

Over 50 University Staff members have sought advice about bullying



By [Martin Spurr](#), Editor (2011/12)

Tuesday 21 February 2012



Figures obtained by FOI requests show that nearly 20 University staff members have left York in the last five years citing bullying or harassment as one of the reasons.

During the period 2007-2009, York was ranked as the second worst institution for staff members leaving because of bullying or harassment.

The statistics also state that 53 members of staff have sought advice over bullying or harassment at work. The University has defended their record, stating: "There have been eight investigations over the past two calendar years, or four per year. We would of course prefer if an investigation was never necessary, but given that we have nearly 3,500 staff, this is not a significant number."

The only institution to have a higher number of staff leave due to bullying or harassment at work during the period 2007-09 was the Open University, where 16 members of staff left compared to 13 at York.

FOIs were sent to 144 institutions and 118 replied with the relevant data, completing the top five were: Northampton with 11 staff members; LSE with eight; and Liverpool John Moores with seven.

Similarly, a University and College Union (UCU) national survey in 2008 asked a random sample of employees in Higher Education and found that 34 per cent of respondents claimed they had been bullied at work in the preceding six months.

The survey also reported that five per cent of respondents said they were aware of 'now and then' derogatory comments about them appearing on student websites, while 13 per cent said they had received derogatory, offensive or bullying e-mails from students.

The University defines harassment as including: suggestive sexual remarks, racist insults or jokes, verbal abuse or foul language, unfair allocation of work, exclusion, and unwelcome attention. It advises staff members to contact a Harassment Adviser or senior staff member amongst others.

A spokesperson for the University commented: "We actively encourage staff who are concerned about

potential bullying and harassment to seek support from colleagues in HR and Equality & Diversity.

"The fact that a member of staff raises an issue does not necessarily mean that wrongdoing has taken place, and as the figures show, in most cases, the matter can be successfully dealt with informally."

But the University suggested that comparing institutions on this issue may be difficult: "In general, the way information of this nature is collected and recorded is likely to be different from institution to institution and it is therefore doubtful that the data resulting from the FOI responses can be compared on a like-for-like basis."

The UCU survey figures also show that 23 per cent of respondents, who had experienced bullying, made an official complaint to their institution.

Sally Hunt, General Secretary of the UCU, addressed the results of the UCU 2008 survey stating: "Bullying at work can take many forms and all of them create stress for the victim. Everybody has the right to expect to work in a safe environment free from bullying."

"Good institutions are ones that are aware of the problem and are proactively trying to tackle it. Poor ones are those who refuse to accept there may be a problem or try to place the blame elsewhere."

The UCU survey questioned 9,700 of its members about bullying and harassment in the workplace and found that in 19 institutions at least one in 10 respondents said that they were 'always' or 'often' bullied.



3 comments

Dave Taylor

22 Feb '12 at 4:40 pm

Having spoken to a senior staff member who left during that period, I can quite believe the allegations behind the statistics. The culture of bullying and harrassment comes down from the top of an organisation, and the University of York clearly has a lot to do to change. This also means that the President of the Students' Union must also be a strong character, to stand up for students, in that sort of environment. That's one of the reasons why I support the candidate that I do, believing him to be the best person for the job.

Report

Jo Mo

23 Feb '12 at 5:03 pm

Crucial point:

"Good institutions are ones that are aware of the problem and are proactively trying to tackle it. Poor ones are those who refuse to accept there may be a problem or try to place the blame elsewhere."

Report

Alan Price

23 Feb '12 at 11:30 pm

This issue is very common and toxic to the university with much of it happening behind the scenes. A warning for prospective students and employees...

Report

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