

## **Respect@SOAS Policy, February 2017**

***Please note this replaces the Dignity at SOAS Policy***

SOAS is committed to creating and maintaining a School-wide culture of respect as part of its commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) SOAS also has a legal duty to foster good relations between those with one or more of the 9 “protected characteristics” and others. For a list of the protected characteristics see link below.

### [EHRC list of protected characteristics](#)

Taking this further, everyone (staff, students, contractors, visitors) is entitled to go about their daily business at the School or School related business without being discriminated against for any reason (including having one or more of the defined protected characteristics); **belittled; harassed; bullied; deliberately offended; undermined or excluded by others**, be they fellow students, colleagues or academic, professional services and support staff, contractors staff or visitors.

However, recognising that the School is made up of people not automatons and that there will inevitably be occasions when behaviour – deliberate or otherwise - causes upset and offence, it is essential that the School has measures in place to address and deal with such behaviour.

Discrimination, bullying and harassment on the grounds of sex, gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, social class or other areas of difference, is unacceptable and covered by the Respect@SOAS policy if an informal attempt at resolution is appropriate. Sexual assault or violence of any kind are taken extremely seriously by the School and are probably best dealt with through the formal procedures available (see following page). The School’s Gender Based Violence Guidance can be found here.

### [Link to Gender Based Violence Guidance](#)

Discrimination, bullying & harassment should be distinguished from vigorous academic debate and the expression of unpopular and controversial opinions, which may make some employees and students feel uncomfortable, but which are a valid exercise of the right to freedom of expression (i.e. within the law). However, such opinions should not be expressed in an offensive or defamatory manner; the rights and feelings of others should be considered.

Discrimination, bullying and harassment should also be distinguished from the reasonable exercise of line management and performance management responsibilities to ensure that objectives are met and that duties are undertaken to an acceptable standard.

**The Respect@SOAS** Policy is an *informal* alternative to the first stage formal complaints and grievances procedures and is a recognition that it is not always appropriate or desirable in the first instance to resort to a formal process as it can lead to entrenched positions and/or inadvertent escalation of the problem. This policy replaces the existing **Dignity at SOAS** Policy for students, staff, visitors and contractors.

This policy should not be followed in parallel with any other complaint / grievance policy or procedure, only one policy or procedure should be followed at any one time.

The intention of the **Respect@SOAS** Policy is to offer an informal process to any person who experiences discrimination, bullying or harassment. However, where an informal approach does not resolve the issue, or where a case is deemed by the complainant as too serious to be resolved informally, the appropriate formal Grievance Procedure for staff should be instigated.

[Staff Grievance Procedure](#)

If the issue is a complaint about the behaviour of a student, the formal route would be via the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

[Student Disciplinary Process](#)

For students with a complaint, the formal route would be via the Student Complaints Procedure.

[Student Complaints Procedure](#)

Disrespectful conduct which has the effect of violating a person's dignity or which creates an **intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment** for that person; or is reasonably considered by that person, and SOAS, to have that effect, even if this is not the intention of the respondent, is covered by this policy. Examples of the type of behaviour that would be covered by this policy include:

- Unwanted physical conduct
- Unwanted verbal conduct
- Unwanted non-verbal conduct
- Bullying

Bullying and harassment may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Behaviour which is offensive, abusive, malicious, insulting or intimidating.
- Unjustified criticism
- Punishment imposed without reasonable justification

## **Informal Procedure**

### **Process**

1. The School has a number of impartial Anti-Harassment contacts, they can be contacted in the first instance to explain the intention and steps of the **Respect@SOAS policy**; whether it is appropriate in the specific incident; to offer advice and guidance as to the options available and how to access them.

#### **[anti harassment contacts](#)**

Their role is not to advocate on your behalf or to attend meetings with you as they are required to remain neutral at all times. That type of support should be accessed through Trade Union officials, a colleague or the Students Union as appropriate.

2. Request that the individual(s) STOP the behaviour that is problematic. Anti-Harassment contacts can advise on the wording of the STOP request. The request can be made:

- a. Verbally
- b. In writing

A Stop message - either verbal or in writing - should contain the following:

- A brief explanation that this is a Stop message under the terms of the informal Respect@SOAS policy, consider providing a link to the policy within your message.
- A description of the behaviour that is causing concern/distress
- A description of the impact the behaviour is having on you & your ability to carry out your job.
- A politely worded request to stop the behaviour described, ending with wording that indicates your intention is to foster better working relationships

3. If the behaviour that is causing the problem continues following the STOP request, the **Respect @SOAS** policy offers external mediation as another, informal route to resolving the issue. Both/all parties must agree to mediation for it to take place. If agreed, mediation can be organised by the Diversity Office and will be externally facilitated by an independent and suitably experienced/qualified person.

4. If mediation isn't successful or is declined by one party, the formal Complaints or Grievance Procedure should be considered as that is the final stage of the **Respect@SOAS** policy.

[Staff Grievance Procedure](#)

[Student Complaints' Procedure](#)

[Student Disciplinary Procedure](#)

5. If at any time the complainant decides to pursue a complaint/grievance under the relevant formal procedure this will automatically end the informal process.

### **Third Party Procedure**

If the person who is being complained about is a third party i.e. a contractor not directly employed by the School or a visitor, this Policy still applies. The relevant department/service area/individual responsible for the contractor's or visitor's presence on site will be identified by the Diversity Team and the complaint forwarded to them to deal with directly. They will be asked to inform the Diversity Team of the action taken.

### **If You Are the Recipient of a STOP Message**

Often people are not aware that things they say or do can be upsetting to others and had no intention to deliberately offend. If you have received a STOP message either in writing or verbally, you are required to consider the impact your words or behaviour has had on the person issuing the STOP message and to do so with good will. It is important to understand that by responding with good will you are NOT accepting blame or taking responsibility by doing so.

Remember this is an informal process and the sole intention of the **Respect@SOAS** policy is to help members of the School, be they staff, students, visitors or contractors, resolve difficulties without resorting to formal procedures. How you respond to the STOP message will have a significant effect on the outcome, hopefully you will be able to understand and accept the request. If you are not able to do so for whatever reason, you may be asked (by the Diversity Office) if you are willing to attend external, independent mediation with the person who sent the STOP message, assuming that person has indicated that they would also be willing to attend mediation.

If the issue remains unresolved by the **Respect@SOAS** process then the relevant formal procedure maybe invoked.

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