

Informal advice for students

Appendix 1 from the College Harassment Policy

If you feel you are being harassed or bullied you may find it useful to consider the following points:

Before deciding what to do about the situation, you will find it helpful to seek confidential help and advice. Many people find it difficult to think clearly about a situation which is causing them distress. Discussing the problem with someone else, such as a fellow student, your tutor, one of the College Nurses, the Chaplain, or the Senior Tutor, gives you the opportunity to analyse how you feel about it, what effect it is having on you, and what you believe is needed to solve the problem.

Discussion with any adviser will normally be strictly confidential, and further action involving you will not be taken without informing you. You should be very careful to protect your own confidentiality, and must also protect the confidentiality of all others involved in the situation. You should be aware there are limits to confidentiality. If you state that you do not want any further action to be taken, you may be asked to confirm this in writing. Action of some kind may, however, still need to be taken to protect you or others, although every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality.

You should always keep a record of the incidents which are causing you distress.

If you can avoid confrontation you have a better chance of solving the problem. If you are unhappy with somebody's behaviour towards you and feel able to tell him or her how you feel and what you would like to see changed, either face to face or by letter, this may resolve the situation.

If seeking resolution in this way you may want to ask for support on a confidential basis, either to help you to work out what to say or to accompany you when you meet the person you are complaining about. Because of the possibility of counter-accusation or recrimination, it is probably wise to alert an adviser to the problem before you approach the person concerned, even if you feel able to take this action on your own. If you want to communicate this message by letter, (hard copy or electronic) you will find a simple form of words suggested at the end of this section.

Even if you are able to resolve the situation yourself, you may wish to inform an adviser in the College or that of the person complained against so that he or she is aware of any situation or incident which could cause future difficulties.

If you have tried a direct approach and it has not worked, or if you do not feel confident enough to try it, you may seek help from those outlined above to resolve the problem on your behalf.

If an informal approach has not or would not have the desired effect or the matter is particularly serious, you can make a formal complaint to the Senior Tutor who will then arrange for a formal investigation within a brief timescale, in line with the College's Complaints procedures.

Incidents outside College

Members of staff may belong to more than one Institution or College; in such cases, the appropriate institution is that responsible for the context in which most of the relevant behaviour has taken or is taking place (e.g. Departments or Faculties for lectures, seminars or practical classes, and Colleges for supervisions). Complaints against other students are normally most usefully pursued within their College, but a University Department or Faculty may be appropriate (e.g. if the behaviour takes place in the context of a class organised by the Department or Faculty).

In the event of any difficulty identifying the relevant institution, the Senior Tutor on your behalf, may take advice to resolve this; however, any complaint must be made through one Head of Institution only.

Digital Material

If the behaviour which is causing you distress involves messages or offensive material sent to you by computer and you cannot identify the source, you or your tutor can contact the College's Computer Office for help, either directly or through your tutor; if the source is outside the College then you, your tutor or the College's Computer Officer can send an email to confidential@ucs.cam.ac.uk, which will be dealt with by a senior member of the Computing Service.

Using the right words

The following suggests a format that it may be helpful to use in a letter or in speech:

1. Describe the behaviour very precisely, where and when it happened. If you are vague the person causing the problem may be able to pretend that he or she does not understand what you are talking about.
2. Tell the person how you feel about what has happened.
3. Describe the effect it is having on you (e.g. you may find you are avoiding the person, or working less effectively so that your work performance is affected, or you may feel unable to attend a club or society).
4. Say precisely what you want to happen.