

## WHAT IS HARASSMENT OR BULLYING?

Many forms of behaviour can constitute harassment or bullying, but most significantly, the behaviour is unwanted by the recipient.

The behaviour may be deliberate or just misplaced. It may be a course of action or just one event.

It can range from violence or assault to less obvious actions such as ignoring someone at work.

The following, although not an exhaustive list may all constitute behaviour at work that is harassment or bullying:

- **Physical:** ranging from gestures or touching to assault or damage to property;
- **Verbal:** the use of offensive jokes, banter, gossip, nicknames, shouting, persistent criticism, threats or patronising language;
- **Written:** the circulation of offensive notes, letters, emails;
- **Display** of offensive material: posters, graffiti, lewd pictures;
- **Behaviour:** including isolation, non-co-operation at work, exclusion from social events or setting unachievable deadlines for work.

## EFFECTS OF HARASSMENT & BULLYING

Harassment and bullying behaviour in the workplace is offensive and threatening. It can affect an officer's professional performance and psychological welfare, and can be so destructive that the effects continue after work, devastating personal lives as well as careers. Harassment and bullying can result in low morale, increased sickness absence, requests for transfer or resignations.

If a complaint is made to an Employment Tribunal, or civil proceedings taken to court, a Force may also suffer expensive litigation, adverse publicity and a loss of public confidence. It is in everyone's best interests to have a workplace free of harassment and bullying.

## POTENTIAL LEGAL REMEDIES

Although harassment and bullying can be unpleasant and offensive, it is only actionable under the law in certain limited circumstances. Neither bullying nor harassment was made a specific offence under any statute. However, the courts found that harassment could be **unlawful direct discrimination** under the Sex Discrimination Act and Race Relations Act.

## DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

Harassment at work is potentially unlawful only when it is on the grounds of an officer's **sex, married status, race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin**. From December 2003 it will be unlawful if the harassment is on the grounds of an officer's **sexual orientation**, or their **religion or belief**. From October 2004 police officers will be able to take legal action if harassment is on the grounds of their **disability**.

There is also a new definition of harassment recently incorporated into the discrimination legislation that outlaws behaviour which violates another person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that other person.

It will sit alongside the existing definition of direct discrimination and future cases will be decided under the direct discrimination provisions and/or the new definition.

If the treatment constitutes harassment or bullying but can not be shown to be on any of these grounds then claims can not be pursued under discrimination law at an Employment Tribunal.

## VICTIMISATION

The discrimination legislation provides protection from victimisation when someone has brought proceedings under the law, given evidence or information or anything else in relation to their or another's proceedings, or made an allegation of discrimination in good faith.

From 1 April 2004, Police Officers will be protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act (whistle blowing) should they raise a complaint.

## OTHER LEGAL REMEDIES

Bullying is not a specific offence under any statute but it may be possible to take action under the Health and Safety legislation if it can be shown that the Force did not provide a workplace environment having due regard to the health, welfare or safety of the officer.

In circumstances where it can be shown that the treatment resulted in the officer suffering a physical or psychological injury, it may be possible to take a personal injury claim.

In the more extreme cases, the Protection from Harassment Act 1996, and/or s154 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (intentional harassment) may provide legal remedies depending on the circumstances.

Only if the bullying constitutes harassment on one of the specified grounds it may be possible to use the discrimination legislation.

## TIME LIMITS

The time limit for lodging a claim is dependent upon the legislation that it is alleged to have been breached.

A personal injury claim must be presented to a County Court within 3 years of the alleged unlawful act(s).

Discrimination claims must be presented to an Employment Tribunal within 3 calendar months less 1 day from the date of the last alleged act of discrimination.

## HOW CAN YOU COMBAT HARASSMENT OR BULLYING

- Make sure your own behaviour does not cause offence or is misunderstood;
- Be aware of equality and diversity issues and treat everyone with dignity and respect;
- Do not be afraid to stand up against offensive behaviour, harassment or discrimination at work.
- Do not be afraid to support any colleagues who are being subjected to offensive comments, conduct, harassment or discrimination.
- Know your Force policies on dignity at work, harassment and bullying.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE HARASSED OR BULLIED

- If you feel able, make it clear to the harasser or bully that you object to their behaviour (you may want to take a Federation Representative or a friend with you for support);
- If the behaviour continues, keep a record of the incidents, and
- Speak to your Police Federation Representative, a supervisor or a senior officer to discuss your options;
- If necessary, raise a complaint through the Grievance or Fairness at Work procedure, and
- If necessary, seek medical help.

## WHAT THE POLICE FEDERATION CAN DO FOR YOU

The Police Federation will take your complaint seriously, treat it confidentially and help you to resolve the matter. You can discuss your options with any Federation Representative and, if necessary, they can help you to:

- Raise a grievance through the internal Force Grievance or Fairness at Work Procedure;
- Progress the matter through the Police Misconduct or Staff Discipline Procedures, or
- Raise the matter as a Health and Safety issue.
- If appropriate, help you to get in touch with a relevant Support Group;
- Where the matter cannot be resolved, assist you to take appropriate legal action.

**Further information on representation is available in the Police Federation Equality and Diversity Representation Advice leaflet.**



**POLICE FEDERATION**  
of England and Wales

# Harassment & Bullying

The Police Federation of England and Wales is the representative body for all Constables, Sergeants and Inspector ranks in the Police Forces of England and Wales. We are fully committed to the elimination of unfair discrimination on the grounds of gender, family status, age, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, disabled status, or any other unjustified condition, and the promotion of equality and diversity for all, in our own practices and arrangements and throughout the Police Service of England and Wales.