

Portland Vets' Policy on Prevention of Harassment
and Bullying in the Workplace

The vast majority of our clients treat Portland Vets' team members with the courtesy and respect that is essential for an effective professional relationship.

This policy sets out how we will respond to the rare instances of unacceptable behaviour by clients.

Zero-tolerance approach

People have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and Portland Vets has a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and bullying of team members by clients.

We encourage our employees to report instances of harassment or bullying to their line managers, and allegations will be considered speedily, seriously and confidentially.

Unacceptable client behaviour will be responded to by the Practice Manager. This may result in a written warning regarding the client's future conduct or formal notice of withdrawal of veterinary services ('sacking').

What are harassment and bullying?

The terms bullying and harassment are often used interchangeably. However, in the UK, under the Equality Act 2010, harassment has a specific meaning of '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'. Bullying is not specifically defined in UK law but ACAS says bullying 'may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient'.

Harassment and bullying may be against one or more people and may involve single or repeated incidents across a wide spectrum of behaviour, ranging from extreme forms of intimidation, such as physical violence, to more subtle forms such as ignoring someone. It can occur without witnesses, in face-to-face interactions, as well as online. Examples include:

- Unwanted physical contact
- Unwelcome remarks about a person's age, dress, appearance, race or marital status, jokes at personal expense, offensive language, gossip, slander, sectarian songs and letters
- Shouting
- Persistent unwarranted criticism
- Personal insults
- Coercion for sexual favours
- Personal intrusion from pestering, spying and stalking