

Guideline for handling offensive behaviour such as bullying and sexual harassment



1. Background and purpose

The University of Copenhagen has an [Occupational Health and Safety policy](#), which aims to be the inspiration for establishing creative and attractive environments where employees experience workplaces that are characterised by supporting talent, openness, respect, community and inclusion and where students are met by an inspiring study environment.

The University of Copenhagen has a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying, sexual harassment and other behaviours which offend employees or students. Offensive behaviour is humiliating and creates a bad working environment, which the University does not accept.

The University of Copenhagen's research, degree programmes and reputation are based on a good study and work environment. Teaching and research are conducted in collaboration – both internally and externally. The basis for good collaboration is that students and employees respect one another and maintain a civil manner and tone.

There is a particular risk that sexual harassment and other forms of offensive behaviour are exercised in unequal power relations. All managers, employees and students must promote a culture that builds on inclusion and respect. Employees, students and managers always have the right to object to actions or statements which they perceive as sexual harassment or other offensive behaviour without this having consequences for their work or student life at UCPH.

If problems do arise, they should be handled quickly and preferably at the level where they occurred. When implementing measures to prevent and eliminate problems it is only natural for UCPH to consider the perspectives of the organisation, management, colleagues and the individual employee. Managers and staff must have a clear focus on preventing and discouraging offensive behaviour and on minimising the consequences if such incidents do occur.

2. What is offensive behaviour

Offensive behaviour may be exercised by and between managers, employees and students, but can also be exercised by, for example, external business partners and suppliers, patients or other visitors to the University. Offensive behaviour means that another person's dignity is violated either physically or mentally. Offensive behaviour can be bullying¹, sexual harassment² and any kind of assault or abuse and may occur in physical, verbal and written form, including electronically³. Offensive behaviour is also violations on the basis of, for example, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, age or disability.

The employee's/student's experience of having been subjected to offensive behaviour is the starting point.

[Read more about offensive behaviour in the University's toolkit about bullying.](#)

¹ Definition of bullying: Bullying in the workplace is considered to occur when a person is regularly subjected to unpleasant, degrading or hurtful acts by one or more individuals, against which they find it difficult to defend themselves. Teasing which is perceived by both parties as good-natured or as single conflicts does not constitute bullying.

² Examples of sexual harassment are: unwanted physical contact, touches, pats, squeezes, pinches, caresses or similar. Unwelcome sexually innuendos, such as obscene stories, jokes, comments about appearance and rude oral assaults. Proposing, expecting or requesting sexual favours. Obscene and compromising offers of or invitations to sexual intercourse. Showing pornographic images. Physical assaults.

³ [Cyber harassment is a working-environment problem.](#)

3. Responsibility for handling offensive behaviour

The manager and employees should work together to create the framework for a work environment with a civil tone where offensive behaviour does not occur. If instances of offensive behaviour do occur, they should be handled quickly and preferably at the level where they occurred. When learning of offensive behaviour, it is important to be aware that there are several parties to the case, which all have the right to be treated with care and respect. The University has prepared [Guidelines for dealing with written complaints about employees](#) and specific cases will be handled in accordance with these guidelines.

3.1 Management's responsibility

If the management learns about an instance of offensive behaviour, it must immediately take action and begin clarifying the problem. This applies regardless of the organisational level on which the management is. The management does not need to receive a complaint in order to take action in a case involving offensive behaviour.

The management is responsible for preventing offensive behaviour by creating a culture where it is possible to talk openly about the different attitudes, experiences and expectations that may exist in the workplace, and about what is perceived as offensive behaviour. Faculty and departmental management have a special responsibility to take into account that the workplace includes both staff and students.

When an instance occurs, the line manager must ensure that it is investigated. This must be done in cooperation with the parties concerned. On the basis of the investigation, the manager must decide on how the case is to be handled. The manager must be aware of the options for how the parties involved can receive the necessary help and support.

3.2 Colleagues' responsibility

Colleagues must show respect for each other and maintain a civil tone. Colleagues are expected to actively contribute to preventing offensive behaviour.

3.3 Individual staff members' responsibility

If an employee experiences offensive behaviour or observes a colleague subjected to offensive behaviour, they are expected to contact their manager and/or union representative/OHS representative, who has a duty to take the complaint seriously. If an employee experiences offensive behaviour from their manager, he/she may contact their manager's manager or his or her union representative/OHS representative. In addition, the employee has the opportunity to get help to deal with the experience via [the University's psychological counselling service](#).

4. Particularly in relation to students

Offensive behaviour may also occur between staff and students and between students. Such cases must also be treated with care and respect for the parties involved. Complaints from a student about a UCPH employee will be dealt with according to the [Guidelines for dealing with written complaints about employees](#). Students whose behaviour is considered as offensive will be treated with care and in accordance with applicable rules and guidelines in this area. Read more in [Rules concerning disciplinary measures applied to students at the University of Copenhagen \(the regulations\)](#).

5. The tasks of OHS committees and the collaboration committees regarding offensive behaviour

As one of the tools to prevent and handle cases involving offensive behaviour, the management at the relevant organisational level must ensure that a local action plan against offensive behaviour is prepared. The collaboration committee and the occupational health and safety committee (OHS committee) must approve the action plan and make sure it is kept up to date. It would be natural to discuss the topic at least once a year. For example as part of the annual OHS discussion or at a joint meeting between OHS and collaboration committees, regardless of whether offensive behaviour has taken place. Guidelines and template for local action plans are attached to this guideline and are also available on KUnet.

6. Termination and validity

The guidelines take effect when adopted by the General Collaboration Committee.

Termination must comply with the rules in the collaboration committee circular according to which either of the parties may give three months' notice of termination of the guidelines. Before termination, the collaboration committee is to endeavour to amend the existing guidelines to make them satisfactory for the parties in the collaboration committee.

This guideline replaces the previous Guideline for the psychological workplace environment, including bullying, harassment and stress.

Processed and adopted at the HSU meeting held on 25 June 2018.

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