

Independent review of bullying and harassment at the Bar

Call for submissions response form

Submissions can be sent in any format directly to the review team via BHReview@barcouncil.org.uk.

If you find it easier, you can complete any or all of the questions below and email your completed form to BHReview@barcouncil.org.uk.

Unless told otherwise, submissions will be published alongside the final report on the Bar Council's website.

Please indicate how you would like your responses to be treated (check the box):

- ☐ Published in full
- ☒ Published anonymously (the content will be published but not the name of the submitting party)
- ☐ Published with certain redactions (please indicate this in the responses)
- ☐ Kept confidential (the submission will only be seen by the review team and not published)

If you would like to submit your answers completely anonymously and confidentially, please use [Talk to Spot](#).

Name (optional)

Organisation (if you are responding on behalf of an organisation)

1. Reasons for bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment

- a. In your view, why is bullying, harassment and sexual harassment a persistent problem at the Bar?

Because the profession is male dominated and the average barrister is full of entitlement, has not experienced consequences for their actions and believes they are 'elite' or above other people, particularly women. The comment applies to some judges, both male and female, who appear to consider that their role is not one of professionalism but a way to facilitate their bullying behaviour. Some of the people have personality problems. It has not been tackled and here we are – people still experience bullying and harassment because some barristers think they are better than other people and can get away with it (just because of their own perception of their 'intellect' – which is actually lacking if one bullies or harasses other people).

- b. Are there particular dynamics or working practices at the Bar which allow for bullying, harassment and sexual harassment to persist?

Every part of the profession from the moment one becomes a pupil to all the way through. If you speak up, you are the person who is considered 'not nice' / unreasonable / at fault and it can result in people getting less work or being isolated in chambers (because of the perception that you're not a team player). There should be zero tolerance of it all – surely it brings the Bar into disrepute!

- c. Are the relevant standards of behaviour relating to bullying, harassment and sexual harassment known, clear, accessible, and sufficiently robust?

I do not understand the question.

- d. Are the relevant standards of behaviour relating to bullying, harassment and sexual harassment sufficiently mainstreamed within barristers' professional obligations? Should they, for example, be included within the Core Duties set out in the [BSB Code of Conduct](#)

They should be clearly included and a zero-tolerance approach taken (not to strike off, but to reprimand, bearing in mind that most behaviours can be modified with the act-consequence approach).

2. Impact of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment

- a. What is the impact of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment on those who are subject to such misconduct?

Let's see – within the past few weeks I have arguably been targeted due to my disability, which resulted in me being distraught and being unable to respond (due to the shock someone would use my disability and label themselves a professional), previously I have been harassed and sexually harassed, which I have always dealt with – usually successfully and the behaviour has changed. One of the times I just left the chambers I was a member of and did not tell anyone because the man involved was very well-connected and I did not think anyone would believe me. He is an absolute slime ball but he and his partner at the time made my life hell for months (he would sneakily try to touch me, and she would exclude me from being invited to events which isolated me).

- b. Is there a wider impact upon barristers' staff, clients (professional and law), or the justice system more broadly?

If you are harassed or bullied while doing your job, any human being is going to be upset and eventually break. It is stressful – so of course there is an impact on work even if it is negligible or if it solely is that the barrister is more stressed than they would be - and the profession needs to get a grip. It's now 2024 and from the moment I joined the Bar, I have witnessed an endless array of unprofessional behaviours including sexual harassment, suspected/alleged assaults, bullying and just bad behaviour which doesn't belong in anything that labels itself a profession.

3. Reporting mechanisms, resources, and sanctions

- a. What are the barriers to reporting incidents of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment?

Being seen as a trouble maker, being isolated, them being more influential / earning more in chambers / being better connected/ or just generally better an manipulation.

- b. What mechanisms could be put in place to mitigate any repercussions against a complainant who has reported bullying, harassment or sexual harassment?

That anyone who raises an issue/reports is given some level of protection from further harassment // protection from a drop in work as a result of the report (eg by including it professional requirements that we are not permitted to harass someone who has reported /chambers are not permitted to retaliate).

- c. The Bar Standards Board (BSB) rules place a duty on barristers to report to the BSB in circumstances where there are reasonable grounds to believe there has been serious misconduct (with an exception set out in guidance for victims). Is this duty to report known, understood and implemented in practice?

I do not think this is widely appreciated and I think in practice it is very difficult to stand up for oneself or others (I have done so and suffered retaliation).

- d. Is there sufficient support in place both for complainants and persons accused of bullying, harassment, or sexual harassment? Do the existing mechanisms appropriately balance the need for confidentiality and transparency?

I do not think so.

- e. Should there be interim measures which permit a person accused of bullying, harassment, or sexual harassment to be subject to a precautionary exclusion from Chambers, their employer, or from practice during the adjudication of a complaint?

It depends. If the accusation is rape or sexual assault, that is one personality type that is unlikely to be modified by facing consequences and they are dangerous to the public (and their victims) – they should be excluded and permitted to practice remotely (eg papers, do telecons /videocons) during investigation, and reported to the police. If the allegation is not of that nature, it might be best that the person is immediately sent on a course to understand what bullying behaviours and harassment are, and given a warning that if there is further misconduct, they will be excluded from practice. That way, they have chance to modify their behaviour going forward.

- f. Are investigations into complaints (by the BSB, Chambers or any other relevant body) concerning bullying, harassment or sexual harassment sufficiently independent, prompt, robust, and fair?

Not from what I am aware of, no.

- g. Following an upheld complaint of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment, are the sanctions imposed appropriate and fair? Is enforcement action sufficiently robust to act as a deterrent?

Let's face it if someone bullies, harasses or sexually harasses another barrister, what the heck are they doing privately with junior staff or members of the public? It is not a good idea for them to be near members of the public alone! I believe in rehabilitation, but that comes from some level of consequence fitting the complaint. Bullying, harassment and sexual harassment can have a long term impact on victims and the sanction should reflect that.

4. Potential reforms to tackle bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment

- a. Are there any preventative steps which can be taken to tackle bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment? In particular, what could be done in the court room, in Chambers, and at the Bar more widely, to assist in preventing such misconduct?

Train judges not to be inappropriate /to spot when someone is exhibiting bullying behaviour. Chambers are never going to be bothered about anything other than what we can earn for them. Have drop-in audits (eg without notice) to monitor court behaviour, who have the power to report judges, counsel etc.

- b. What improvements could be made to existing reporting mechanisms and support services?

Make it easier and offer support for victims.

- c. In what ways could the judiciary, clerks, chambers professionals, and others work together with the Bar to bring about change?

I doubt some of them care about anyone other than themselves. It is not a good profession, people do not act professionally at times. Therefore, I am not sure they would bring about change unless they were forced to.

- d. Are there any other comparable professions which can offer examples of best practice in tackling bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment?

The medical profession to some extent.

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with the review?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please answer as many of the questions as you are able and submit your answers via email to BHReview@barcouncil.org.uk. Please note your responses will not be seen by the Bar Council unless you have opted to have them published.

The review team is not able to respond to specific concerns or reports. Please report these via the usual channel in Talk to Spot or to the BSB. [Find out more](#).