

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE - (VIOLENCE)

CODE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

This Code of Practice identifies the College's procedures for the management of verbal and physical abuse (violence) to its staff and students. Each member of the staff and student population is entitled to be treated with respect and to conduct their business free from the threat of violence. There is a similar expectation that staff and students will treat others with respect.

There is evidence that the risk of violence within the College is low. However, this document identifies the measures to be taken where it is established that verbal and/or physical abuse may present an identifiable risk.

Those found to have committed an act of violence will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

The College has a Harassment Policy identifying how harassment and bullying is to be managed and the procedures and support available to an individual where they are subject to such behaviour. Where it is unclear whether an incident constitutes harassment or violence and under which document it should be handled, advice should be sought from either the Director of Personnel or the College Health & Safety Adviser.

SECTION 1 DEFINING VIOLENCE

The Health and Safety Executive define violence as:

“Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.”

Verbal abuse and threats may indicate a risk of actual injury, while malicious damage to either College or an individual's property may cause distress and fear of attack. Where there is no actual or potential physical injury, considerable emotional stress may result. Each may be indicative of an absence of, or inadequate, risk assessment and, therefore, no or insufficient controls implemented.

While people have different perceptions of what they find threatening or offensive, it is important that each incident is reported, treated seriously, and management act on the information provided. Abusive telephone calls or threatening behaviour are the most common examples of this type of unacceptable conduct.

SECTION 2 THE REQUIREMENT TO MANAGE VIOLENCE

Staff and students identified as being potentially 'at risk' have a right to be assured that all action that is reasonably practicable is being taken for their protection.

To determine whether the potential for violence exists within their area of responsibility, and from this to identify who may be 'at risk', heads of department/school/directors (hereafter referred to as 'managers') will initiate a review to determine the potential for it to take place. Where the review identifies that a potential risk does exist, a formal risk assessment will be conducted to establish who may be at risk, the nature of the risk, and the measures necessary for risk control.

To ensure that all relevant information has been taken into account, staff representatives and those who may be identified as potentially at risk (or representatives acting on their behalf), will need to be involved in the risk assessment. Where unacceptable risk exists, the identification and implementation of appropriate control measures will be required.

Issues that it may be helpful to take into account include:

- The physical aspects of premises
- Working practices and patterns;
- The need for training.

Reviews of risk assessments should take place at least every two years, or before, should circumstances identify it to be necessary.

SECTION 3 REPORTING INCIDENTS AND TAKING REMEDIAL ACTION

College Security staff are in attendance at all times of the day and night. In the event of an individual being under threat, Security should be contacted using the internal College Emergency Telephone Number: 444. They should be advised of the incident at the time it is in progress, or where that it is not possible, at the earliest opportunity thereafter. A member of the security staff will be in attendance within minutes of notification.

Managers will investigate all incidents brought to their attention and take action to reduce the potential for an incident to recur.

Note: It is understood that personnel may not always wish to lodge a formal complaint, in which case they are still advised to notify their manager.

SECTION 4 TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Staff and students who, as a result of the risk assessment, are identified as being particularly exposed to the risk of violence, need to be aware of the risks they face, be capable of recognising the potential for danger, either to themselves or to others, and be aware of how they may diffuse potentially hazardous situations.

Such staff will, therefore be provided with training which should include:

- The cause of violent and aggressive behaviour
- The policy and procedure for dealing with violence
- Safe working practices
- What to do when feeling threatened with violence
- Managing confrontation by using positive interpersonal skills
- Methods for attracting the attention of colleagues

- The use of security equipment such as alarms

The College is supportive of those who, even though the above procedures have been implemented, are subject to an assault or suffer verbal abuse and following such an incident, an offer of counselling support will be made.

As identified in Section 3, line managers will investigate cases of violence and where sufficient evidence exists, normally involving assault, following discussion with, and the approval of the Director of Resources, notification will be made to the Police. Where appropriate, a letter will also be sent to a person(s) allegedly having made a threat, or verbally or physically having abused a student, member of staff, or visitor, advising that disciplinary or legal action may be taken against them.

Dr Richard Fisk
Health & Safety Adviser
4/4/05

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE (VIOLENCE)

(GENERIC RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE PAPER)

Introduction - The Legal Requirement to Assess Risks

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, require employers to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of -

- “(a) *the risks to the health and safety of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work; and*
- (b) *the risks to the health and safety of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking....”*

These duties, do, therefore, impose an obligation on managers to risk assess those activities in which there is an identified potential for verbal and/or physical abuse to occur to members of staff, students and visitors to College premises.

In conducting risk assessments the following definitions apply:

- Hazard - something with the potential to cause harm.
- Risk - the probability (or likelihood) of harm occurring in the actual circumstances of use.

Section 1 Verbal Abuse - Preliminary Risk Assessment

Managers will undertake a preliminary review to establish whether an identifiable potential exists for verbal abuse within their area of responsibility. In accordance with the College Code of Practice: *Verbal and Physical Abuse (Section 2)*, the review will involve those who may be identified as potentially at risk, or representatives acting on their behalf. It will include the steps identified below.

1. Establish precisely who may be at risk, from whom, and in what manner. While abuse will not always involve those to whom a service is provided, an example is staff having frequent (perhaps daily) telephone or face-to-face contact with those to whom they provide assistance. The users of that service may at times feel frustrated and believe they do not receive the level of service to which they are entitled. As a result they may become frustrated and present that frustration in the form of anger and verbal abuse, possibly threatening physical violence.
2. Having identified the hazard in terms of those who may be subjected to it, from whom, and in what manner, it will then be necessary to establish the level of risk involved. As identified above, risk is the probability or likelihood of harm occurring from an event. The level of risk will be estimated as one of the following:

Low Risk: being extremely unlikely to arise.

Medium Risk: there being a distinct possibility that an incident will arise in the foreseeable future.

High Risk: being highly likely to arise.

3. Where the risk is identified as low, i.e. being highly unlikely to arise, it will normally require only minimal safety precautions being identified, implemented and recorded. Any safety precautions will then be reviewed at appropriate intervals as determined by those conducting the risk assessment.

Full Risk Assessment

4. Where the preliminary assessment identifies the risk as either *medium* or *high level*, then the College Health & Safety Adviser and health and safety co-ordinator should be asked to assist with the completion of a formal, written risk assessment. The assessment will establish, for example, any necessary new safety procedures/instructions, amendments required to the physical layout of the environment, further staff training, or other workplace precautions required.
5. Managers will be responsible for the implementation of the above and for undertaking periodic reviews (the frequency of which shall be determined by the risk assessment). These will establish whether controls are operating satisfactorily and whether further measures are necessary.

Training and Departmental Standards

6. In those cases in which the assessment identifies the risk arising from verbal abuse to be at either medium or high risk levels, then personnel so exposed shall be provided with appropriate training as described in Section 4 of the College Code of Practice - Verbal and Physical Abuse (Violence).
7. Whether risk is identified as being at the *low*, *medium* or *high* levels, the manager will also establish precise departmental standards for dealing with customers courteously, efficiently and, where appropriate, firmly. Also to be identified will be the procedures to be followed in the event of verbal abuse arising from either telephone or face-to-face contact. This will include identifying, when an instance of abusive behaviour occurs, that the person in receipt of the abuse will request the other party to stop. Where they fail to do so, they are to be advised that they will be referred to the line manager. Where the unacceptable behaviour continues, they are to be transferred to the line manager, and where that is not possible, are to be advised that their problem cannot be dealt with further at this time and will be referred to the next level of management. At all times, they are to remain courteous, not enter into arguments and, where possible, remain calm.

The above is intended only as a guide to the conduct of risk assessments. For instances falling outside the scope of this example, the College Health & Safety

Adviser should be consulted for advice on the structure of the assessment and the action to be taken.

All personnel should be reminded of the College internal Emergency Telephone Number: 444. If they feel threatened at any time of the day or night and require assistance, this will connect them with Security who can be in attendance within minutes.

Section 2 Physical Abuse - Preliminary Risk Assessment

The preliminary risk assessment for physical abuse shall be conducted in accordance with steps 1 -3 identified above for verbal abuse.

Physical Abuse - Full Risk Assessment

Conducting the risk assessment will be undertaken in accordance with stages 4-7 above and require under stage 4, the involvement of the Head of Security. Particular emphasis will be placed on training, physical layout of the premises and emergency response arrangements, together with the management of lone working issues.

As with the management of verbal abuse, personnel must be familiarised with the College emergency telephone arrangements.

Dr Richard Fisk
Health & Safety Adviser
4/4/05

'In accordance with the College's commitment to equality and diversity, this Policy has been written and screened to avoid discrimination and promote a positive approach to race, disability and gender issues. Comments on the content of this document should be directed to Mrs Leanie DuToit in the College Health and Safety Office.'