



Harassment and Bullying Policy

Introduction

Metaverse VR (MVR) recognises harassment and victimisation as being unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. As such, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Personal harassment takes many forms ranging from tasteless jokes and abusive remarks to pestering for sexual favours, threatening behaviour and actual physical abuse. For the purposes of this policy, it also includes bullying.

Bullying is understood to be targeted and persistent offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour and can include the abuse or misuse of power to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Whatever form it takes, personal harassment will always be taken seriously and is totally unacceptable.

We recognise personal harassment can exist in the workplace, as well as outside, and this can seriously affect your working life, interfering with your performance in role or by creating a stressful, intimidating and unpleasant working environment.

We deplore all forms of personal harassment and seek to ensure the working environment is a supportive and safe place for you to be. The aim of this policy is to inform you of the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provide you with a way of redressing the situation if you feel you are a victim of personal harassment.

It is our duty to implement this policy to safeguard all employees and you are expected to comply with it. We will also review this policy at regular intervals in order to monitor its appropriateness and effectiveness.

Personal Harassment

Personal harassment takes many forms and you may not always realise types of behaviour could constitute harassment.

Definition: “Personal harassment is unwanted behaviour by one employee towards another”.

This means your colleagues may find some things unacceptable, whereas for you it would not be an issue, so please be mindful and take time to consider the following examples of types of harassment to help bring this to life:

- insensitive jokes or pranks
- lewd or abusive comments
- exclusion or victimisation, e.g. deliberate exclusion from conversations
- displaying abusive or offensive writing or material
- abusive, threatening or insulting words or behaviour, includes name-calling
- picking on someone or setting them up to fail
- undermining or being demeaning towards a colleagues' contribution or position
- demanding a greater work output than is reasonably feasible
- blocking promotion or other development/ advancement.

These examples are not exhaustive and disciplinary action at the appropriate level may be taken against you for any form of personal harassment.

Sexual Harassment

Definition: “Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour related to sex, or of a sexual nature, by one employee towards another”

Sexual harassment can take many forms and can go undetected for a period of time, particularly if you are unaware of the types of behaviour classed as sexual harassment.

Some examples of sexual harassment are provided below:

- lewd or abusive comments of a sexual nature, such as an individual's appearance or body
- unwelcome touching of a sexual nature
- displaying sexually suggestive or sexually offensive writing or material
- asking questions of a sexual nature
- sexual propositions or advances, whether made in writing or verbally.

Sexual harassment can also be deemed to have taken place if you are treated less favourably because you have rejected, or submitted to, any unwanted conduct related to sex or is of a sexual nature. Whether less favourable treatment occurs as a result, will be examined broadly and includes areas such as blocking promotion and refusal of training opportunities or other development opportunities.

Victimisation

Definition: “Victimisation is when you are treated less favourably as a direct result of raising a genuine complaint of discrimination or harassment. Furthermore, any employee who supports or assists another employee to raise a complaint is also subjected to victimisation if they are treated unfavourably”.

Third Party Harassment

MVR operates a zero tolerance policy in relation to harassment perpetrated against one of its employees by a 3rd party, such as a client/ customer or visitor to the organisation. You are encouraged to report any and all instances of harassment involving a 3rd party. If we find the allegation is well-founded, we will take the necessary steps to remedy the complaint. This could include, but is not limited to:

- warning the individual about the inappropriate nature of their behaviour
- banning the individual from our premises
- reporting the individual's actions to the police.

In addition to this, we will endeavour to take all reasonable steps to deter and prevent any form of harassment from 3rd parties taking place.

Responsibilities

Employee Responsibilities

We require you to behave appropriately and professionally at all times during the working day, and this may extend to work-related events outside of working hours, such as social events.

Any form of harassment or victimisation may lead to disciplinary action being taken against you, up to and including dismissal, if it is committed:

- in a work situation
- during any situation related to work, such as a social event
- against a colleague or other person connected to MVR outside of a work situation, including on social media
- against anyone outside of a work situation where the incident is relevant to their suitability to carry out the role.

An alleged breach of this policy will be investigated as a disciplinary, please see our “Disciplinary Policy and Procedure” on our Sharepoint.

Employer Responsibilities

We are responsible for ensuring all our employees, understand the rules and policies relating to the prevention of harassment and bullying behaviour at work and during work-related social events. We will promote a professional and positive workplace where managers are alert to and proactively identify areas of risk and incidents of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying.

We will also take into account aggravating factors, such as abuse of position, when deciding what disciplinary action to take.

Where an incident is witnessed, or a complaint is made under this policy, we will take prompt action to deal with the matter. All incidents will be deemed serious and dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Complaining about Harassment and/or Bullying

Informally

If you believe you are a victim of minor harassment, please make it clear to your harasser on an informal basis their behaviour is unwelcome and ask them to stop. If you feel unable to do this verbally, then you should either email or hand a written request to the harasser.

Complaints of personal harassment, and particularly of sexual harassment, can sometimes be of a sensitive or intimate nature and it may not be appropriate for you to raise the issue through our normal grievance procedure. In these circumstances you are encouraged to raise such issues with a senior colleague of your choice (who you are most comfortable sharing with) in confidence for advice and support.

Formally

If the informal approach fails or where the harassment is more serious, you should bring the matter to the attention of the COO as a formal written grievance.

If possible, please keep notes of the harassment (type and frequency) so your written complaint can include:

- the name of the alleged harasser
- the nature of the alleged harassment
- the dates and times when the alleged harassment occurred
- the names of any witnesses
- any action already taken by you to try and stop the alleged harassment.

On receipt of a formal complaint we will take action to separate you from the alleged harasser to enable an uninterrupted investigation to take place. This may involve a temporary transfer of the alleged harasser to another work area or suspension with contractual pay until the matter has been resolved.

On conclusion of the investigation, which will be concluded as quickly as possible, a report of the findings will be provided to the Hearing Manager for the grievance meeting. Please see the “Grievance Policy and Procedure” on our Sharepoint for more details.

You will be invited to attend a grievance meeting, at a reasonable time and location, to discuss the matter. You have the right to be accompanied at the meeting by a colleague, and while we recognise it may be difficult due to the circumstances, please take all reasonable steps to attend. Please be assured that anyone involved in the investigation will be required to act in confidence, with any breach of confidence being treated as a potential disciplinary matter.

You will have the opportunity to present your case at the meeting and the Hearing Manager will explain the outcome of the investigation.

You have a right to appeal the outcome, within 5 working days of receiving the outcome. If you would like to appeal, please use the template and follow the procedure outlined in the Grievance Policy and Procedure on our Sharepoint.

If the Hearing Manager’s decision is the allegation is well founded, the harasser will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure up to and including dismissal.

We are committed to ensuring you are not discouraged from using this procedure, so please be assured that no employee will be victimised for having brought a complaint.

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