

Dignity and Respect Policy			
Document type:	Policy		
Document number:	HR-100	Version:	03
Department:	Human Resources		
Approved by:	Executive Board	Date approved:	09/03/2026
Effective from:	10/03/2026	Review date:	10/03/2029
Publication:	SOAS website		
Related documents:	Sexual and Gender Based Violence policy Staff Grievance Policy Staff Disciplinary Policy Student Disciplinary Procedure Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech Report and Support Webpage Personal Relationships Policy Reasonable Adjustments Policy Public Complaints Procedure		
Documents replaced:	HR-100-02 Dignity and Respect Policy		
<p><i>Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.</i></p>			

1. Overview

- 1.1. SOAS is committed to providing a safe and inclusive work and study environment both physically and in online environments. Bullying, harassment and discrimination have no place in SOAS culture and this policy sets out our commitment to ensuring that every member of our community is treated with dignity and respect.
- 1.2. The ethos of this policy is aligned with the SOAS 2026 - 2030 EDIW Plan that we are *One SOAS: Diverse by nature, inclusive by design*, and this policy contributes to that inclusivity.
- 1.3. We recognise the complexities of establishing and maintaining an inclusive culture and the power dynamics involved in challenging and addressing bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- 1.4. This policy sets out:
 - 1.4.1. The roles and responsibilities for 1). the university, 2). those in management and supervisory positions and 3). individuals, in establishing and maintaining an inclusive culture within which people are, and expect to be, treated with dignity and respect. This includes preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination, as well as supporting people and addressing situations that arise.
 - 1.4.2. Where to go for support for individuals involved in violations and suspected violations of dignity and respect
 - 1.4.3. Where to go to report incidents which violate a person's dignity and respect.

- 1.5. This policy applies to all staff (temporary and permanent), contractors, students and third parties (including those with honorary titles, alumni and board members). It also includes situations which have been witnessed as well as experienced directly.
- 1.6. Complaints against third parties will be investigated and addressed wherever possible, with action being taken through the most appropriate channel (for example, where appropriate, through the termination of a supplier's contract).
- 1.7. This policy references procedures set out in other policies, which become relevant following the formal reporting of an incident. For example, an individual member of the community may display behaviours which violate this policy. Following the formal reporting of those behaviours, the individual will be subject to the processes, and where appropriate, the sanctions set out in either the staff disciplinary policy or student disciplinary procedure.
- 1.8. We believe in encouraging collaboration, plurality of thought and discourse and maintaining lawful academic freedom and freedom of expression. This is outlined in more detail below, and should be read in conjunction with our Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

2. Definitions

2.1. Harassment

- 2.1.1. This policy uses definitions of harassment set out in the Equality Act 2010 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, as adapted by the Office for Students¹.
- 2.1.2. Harassment, including sexual harassment, includes unwanted behaviour or conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment because of, or connected to, one or more of the following protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
- 2.1.3. Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, harassment does not need to be related to a protected group (unlike the Equality Act 2010) and is a course of conduct conducted on at least two occasions that harasses one other person, or a course of conduct that harasses two or more persons at least once each. References to harassing a person include alarming the person or causing the person distress.
- 2.1.4. Sexual misconduct refers to any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. This includes, but is not limited to: sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape.
- 2.1.5. SOAS has a separate sexual and gender based violence policy which works alongside this policy.

¹ Office for Students Website: Prevent and address harassment and sexual misconduct, Section 3, Definition: [Definitions - Office for Students](#) Last updated in July 2024 and last accessed November 2025

2.2. Bullying

2.2.1. While there is no specific legal definition of bullying, it is recognised as unwanted, offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour. It involves an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to the recipient, often occurring as a gradual process that erodes confidence and capability².

2.3. Discrimination

2.3.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, discrimination means treating someone less favourably, directly or indirectly, based on one of the nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

2.3.2. In addition, victimisation refers to negative treatment as a result of being involved with a discrimination or harassment complaint.

2.3.3. It is also unlawful to refuse to provide reasonable adjustments to disabled employees, which is covered separately by our Reasonable Adjustments policy.

3. Lawful Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

3.1. We recognise that members of our community will hold different and sometimes conflicting views. This policy should be read in conjunction with the SOAS Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech to ensure that lawful academic freedom and freedom of expression are protected, while also maintaining dignity and respect across the university.

3.2. SOAS will always seek to resolve any tensions between this policy and our Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech through dialogue and mutual respect. However, we follow the EHRC and OfS guidance, and should a situation arise where this policy conflicts with the Code of Practice and resolution cannot be found, the latter will prevail.

3.3. Teaching and Learning

3.4. All teaching and learning should be undertaken appropriately, inclusively and without singling out particular students or groups of students.

3.5. However, students may experience course materials, including but not limited to books, videos, sound recordings and pictures which they may find offensive. Furthermore, they may be challenged by views expressed as part of teaching, research or discussions with which they disagree, and even find offensive. This is likely to be protected by academic freedom and freedom of expression and therefore unlikely to be considered harassment under the Equality Act 2010.

² Based on ACAS definition of bullying at work.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. The University

- 4.1.1. The University has a responsibility to ensure that staff, students and third parties are aware of this policy and adhere to upholding a SOAS culture of dignity and respect.
- 4.1.2. The University will ensure the policy is made available and embedded into relevant training, contracts and inductions. Preventative training and related measures are in place and will continue to be rolled-out.
- 4.1.3. The University is responsible for ensuring there are accessible and widely communicated reporting mechanisms in place (as set out below), offering different options for various situations.
- 4.1.4. The University will ensure that complaints of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination are handled effectively and efficiently, and where relevant through:
 - 4.1.4.1. Report and Support
 - 4.1.4.2. The Student Disciplinary Procedure
 - 4.1.4.3. The Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Policies
 - 4.1.4.4. The Public Complaints Procedure
- 4.1.5. The University will ensure that those who have experienced, witnessed and been accused of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination are supported appropriately.
- 4.1.6. The University will not use non-disclosure agreements in relation to sexual misconduct.
- 4.1.7. The University will monitor reports and complaints in relation to bullying, harassment and discrimination and identify any specific patterns and trends, putting relevant actions in place. Data on bullying, harassment and discrimination will be reported annually to the Executive Board and the Board of Trustees for transparency and governance purposes.

4.2. Managers

- 4.2.1. Managers and those in supervisory positions includes, but is not limited to, Senior Managers, Directors, Heads of Department, Heads of Service, line managers, team leaders, academic supervisors and teaching staff (where the staff member is responsible for maintaining dignity and respect within the learning environment).
- 4.2.2. Managers have a responsibility for responding to incidents of bullying, harassment and discrimination that are reported to them. They should ensure that the people involved are receiving appropriate support.
- 4.2.3. Managers should be aware of power imbalances which exist in any culture, and how they can be proactive bystanders through modelling and promoting an inclusive culture based on dignity and respect.

- 4.2.4. Managers should ensure they arrange appropriate inductions and training for their teams so that every member of staff is aware of their responsibilities under this policy, and how to report any bullying, harassment and/or discrimination that they experience or witness.
- 4.2.5. Managers should respond to relevant data on bullying, harassment and discrimination in their area, for example the staff survey findings.
- 4.3. **Individuals**
 - 4.3.1. Every member of the SOAS community, including staff, contractors, students and third parties (including those with honorary titles, alumni and board members), has a responsibility to adhere to this policy and to ensure they are promoting a culture of dignity and respect.
 - 4.3.2. Individuals must not harass, bully or discriminate against other people. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - 4.3.2.1. Shouting or using abusive language, ridiculing or demeaning another individual
 - 4.3.2.2. Using threatening language and/or body language towards another individual
 - 4.3.2.3. Touching another individual inappropriately and without consent or deliberately invading an individual's personal space
 - 4.3.2.4. Using discriminatory or derogatory language and/or treating someone differently based on a protected characteristic
 - 4.3.2.5. Abusing your power as a manager to blame other people for errors
 - 4.3.2.6. Deliberately sidelining colleagues and limiting or narrowing their responsibilities
 - 4.3.2.7. Continued suggestions for socialising outside of work after it has become clear that such suggestions are unwelcome
- 4.4. Where an individual experiences or witnesses bullying, harassment or discrimination, please see the reporting and support section below. We encourage all staff to be active bystanders and to intervene in inappropriate situations wherever appropriate and where they are safe to do so.
- 4.5. Where an Individual is the cause of the bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, they have a responsibility to adjust their actions, behaviours and communications at SOAS. Depending on the severity and/or frequency of the incident(s), the Staff Disciplinary Policy or Student Disciplinary Procedure will be used. Alternative and appropriate mechanisms will be used for third parties and contractors.

5. Support

- 5.1. For anyone in immediate harm or danger, always contact campus security, or if the threat is serious, call emergency services.
- 5.2. For the most up to date information on support for bullying, harassment and discrimination, the staff and student intranet pages are the best source of information as they are updated regularly. Additionally, the [Report and Support website](#) includes available support options, and for all of the support available specifically in relation to sexual harassment and misconduct, see the [dedicated SOAS webpage](#).
- 5.3. **Student support**
 - 5.3.1. Students can contact the student advice and wellbeing team for dedicated support and counselling. There is also a Student Assistance Programme available 24/7, and the details are available on the student intranet pages.
 - 5.3.2. Students can seek advice and support through the Student Union.
- 5.4. **Staff support**
 - 5.4.1. Staff can contact a SOAS Wellbeing Ambassador for confidential advice and guidance. The Ambassadors have all had Mental Health First Aid Training, and can help signpost staff to the most appropriate places for support, as well as talking through the different reporting options.
 - 5.4.2. Staff can contact the Employee Assistance Programme 24/7 and the call will be answered by a qualified clinician. The details are available on the staff intranet pages.

6. Reporting

- 6.1. SOAS recognises the complexities of challenging and reporting bullying, harassment and discrimination. Reporting options and preferences will vary depending on various factors, including:
 - 6.1.1. The severity and frequency of the incident(s).
 - 6.1.2. The relationship between the victim/witness and the person who caused the incident.
 - 6.1.3. The relationship between the victim/witness and their line manager.
 - 6.1.4. How safe someone feels in formally reporting an incident they have experienced or witnessed and the power dynamics involved within the incident.
- 6.2. SOAS also recognises that bullying, harassment and discrimination can occur as a continuum, where low-level inappropriate behaviours can begin to escalate. Where possible, our aim is to intervene in situations as early as possible, using informal mechanisms where appropriate, to prevent unnecessary escalation of behaviours and/or sanctions.

6.3. Informal reporting

- 6.3.1. Students and staff can raise any concerns they have with their line manager or academic advisor and/or supervisor in the first instance and where they feel able to do so. The person reporting and the line manager/ academic advisor/ supervisor can discuss and agree next steps, and if needed, seek further advice from either their HR Business Partner or Student Casework team as appropriate.
- 6.3.2. Any incidents of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination can be reported informally through Report and Support, and the person making the report can specify whether they want further action taken. Reports can be made anonymously, and by those who have witnessed an incident.
- 6.3.3. Students and staff can access additional advice on reporting through trade union representatives, the student's union, and for staff, through Wellbeing Ambassadors, to understand the available options.
- 6.3.4. Where incidents are reported informally, actions taken will be at the discretion of the managers and academic advisor/ supervisors involved. The University will review regularly any anonymous and informal reporting data to identify any specific trends and patterns on which to act.

6.4. Formal Reporting

- 6.4.1. All forms of bullying, harassment and discrimination can be reported through Report and Support. Reports will be directed to the most appropriate team. Even where reports are made anonymously, it is possible to use the anonymous messaging service to receive updates and advice following the report.
- 6.4.2. Staff and students have full access to the Staff Grievance Policy or Student Disciplinary Procedure regardless of whether they use Report and Support.
- 6.4.3. Formal reporting may also lead to a full investigation through the Staff or Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

7. Data monitoring and policy review

- 7.1.1. Data from Report and Support, HR, Student Casework and Campus Safety Team will be analysed at least annually and reported to the Executive Board and Board of Trustees. In addition, meetings will be held with the Student's Union to share appropriate information and findings, to learn from each other and to create relevant joint actions.