CODE OF PRACTICE
AND GUIDELINES
FOR THE PANEL
OF POLICY ADVISORS

(UNDER POLICY TO PROMOTE RESPECT AND TO PROTECT DIGNITY)
The Panel of Policy Advisors is envisaged as playing a vital role in the Policy to Promote Respect and to Protect Dignity. This code of practice acts as a guide for their role in addition to that laid down in the University’s Policy.

**The Role**

The Policy Advisors handle cases from both staff and students throughout the College on a strictly confidential basis. No information is passed to any third party without the permission of the complainant and all discussions within the Panel take place on the basis of strict anonymity. It is an informal service and does not form part of the disciplinary mechanism of the University, though members will provide advice on how to make a formal complaint.

The role is as follows:

- Listen to the story.
- Provide personal support and help the staff/student to solve the problem. This applies to complainants, alleged harassers, and witnesses. A Contact Person will not see two sides of a case.
- Advise and give information on other sources of help e.g. Welfare supports / Student Counselling / Health.
- Provide information on the University’s complaint procedures.
- Provide support to the individual staff or student during a formal procedure.

Members of the Panel will have access to a range of sources for their information and training, such as: seminars, workshops, conferences, liaison with the Human Resources Department, contact people in other universities and informal meetings of the Panel.
Recruitment and Service of Panel Members
The following sets out an appointment process for the selection of Policy Advisors under the Policy to Promote Respect and Protect Dignity. This process will seek to attain the broadest spectrum of Policy Advisors and the best people for the Panel.

Selection is carried out by a Committee comprising the Training and Development team, Director of Student Support and Development (or nominee), the Equality Director and an external expert in the area. Administrative support for the process will be provided by the Equality Office.

Advisors will be appointed for 3 years in the first instance, although people can opt out or be requested to do so during the period. The membership of the Panel will be reviewed each year prior to the commencement of the Academic year in September by the Equality Director and one other member of the Selection Committee reviewing any existing or forthcoming vacancies. If deemed necessary by the two reviewing officers, a call for expressions of interest will be launched with the assessment process being held in Semester one. (If the need arises, calls can be launched at different times of the year.)

Ideally the Panel of Advisors will comprise of staff from all levels of the organisation (it is important that all grades of staff feel supported by this group), across a broad range of schools and units, and will aim to be a diverse group of mixed gender. There should be no conflict with others roles in University. There should be a sufficient number of Advisors to provide choice for staff and students and to allow for change in the group.

The qualities of a good Policy Advisor are set out below.

- non-judgemental
- open-minded
- approachable
- respected
- able to listen and hear and be empathic
- calm
- clear about boundaries and roles
- supportive but not inclined to get overly involved
- concerned
- already a trusted person re privacy, confidentiality
- sensible and practical
- skilled re assertiveness, conflict, relationships

Clearly this role is important to the University and to those staff and students who attend with the Policy Advisors. It is vital, therefore, that people consider the responsibility that this role carries and that both staff and students can come to see the contact persons. It is a voluntary role which requires a time commitment for both training (about 1 day), lunchtime sessions (12.30 – 2pm, 6 -8 times a year) and meetings with staff who may want to make a complaint or seek advice (which varies from issue to issue).
The Appointment Process

There are five steps in the appointment process as below:

Advertising
Positions will be advertised by DCU staff email. Staff may
- Self-nominate or
- Be invited by the Equality Office

Expressions of Interest
Expressions of Interest will be sent to the Equality Director on the required form.

Selection
- Reference check – applicants must supply at least one referee internal to DCU who will be contacted.
- Participation in an awareness training session.
- Shortlisting of candidates.
- Assessment of shortlisted candidates by the Selection Committee (the Personnel Officer, The Director of Student Counselling (or nominee), a representative of the Contact Persons, the Equality Officer, and an external expert.)
- Sign up to the Code of Practice and time commitment.

Training
It is a condition of taking up the post that all staff participate in the required training and complete it to the satisfaction of the Selection Committee.

Approval
Names of the selected contact persons are presented for ratification to the Equality Steering Group.

Other Points of Note
- The Panel reports to the Equality Steering Group.
- The Equality Director provides a co-ordinating role for the Contact Persons.
- At the end of the period there will be an option, on discussion with the Equality Director, and with the agreement of the Equality Steering Group for resubmission of the Contact Person to the Board to act in this capacity for a further three year period.
- All Panel members should be aware of their own personal circumstances. If due to other commitments, situations or personal crises they are not in a position to fully carry out their duties they should notify the Equality Director and request time off and / or can resign their position.
• Panel members may, in certain circumstances, be asked to resign their position.

• Anyone resigning their position, must shred or handover their files (which will normally be statistical files) to the Equality Office. This should be done in consultation with the appropriate colleagues.

• Contact People should be aware that from time to time they may encounter a particularly difficult case, and they can seek support and a consultation from any of the support services available. These include the Human Resources Officer, Student Counselling Service, other contact persons etc. If legal advice is required the Contact Person should contact the Human Resources Department or the College Secretary.
**Interaction with Staff and Students and Extent of Role**

- The Panel will deal with complaints related to communication difficulties, harassment, sexual / racial harassment and bullying. Individuals with other workplace grievances, or personal problems will be referred to the relevant support services – Human Resources, Tutors, Student Counselling, Occupational Health or other appropriate Health Services.

- The Panel will provide support on cases of bullying or harassment, but will not act in a representative or investigative capacity. All parties (complainants, alleged harassers, and witnesses) can approach the contact persons and where feasible will be facilitated. It would be normal that different parties will see different Contact Persons.

- The Panel will treat all complaints/approaches from staff members or students in a serious, confidential and sympathetic manner. A fundamental aspect of the role is to explore and advise on the safety, both physical and psychological, of the complainant and in certain circumstances of the alleged harasser / witness.

- The commitment to treat information with complete confidentiality cannot be absolute. In specific situations e.g where there may be a risk of suicide, threat to life or potential harm to another party, etc, these concerns must immediately be brought to the attention of other staff or agencies. Advice should be sought as how to proceed in these circumstances from one of the following: the Human Resources, Director of Student Support and Development, Student Union Sabbatical, University Secretary.

**Meetings**

- The Contact People will normally meet in a private area on the College premises. Meetings will usually last up to one hour (approx) and generally take place during normal work hours. Contact people may also wish to set a limit on the number of meetings with a complainant. The number will obviously vary depending on the situation but avoiding a dependency relationship is a consideration.

- If a suitable room cannot be located, contact the Equality Director, who will assist in locating a room.

- Home or mobile phone numbers will not normally be given to complainants.
• In the first instance they should set out with the individual the remit of their role. This includes the informal nature of the role, confidentiality, legal issues such as freedom of information.

**Record Keeping**

• Notes of meetings, in general, should not be kept. However, if the case is ongoing, it is recognised that such notes are useful as an aide memoire. Records should be kept confidential with no names or departments mentioned, and the Panel should be aware that FOI applies to these records. Closed statistical records should be shredded on production of the annual report.

• Records should be kept in a secure environment. If this is not possible the Equality Office will arrange for a secure environment for the files.

• For the purposes of monitoring, and with the assistance of the Equality Director the Panel will keep a confidential, coded record of cases. These will not include the names and departmental details of any staff or student, but will include demographic details on the complainant and alleged harasser (undergrad/postgrad, academic or non-academic staff member), and a brief note of the case and whether it was bullying / sexual harassment/ or harassment under the 9 equality grounds. Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complainant:</th>
<th>Undergraduate, male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleged harasser:</td>
<td>Undergraduate, male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case:</td>
<td>Bullying, persistent ridiculing in class, and exclusion in groups outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes:</td>
<td>Given advice and support in 2 meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C did not make formal complaint but approached individual and made clear he wanted the behaviour to stop. No further contact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Other Duties**

- The Panel will nominate a member to attend the Equality Steering Group.
- The Panel will produce an annual report for the Equality Steering Group.
- The Panel will contribute to or advise on the process of policy dissemination throughout the College. The Panel may be involved in any of the following ways:
  - Tutor training e.g. provision of briefing sessions, seminars, presentations
  - Liaising with student welfare officers, health promotion officer, students union in order to encourage and highlight policy to students and staff

**Training and Support**

The Policy Advisors will receive training that will provide them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to carry out their role in an effective manner. All Panel members are required to attend ongoing training and support-information sessions on a regular basis as provided.

On completion of the training, the Panel will:

- Be aware of the relevant features of the legislation covering bullying and sexual harassment, i.e. Employment Equality Act, Equal Status Act and Natural Justice.
- Understand the University policies on bullying and sexual harassment. Also have an understanding of the procedural requirement, record keeping, and FOI.
- Understand the role and responsibilities of the contact person and have developed the skills to carry out the role in an effective manner.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of others involved in the implementation of College policies on bullying and sexual harassment.
- Have developed listening, advisory and support skills
- Have an understanding of the impact of the alleged behaviour on the complainant and alleged harasser. And the welfare and risk issues arising.
- Understand the boundaries of confidentiality.
The Panel will be a resource/support for each other and agree to meet up on a regular basis. From time to time members of the panel may phone or email each other for advice. Strict confidentiality must be maintained at all times, with no identifying details of any case being given. They will keep up to date with the broader developments in the sector and external bodies/institutions e.g. ICTU, IBEC etc. The Panel will be kept up to date on legislative changes via the Equality Office.

The Equality Director will provide support setting up meetings/training sessions, co-ordinating the annual report, and generally providing advice and support in policy and procedure matters.
Panel of Policy Advisors
Expression of Interest Form
(strictly confidential)

NAME & TITLE: ____________________________________________________________

HOME ADDRESS: __________________________________________________________

COLLEGE ADDRESS: _______________________________________________________

CONTACT DETAILS – EMAIL AND PHONE: _______________________________________

REFEREE: (name, address, phone)
__________________________________________

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What do you see as the role of the Contact Persons?

__________________________________________

Why do you want to become a Contact Person?

__________________________________________
What value can you add to the Panel?

Do you have any previous experience in any similar area, explain?

What supports systems do you have in place for yourself?

Can you commit to the time required by the Contact Persons? Please note that these are Board approved posts, and Heads of Areas will be written to asking to release staff for their duties.  YES / NO

[Training 1 day; Lunchtime sessions - 6 - 8 times a year; Meetings with staff who may want to make a complaint or seek advice (which varies from issue to issue).]

I HAVE READ THE CODE OF PRACTICE, UNDERSTAND IT, AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY IT.

SIGNED __________________________________________ DATE __________