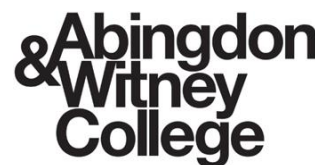


Preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students in higher education



August 2025

This single source of information has been published in the context of the Office for Students (OfS) regulations relating to matters of harassment and sexual abuse within Higher Education (HE) providers.

This document, combined with the relevant college policies, provides a consistent set of guidance that all staff and students studying HE at Abingdon and Witney College must adhere to in order to:

- minimise potential barriers to reporting and disclosing instances of harassment and sexual misconduct
- ensure that investigatory procedures are fair and independent
- ensure all students involved receive appropriate support
- clearly set out behavioural expectations for all students.

Within the context of Abingdon and Witney College, the term “Safeguarding” is an umbrella term which incorporates matters relating to incidents of potential harm to our students, including harassment and/or sexual misconduct which affect one or more students (including the conduct of staff towards students, and/or the conduct of students towards students) which applies in relation to students on higher education courses (Level 4 and above).

What do we mean by sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment can be verbal, non-verbal, physical, or digital. Even behaviours that are framed as "jokes" or "banter" can be harmful and constitute harassment. As outlined in the College Policy on Dignity at Work (2024), sexual harassment can include (but is not limited to):

- Comments or jokes of a sexual nature
- Displaying sexually graphic pictures, posters or photos
- Suggestive looks, staring or leering
- Propositions and sexual advances
- Making promises in return for sexual favours
- Sexual gestures
- Intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life or a person discussing their own sex life
- Posts or contact of a sexual nature on social media
- Spreading rumours about a person's private life or intimate relationships
- Sending sexually explicit emails or text messages, and
- Unwelcome touching, hugging, massaging or kissing.

Proactive steps we take to prevent staff on student harassment

Abingdon and Witney College have policies that are clear about our expectations of staff behaviour and our view that they are in a position of trust. These include:

- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Managing and Preventing student bullying or harassment policy
- Professional Standards Guidelines
- Relationships at Work policy*
- Safeguarding Policy (available on the College website)

We mandate that all staff are trained in handling disclosures and Safeguarding Team staff who are responsible for handling investigations or decisions are specially trained to do such and in line with freedom of speech responsibilities. Additional staff training also takes place throughout the academic year to ensure that all staff are clear on College expectations. Training sessions include (but are not restricted to) annual safeguarding training, duty of care training etc.

**as a community based provider there will be situations where there are existing relationships between staff and students. As part of the relationships at work policy, we require these to be declared. Relationships are then risk assessed accordingly.*

Proactive steps we take to prevent student on student harassment

Evidence-based training is mandatory for all students, including understanding consent and bystander training, delivered by qualified experts and aligned with free speech principles. This is delivered via tutorials, online sessions and induction periods.

Regular and accessible communication of policies and reporting procedures are available via the HE student intranet.

What to do in the case of harassment and/or sexual misconduct allegations

Students should report the incident to a trusted member of college staff. This may include (but is not restricted to) your course leader, your tutor or directly to the Safeguarding team. Allegations can also be made anonymously via the Whispa process available here [Student Services - Home](#)



Staff are trained in handling disclosures initially which will then be passed to our Safeguarding team for investigation.

Providing Appropriate Student Support

All students have a right to appropriate student support during investigations. Support will be tailored to:

- Complainants
- Witnesses
- Alleged or actual perpetrators

This includes access to academic support, mental health services, and adjustments to study or assessments as needed. These may not be provided by Abingdon and Witney College who may choose to refer individuals to an external organisation for support.

Support is available regardless of whether a formal report is made or where the incident occurred.

Handling Information Sensitively and Fairly

Information is collected and managed with confidentiality and in line with data protection laws.

Students will be clearly informed how their information may be used, particularly in disciplinary processes.

Fair and Credible Investigations

Where staff or students are implicated in harassment and/or sexual misconduct cases, the staff policy “Allegations of Abuse Against Staff” or “Managing and Preventing student bullying or harassment” will apply to ensure that investigations are impartial, transparent, and uphold natural justice, even if the case involves criminal allegations. There is a rebuttable presumption that academic content and open discussion do not amount to harassment unless proven otherwise.