

## **Positioning statement on harassment and bullying**

The Royal Academy of Engineering has the vision of an inclusive profession that inspires, attracts, recruits and retains people from all backgrounds. This statement supports this vision by encouraging a zero-tolerance approach to harassment or bullying in any form. It covers all engineers, including those with 'protected characteristics' as described by the Equality Act 2010, and those not covered by legislation.

The statement was developed in consultation with WISE, Women in Engineering Society, InterEngineering, Association of Black Engineers and the Engineering Council.

The Academy has reviewed and updated its own policy and practice on harassment and bullying and encourages all engineering employers and professional engineering institutions, engineering educators and others responsible for engineering environments to do the same to support eradicating harassment and bullying across the engineering profession. The need to eradicate harassment and bullying extends to all engineering environments where engineers work. Whether within the UK or internationally, employers have a duty of care to protect their employees from harassment and bullying and take steps to prevent it.

Risks in not taking action to eliminate harassment across the profession include:

- Exposing engineers to hostile, exclusionary and damaging work environments.
- Minimising the impact of efforts to attract and retain people into the profession and address the skills crisis.
- Adverse impact on the reputation of the engineering profession.
- Limiting the creative capacity of individual engineers who may feel undervalued and more likely to leave the profession.
- Adverse impact on the reputation of organisations and employer brands.
- Decreased motivation among employees leading to a decrease in productivity.

Resources and sources of support to implement good policy and practice, including where individual engineers can go to get advice on harassment and bullying, are included in the final section of this document.

### **Drivers for action**

This section lays out the case for taking steps to address harassment and bullying across the profession. These include the need to create cultures where all engineers thrive, ethical standards for professionally registered engineers and UK legislation that outlaws harassment and the victimisation of those who report it.

## ***Creating cultures where all engineers thrive***

As part of its Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programme, the Academy is collaborating with engineering employers and others to create environments where engineers from all backgrounds thrive. To support this, in 2017, the Academy released a report<sup>1</sup> on findings from a survey that 7,000 engineers responded to. In response to the survey, 48% engineers chose 'able to give and take banter' (defined in the survey as playful conversation) as one of the top five descriptors of how engineers relate to one another. The investigation also found that perceptions of 'banter' differed between different demographic groups with younger engineers, women and black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) engineers significantly more aware than older, male and white colleagues of the ways in which banter can sometimes mask offence. In fact, women engineers were almost twice as likely as their male colleagues to include 'offensive language and behaviour often get passed off as banter' in their top five descriptions of how engineers relate to each other. A female engineer responding to the survey said:

*"As the only woman on the team I find it tiring to have to banter to get on with the guys – I don't want to be 'horrible' to be respected, it doesn't feel natural. I want to converse without the need to be funny, to take an interest in each other's lives. I find it boring and end up having to laugh at their jokes so as not to look rude or not be a team player and take a back seat, which makes me look passive. I wish I was in a team with more women or men who don't feel the need to joke about everything."*

Another respondent engineer reported:

*"It still appears acceptable for people to joke/banter about people being gay, comment on women's appearance or to talk about 'pikies' without consideration that this may be offensive. Even when challenged, the problem with these behaviours is not understood."*

The report also shows that 14% of engineers reported experiencing harassment and bullying in the past 12 months, and 12% reported that they had witnessed it. Of the 14% of engineers that reported experiencing harassment and bullying, 22% were BAME, 25% female, 18% white and 17% male. This illustrates that harassment and bullying is experienced by all groups in engineering – not just women and those from minority backgrounds.

### Engineering Council statement of ethical principles and whistle-blowing

In addition to supporting the D&I programme vision, the Engineering Council's statement of Ethical Principles<sup>2</sup> requires those seeking professional engineering

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<sup>1</sup> *Creating cultures where all engineers thrive*, [www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/creating-cultures-where-all-engineers-thrive](http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/creating-cultures-where-all-engineers-thrive)

<sup>2</sup> [www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/guidance/statement-of-ethical-principles/](http://www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/guidance/statement-of-ethical-principles/)

registration to demonstrate that they “exercise responsibilities in an ethical manner” and comply with professional codes of conduct.

The Statement of Ethical Principles states that: “Engineering professionals work to enhance the wellbeing of society. In doing so they are required to maintain and promote high ethical standards and challenge unethical behaviour.” In addition, the section on leadership and communication in UK-SPEC<sup>3</sup>, which specifies standards for professional engineering competence, includes a duty on all professionally registered engineers to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. This ethical responsibility and obligation applies to harassment or bullying, in a similar way as to a physical health and safety risk.

In addition, Engineering Council guidance on whistleblowing<sup>4</sup> for engineers and technicians states that all professionally registered engineers must:

- Act when they encounter material and unmanaged risk, danger, malpractice or wrongdoing that adversely affects others.
- Act in line with their professional engineering institution’s code of conduct.
- Comply with the laws of the country in which they operate.

### Legal drivers – Equality Act 2010

Harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. All employers have a duty of care to protect employees with the nine protected characteristics below from harassment and take reasonable steps to prevent it. This includes protection from harassment perpetrated by other employees and non-employees, including contractors, agency staff, clients and customers.

Age	Disability
Sex	Sexual orientation
Gender reassignment	Race
Religion or belief	Pregnancy and maternity
Marriage or civil partnership	

The Academy believes that all engineers should be protected from harassment, not only those with protected characteristics.

### **What is harassment?**

The definition of harassment in the Equality Act 2010 is “unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual”.

Harassment is often thought to apply only to persistent behaviour but it can also apply to a single incident. For example, a racially or sexually abusive comment or action would be harassment.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/standards/uk-spec/](http://www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/standards/uk-spec/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/guidance/guidance-on-whistleblowing/](http://www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/guidance/guidance-on-whistleblowing/)

In general terms, harassment is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity or confidence of people in the workplace.

It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual and may be persistent or an isolated incident.

The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

### **Some examples of harassment**

“Imran is a member of the design team. His boss has decided that the team needs to have a team bonding session and has organised a night out which involves going to greyhound racing, having a meal and drinks. Imran is a practising Muslim and gambling and drinking alcohol are against his religious beliefs. He is very uncomfortable about attending the team event but does not want to be seen to be being difficult or not a team player. This is not the first time this sort of event has been organised and other members of the team have commented on Imran not going before in a derogatory way.”

“Paul has a disability. His line manager frequently makes reference to it and teases him about it. The rest of the team are being affected by the manager’s remarks and the environment is now offensive. Paul decides that he is going to claim harassment against his line manager.”

“Sarah is responsible for taking notes at a monthly meeting that is attended by senior people from the organisation in which she works. There is a mixture of men and women but more men. In the meetings, one man has started to make sure that he sits next to Sarah and has developed a habit of touching Sarah’s hand and using familiar language with her. Sarah is now dreading going to the meetings and last month had the day of the meeting off sick. She doesn’t feel able to say anything because the man is very senior in the organisation.”

### **What is bullying?**

While bullying is not protected under legislation in the same way as harassment, it has similar features and a similar adverse impact on the receiver. Bullying is described by ACAS<sup>5</sup> as:

“Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which amounts to an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure and makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable.”

### **Perception of the receiver**

It is important to note that behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered ‘firm management’ by another. Although most people will

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<sup>5</sup> [www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/j/Bullying-and-harassment-in-the-workplace-a-guide-for-managers-and-employers.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/j/Bullying-and-harassment-in-the-workplace-a-guide-for-managers-and-employers.pdf)

agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment, it is sometimes the 'grey' areas that cause most problems. Bullying isn't always an aggressive act, it can be passive eg exclusion from activities.

### **Some examples of bullying:**

- Spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone by word or behaviour.
- Copying messages that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know.
- Ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail.
- Exclusion or victimisation.
- Unfair treatment.
- Overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position.
- Unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials, asking for sexual favours or making decisions on the basis of sexual advances being accepted or rejected.
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation.
- Deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism.
- Preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.

### **Taking action - eradicating harassment and bullying from the profession**

To eradicate harassment and bullying across the profession employers must:

- Take a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and bullying.
- Communicate and implement clear harassment and bullying policies to all employees, contractors, members, and associates.
- Treat all complaints seriously, investigate and take appropriate action.
- Have mechanisms in place that empower employees to report harassment or bullying that affects them, or that they witness, in a way that ensures they are not intimidated or victimised.
- Deliver training or other opportunities to all employees to ensure there is clarity on what constitutes harassment and bullying. For instance, by providing insight into unacceptable behaviour, unconscious bias, or active bystander training etc.
- All employees should have access to the list of resources that is supplied with this document, which includes names of organisations that they can contact if they feel unable to follow the internal policy within the company.

## Resources and sources of support

### Support for individual engineering employees

All engineering employers should have processes in place to support their employees in reporting harassment and bullying. However, it is widely acknowledged that sometimes employees do not feel comfortable reporting incidents internally. In these instances, individual engineers can contact the organisations below although the Academy recommends that, where possible, engineers share internally rather than outside their organisation.

1. The Association for Black and Minority Ethnic Engineers  
Contact AFBE-UK for support and advice  
[www.afbe.org.uk](http://www.afbe.org.uk)  
Contact: [info@afbe.org.uk](mailto:info@afbe.org.uk)
2. InterEngineering  
InterEngineering connects, informs and empowers LGBT+ engineers and supporters. If you have any concerns or would like some advice on issues relating to sexual orientation or gender identity, then please contact the team for support.  
[www.interengineeringlgbt.com](http://www.interengineeringlgbt.com)  
Contact: [team@interengineeringlgbt.com](mailto:team@interengineeringlgbt.com)

### Charities that support people being harassed or bullied

1. WISE  
[www.wisecampaign.org.uk/](http://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/)
2. Women's Engineering Society (WES)  
[www.wes.org.uk/](http://www.wes.org.uk/)
3. Women's Aid  
[www.womensaid.org.uk/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/)
4. Bullying UK  
[www.bullying.co.uk/](http://www.bullying.co.uk/)
5. Stonewall  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/)
6. Anti-Bullying Ambassadors Programme  
[www.antibullyingpro.com/](http://www.antibullyingpro.com/)
7. Samaritans  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
8. Safeline  
[www.safeline.org.uk/](http://www.safeline.org.uk/)

## Employer Support Organisations

1. ACAS – Bullying and Harassment at Work, Guide for Managers and Employers  
<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1864>
2. CIPD – Bullying and Harassment, information and guidance  
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/harassment>
3. CBI statement on Harassment and Bullying  
<http://www.cbi.org.uk/news/business-has-vital-role-to-play-in-stamping-out-sexual-harassment/>
4. Equality and Human Rights Commission – information on Harassment  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/what-harassment>

## Membership Organisations

1. Employers Network of Equality & Inclusion  
<https://www.enei.org.uk/>
2. Business in the Community – Diversity Campaigns  
<https://workplace.bitc.org.uk/#>