Domestic Abuse – Guidance for Managers and Staff

1 Introduction

1.1 This purpose of this guidance is to ensure that members of staff who are experiencing domestic violence and/or abuse are supported and enabled to remain productive and at work. It also sets out how managers can help team members experiencing domestic violence and/or abuse.

1.2 This guidance applies to all staff at the University.

2 Definitions

2.1 Domestic abuse can take many forms, including violence, abuse or threatening behaviour between adults who are, or have been, partners or family members. Abuse can be physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal or financial. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone.

3 Information on Domestic Abuse

3.1 One in four women and one in six men will experience domestic violence or abuse at some point in their lifetime. It is therefore very likely that all workplaces, including the University, will have staff that have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

3.2 Staff should be aware of the following:

- 75% of those experiencing abuse are targeted at work (including on their way to and from work).
- It is possible to use workplaces resources such as phone and email to perpetuate abuse.
- Domestic abuse can take many forms. As well as physical abuse it can include emotional, verbal, sexual or financial abuse – it is about the abuse of power and control of one person by another.
- On average, a woman will experience 35 episodes of domestic abuse before seeking help.
- Men are less likely to tell anyone about experiencing domestic violence than women.
- People experiencing domestic abuse can be subject to disciplinary action or even lose their jobs because of (for example) lateness and absence when the underlying cause is unknown.
  It estimated that around 2% of employed women lose their job as a result of domestic abuse, and 20% need to take time off work.
- Domestic abuse is often a hidden crime, and many incidents are not reported to the police.
- Domestic abuse can cause staff to be absent from work, late or underperform.
- Staff may wish to remain at work because they see the workplace as a safe place.

There are simple steps that managers and organisations can take to respond to this sensitive issue. Advice is available from HR at all times.

3.3 There can be signs that someone could be experiencing domestic abuse. For example, sudden changes in behaviour or performance, unexplained absences or a changed appearance (such as dress) – but remember there could be many reasons for these changes. If you suspect that a member of staff is experiencing domestic abuse, you can open a conversation – simply ask someone how they are or acknowledge your observations and ask if everything is okay or if they need to discuss anything. Where necessary, signpost the University counseling services, who will be able to provide additional support.

4 Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Managers have a crucial role to play in enabling staff experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. The manager may be in a position to notice potential signs of domestic abuse, and can, with support from HR if required, encourage the member of staff to discuss any issues they are experiencing.

4.2 Where managers become aware of domestic abuse, they are responsible for ensuring:

- confidentiality in all instances (except in relation to child protection) – there may be occasions where it is necessary to agree with the member of staff what (if anything) colleagues should be told where there is a risk of incidents in the workplace
- ensuring the safety of all team members is protected (taking appropriate support and advice from Safety Services where necessary) – particular care should be taken in the event that the member of staff is a lone worker
• signposting relevant support (such as the University counselling service)
• advising the member of staff on relevant policies (such as Special Leave) and applying appropriate discretion on the use of these policies
• taking action to enable the member of staff to remain at work – working with the individual at all times
• notifying HR (with permission of the individual)
• undertaking a risk assessment in relation to the member of staff and colleagues.

5 Principles of the University approach to domestic abuse

• All members of staff who are experiencing domestic abuse will be supported, regardless of the type of abuse.
• HR will be able to support a manager on taking practical steps to enable the individual to remain at work.
• Advice on keeping a member of staff at risk from domestic abuse safe whilst at work can also be sought from Safety Services (with the permission of the individual).
• The University recognises that a high proportion of staff who experience domestic abuse are targeted at work and it is possible to use workplace resources (such as phones or email) to perpetuate that abuse. The University will take practical steps, in discussion with the member of staff, in order to minimise the risk at work. This could include (for example) diverting phone calls, changing phone numbers, alerting reception staff, temporary changes to work location or flexible working arrangements.
• The organisation recognises that those experiencing domestic abuse may need to be absent from work from time to time and will assist them by using special leave policies. The University will also be flexible with regard to absences from work. Individual absences can be discussed between the member of staff and their manager, with support from HR if required.
• Staff may request confidential discussions about domestic abuse at work with a member of Human Resources if they do not feel that they can discuss the issue with their manager.
• Members of staff who are experiencing domestic abuse can receive support from Occupational Health and the University counseling service.

Where both parties work for the University, HR should be consulted on appropriate action including any actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of incidents taking place at work. If any incident of domestic abuse takes place in the course of employment the University will take appropriate steps against any perpetrator, including disciplinary action.
Document control box

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