

Bullying and Harassment Policy

V25.2

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Policy/Document Relates to	VQA Employees, contractors, temporary colleagues, customers, suppliers and third parties.
Policy/Document is for the use of	VQA Employees, contractors, temporary colleagues, customers, suppliers and third parties.
Should be read in conjunction with	Bullying & Harassment Procedure Disciplinary & Dismissals Procedure Grievance Procedure (available upon request)

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Statement of Policy

VQA is committed to encouraging and maintaining good employee relations within a working environment which fosters teamwork and encourages employees to give their best. Everyone in the Company and those who have dealings with the Company has a responsibility to maintain good working relationships and not use words or deeds that may harm the wellbeing of others. In addition to the obligations placed upon both employers and employees by the Equality and Human Rights legislation, everyone has the right to be treated with consideration, fairness, dignity, and respect. This contributes to a workplace environment in which individuals feel safe and can work effectively competently and confidently.

The Company's policy applies to all permanent and fixed term employees in terms of formal process. However, we expect every individual associated with VQA to adhere to the behaviours and reporting outlined in this policy. This includes contractors, temporary colleagues, customers, suppliers and third parties. The policy, in addition, covers the behaviour of staff outside working hours which may impact upon work or working relationships.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time.

Internal Responsibility

The People Services Team are responsible for the maintenance and compliance of this policy.

The Head of People Services has overall responsibility for ensuring that this policy complies with our ethical and legal commitments and that all VQA actions and activities are in line with the contents of this policy

If you have a complaint regarding any such offensive behaviour, we encourage you to act quickly in line with this policy to work with us to address issues. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Bullying & Harassment Procedure.

Review arrangements

We will review the policy as part of our annual policy review.

In addition, this policy may be updated in light of feedback or changes in employment legislation to ensure our arrangements for dealing with instances remain effective. The annual review of this policy will be undertaken by the HR Manager and any amendments or updates to this policy will be approved by VQA's Leadership Team.

If you would like to raise any points or offer feedback regarding this policy, please contact us via the details provided at the start of this document.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, VQA have adopted the definitions used by The Equality Act 2010 or the Equality & Human Rights Commission to define bullying, harassment, victimisation and discrimination.

A positive and inclusive work environment

Diversity, inclusion and belonging are at the heart of this policy to promote dignity and respect for all where individual differences are recognised and valued.

- Diversity means recognising and celebrating individual differences amongst colleagues.
- Inclusion and belonging means you feel welcome, valued, and able to be your true self so that you can thrive during your time with VQA.

Our commitment to a positive and inclusive workplace

This Policy outlines our commitment to dealing with all forms of unlawful discrimination. We have a zero-tolerance approach to unlawful and offensive behaviour, and we don't tolerate victimisation.

- All complaints are taken seriously and dealt with sensitively, confidentially and promptly in line with our Bullying & Harassment Procedure, Grievance and Disciplinary policies and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment for any actions of gross misconduct.
- People have the right to express their personal beliefs, including those related to religion or other protected characteristics. However, these expressions must not lead to discrimination, harassment, or harm to others. This policy aims to balance freedom of expression with creating a respectful and inclusive environment for everyone.

Definitions of offensive behaviour

- Bullying: Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which serves to undermine the competence, effectiveness, confidence and integrity of another person.
- Harassment: Unwanted conduct relating to a protected characteristic which serves to violate another person's dignity. This is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.
- Victimisation: Being treated less favourably because of being involved with a bullying, harassment or discrimination complaint. This is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.
- Unlawful direct discrimination: When someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- Unlawful indirect discrimination: When a working practice, policy or rule is the same for everyone but has a worse effect on someone because of a 'protected characteristic'.
- Perceptive and associative discrimination: When someone is treated less favourably based on an incorrect perception of a protected characteristic or being associated with someone

Roles and responsibilities

The Organisation

- We have a duty of care to create an environment where offensive and unlawful behaviour is not tolerated, to protect employees from such behaviour, and to support their wellbeing.
- We'll regularly review our policies and practices to ensure they promote fairness, inclusivity, and a culture of respect.
- We will ensure that all complaints are taken seriously, investigated promptly, and handled confidentially.
- We will take appropriate disciplinary action against those who engage in offensive behaviour.

Managers

- Managers are responsible for creating a positive and inclusive work environment, where all colleagues feel safe and respected.
- They must uphold this policy and take prompt action when they witness or are made aware of offensive behaviour.
- Managers should provide support and guidance to colleagues who raise concerns, ensuring they feel heard and protected.
- They must ensure that reports of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation are handled fairly, confidentially, and in line with our policies.

- Where necessary, managers should seek advice from the People Services Team on how to address and resolve issues appropriately.

Colleagues

- Colleagues are responsible for their own conduct and must treat others with dignity, respect and professionalism at all times.
- It is every colleague's duty to speak out if they witness unacceptable behaviour. By doing so, we help create a safe and respectful workplace for everyone.
- Colleagues should cooperate with investigations if they are involved in a complaint, ensuring honesty and confidentiality.
- If a colleague experiences or witnesses inappropriate behaviour, they should follow the reporting procedures outlined in this policy.
- All parties are expected to treat matters being dealt with under this policy as confidential ensuring privacy and fairness for everyone involved.

Who can raise a complaint

- Any colleague or individuals who interact with VQA can raise a complaint which will be taken seriously and investigated.
- The process for raising complaints applies to permanent and fixed term colleagues.

Raising a complaint

We have both an informal and formal route for reporting and investigating complaints. Individuals who have a concern should consider which route is most appropriate in the circumstances. They may wish to seek guidance from their line manager or a member of the People Services team in relation to this. All complaints whether raised informally or formally will be taken seriously and dealt with.

Details of how to make a complaint can be found in the Bullying and Harassment Procedure.

Anonymous Reporting

We encourage employees to provide their personal details when raising a complaint so that we can offer personal support, keep them updated on the investigation, and ensure a thorough resolution. However, if you prefer, there is an option to raise a complaint anonymously via this Harassment Complaint Form. You can view a copy of this form in Appendix 1 of the Bullying & Harassment Procedure.

Anonymous complaints must still include relevant evidence to allow for an investigation. Please note that if your concern is raised anonymously, we will not be able to update you on the outcome due to the lack of contact details.

Anonymous reporting is available to all individuals who work with or interact with the company, regardless of their employment status.

Sexual Harassment

- We will not tolerate harassment of any kind. We also have an additional legal responsibility regarding sexual harassment, as the law requires, we take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. We will implement steps to proactively prevent sexual harassment including risk assessments and regular mandatory training. We will also regularly review this policy and training to ensure its effectiveness and compliance.

- Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Examples include but are not limited to: unwanted physical contact, sexual comments, inappropriate jokes, displaying offensive material, unwanted compliments, sexual invitations or demands and sexual gestures.
- Harassment may be an isolated occurrence or repetitive: it may occur against one or more individuals.
- This commitment extends to everyone who works with or interacts with the company, including non-employed individuals such as contractors, agency workers, and volunteers.

Third party harassment

Third party harassment, such as unwanted behaviour from a supplier or customer, is unlawful and will not be tolerated. This could include, for example, unwelcome sexual advances from a client, customer or supplier visiting VQA's premises, or where a person is visiting a client, customer or supplier's premises or other location in the course of their work.

If you experience third party harassment, please raise this in line with the Bullying & Harassment Procedure as soon as possible. Relevant action will be taken as appropriate, which may include raising with the third party for investigation, considering the viability of the relationship moving forward, and reporting the matter to the police.

This applies equally to all individuals working with the company, whether employed or not, and the company will take appropriate action to protect anyone subject to third party harassment.

Any sexual harassment by a member of staff against a third party may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

We will take active steps to try to prevent third-party sexual harassment of staff. This may include making third parties aware of our zero-tolerance policy.

Training

We believe training is important and will help all colleagues better understand what is expected in the workplace and what to do if they have concerns about inappropriate behaviour. All colleagues will undertake mandatory e-learning on an annual basis appropriate to the topic. This may include training on equality, diversity and inclusion, preventing sexual harassment and other training relating to appropriate conduct in the workplace.

In addition, managers will receive specific manager training on handling situations.

Appeals

Appeals against decisions taken under the Bullying and Harassment at Work Policy and Procedure shall be dealt with as follows:

- Appeals against a disciplinary sanction will be dealt with in accordance with the appeals process in the Disciplinary Procedure.
- Appeals by a complainant about the outcome of any inquiry will be dealt with in accordance with the appeal process in the Grievance Policy.

Reporting outcomes, confidentiality and record-keeping

Confidentiality is an important part of the procedures provided under this policy. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must

only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. Breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action under our Disciplinary Procedure.

When appropriate and possible, where a complaint is upheld, we will advise the complainant of the action that has been taken to address their specific complaint and any measures put in place to prevent a similar event happening again.

Information about a complaint by or about a staff member may be placed on their personnel file, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

Malicious complaints

This procedure is designed to support genuine concerns around bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination at work. If at any time, there is evidence to suggest that a complaint has been made maliciously then the complaint will not be investigated further.

If we have evidence to suggest that you've raised a complaint that you know to be untrue, or have given false evidence, then this may lead to disciplinary action. This applies to all individuals raising concerns, regardless of whether they are employed by the company or not. Malicious complaints may result in appropriate action, which could include review of the working relationship.

Support available for you

- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- Wellbeing resources
- Mental Health First Aiders
- People Services Team
- The Equality Advisory and Support Service (www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)
- Protect (www.protect-advice.org.uk).
- Victim support (www.victimsupport.org.uk).
- Rape crisis (www.rapecrisis.org.uk).
- Rights of women (England and Wales) (www.rightsofwomen.org.uk).
- Scottish Women's Rights Centre (Scotland) (www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk).

If you have any queries about the policy or process, please speak with your manager. If you are not comfortable doing so, you may contact a member of the People Services Team as an alternative.

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