



Keeping safe: The Importance of Safeguarding at work

All organisations have a duty of care for their people

This is a vocational apprenticeship programme. As such, learning is intended to be practical and experiential and to happen not just *while* you're at work, but *through* the work that you do.

The word 'safeguarding' is most often associated with protecting society's most vulnerable from harm and abuse, whether that's an elderly person in a care home or children and young adults at school. And, rightly, there is a range of law and regulation which provides specific rules and guidance for workplaces with these particular needs. But safeguarding is also a much wider, all-encompassing term that covers the measures that are used to protect people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and to keep them safe from harm, whatever the context.

When it comes to the world of work, all organisations have a duty of care for their people, whether that's through an employment relationship or in their non-contractual dealings with them. According to the UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), this means we must do "all we reasonably can to support people's health, safety and wellbeing." This includes:

- making sure the working environment is safe
- protecting staff from discrimination
- carrying out risk assessments
- having the right policies and procedures in place
- making sure that people are trained to support and benefit from these policies and procedures.

And it's not just a question of *physical* safety – making sure those trip hazards are identified or electrical appliances are tested regularly, crucial though these things are. The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the body responsible for health and safety enforcement, is clear, for example, that **workplace stress** is a hazard like any other, and needs to be monitored and managed accordingly. Looking after people's *mental and emotional wellbeing* is central to effective safeguarding.

Here at Future Talent Learning, it's a responsibility we take very seriously, as our **Safeguarding and Prevent Policy** attests. We also believe it's important that the people with whom we work have the information they need to understand what we mean by safeguarding and to be equipped to play a role in keeping workplaces safe from harm and workplace relationships healthy. Debates about bullying and harassment at work help to encapsulate this approach.

Bullying and harassment at work

It's a sobering statistic that ACAS receives more than 20,000 calls to its bullying and harassment helpline each year. Workplaces and working relationships can be blighted by inappropriate behaviours, and it's incumbent upon employers – and their employees – to work in partnership to address these often tricky and emotive issues. And that can be less than straightforward.

Bullying and harassment can often be hard to recognise; what one person might call 'banter' could be perceived as unwarranted and offensive by others. People on the receiving end may not complain because they fear being seen as overreacting or that their concerns will not be taken seriously. Others may be unclear about how to make a complaint, or what might happen if they do.

That's why it's important that companies have clear policies and procedures which are communicated effectively and that they create safe cultures where people feel able to raise concerns and can expect to have those concerns taken seriously and investigated properly – without consequence.

It also means being clear about what is (and is not) considered to be acceptable behaviour. It may be obvious that things such as inappropriate physical contact, unwelcome verbal comments, offensive emails or unpleasant comments on social media should all be taboo. But we might not always consider more insidious examples, such as overbearing supervision, denying someone training or promotion opportunities or making threats about job security. Yet the effects are likely be the same.

The Equality Act 2010 – and beyond

The law provides a helping hand here. [The Equality Act 2010](#) defines workplace harassment as:

Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

That means that harassment is unlawful if is because of, or related to, one of the Act's **protected characteristics**. These are:

- age
- sex
- disability
- gender (including gender reassignment)
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation

Under the Act, inappropriate behaviours such as sexual harassment, using racist language or taunting a disabled colleague are clearly against the law. Employees can complain of behaviour either targeted at them or that they find offensive, even if it is not directed at them or do not personally possess a relevant characteristic themselves. The Act offers significant protection and employers falling foul of it are rightly penalised.

We would do well, though, not just to think about bullying and harassment in these strict legal terms. Two more general definitions can help us to frame our approach and response, whether or not protected characteristics are involved:

ACAS defines bullying as:

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Citizen's Advice defines harassment as:

...unwanted or unwelcome behaviour which is meant to or has the effect of either:

- violating your dignity, or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The phrase "dignity at work" is increasingly being used as an umbrella term for the rules and protocols that prevent people being badly treated when working. It's a positive term that appeals to the human in all of us and speaks to the wider role that safeguarding can and should play in workplace cultures.

The poet, Khalil Gibran, wrote that "safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being". If workplaces are to provide the physical and psychological safety we need to do our work to the best of our abilities and potential, we all need to be mindful of the effects – for good or ill – of the words and behaviours of ourselves and others.

Everyone has a responsibility for fostering workplace cultures in which safety – in every sense of the word – is paramount. Safeguarding is not a nice-to-have that's encapsulated in a policy and never considered again. It's an essential underpinning for work and workplaces that inspire, enable and empower

Future Talent Learning's procedure for responding to a concern, allegation or disclosure

If you are aware, or have been made aware, of a safeguarding concern, allegation or disclosure, please follow the following procedure:

- Do not make promises about confidentiality – any concerns will need to be reported to the Safeguarding Team.
- Explain to the person at the outset that you will need to report the concern, allegation or disclosure and share the information with the **Safeguarding Lead or Team**.
- If anyone has concerns about possible abuse or neglect, they must contact the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible for advice and support.
- If the complainant is the person at risk concerned, questions should be kept to a minimum and leading questions should be avoided.
- For your information, the details of the Future Talent Learning Safeguarding Team are detailed below. Please do make contact using the details below should you have any safeguarding concerns during your time on programme.
- Should you wish to self-refer any safeguarding concerns, please use the details below to do so.

Future Talent Learning Safeguarding Team details:

Email: safeguarding@futuretalentlearning.com

Designated Safeguarding Lead Name: Sarah Burgess