

## Eradicating Workplace Bullying, including Cyber-Bullying - *The Case for Dignity at Work*

The [UK National Workstress Network](http://workstress.net) held its Annual Conference once more at Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Nr Birmingham. This latest Conference was a new venture for us in that it was for the first time residential over the weekend of November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> – by popular request, allowing greater networking and to more time to consider aspects of workplace stress in greater depth.

We were once more indebted to NASUWT for its generous support in providing conference facilities, for which we again extend our grateful thanks.

Not only was this year's conference a new venture with the extra time, it was also the best ever attended, with some 94 present on the day. Some late bookings meant that a small group of delegates were accommodated off site as the premises were full for the Saturday night. In addition, we had had to turn away about 20 very late enquirers, which was unfortunate. The Early Bird pricing system certainly works to everyone's advantage but regrettably some very late applicants had to be declined largely on the basis of overfull accommodation and workshop group sizes.

Delegates were able to take advantage of the accommodation facilities being available as an extra for the night of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November, which allowed some early registration and networking.

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### Conference Theme:-

This year, the focus of the Conference was on workplace bullying, including the relatively new phenomenon of Cyber-Bullying and abuse of technology as a tool to harass and victimise workers. The background of Dignity in the Workplace enabled a range of inputs and outcomes to be achieved. A full and in-depth opening plenary session preceded sessions of extended workshops and on the Sunday morning saw significant numbers attending a range of Masterclass discussions on related topics.

### Conference Programme:-

The opening plenary session speakers included:-

Professor Charlotte Rayner, Portsmouth University Business School

Simon Dewsbury, Thompsons Law, Birmingham

Jo Brown, Just fight On

Debbie Hutchings, UNITE [AMICUS]

Ian Draper, Stress Network Convenor

### Workshop topics included:-

Workshop 1 Promoting a culture for positive change Debbie Hutchings

Workshop 2	Negative Behaviours in the Workplace	Rachel Pope
Workshop 3	Returning to Work after Bullying	Jo Brown
Workshop 4	Technologies and Bullying	Ian Draper

**Master Class groups studied:-**

Bullying and Disability. Casework	Brian Robinson
Why Bullies Bully.	Dr Sheila White
Disputes Resolution and Grievance	Ian Draper
HSE Management Standards, Relationships & Support	Dave & Dianne Jones

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**Opening Plenary session**

Conference was chaired by Simon Pickvance of [Sheffield Occupational Advisory Health Service](#).

The opening presentation was given by Charlotte Rayner of Portsmouth University Business School, outlining the recent research work on Bullying.

This was followed by Simon Dewsbury from Thompsons Law [West Midlands Offices] who gave a brief outline of the current legal situation for Stress and Bullying cases.

Jo Brown spoke about the issues of dealing with bullied individuals and how they can be reintegrated back to work following absence and grievance.

Debbie Hutchings of UNITE [AMICUS] spoke of the Dignity at Work Campaign and programme.

Finally, Ian Draper gave a brief outline of some of the issues related to the use, abuse and misuses of technologies as bullying tools in the workplace.

A short Q&A session followed and the conference then broke for lunch, networking and workshop sessions.

Each of the speakers' presentations [where used] for the above Plenary session is attached with this report for reference.

**Saturday Afternoon Workshops**

**Workshop 1**

**Promoting a culture for positive change**

The workshop began by establishing perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, then moving on to look at the structure of a Dignity at Work Policy and how Shop Stewards and Safety Representatives could be involved in promoting and implementing best practice in the workplace.

**Workshop 2**

**Negative Behaviours in the Workplace**

Having agreed a definition of 'bullying' the group examined an individual questionnaire to raise awareness of the behaviours of incivility and aggression, and the relationship of these to the perception of bullying. A short DVD entitled '*Reflections on Community Life*' prompted discussion of identified behaviours.

Through a broad examination of a range of examples, Delegates were better able

- to understand the impact of negative behaviours in the workplace, the effects of incivility, aggression and low and higher frequency behaviours on individuals and organisations;
- to better understand of the perception of bullying linked to incivility and aggression;
- and to develop knowledge to assist in addressing the problems of negative behaviours in the workplace through recommendations for action.

### **Workshop 3**

#### **Return to work: A Post-Bullying Intervention**

Many aspects of bullying and harassment at work have been researched and looked at – except what happens afterwards.

The workshop enabled participants to better understand what it takes for a successful return to work following a bullying and harassment case. The barriers were many when dealing with people who have been hurt and have lost trust. The greatest asset of a company is its human resource, yet most people who are bullied leave. The workshop set out to examine retention, rebuilding of trust and broken relationships between the parties in conflict.

The session covered data from a survey including the length of time off sick and why, how they left employment, and identified barriers to a return to work from both sides. Using real life Case studies an assessment was made of errors committed by employers. Discussion also focussed on how Safety Representatives and Shop Stewards could help members suffering at the hands of bullies and particularly through sickness absence management and return to work.

The concluding session examined how employers should be pro-active in ensuring successful return to work arrangements and how staff retention could be improved through the adoption of early intervention strategies.

### **Workshop 4**

#### **Technology Abuse and Bullying**

This workshop explored the extent to which a range of technologies was used and abused to create a fear culture in the workplace, and how certain workers and groups of workers were more vulnerable to personal attack by managers, co-workers and client groups. The session concluded with some brief examination of how policy might be developed, its key essentials and how having been agreed it was put into practice.

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## **Sunday Master-classes**

### **Masterclass 1**

#### **Bullying and Disability Casework**

Through the study of a real life bullying-harassment and discrimination case study, participants were encouraged to examine how a case could be handled in the workplace. Analysis of the background facts, the actions of the workforce and managers and the views of the ‘victim’ were carried out.

A broad strategy for taking such an issue forward was developed.

### **Masterclass 2**

#### **Why Bullies Bully Case Study based on research**

This session provided theoretical frameworks for understanding how bullying arises in organisations and showed how these frameworks could be used to prevent and more

effectively manage bullying scenarios thereby helping to avoid costly disciplinary and legal actions. Some time was spent on the vexing questions of why bullies often accuse victims of being perpetrators and why they rarely show remorse for their actions.

The case study, taken from research in a public sector organisation, illustrated how a leader became a bully, enabling some understanding of how bullying was more than a dispute between two or more individuals. The concepts of boundaries, containment and projection were used to understand how bullies bully.

A risk analysis, a means of looking across an organisation to identify potential areas in which bullying was discussed.

Among the key outcomes were:

- knowledge of the motives of bullies and an understanding of the addictive nature of bullying;
- An ability to identify areas within the workplace where bullying might develop; and
- Confidence to apply the concepts to enhance policies and procedures.

### Masterclass 3

#### Disputes Resolution and Grievance

The Employment Act 2002, established a framework for promoting the resolution of employment disputes in the workplace. The detail of how the procedures would operate in practice was set out in secondary legislation, the Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2004 that were made on 12th March 2004. [Both came into force on 1 October 2004.] Some brief outlines of the impact of these regulations was considered alongside the normal in-house grievance provisions that were generally found in workplaces.

The Session looked at how the regulations have affected the resolution of grievance cases and through a specific real life case studies, how individuals with support could secure satisfactory outcomes.

### Masterclass 4

#### HSE Management Standards: Relationships & Support

The Master Class examined the impact of the HSE Stress Management Standards and how the key themes of Relationships and Support within those standards could be used to prevent bullying situations in the workplace.

**Closing Plenary** session was brief and took comments on the weekend and its outcomes. Everyone was thanked for their contributions and participation.

The **Next UK National Work Stress Network Conference** will take place at Hillscourt Centre, Rednal over the weekend of **November 21st and 22nd 2009**.

**More detailed reports on the workshop and master class sessions are available along with this report. The speaker presentations are also available.**

**We apologise for the unanticipated delay in producing this report and accompanying documents, which was due to pressure of work followed by a sudden temporary loss of past and present email facilities.**

Ian Draper, Network Convenor, December 2008.