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Action plan to counteract victimisation and discrimination at the Department of Psychology

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1. Introduction

The action plan aims to clarify the rules that apply to employees of the Department of Psychology and how to deal with conflicts and situations that involve victimisation and discrimination or bullying, harassment/sexual harassment. Victimisation refers to “Actions directed against one or more employees in an abusive manner, which could lead to ill health or their being placed outside the community of the workplace” (AFS 2015:4). Discrimination is when “someone is given a disadvantage or victimised and that this is related to any of the seven grounds of discrimination: sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age” (Blomberg, 2016, p. 41).

2. Communication at the department

The department is to conduct research, teaching and external engagement. Because of the high quality requirements at any university department, the academic freedom of our teaching staff and researchers, and the fundamental significance of critical thinking, discussion and debate are essential to the development of the department. Therefore, our work duties place high demands on good communication and the ability to both provide and accept criticism in a constructive way. Any workplace experiences conflicts, and they are sometimes a result of a misunderstanding that can be resolved through better communication. Conflicts can also be related to different opinions on specific topics and can then be seen as a constructive part of an open debate and a natural process to achieve high quality decisions. It becomes more serious in cases where conflicts escalate and become personal, where the focus is no longer on the subject matter but rather the other person being perceived as a problem.

All communication at the department is to be permeated by dignity and respect for the equal value of every person. Victimisation or sexual harassment must never take place at the Department of Psychology.

Everyone is responsible for speaking out if they are approached or treated in a way that they find inappropriate. Good communication involves personal feedback, which is to be an integral part of our workplace. The feedback is to be factual, descriptive and as specific as possible. It should also be directed to things that can be changed (behaviour), preferably requested, and closely related to current events. Communication skills and constructive criticism can always be improved. Therefore, we must be open to accept criticism and consider this as an opportunity for learning, while having a generous attitude that allows people to be different, have different styles, and occasionally make mistakes.

3. Preventative measures

The department is to have a clear structure where people are well aware of the responsibilities and authorities involved in each role.

Every year, the department is to offer all employees training on key regulations and the opportunity to develop their communication and conflict management skills.

Those who hold managerial positions in administration, education and research are to be offered specialised training and opportunities for guidance and support.

4. Responsibilities and resources

Every employee has a responsibility to never participate in victimisation, to know and abide by regulations, and to clarify what they consider unwanted behaviour.

Therefore, conflict situations are to primarily be resolved among the people involved. The next step is to discuss the situation with the head of department who is responsible for the work environment. This may lead to discussing solutions or meeting with all affected parties in order to clarify the situation or to mediate. Other resources include the department's health and safety representative, the Occupational Health Service and trade union organisations who can provide various forms of help and support.

5. In case of an incident

If you are subject to what could constitute victimisation, bullying, discrimination or harassment, you are to contact the head of department, who is obliged to promptly investigate the situation. The head of department is also obliged to initiate an investigation if they have become aware of such an incident even if it has not been reported. If you are not able to turn to the head of department, you should contact the dean. You can also discuss the issue with your health and safety representative and union representative.

The head of department's investigation may initially consist of discussions with the affected parties and followed by proposed measures on the basis of an overall assessment of the situation. The head of department and employee may reach out to the Occupational Health Service for support in this process. If necessary, external HR specialists may be consulted to investigate a situation or provide support to the employees concerned.

Difficult situations may require an extended investigation procedure with an external impartial investigator to clarify the course of events and the different responsibilities of the affected parties. The investigation may lead to a report to e.g. the Staff Disciplinary Board at Lund University.

All measures implemented in connection with these types of incidents are to be followed up by the head of department.

6. Consequences

The investigation is to identify the causes, and lead to proposals for changes in the workplace that can prevent and stop similar incidents from taking place through resources, clarification of roles and procedures, etc.

It is important those involved are informed of the implemented measures and the outcome of the investigation. The employees concerned are to be given the support they need from the Occupational Health Service or through other appropriate resources.

Other consequences can include reprimands or legal measures in the form of warnings, relocation and termination.

REFERENCES

AFS 2015:4, Organisational and Social Work Environment Provisions <https://www.av.se/globalassets/filer/publikationer/foreskrifter/engelska/organisational-and-social-work-environment-afs2015-4.pdf>

Lund University Work Environment Policy 2014–2017 <http://www.staff.lu.se/sites/staff.lu.se/files/2014-2017-work-environment-policy.pdf>

Blomberg, S. (2016). Mobbning på jobbet. Uttryck och åtgärder. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Discrimination Act http://www.government.se/4a788f/contentassets/6732121a2cb54ee3b21da9c628b6bdc7/oversattning-diskrimineringslagen_eng.pdf