

Dignity and Respect Policy for Students

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Version 1.1

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Dignity and Respect Policy for Students

1. Introduction

1.1 The Governing Body and the Executive Management Team of South East Technological University ('SETU') are fully committed to fostering an environment that promotes dignity and respect across the University. Dignity and respect are regarded as an integral part of SETU. All SETU students have a right to be treated with dignity and respect by others and have an obligation to treat others with dignity and respect. This Dignity and Respect Policy for Students (the 'Policy') must therefore be observed and complied with by all SETU students, who are expected to make themselves aware of the Policy and related policies/procedures.

1.2 This Policy only applies in circumstances where the person who makes a complaint ('Complainant') relating to dignity and respect and the person against whom a complaint has been made ('Respondent') relating to dignity and respect are both students under this Policy. Table 1 on page 9 of this Policy addresses circumstances where either the Complainant or the Respondent are not a student under this Policy and, thus, where this Policy does not apply. Therefore, Table 1 should be referred to in reading this Policy and its relevance to particular circumstances noted by students.

1.3 A 'student' under this Policy is defined as 'any person who has accepted an offer to study and is pursuing a course of study at SETU and includes any visiting student. Visiting student means any student who may also be bound by the terms and conditions of their contract (of employment and/or the policies and procedures of their host institution) and are considered as students under SETU Regulations, Policies and Procedures to include this Policy¹.

¹ A student from another institution who is only visiting the University (for example, as part of a visiting sports team or while attending an open day on the campus) is considered as a visitor to South East Technological University and not as a visiting student.

1.4 A 'staff member' under this Policy is defined as 'any person who is an employee of South East Technological University'.

1.5 A 'relevant third party' under this Policy is defined as 'any person or organisation who is a client, customer or business contact of South East Technological University or a visitor to South East Technological University'. This definition includes (but is not limited to): employees of SETU's wholly owned subsidiaries; organisations in which SETU students are on placement; contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers of SETU; businesses and persons to whom SETU provides products or services; and guests of SETU who are visiting the University.

1.6 SETU is committed to effective communication of this Policy and its associated procedures and processes. The existence of the Policy and its associated procedures or processes will be communicated in student and staff inductions, student and staff handbooks, training courses and/or awareness initiatives, notice boards, the website and emails as appropriate. A copy of this Policy is available on the SETU website and is accessible to both internal and external stakeholders.

2. Policy Statement

2.1 Purpose and Aims of the Policy

2.1.1 To articulate that SETU will not tolerate bullying or harassment² of or by its students in their place of study, arising in the course of their studies or arising in their activities related to the University, and to create an environment where bullying and harassment are not tolerated in any form.

² Any matters relating to sexual harassment are not addressed by this Policy and are instead separately addressed as part of the 'Sexual Misconduct: Student Policy and Procedure', which should be referred to where relevant and where sexual harassment is defined.

2.1.2 To demonstrate a comprehensive, accessible, effective Policy based on best practice that focuses on the protection of an individual's dignity and respect and remedial action within the scope of the Policy.

2.1.3 The aims of the Policy are to:

- Foster a working and learning environment where individuals and groups treat one another with dignity and respect;
- Ensure that all students and other relevant persons are aware of their responsibility to behave in a way that reflects a culture of dignity and respect;
- Encourage the use of appropriate informal resolution pathways as early as possible, where appropriate.

2.1.4 This Policy does not set out in detail the procedures by which allegations of bullying or harassment by or of students that give rise to a complaint can be investigated and addressed nor the possible outcomes. Instead, the Policy defines what is meant by bullying and harassment in the context of the Policy and identifies the location of procedures that may be relevant depending on the parties to a complaint. In this regard, the Policy references other policies, procedures and processes (see Table 1 below) which should be read by students and other relevant persons in conjunction with this Policy as appropriate in identifying relevant procedures and possible outcomes.

2.2 Principles underlying the Policy

2.2.1 SETU is committed to providing a safe working and learning environment in the University in which all persons have the opportunity to fulfil their potential with dignity. Such an environment should be free of all forms of bullying and harassment.

2.2.2 It is the policy of SETU to protect freedom of expression and intellectual enquiry which are part of the ethos of higher education and of academic freedom, whilst ensuring

that such freedoms are exercised in such a way as not to interfere with the rights of others, or undermine any individual's right to be treated with dignity and respect.

2.2.3 Each person has a responsibility to be aware of their obligations under this Policy and the possible effect of their behaviour on others. SETU expects that all members of the University community (including, but not limited to, students and staff members) will conduct themselves in a professional and acceptable manner. This Policy has a strong preventative focus and emphasises that every person has a duty to maintain a working and learning environment in which the dignity of everyone is respected. Any person accused of bullying and harassment under this Policy and any person who makes a complaint under this Policy will be afforded natural justice and treated with fairness and sensitivity.

2.3 Scope of the Policy

2.3.1 This Policy applies to all students of SETU in all recognised SETU locations and participating in relevant and recognised SETU activities including (but not limited to):

- All SETU campuses, or other places where students are representing SETU including work or practice placement or at other institutions as part of or related to their SETU studies (e.g., Erasmus exchange programmes);
- At events such as social functions, conferences, sporting events, field trips, or other occasions which are organised by SETU or related to SETU or to a person's study, or at which one represents SETU;
- In writing, on the telephone, by e-mail or other electronic means or on the internet in any SETU related activity. This includes activity related to online SETU social media sites and networks.

2.3.2 This Policy has been developed to deal with dignity and respect relating to SETU students in their interactions with each other. There is also a separate Dignity and Respect Policy, which applies to students in particular circumstances. See Table 1 below for guidance

on the appropriate SETU policy to use in given circumstances. The part of Table 1 coloured in green relates to the current Policy; the remaining parts are outside of the scope of this Policy³.

	Complainant ⁴ : Staff Member	Complainant: Student	Complainant: Relevant third party
Respondent ⁵ :			
Staff Member	Dignity and Respect Policy	Dignity and Respect Policy	Dignity and Respect Policy
Student	Dignity and Respect Policy and, where necessary, Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure	Dignity and Respect Policy for Students for definitions, with complaints through the Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure	Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure for complaints
Relevant third party	Dignity and Respect Policy	Complaint to be brought to relevant Head of Function for guidance	Not relevant as all parties are external to SETU

Table 1: Appropriate policies, procedures and processes depending on the Complainant and Respondent.

2.3.3 Where a student (who is a Respondent or Complainant) is also an employee of SETU, they will be regarded as a staff member unless the student's status as an employee of SETU is clearly of no relevance to the matter in question.

³ As noted in footnote 2 above, any matters relating to sexual harassment are not addressed by this Policy and are instead separately addressed as part of the 'Sexual Misconduct: Student Policy and Procedure', which should be referred to where relevant and where sexual harassment is defined.

⁴ Complainant is a person who makes a complaint.

⁵ Respondent is a person against whom a complaint has been made.

2.4 Other SETU Policies, Procedures and Processes and Individual Rights

2.4.1 This Policy interfaces with various SETU policies, procedures and processes. These include (but are not limited to) the Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure and the Dignity and Respect Policy. This Policy will interface with other relevant SETU policies, procedures and processes as they emerge.

2.4.2 This Policy aims to ensure that problems of bullying or harassment by or of students which occur can be resolved within SETU. Serious allegations, or allegations of an assault, may be subject to investigation by external bodies e.g., Garda Síochána, Health Service Executive. However, use of this Policy and associated procedures or processes will not affect the Complainant's statutory rights under relevant legislation to take other legally permitted actions.

2.5 Timelines

2.5.1 It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are progressed in a timely and efficient fashion and every effort will be made to resolve matters in a timely manner. However, it is recognised that there may be circumstances in which additional time is required depending on individual cases. Relevant students will be kept informed in writing of any delays arising.

2.5.2 This Policy does not set out specific timelines. However, if a matter to which this Policy applies needs to be addressed through a different SETU policy, procedure or process, then any time limits set out in that policy, procedure or process will apply.

3. Definitions and Explanations of Terms

3.1 Respectful Behaviour

3.1.1 Most relationships in working and learning environments are positive, where individuals behave in a way that upholds dignity and respect. Examples of respectful behaviour includes:

- Communicating in a courteous, kind and respectful tone and manner;
- Listening to others to understand and appreciate their points of view;
- Where we disagree with someone's point of view, stating this in a calm, respectful and courteous tone;
- Seeking to understand other people's perspectives and asking clarifying questions rather than making assumptions;
- Being open to constructive feedback i.e., feedback that is formulated positively and addresses the issue rather than personalising it;
- Reflecting on and being aware of the effect of our behaviour on others;
- Avoiding making unreasonable and unmanageable demands of others;
- Responding to written communications in a courteous and timely manner;
- Thinking about the impact of seemingly harmless comments or actions before saying or doing them.

3.2 Bullying

3.2.1 In the learning environment, there can be conflicts and interpersonal difficulties. Many of these are legitimate difficulties that should be dealt with through the appropriate channels.

3.2.2 Bullying in a workplace or learning environment (such as SETU) is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether, verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others at the place of work or learning and/or in the course of employment or study-related activities, which could be reasonably regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work or study. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity at work or study, but as a once off incident is not considered to be bullying.

3.2.3 A pattern of the following behaviours (not exhaustive) are examples of types of bullying:

- Exclusion with negative consequences;
- Verbal abuse/insults;
- Physical abuse (that is not sexual in nature);
- Being treated less favourably than colleagues;
- Intrusion – pestering, spying or stalking;
- Menacing behaviour;
- Intimidation/Aggressive interactions;
- Undermining behaviour;
- Excessive monitoring of work;
- Humiliation;
- Withholding necessary information;
- Blame for things beyond the person's control;
- Using aggressive and obscene language.

3.2.4 It is important to note that behaviour that may be acceptable to one person may be reasonably regarded by another person as unacceptable. In this regard, it is the behaviour of the respondent from the perspective of the complainant which is relevant in terms of whether a person chooses to make a complaint or not.

3.2.5 The proper exercise of authority by a staff member of SETU does not constitute bullying. Examples of this (which are not exhaustive) could include a staff member asking a student to desist from speaking loudly in quiet areas or to adopt appropriate behaviour in an examination or classroom setting.

3.2.6 Bullying does not arise where critical comments are made in an honest and constructive manner, are backed up by clear facts and are imparted in a reasonable way. Fair and constructive feedback on a person's conduct, academic/work performance or attendance, and reasonable corrective action arising from this (which may include taking reasonable disciplinary actions where appropriate and relevant), does not constitute bullying. This could be, for example, from an SETU staff member to a student or from another student where students are working together.

3.2.7 Other examples (not exhaustive) of what does not normally constitute bullying include:

- Expressing differences of opinion strongly;
- Actions taken which can be justified as regards the safety, health and welfare of students;
- Legitimate management responses to crisis situations which require immediate action;
- Student's legal right to complain;
- Offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice to a person about SETU-related behaviour which is not of itself welcome;
- Conflict where people respectfully disagree with or disregard the others' point of view;
- If someone writes to a student under the Dignity and Respect Policy for Students regarding their conduct, this does not constitute an incident of bullying.

3.3 Harassment

3.3.1 Harassment is any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the discriminatory grounds, being conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

3.3.2 The nine discriminatory grounds upon which harassment is based are:

1. Gender;
2. Family status;
3. Civil status;
4. Sexual orientation;
5. Religious belief;
6. Age;
7. Disability;
8. Race; and
9. Membership of the travelling community.

3.3.3 The following list of examples of harassment is illustrative rather than exhaustive:

- Verbal harassment – jokes, comments, ridicule or songs;
- Written harassment – including text messages, emails, notices or comments during online meetings in chat;
- Physical harassment – jostling, shoving or any form of assault (which can include touching another person without their consent, such as an unwanted kiss, pat or caress);
- Intimidatory harassment – gestures, posturing or threatening poses;
- Visual displays such as posters, emblems or badges;
- Excessive monitoring of work (e.g., academic work, work placement etc.);
- Isolation or exclusion from social activities;
- Unreasonably changing a person's work content or targets;

- Pressure to behave in a manner that the person thinks is inappropriate, for example being required to dress in a manner unsuited to a person's ethnic or religious background.

3.3.4 A single incident may constitute harassment, or harassment may arise from repeated behaviour that is inappropriate.

3.3.5 Sections 3.2.6 and 3.2.7 above are also relevant in the context of harassment, being indications or examples of what does not constitute harassment.

3.4 Victimisation

3.4.1 SETU will not tolerate victimisation. Victimisation occurs where a person suffers adverse treatment for making a complaint in good faith, supporting a complaint, giving evidence, or by giving notice of an intention to do any of these.

3.4.2 SETU will ensure that a person who makes a complaint in good faith, supports a complaint, gives evidence or gives notice of intention to do any of these, will not prejudice their future prospects within SETU or give rise to a penalty.

3.4.3 SETU will deal with any complaints of victimisation through the appropriate complaints procedure, depending upon the parties to the complaint.

3.5 Conflict and Disagreements

3.5.1 Conflict and disagreements may occur between people and are a normal aspect of life and human interaction, given the diversity of people with different personalities, communication styles, backgrounds, etc. within educational institutions and workplaces. In fact, the airing of disagreements can lead to better working and studying relations in the long run if managed well and resolved collaboratively. All students, staff members and relevant third parties are encouraged to address disagreements as early and as

constructively as possible, and to avail of options and supports outlined in this Policy and in other relevant policies, procedures and processes as appropriate. Interactions between individuals may become emotional, heated or evoke strong feelings; however, this does not necessarily mean that the interaction fits the definitions of bullying or harassment as outlined above or in other policies as appropriate.

3.5.2 It is important to be mindful that conflict, if unresolved or not dealt with properly and proactively, does have the potential to intensify and take the form of bullying.

3.5.3 It is the ultimate responsibility of relevant SETU managers to ensure that all observed or reported conflict-related incidents and behaviours are addressed and resolved appropriately.

3.6 Academic Freedom

It is not the intention that this Policy undermines, in any manner, academic freedom. It is the policy of SETU to protect freedom of expression and intellectual enquiry which are an important function of higher education. Discussions and opinions expressed concerning gender, race, disabilities, religious belief etc. in the classroom, learning environment or other academic contexts, relating to the subject matter of the course, module or class discussion, may be offensive to an individual because of the individual's personal opinions or beliefs but this is not generally considered improper conduct.

3.7 Confidentiality

All complaints or queries raised in relation to bullying and harassment will be treated seriously, fairly, and confidentially by all involved. All information received under this Policy will be handled sensitively and in accordance with SETU's suite of Data Protection Policies and associated procedures. Breaches of confidentiality will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter under the appropriate disciplinary policy, procedure or process for

students and/or staff. However, there may be circumstances where SETU or its staff are required to share confidential information with others (including An Garda Síochána and Tusla), such as where there may be potential harm to another person, where there may be a threat to life or where there is a legal obligation to do so.

3.8 Frivolous, Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

3.8.1 SETU will regard as serious a situation where a complaint made under this Policy is found to be malicious, frivolous or vexatious. Such findings could result in disciplinary action.

3.8.2 A complaint under this Policy may be found to be frivolous if it was made with the knowledge that it is deemed untrue.

3.8.3 A complaint under this Policy may be found to be vexatious if it is found to have been made with the knowledge that it was untrue and with the intention of putting the other party to unjustified trouble or expense.

3.8.4 A complaint under this Policy may be found to be malicious if it was made with an improper and wrongful motive such as an intention to harm another person.

3.8.5 An unsubstantiated complaint does not automatically render the complaint as vexatious or malicious.

3.9 Disciplinary Action

SETU takes all complaints of harassment or bullying very seriously. A complaint of harassment or bullying following investigation (under the appropriate SETU policy,

procedure or process) may lead to disciplinary action under an appropriate SETU policy, procedure or process as an outcome. Please refer to Table 1 earlier for details of relevant SETU policies, procedures and processes and their interactions with this Policy. Possible disciplinary actions may be set out in SETU policies, procedures and processes as potential outcomes.

4. Overview on dealing with Bullying and Harassment

4.1 Elimination

The best way to eliminate bullying in an organisational setting is to foster an environment which encourages helpful and supportive behaviour and discourages unacceptable behaviour. In addition to ensuring that their own behaviour is not in any way offensive, students should make clear to others that bullying or harassment is unacceptable and should support colleagues experiencing such difficulties by identifying where help can be found and encouraging their colleagues to work towards a resolution.

4.2 Record of Incidents

Whether a person adopts a Direct Contact (section 4.3), Informal (section 4.4), or Formal (section 4.5) process or procedure, it is important to make an accurate record of the date and time of any incidents and the name of anyone who was around at the time and who may have witnessed what happened.

4.3 Direct Contact

4.3.1 In most cases, the most effective and efficient way of dealing with difficulties and achieving an outcome without making an actual complaint is to speak to the person concerned as early as possible. This can minimise any embarrassment or escalation of the

situation and preserve good working or learning relationships. If appropriate, a member of SETU staff can be approached to ask for their assistance here in seeking a resolution.

4.3.2 Another approach, if you do not want to face the person, is to put your concerns in writing directly to the person concerned. Explain what it is about the behaviour that is upsetting you and ask for it to stop. State clearly that this letter is part of the Direct Contact approach under the Dignity and Respect Policy for Students. If you decide to seek to address the problem by writing to the person, you should keep a copy of the letter or memo and any response.

4.3.3 Many incidents may be dealt with effectively through direct contact as often the person responsible is unaware of the effect their behaviour is having on others and will cease these actions on being made aware of the distress caused by them.

4.3.4 Where it is too difficult or embarrassing for you to do this on your own behalf, a third party such as a Student Union representative or colleague could accompany you, while you speak directly to the person concerned.

4.3.5 Appendix 1 to this document contains Guidelines for Approaching a Person Directly, which may be helpful to consult here.

4.4 Informal Resolution Process

4.4.1 Where possible, and without prejudice to the right of a person (or, where necessary, SETU) to invoke formal procedures/processes under another relevant policy, procedure or process, every effort should be made to address allegations of bullying or harassment by informal means. An informal approach in no way proposes to diminish the issue or the effect difficulties may have on individuals. However, it is likely to produce solutions and outcomes that are speedy and effective but minimize embarrassment and the risk of breaching confidentiality. Please refer to relevant SETU policies, procedures and

processes (see Table 1 earlier) for information on available informal resolution procedures and processes and possible outcomes.

4.5 Formal Disciplinary Process

4.5.1 A person is encouraged to normally raise an issue related to this Policy under relevant informal resolution processes (where these are available as part of an appropriate SETU policy, procedure or process; see Table 1 above) for the benefits outlined above. However, if the informal resolution process is not suitable for any of the parties involved or has been exhausted, a person may make a formal complaint through the appropriate formal disciplinary process under the relevant SETU policy, procedure or process (see Table 1 above) where this is available. This may give rise to a disciplinary action following the relevant procedure or process. Information on possible disciplinary actions may be set out in the relevant SETU policy, procedure or process followed. It should be noted that serious allegations may be subject to external bodies e.g.: Garda Síochána, Health Service Executive, Tusla.

4.5.2 Use of this Policy or other policies and relevant procedures or processes will not affect the Complainant's right to make a complaint to an appropriate external third party, such as An Garda Síochána, and persons are encouraged to do so where it is appropriate.

4.5.3 The University reserves the right to instigate a formal disciplinary process itself by making a formal complaint if an issue is sufficiently serious, and to refer serious allegations to bodies such as An Garda Síochána itself if it deems that this is necessary.

5. Policy Development and Implementation

5.1 SETU is committed to ensuring that the appropriate structures are in place to allow for the ongoing development of this Policy and its implementation. This will be overseen by

the SETU Governing Body and Executive Management Team, in conjunction with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

5.2 The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning is responsible for the coordination of the design, development, implementation, and training associated with this Policy.

5.3 The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning is responsible for the coordination of the timely review of this Policy and associated procedures.

6. Policy Monitoring and Reporting

6.1 SETU is committed to monitoring incidents of harassment to ensure that this Policy and related policies/procedures are effective, and establishing a system of monitoring and managing complaints of discrimination, harassment and bullying to support the implementation of the Policy and assess its efficacy.

6.2 SETU is committed to putting the systems in place to facilitate the gathering and analysis of data pertaining to this Policy, to allow for appropriate reporting of matters and for the enhancement and development of the Policy on an ongoing basis.

6.3 The Complaints Resolution Officer⁶ will report on matters covered by the Policy to the Executive Management Team and Governing Body on an annual basis (and more often if requested by the Executive Management Team or Governing Body, or if deemed necessary by the Complaints Resolution Officer) as appropriate. The Complaints Resolution Officer will take all reasonable steps to ensure that no individuals are identifiable from this report.

⁶ For information on the role and work of the Complaints Resolution Officer, please refer to the Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure.

7. Review of Policy

7.1 This policy will be reviewed in advance of the review date, and/or as soon as possible following new or updated legislation, national or sectoral policy.

8. Policy author

8.1 The author of this policy is the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. Any feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy author. The policy author is responsible to ensure that the Policy Owner is aware of these comments when reviewing the policy.

9. Useful Links/ Supporting Documentation

SETU Policies and Documents:

<https://www.setu.ie/about/policies-and-documents>

Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure:

<https://www.setu.ie/Craft/assets/policies/Student-Expected-Behaviour-Policy-and-Disciplinary-Procedure.pdf>

Sexual Misconduct: Student Policy and Procedure:

<https://www.setu.ie/Craft/assets/policies/Sexual-Misconduct-Student-Policy-and-Procedure-V1-May-2026.pdf>

Dignity and Respect Policy:

<Link to be added when available>

Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Approaching a Person Directly⁷

1. If you feel able to do so, raising the issue with the other person directly as soon as possible can be a way of resolving the issues with the minimum of embarrassment, conflict or stress and which maintains goodwill in the working or learning relationship.
2. Prepare well. Use these questions to help you reflect on what you want to get from the meeting and what you want the other person to do differently.
 - What's difficult/inappropriate about the behaviour?
 - What's the impact on you?
 - What's the change you are looking for?
 - What message do you want to get across?
 - How can you communicate your concerns in a way that they will listen rather than feel they have to defend themselves?
 - What tone/body language/words will you use?
 - What might their viewpoint be? If there has been a difficult interaction between you, they may also feel upset or frustrated about the situation.
 - What concerns might they have and are you open to hearing their concerns?
 - How can you ensure you stay calm and constructive during the conversation?
3. Think about the time/place to have a conversation. It is best done in private and during the working/learning day. It is also best done when you are in a calm and centred frame of mind.
4. Frame the invitation to the conversation as neutrally as you can. For example, 'I would like to meet with you to discuss some concerns I have with regards to the last meeting we had about x'.

⁷ These guidelines are adapted from the Dignity and Respect Procedure for Staff.

5. Be specific and constructive. Instead of saying 'I don't like when you bully me' refer to examples of specific behaviour that you experienced e.g., 'I don't like when you criticise my work in front of others'. Think carefully about how you can word your statement so that it is constructive and clearly states what you are not happy with, rather than simply (negatively) labelling them or their behaviour.
6. Speak about it from your point of view – say 'I feel ...when you criticise me in public' rather than 'You are always putting me down'. It can be helpful to share the impact it is having on you, if you feel comfortable sharing this.
7. Let them know what it is you would like them to do differently. Be prepared also to hear their concerns and any requests they might have around them. Demonstrate a willingness to resolve the situation.
Questions that can signal this:
 - 'What can we do to make things work better between us?'
 - 'May I tell you what would work better for me and you can share what would work better for you?'
8. Aim for assertive communication in words and body language: this means being calm, clear, having an attitude of goodwill and a non-confrontational approach.