health Service can be provided by the Employee Relations Manager, Human Resources.

VII. Recognised Trade Unions

The RVC recognises and values the important role which trade unions play in eradicating harassment and bullying from the workplace. To this end, the [RVC's employee recognised trade unions](#) (UCU, UNISON, UNITE) have been fully consulted in the drawing up of this policy and procedure. Union Members are encouraged to approach their representatives regarding any concerns.

VIII. Mediators

Mediators have been specially trained to facilitate informal outcomes where possible between those who have raised concerns and the person(s) that they have concerns about. Mediators will normally be sourced from outside the RVC to ensure impartiality, but on occasion, and with the agreement of all parties, may be drawn from Human Resources or trade unions. In such cases, HR or trade union mediators will operate in confidence and independently of their normal roles. Where an external mediator is appointed, HR is responsible for the negotiation and management of such provision.

EXTERNAL SOURCES

IX. There are a number of external sources of help and assistance. Advice can be obtained from the following and other similar organisations:

[British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#)
[Citizens Advice Bureau](#)
[Equality & Human Rights Commission](#) [Samaritans](#)
[Stonewall](#)
[Recourse - UCU Colleges and Universities Support Network](#)

GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL THEY ARE BEING HARASSED OR BULLIED

- I.** Bullying and harassment can make individuals feel anxious and humiliated. They may have feelings of anger and frustration at being unable to cope with the situation. Some people may try to retaliate in some way. Others may be frightened and become de-motivated. Stress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to job insecurity, illness, withdrawal from work or study, and even resignation.
- II.** Employees who are experiencing, or who have experienced, harassment should not feel that they are to blame. Sometimes people are unsure whether or not the way they are being treated is acceptable. Concern over what constitutes bullying and harassment should not deter them from discussing their concerns with an appropriate person (for example: manager or supervisor; HR Advisor; Dignity at Work and Study Ambassador; union representative).
- III.** If you find yourself in this situation:
- Take any action you decide upon as quickly as possible;
 - Seek advice from someone with whom you feel comfortable to discuss the problem confidentially;
 - Keep a diary of all incidents – records of dates, times, any witnesses, your feelings. Keep copies of anything that is relevant (e.g. letters, e-mails; notes of meetings). Keep records and let your Manager know of any medical help you seek;
 - If you can, an informal approach can often resolve the situation. Try and tell the person to stop whatever it is they are doing which is causing you distress, otherwise they may not be aware of the effect of their actions. If you find it difficult to confront the person alone or directly face-to-face, then consider either asking a colleague or Dignity at Work and Study Ambassador to accompany you or put it in writing to them making it clear what it is you object to in their behaviour. Keep a copy of this and any reply;
 - If you do not feel able to raise the issue personally, or, having tried this, the situation still does not improve, then you may wish – as part of the informal procedure – to consider a mediation process involving a neutral third party. This process requires both you, and the person against whom you are making the complaint, to agree to enter into the conciliation process with the genuine view of seeking a resolution to your difficulties;
 - If you decide to make a formal complaint, follow the Procedure set out in Section 9 of the Policy document. This will give you information about who to complain to and how your complaint will then be dealt with;
 - Remember, you have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union rep to any meetings dealing with your formal complaint (including investigatory meetings).
 - You will be informed of the outcome of the investigation into your complaint (see para 9.12):
 - a. If the investigation into your complaint reveals that some form of unacceptable behaviour has taken place, then prompt action will be taken to bring this to a halt immediately, and prevent its re-occurrence. Depending upon the findings, disciplinary action against the bully/harasser may be taken in accordance with the RVC's Disciplinary Procedure. If this were to happen, then you would be required to give evidence, and would be given appropriate support;
 - b. If the investigation reveals that your complaint cannot be upheld, then no further action will be taken (other than if it is considered that your complaint was malicious or in bad faith).
 - If you have grounds to complain that the investigation came to an unreasonable conclusion, you may appeal under the relevant procedure. See section 10

GUIDANCE FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF HARASSMENT OR BULLYING

- I.** The RVC fully supports the right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect at work and study and is committed to promoting an environment where everyone can give of their best. Whilst every individual has a responsibility for conducting themselves with courtesy and respect, there will, from time to time, be situations where there is a level of disquiet or friction or where behaviours are unacceptable.
- II.** Within the context of an academic environment, academic disagreement and even conflict are to be expected and are usually experienced as both productive and developmental. Most of the time, colleagues are able to overcome differences of opinion through tolerance, acceptance of diversity and debate. However, there are occasions when what may seem small differences are compounded, or more extreme activity occurs which moves beyond the boundaries of normally accepted behaviour.
- III.** The RVC welcomes and values the diversity of its community. Where disagreements or tensions arise as a result of differences in understanding about acceptable behaviours, everyone is expected to work together to resolve the issues fairly; to clarify and agree what behaviours are appropriate; to support individuals who may have been adversely affected, and, where appropriate, to modify the behaviour that has caused offence. All staff are required to adhere to the [RVC behaviours framework](#). The RVC believes that, if at all possible, an individual who has a complaint should voice their concerns or anxieties to the other person, as an awkward situation may be resolved through a timely word.
- IV.** If **you** have been accused of harassment or bullying, you will be notified of this either:
- a. **informally** by being approached directly by the person (perhaps with a companion or via writing), or via an RVC Mediator (see Section 7 and 8 of the Policy above); or
 - b. **formally** by being informed by your Manager of the nature of the complaint and of what will happen next under the RVC's Procedure (normally an investigation by an independent person).
- V. What to do?**
- You should make sure that you read this Policy and guidelines which set out what can be expected at each stage of the procedure;
 - When advising you of a formal complaint, your Manager/Head of Department would have discussed contact issues regarding the complainant with you and strategies to address this in a way which causes minimum distress or disruption. If contact would normally be inevitable or unavoidable, then it may be appropriate to have a third party present where it is necessary to hold work related meetings;
 - If a short period of suspension is considered appropriate during the investigation, then this will be with pay and will be regarded as a neutral measure. The period will be kept as short as possible. You will be expected to make yourself available to meet with the investigator;
 - You should make your own notes relating to any incidents that have occurred involving the person making the allegation, and be prepared to respond to questions relating to the incidents;
 - You should consider contacting your trade union or professional association for advice, as appropriate. There are also alternative forms of support, including:
 - <https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-bullying>
 - <http://www.care-first.co.uk/index.php>
 - <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

- You will be given every reasonable opportunity to state your response to the allegations;
- You have the right to be accompanied to meetings by a trade union representative or work colleague.
- You will be informed of the outcome of the investigation into the complaint against you:
 - a. If the investigation reveals that the complaint cannot be upheld, then no further action will be taken (unless it is considered that the complaint against you was malicious or in bad faith);
 - b. If the complaint is considered to be well-founded, a decision will be taken as to whether it warrants the convening of a disciplinary hearing. If this is the case, this will be conducted in accordance with the RVC disciplinary procedure.

FORM FOR REGISTERING A FORMAL COMPLAINT OF HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

To be completed in accordance with Section 9 of the RVC's Dignity at Work Policy

Name:	Job Title:
Department and Campus:	
<p>Briefly describe your complaint (include: where the incident(s) happened; date(s); time; names of any witnesses; the effect or impact this has had on you. Attach copies of any relevant documents). Continue on separate sheet if necessary.</p>	
Name(s) of Person(s) against whom you are bringing the complaint:	
Is this person: an RVC employee / a student / a third party (i.e. client/supplier or visitor to the RVC)?	
Have you read the Dignity at Work Policy? Yes/No	
Have you sought support from the RVC's Dignity at Work and Study Ambassadors Yes/No	
<p>Have you tried to deal with the situation informally? Yes/No If yes, how did you do this and what was the outcome?</p> <p>If no, why not?</p>	
<p>Have you considered RVC Mediation? Yes/No If yes, what was the outcome?</p> <p>If no, why not?</p>	
What outcome are you seeking?	

Signature of Complainant: **Date:**

Please forward the completed form to your line manager or Head of Department as appropriate with a copy sent for the attention of the Director of Human Resources: hr@rvc.ac.uk