

West End Operatic Society Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy

Introduction

West End Operatic Society (WEOS) is committed to providing a creative environment free from harassment and bullying whilst ensuring all members, committee members, volunteers, visitors, audience members (and any staff and freelancers) are treated, and treat others, with dignity and respect. This Policy covers harassment or bullying which occurs at rehearsals, performances, meetings or during any other activities arranged by the Society, including social functions.

The theatre and creative world pushes boundaries; it explores, expands, and celebrates the spectrum of human emotions and experiences. This should never be at the expense of safety or people's right to not be bullied or harassed. This Policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and WEOS may amend it at any time.

What is harassment?

Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment. It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past. Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.

Harassment may include, for example:

- unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing
- unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may perceive as harmless)
- offensive emails, text messages or social media content
- derogatory or stereotypical remarks about a particular ethnic or religious group, religion, belief, or gender
- mocking, mimicking or belittling a person's disability

A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended "target". For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment. Victimisation may include, subjecting a person to a detriment because they have, or are suspected of, alleging that a person has contravened the Equality Act 2010 or doing any other thing for the purposes of or in connection with the Act. Harassment and victimisation are unlawful and will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of membership of our Society.

What is bullying?

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority, but can include both personal strength and the power

to coerce through fear or intimidation. Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct. Bullying may include, for example:

- physical or psychological threats;
- overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision; or
- inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance.

Legitimate, reasonable and constructive criticism of a worker's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to workers in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying on their own.

Young people and bullying or harassment

Young people may be more susceptible to being bullied and less likely to come forward. Young people may indicate signs they are being bullied or harassed and it is important adults are aware of some of the signs a young person may demonstrate. They may:

- be frightened of walking to or from an activity
- not want to use public transport; change their usual routine
- become withdrawn anxious, or lacking in confidence
- start stammering
- be frightened to say what is wrong
- attempt self-harm, or threaten suicide or run away

If a young person displays any of these signs, a board member should be made aware so they can investigate.

If you are being harassed or bullied

If you are being harassed or bullied, consider whether you feel able to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. You should explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes you uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing, you should speak to a Society board member, who can provide confidential advice and assistance in resolving the issue formally or informally. If informal steps are not appropriate, or have not been successful, you should raise the matter formally under the Society's Complaints Procedure. WEOS will investigate complaints in a timely and confidential manner. The investigation will be conducted, if possible, by someone with appropriate experience who has had no prior involvement in the complaint. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. Once the investigation is complete, we will inform you of our decision. WEOS will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem and provide protection and support for those involved. Anyone who makes complaints or who participates in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result.

Codes of behaviour

Bullying and harassment can take many forms. However, below are some suggested codes of behaviour :

Do

- call out bullying and harassment when you see it
- report any bullying and harassment (either to yourself or others)
- support those suffering bullying and harassment.
- remember that physical intimacy as part of rehearsal and performance can be a source of stress and vulnerability. It should be approached with sensitivity and professionalism as every person has a right to their own boundaries. Respect changing and performance spaces as in any other intimate environment.

Don't

- put young people in uncomfortable positions by making unreasonable demand
- push people to share personal experiences if they don't wish to (particularly in creative environments)
- sexually objectify colleagues.

Record-keeping

Information about a complaint may be saved in WEOS records, along with a note of the outcome and any documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

Updated November 2024