

University of Edinburgh

**Environmental/cultural investigation
into an alleged culture of bullying and
harassment at The Royal (Dick) School
of Veterinary Studies**

Precis of results

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The University of Edinburgh was approached by union representatives of a number of their staff, raising issues in relation to an alleged culture of bullying and harassment at The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, (R(D)SVS).

In response the University of Edinburgh (UoE) engaged the services of Intersol Global (IG) to conduct safe space interviews with a number of staff to establish the extent of the issues raised.

Safe space interviews were conducted between 25th February and 2nd March 2020. 21 members of staff from a wide range of roles within R(D)SVS were interviewed anonymously. 18 face to face and 3 by telephone. The face to face interviews were held at an offsite location.

The issues raised were:

Issue 1

An intolerable breach of basic health and safety standards in aggressive and abusive language and physical behaviour by, but not limited to, the Head of School.

Issue 2

Shocking levels of harassment leading to many staff taking leave due to stress.

Issue 3

Long-term members of staff leaving due to feeling marginalised, harassed and eventually bullied out of their jobs.

Issue 4

Unacceptably high workloads on remaining staff due in part to long-term staff leaving and absence due to stress.

Issue 5

Negligible faith in the impartiality of human resources when dealing with complaints.

Issue 6

Negligible faith in the impartiality of recruitment and promotion processes.

Issue 7

A culture of extreme fear of being labelled as a troublemaker.

Issue 8

The use of disciplinary procedures, marginalisation, and unprofessional conduct against those labelled troublemakers, or those who question inappropriate behaviour of management.

The results of the safe space interviews.

Issue 1

67% of those interviewed gave examples of an intolerable breach of basic health and safety standards in aggressive and abusive language and physical behaviour by, but not limited to, the Head of School.

Issue 2

14% of those interviewed gave examples of shocking levels of harassment leading to many staff taking leave due to stress.

Issue 3

38% of those interviewed gave examples of long-term members of staff leaving due to feeling marginalised, harassed and eventually bullied out of their jobs.

Issue 4

33% of those interviewed gave examples of unacceptably high workloads on remaining staff due in part to long-term staff leaving and absence due to stress.

Issue 5

57% of those interviewed gave examples of negligible faith in the impartiality of human resources when dealing with complaints.

Issue 6

24% of those interviewed gave examples of negligible faith in the impartiality of recruitment and promotion processes.

Issue 7

33% of those interviewed gave examples of a culture of extreme fear of being labelled as a troublemaker.

Issue 8

38% of those interviewed gave examples of the use of disciplinary procedures, marginalisation, and unprofessional conduct against those labelled troublemakers, or those who question inappropriate behaviour of management.

During the interviews the staff were asked how UoE could make improvements, and the main the areas the staff members interviewed would like to see improvement in were;

- An improvement in the Head of School's interpersonal skills when dealing with staff.
- An acknowledgement of the existence of a poor culture at the college.
- Honesty and transparency in the Human Resources department dealings with issues raised by staff.

Conclusions

The conclusions are based on the safe space interviews which are recognised as a snapshot of the opinion of a relatively small sample representing around 2.5% of total staff (20+ interviewed out of 800+ staff employed). It is recommended that to obtain a fuller picture of the extent of issues 1 to 8 within the workplace UoE considers conducting an electronic anonymous survey with all staff employed by the School.

The findings from the interviews show that, in the perception of the participants, there is a culture of bullying and harassment at UoE R(D)SVS. The findings show that when such culture is reported, it is not being dealt with effectively, and with little impact on staff perceptions of the ongoing problem.

The reported behaviour of senior staff and the perceived lack of action on behalf of HR to address the behaviour, has had an adverse impact on the morale of those interviewed. Attempts to report examples of the issues to HR had in some examples been quoted as handled badly by HR, leading to 57% of examples of issue 5.

The 38% of reports of issue 3 has an immediate effect on the 33% of reports of issue 4, in the feeling of the workload of those remaining increasing to cover those that had left due to the culture of bullying and harassment.

It was reported by 93% of participants that the Head of School, whilst highly skilled in his profession, had very poor people management skills when dealing with staff. In extreme reported incidents this had led to the percentage of issues 1, 7 and 8. In other reported incidents this reported poor people management skills were apparent but did not reach the threshold of the definitions of issue 1, 7 and 8

The Head of School role profile Key Result Area B is in direct contradiction to the reported behaviour of the Head of School.

The Head of School's reported behaviour in directly intervening in the recruitment panel process was perceived by staff as an unethical attempt to influence staff selection. This perception was compounded by the perception that roles within the college were given to persons related to or connected to senior staff members, without adherence to the University's recruitment processes.

It is recommended that the University give consideration to the issues in the anonymous complaints so that corrective action can be taken as appropriate, in line with Section 2.3 of The University of Edinburgh Complaint Handling Procedure (April 2016).

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