



The British Pteridological Society

Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy

Version 1.4 Final – Adopted Oct 2024

Introduction

The British Pteridological Society is committed to having an environment which is free from harassment and bullying and to ensuring that everyone involved with the Society is treated with dignity and respect. This is essential for healthy operation and for equality of opportunity within the Society.

This policy is intended to support this commitment in practice by providing guidance to trustees and members on expected conduct and setting out how to deal with concerns of bullying or harassment.

Definitions

Bullying is not defined in law, but is described by ACAS as “unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either:

- offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting; or
- an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone.”

Bullying might:

- be a one-off incident or a regular pattern of behaviour
- happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or calls
- happen at Society events or in other Society-related situations
- not always be obvious or noticed by others.

Examples of bullying in the context of the Society could include:

- spreading malicious rumours about someone
- consistently putting someone down in meetings
- excluding someone from social events
- putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments or photos on social media.

Harassment is when bullying or unwanted behaviour is related to any of the following (known as 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010):

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Pregnancy and maternity are treated differently from other protected characteristics under harassment law, however for the purpose of this Policy the Society also considers bullying and unwanted behaviour related to pregnancy and maternity to be harassment.

For unwanted behaviour to count as harassment, it must have either:

- violated the person's dignity, whether it was intended or not
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person, whether it was intended or not.

Victimisation is when someone is treated unfairly because they made or supported a complaint to do with a 'protected characteristic', or because someone thinks they did or might do.

Reasonable criticism of the conduct or performance of a member or trustee does not constitute bullying or harassment.

Policy

The Society will not tolerate bullying or harassment either within the Society or at Society-related events outside of the Society's working environment. This is regardless of whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated course of conduct, and whether done purposefully or not.

We will take appropriate action if any of our members – including trustees – are bullied or harassed by anyone inside or outside of the Society. In the most serious circumstances this may include referring matters to external authorities such as the Charity Commission or the Police.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated seriously. Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. Following an investigation, anyone found to have harassed or bullied another member or trustee may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including withdrawal of Society membership.

You should also be aware that if a court or tribunal finds that you have bullied or harassed someone, in some circumstances the treatment may amount to a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

Anyone who makes an allegation of bullying or harassment in good faith will not be treated less favourably as a result. The Society will not tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of bullying or harassment. Retaliation or victimisation will also constitute a disciplinary offence, which may in appropriate circumstances lead to withdrawal of Society membership.

Accusations of harassment or bullying can have a serious negative effect on innocent individuals. All Society members have a responsibility not to make malicious allegations. A member or trustee found by an investigation to have knowingly made malicious allegations may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including withdrawal of Society membership.

It is important to recognise that perceptions vary, and conduct which one person considers acceptable could be deeply hurtful or offensive to another. All members and trustees must, therefore, treat their colleagues with sensitivity and respect.

If a member or trustee feels that they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance which must be dealt with irrespective of whether their complaint accords with a standard definition.

Reporting concerns

If you witness something you believe is harassment or bullying

You should report the incident in confidence to a trustee, providing as much detail as you can. Such reports will be taken seriously and will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

If you feel you are being bullied or harassed

Please report this to a trustee in the first instance. They will discuss with you how best to deal with the situation, in accordance with this policy. There are two main avenues available to you – informal or formal resolution.

Resolving complaints

Informal resolution

If you feel that you are being bullied or harassed by another member or trustee, you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to them that their behaviour is unacceptable, contrary to our policy and must stop. Alternatively, you may wish to ask a trustee to put this on your behalf or to be with you when talking to the alleged perpetrator(s).

If the above approach does not work or if you do not want to try to resolve the situation in this way, you should raise the issue with the Chair or Vice Chair (or with another trustee who is not involved, if appropriate). They will then discuss with you the option of trying to resolve the situation informally by telling the alleged perpetrator(s), without prejudging the matter, that:

- there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a fellow member,
- such behaviour is contrary to our policy, and
- the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence.

It may be possible for the Chair, Vice Chair or trustee to have this conversation with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. They will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

In certain circumstances we may be able to involve a neutral third party (a mediator) to facilitate a resolution of the problem. The Chair, Vice Chair or trustee will discuss this with you if it is appropriate.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator(s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as a serious allegation of sexual or racial harassment or in cases where a problem has happened before) we may decide to investigate further and take more formal action notwithstanding that you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

Raising a formal complaint

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint about the harassment or bullying to the Chair, Vice Chair or a trustee. A formal complaint may ultimately lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator(s).

We will first investigate the complaint. You will need to co-operate with the investigation and provide the following details (if not already provided):

- the name of the alleged perpetrator(s)
- the nature of the harassment or bullying
- the dates and times the harassment or bullying occurred
- the names of any witnesses; and
- any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally.

The alleged perpetrator(s) would need to be told your name and the details of your complaint in order for the issue to be investigated properly. However, we will carry out the investigation as confidentially and sensitively as possible. Where you and the alleged perpetrator(s) conduct Society activities in proximity to each other, we will consider whether it is appropriate to separate you whilst the matter is being investigated.

After the investigation, we will meet with you to consider the complaint and the findings of the investigation.

After the meeting (and normally within five working days), we will write to you to inform you of our decision. You have the right to appeal if you are dissatisfied with the outcome. Wherever practicable, your appeal will be considered by trustees not involved in the original investigation.

You should submit your appeal in writing, within five working days of receiving confirmation of our decision, explaining the reasons that you are dissatisfied. If you submit an appeal, you will be invited to attend a meeting to consider it. We will write to you afterwards to confirm our final decision.

Disclosure and confidentiality

We will treat personal data collected during this process sensitively and in accordance with relevant privacy law.

Information about how personal data is used and the basis for processing data is provided in the Society's website:

<https://www.britishfernsociety.org.uk/Privacy-Statement/>

Version history

V1.1 - draft based upon CPS policy below, for proposal at Oct Committee meeting.

V1.2 – Privacy policy updates for inclusion

V1.3 – minor corrections

V1.3 Final –adopted Committee Meeting 80, 12th October 2024

V1.4 Final – updated Society website address, 17th Feb 2026

Sources

Carnivorous Plant Society (2022) Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy.

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