



Prevention of inappropriate behaviour and harassment at the University of Helsinki

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1 Introduction

The University of Helsinki disapproves of any kind of inappropriate behaviour, bullying or harassment. Each and every supervisor and teacher at the University is obligated to address the situation if they notice inappropriate behaviour, bullying or harassment in his or her work or study community.

Students at the University of Helsinki have the right to a safe and pleasant study environment. Consequently, all University units must ensure that their students are not subjected to harassment or inappropriate behaviour in the course of their studies and supervision.

These instructions are meant to serve as a guideline for those who have been subjected to inappropriate treatment or harassment in their work or studies, for supervisors, and for all members of the work and study communities.

2 Inappropriate behaviour and harassment in the work and study communities

In all communities, conflicts arise between people from time to time, but not all conflicts and clashes entail inappropriate behaviour or harassment. The border between inappropriate behaviour and mundane conflicts at work may be difficult to recognise.

Inappropriate behaviour includes bullying, harassment, disparaging or other negative behaviour that carries on and leaves the victim feeling defenceless. Inappropriate behaviour may occur between colleagues or fellow students, between a supervisor and an employee, or between a teacher and a student. Any one of these may be the victim or the abuser. The victims will find it especially difficult to handle the situation if the abuser is in a position of power above them.

Bullying includes:

- Engaging in repeated humiliation and insults
- Limiting social interaction, not speaking to a person or returning his or her greeting
- Casting aspersions or spreading gossip about a person, or ridiculing the person
- Blocking a person from receiving work assignments

Bullying does **not** include:

- Reasonable and justified exercise of management powers by the employer
- Conflicts that arise from decisions or interpretations involving work or studies
- Problematic work-related situations that are discussed between employees
- Referral of an employee by the supervisor to an assessment of work capacity
- Changes in assignments that have been discussed with the employee
- Assessment of completed studies and provision of relevant criticism on them



- Provision by the University of reasonable and justified instructions to students on appropriate behaviour or the use of disciplinary powers over students

Harassment refers to violating a person's or a group's dignity and integrity while creating an intimidating, degrading and hostile atmosphere. Harassment is one form of discrimination. Both intentional harassment and conduct with insulting consequences are forbidden. For example, racist jokes or name-calling aimed at a colleague or fellow student belonging to a sexual minority are instances of harassment.

Gender harassment refers to behaviour pertaining to a person's gender which is unwanted and deliberately or otherwise de facto creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, offensive or aggressive atmosphere. Gender harassment is not necessarily sexual in nature. **Sexual harassment** refers to any behaviour that is sexual in nature – physical, verbal or non-verbal – and is unwanted by the recipient.

Sexual harassment may include:

- Sexually insinuating gestures or facial expressions
- Foul language and messages with sexual innuendos, including email and online harassment
- Suggestive comments about a person's body, dress or private life
- Pornographic materials
- Touching
- Suggestions or demands for sex

Discrimination refers to treating a person or a group of people differently from another in a comparable situation without an acceptable reason because of their racial, national or ethnic origin, colour, language, gender, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, political or trade union activities, family relations, state of health, religion, belief or other personal trait. Discrimination occurs when, for example, a teacher refuses to supervise students representing a certain nationality. Indirect discrimination refers to a situation where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice disadvantages certain people more than others. A regulation or an order to discriminate may also qualify as discrimination.

Discrimination at work refers to a situation where an employer treats an employee less favourably in hiring or during employment without a compelling reason. In such situations, the employer violates his or her obligation to treat all employees objectively and equally.

3 Instructions

3.1 For those subjected to bullying and harassment

No one should tolerate inappropriate behaviour. If you are treated inappropriately, tell the bully or harasser immediately that you do not approve of their conduct and tell them to stop. It could be that they did not realise that they were acting in an offensive way.



If the inappropriate behaviour continues, contact your immediate supervisor or, if he or she is the bully or harasser, his or her supervisor. It is the supervisor's duty to use all available means to stop inappropriate behaviour and harassment. Students may contact the head of their department or the dean or vice-dean in charge of teaching at their faculty. In study-related matters, the discipline coordinator should also be informed of any inappropriate behaviour.

If the issue cannot be resolved in your own work or study environment, seek help from the outside. University employees may contact an occupational safety delegate, a chief union representative, the contact person for harassment, the Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit or occupational health. Students may contact the contact persons for harassment at the Student Union or the Finnish Student Health Service. Seek help from the individual or organisation that feels the most natural to you.

Keep a written record of the incidents. The bully or harasser cannot be held accountable if the incidents cannot be proven. Save any offensive emails or other messages.

If you report an incident to your supervisor or a teacher, describe it in detail and provide documentation (e.g., an email). Once you have reported your experience of inappropriate behaviour, you are obligated to participate in the proceedings concerning the matter.

3.2 For supervisors

Supervisors must monitor their work community and actively intervene if any incidents come to their attention. If they find out about inappropriate behaviour through any source, they must assess the situation and take necessary action.

No one from outside the unit can assume the role and responsibilities of the supervisor. Failure to intervene in cases of inappropriate behaviour may in some cases result in the employer being punished for a violation of occupational safety. The superior must take an objective attitude towards the person who feels that he or she is being treated inappropriately.

3.3 For the work and study communities

The members of work and study communities must demonstrate through their attitudes and actions that the community does not tolerate inappropriate behaviour. Every member of a community is responsible for community policies.

Anyone who notices inappropriate behaviour is obligated to report the incident to a supervisor or teacher.

3.4 For teachers, academic administration staff and other staff

If a student harasses a teacher or a member of administrative or other staff, the person subjected to harassment must first ask the student to stop the inappropriate behaviour (e.g., name-calling). If the inappropriate behaviour occurs in email messages or similar media, the recipient can notify the student that inappropriate messages will not be responded to.



If a student harasses other students or disturbs teaching, the teacher can first caution the student and ask him or her to stop. If the behaviour does not stop, the teacher can order the student to leave the classroom. If the student does not comply, the teacher can call a porter. Porters are not entitled to physically force students to leave a room, but usually students will either calm down or agree to leave the room if a porter is called. In extreme situations (e.g., in the case of threatening or violent behaviour), the police can be called to remove the student.

A student can be barred from attending teaching for up to three working days if the student's behaviour could jeopardise another student's or an employee's safety or makes teaching or related activities unreasonably difficult. No official decision to bar a student is made, but the teacher or the traineeship supervisor notifies the student that he or she has been barred, if this is justified. However, the matter must be recorded.

If cautioning a student does not stop the student from harassing others or if the student has been ordered to leave the classroom, the matter must be discussed with the student. If the inappropriate behaviour continues after the discussion, disciplinary measures may be taken where necessary. For detailed instructions, see section 5 *Measures*.

If a student disturbs teaching online (e.g., by writing inappropriate comments on the teaching platform), the matter must first be addressed according to the terms of use for the University's data systems (<https://www.helsinki.fi/en/it/information-security-and-terms-of-use>). The disturbance of online teaching may lead to disciplinary measures. Student use of online resources outside the University (e.g., on social media) falls outside the University's authority.

The University's counselling psychologists and contact persons for harassment provide staff guidance for resolving conflicts. If necessary, the University's legal counsel specialising in academic affairs can be contacted in matters related to students.

3.5 For students

The University is responsible for the teaching and supervision offered to students, as well as for study-related traineeships. Departments and faculties must ensure that students are not subjected to inappropriate behaviour in these situations and that students who have been treated inappropriately can continue their studies without any problems.

- Students who feel they have been treated inappropriately by another student should primarily contact the teacher of the relevant course.
- Students who experience inappropriate behaviour during extracurricular activities intended for students should primarily contact the Student Union's contact person for harassment.
- Students who experience inappropriate behaviour from a member of staff should contact the head of their department or, in a faculty without departments, the vice-dean in charge of teaching.
- The University's contact persons for harassment provide advice and guidance.

3.6 For those accused of bullying or harassment



If necessary, talk to your supervisor. It is better for him or her to hear about the accusations directly. Even if you think that you are not guilty of bullying or harassment, do not belittle the accuser's feelings, and immediately stop behaving in the allegedly inappropriate manner. You can also discuss the situation with an occupational safety delegate. If you are a student, you can discuss the situation with the Student Union's contact person for harassment.

4 Responsibilities of staff and students

Staff must follow the instructions and regulations issued by the employer within its competences. They must also ensure, within the means available to them, the health and safety of both themselves and other staff, and avoid subjecting other staff to inappropriate treatment.

Even though personalities may conflict in a workplace, everyone must make an effort to get along with each other to be able to perform their duties professionally. Everyone must be able to behave with good manners.

Students must behave well at the University and not subject others to inappropriate behaviour or harassment. Each student is responsible for ensuring through his or her own actions that all students can enjoy a safe and pleasant study environment. To progress in their studies, students must follow the study-related instructions and guidelines issued by the University, individual teachers and administrative staff.

5 Measures

5.1 The employer's obligation to take action

The employer is required by law to take action if an employee is subjected to harassment or other inappropriate treatment in the workplace. The supervisor is responsible for clarifying the situation. The Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit can support the supervisor in this task. The supervisor must hear the parties in an unbiased manner to clarify the course of events. The supervisor invites the parties to meetings, at which minutes must be taken. These discussions must also include an agreement on the measures to be taken and the related monitoring, the details of which are recorded in the minutes. The supervisor must ensure that the agreed measures are taken and the monitoring is performed.

5.2 Workplace mediation

People have their own views of what is inappropriate, depending on their background and previous experiences. It is important to resolve situations in a positive way because the people in question must in many cases continue to work together.

Some conflicts can be resolved through discussion, whereas sometimes external assistance may also be needed. Workplace mediation is one of the methods for resolving conflicts at the University. The employer may choose to use mediation, for example, if a



person feels he or she has been treated inappropriately. Mediation can also be used in situations involving students.

Workplace mediation is a solution-centred method of conflict management in which a trained, unbiased mediator guides the parties in a discussion to find a solution that satisfies everyone. The conflicts addressed may include those between two persons and those that affect the whole workplace.

The workplace and its individual members may also be offered other support both during and after the mediation. Options include support from the occupational health provider or work supervision. The Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit assists workplaces in these activities

The Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit also coordinates the University's mediation activities. In practice, this means that after being contacted by a work community with a potential mediation case, the unit conducts an initial review and then decides whether to use mediation or another method to resolve the situation. The unit informs the employer and selects the mediators to be used. The unit is also informed of the solutions adopted in the mediation. The unit also performs long-term monitoring of the University's mediation activities and report the results to the University management.

If mediation is needed in your work community, please contact the Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit.

5.3 Measures under labour law

If an employee continues to treat others inappropriately or if the inappropriate behaviour is serious, the situation may warrant measures under labour law. In that case, the faculty or department must contact an expert at HR Services, who would then be responsible for preparing and presenting the matter.

If the bullying or harassment has included an intentional violation of physical integrity or the threat of such a violation, the employee may report this to the police.

5.4 In the study community

By law, students are entitled to a safe study environment. Students are also obligated to comply with the University's regulations. If a department's or faculty's management learns that a student has subjected other students or staff to harassment or inappropriate behaviour, the management is required to intervene.

The management must clarify the situation by asking both parties for their views of the events and recording these views.

If the situation cannot be resolved through informal, direct discussions and instructions or if the matter is serious enough for such instructions to be considered insufficient, the department or faculty may hold a formal hearing. The student whose inappropriate behaviour has been reported must be invited to this hearing. The head of department, the dean or the vice-dean in charge of teaching must attend. The student must be notified that



he or she may request a support person (e.g., from the Student Union) to attend the hearing. The person subjected to inappropriate behaviour and the person who reported it must also be provided the opportunity to attend the hearing and be accompanied by a support person. The purpose of the hearing is to explain to the student how his or her behaviour is unacceptable, how it must change and what measures will be taken if it does not change. The minutes of the hearing must indicate the student's and the University's views of the matter as well as the University's instructions to the student. The minutes must be sent to the student after the hearing. If the student does not attend the hearing despite being invited, the minutes must be based on the information available and be sent to the student.

If the student's behaviour does not change despite the instructions or if the matter is serious enough for a hearing to be considered insufficient, disciplinary action will be taken. In such situations, the faculty or department must contact the University's legal counsel specialised in academic affairs, who would then be responsible for preparing and presenting the matter. In a disciplinary procedure, students may be issued a written warning if they

- disturb teaching
- behave violently or threateningly, or
- act fraudulently or otherwise violate the University's regulations.

If the student's action or inaction is serious or he or she continues to behave inappropriately after receiving the written warning, the student may be suspended from the University for a fixed period of up to one year. The decision on a written warning must be made by the rector of the University, and on a suspension, by the Board of the University.

The provisions of the Universities Act on restrictions to student admission apply to first- and second-cycle studies in pharmacy, dentistry, medicine, psychology and logopedics. The provisions also apply to studies in social work and teacher education as well as education in psychotherapy. In these fields, admission may be cancelled, for example, if

- The student has repeatedly or seriously endangered another person's health or safety in studies and thereby demonstrated him- or herself as manifestly unsuitable to perform study-related assignments or traineeships
- The student's health or functional capacity manifestly fails to meet the admission requirements of section 37 a, subsection 1 of the Universities Act

If, in the case of inappropriate behaviour or harassment, the student's field is one of those referred to in the provisions of the Universities Act on restrictions to student admission, or if the application of those provisions is considered, the faculty or department must contact the University's legal counsel specialised in academic affairs.

To prevent students' substance abuse and to address substance abuse problems, the University has prepared written guidelines together with representatives of student welfare services. In the case of a student with a substance abuse problem, the relevant guidelines must be applied.



6 Contact persons

If a problem cannot be solved in the workplace, employees can contact the Human Resources Development and Occupational Wellbeing unit, the occupational health and safety officer, occupational health and safety delegates, union representatives or occupational health staff. In harassment cases, employees can contact the University's contact persons for harassment.

In student-related matters, teachers and academic administration staff can contact the University's legal counsel specialised in academic affairs. They can also contact the University's counselling psychologists and harassment contact persons for consultation to resolve conflicts.

Students can contact the Student Union's or the University's harassment contact persons, the Finnish Student Health Service or the Nyyti student support centre.