

Someone has sexually harassed me. What should I do?

The Centre for Environmental Policy (CEP) at Imperial College London is committed to promoting and championing a university environment where all students, staff and visitors are treated with respect, consideration and courtesy and feel safe and supported.

CEP has a zero-tolerance stance towards sexual harassment and constantly strives to ensure that its community of staff and students do not experience any form of sexual harassment or inappropriate behaviour.

CEP takes allegations of sexual harassment very seriously: CEP has a responsibility to ensure that all reported incidents of sexual harassment are dealt with appropriately, both to investigate and address the behaviour of the alleged perpetrator and to provide support for those affected. If you feel that you have been sexually harassed in any way, we are here to help and support you through this difficult and distressing time.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome and uninvited verbal, written or physical behaviour of a sexual nature that you find offensive or which makes you feel distressed, offended, intimidated or humiliated. Sexual harassment may be a single incident or a series of incidents. Sexual harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

The law says it's sexual harassment if the behaviour is either meant to, or has the effect of:

- ▶ Violating your dignity, or
- ▶ Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment

This can include:

- ▶ Sexually degrading comments, jokes, insults or gestures
- ▶ Your body being stared at or leered at
- ▶ Someone asking you for sex or to perform sexual acts
- ▶ Touching or other non-verbal communication
- ▶ Repeated unwanted requests to go out on a date or any other outside-College invitation

- ▶ Sexually explicit e-mails, text messages or social media comments
- ▶ Displaying pornographic, sexually explicit or naked pictures, posters, calendars or screensavers in your workspace or a shared space
- ▶ Making promises or threats in return for sexual favours
- ▶ Sexual orientation-based insults or taunts

It does not matter whether the behaviour was intentional or unintentional, it is the harm that matters.

Mutual flirtation or sexual contact that is desired and freely consented to is NOT sexual harassment.

Unwelcome behaviour that is not freely consented to because of fear, intimidation or coercion does constitute sexual harassment.

You don't have to have objected to a certain kind of behaviour in the past for it to be unwanted and to constitute harassment.

Sexual harassment may be experienced or perpetrated by persons of any background, gender or sexual orientation. It may be by the opposite sex or the same sex.

Sexual harassment can cause stress and hostility. This may result in physical and emotional problems, such as headaches, nausea, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances and eating issues. It may lead to the loss of self-confidence, motivation and productivity, which can interfere with your work or study performance. Some even end up leaving their job or course rather than endure sexual harassment.

**Sexual violence (including serious sexual assault or rape)
is a crime and is not your fault.**

If you have experienced any form of sexual violence there are several options for you to seek help and support:

Rape and Sexual Assault Referral Centres [LINK ↗](#)

Voluntary Organisations Women's Aid, Victim Support,
The Survivor's Trust or Survivors UK (for male victims)

Rape Crisis National Helpline 0808 802 9999
12—2:30pm and 7—9:30pm

Hospital A&E or Genitourinary Department

Your GP Surgery

NHS 111

Police 101

Support and advice

If you have experienced sexual harassment in any form, it is not your fault and you are not being unreasonable by objecting to it. The harasser is to blame. They may be abusing their position of trust or power. You may not be the only person they are harassing.

Do not feel that you have to suffer in silence: CEP is here to help and support you and all complaints will be dealt with in the strictest confidentiality and investigated thoroughly.

Most sexual harassment in the workplace or classroom remains hidden and unreported. Those who are harassed often don't seek help because they feel it may be 'unwise to rock the boat.'

You may feel that no one will listen to you or take you seriously. If the perpetrator is a lecturer or in a more senior position, you may feel this could affect your employment or academic prospects.

This is not the case. It is imperative that the perpetrators are made to understand the consequences of their actions and are held accountable for them.

If you feel that you are experiencing or have experienced sexual harassment, CEP encourages you to ask for support through this difficult time. We have a dedicated team of Advisors to assist you. You will be treated with the utmost care, respect and support, under strict confidentiality rules. Our advisors will be empathetic, impartial, non-judgemental and discreet: we will provide a completely safe environment for you to share your concerns.

We understand that you may be feeling embarrassed, scared, ashamed and 'dirty' amongst other things but we urge you to reach out and seek support. It is important that the perpetrators are identified and dealt with appropriately, but we will not take action without your consent. You will remain in control.

What you should do

1. Keep a diary of events. This should include the date, time, place, who was involved, what happened, and the names of any witnesses.
2. Confide confidentially in a friend. Try not to deal with this on your own.
3. If you feel that you can, ask the perpetrator to stop. In some instances, they might not realise that their behaviour has upset you.
4. Contact one of the CEP Sexual Harassment Advisors or one of the College's support staff (see below). In many instances, advice on a sound strategy for you to handle sexual harassment is enough to resolve the situation.
5. Refer to the University guide on Sexual Harassment

Staff can contact:

- ▶ Human Resources Advisor: r.nyarko@imperial.ac.uk
- ▶ Imperial's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Centre (EDIC)
for support equality@imperial.ac.uk
- ▶ Occupational Health [LINK ↗](#)
- ▶ Contact Confidential Care Assistance Provider
on 0800 085 4764
- ▶ See FoNS Health and Wellbeing [LINK ↗](#)
- ▶ Contact one of the Imperial Staff Networks
[Able@Imperial LINK ↗](#)
[Imperial600 LINK ↗](#)
[Imperial as One LINK ↗](#)

Students can:

- ▶ Talk to their personal tutor or supervisor
- ▶ Contact the student counselling service on 020 7594 9637
- ▶ Contact Imperial's Student Advisors at the Students Union on 020 7594 8060 or advice@imperial.ac.uk

Staff and students can:

- ▶ Contact the CEP Sexual Harassment Advisors
Dr Tilly Collins t.collins@imperial.ac.uk
Dr Yiannis Kountouris i.kountouris@imperial.ac.uk

Common questions and misconceptions

MYTH Women invite sexual harassment by their behaviour or dress.

FACT NO. The harasser is responsible for their own behaviour.

MYTH A firm 'no' is enough to discourage sexual advances.

FACT Some harassers will not listen. Believing that 'no' means 'yes' is unacceptable behaviour.

MYTH Those who sexually harass others always have bad intentions.

FACT Some people that harass are genuinely unaware that their actions are giving offence and are prepared to modify their behaviour when the matter has been explained to them.

MYTH A person may be forgiven their behaviour if they are drunk.

FACT NO. Intoxication is no excuse for sexual harassment.

A recent BBC poll found that nearly 50% of female staff had experienced sexual harassment at work. Over half of these incidents were not reported.