

YUFE Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy

WP9 ED&I - Proposal for the Executive Committee - 18/03/2025

Introduction and purpose

The YUFE Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy (AH&B policy) was developed by YUFE's Work Package 9 (WP9) on Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity (ED&I), through a dedicated Task and Finish Group set up in January 2024. The YUFE AH&B policy was presented for approval in December 2024 and in March 2025. The overview of support systems and report procedures from all YUFE institutions was published on the YUFE website to make it accessible to the wider YUFE community and beyond.

The YUFE Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy is grounded in the principles of the YUFE Code of Conduct, which promotes respectful communication, kindness, and personal responsibility and self-reflection. Every member of the YUFE network—students, faculty, staff, and partners—is expected to embody these values, contributing to a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

In our commitment to fostering a safe and respectful academic environment as is outlined in the YUFE Code of Conduct, we aim to create spaces where all forms of harassment and bullying are actively prevented, addressed, and counteracted. We strive to prevent any unwanted behaviours and encourage individuals who experience or witness actions that violate YUFE's Code of Conduct to take the role of an active bystander or, when necessary, signal these to members of the YUFE Alliance. However, should unwanted behaviours arise, this policy aims to provide clear guidance on identifying and addressing harassment and bullying in all its forms within the YUFE community. It reflects YUFE's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of every individual and ensuring that everyone is treated fairly and with compassion. Aligned with the YUFE Code of Conduct, the policy encourages proactive measures to promote diversity and inclusivity while fostering a safe and respectful environment.

The policy outlines specific definitions of harassment and bullying, as well as procedures for reporting and addressing incidents across YUFE institutions. It establishes transparent pathways for support, ensures that YUFE and its partner institutions take prompt action when incidents arise, and clarifies the respective responsibilities of YUFE and its partners. Importantly, it seeks to lower barriers to

reporting by providing accessible, confidential, and supportive mechanisms, helping individuals feel empowered to raise concerns without fear.

YUFE is an alliance of its partners, currently comprising 10 academic members, 2 non-academic members, and the YUFE AISBL, which hosts the YUFE Central Office. Although each partner institution has its own policies and reporting mechanisms, this policy applies across the entire YUFE Alliance and is shared by all partners.

Definitions

Harassment

Harassment is any unwelcome behaviour that demeans, humiliates, or embarrasses a person and that a person would find offensive, intimidating, or hostile. Harassment often targets individuals based on characteristics such as age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics. Differences of attitude, background or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as harassment by one person may not seem so to another. However, this does not make it acceptable.

Harassment can take many forms, including but not limited to:

- Verbal harassment: Derogatory comments, slurs, jokes, or remarks that are offensive to an individual.
- Non-verbal harassment: Offensive gestures, facial expressions, or other body language that conveys derogatory or offensive messages.
- Physical harassment: Unwanted physical contact, such as touching, grabbing, pushing, or assault.
- Visual harassment: Displaying or sharing offensive images, videos, or written material, including through digital means.
- Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. This includes quid pro quo harassment, where submission to or rejection of such behaviour is used as a basis for decisions affecting the individual's employment or educational status.
- Psychological harassment: Actions that undermine a person's self-esteem or confidence through persistent negative comments or behaviours.
- Cyber harassment: Using digital communication tools such as emails, social media, or messaging apps to harass, threaten, or intimidate an individual.

Harassment can occur as a single act or as a pattern of behaviour. It can be direct or indirect and can occur in person, through written, or multimedia digital communication, or via third parties.

Bullying

Bullying is a repeated, intentional act of offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, and/or an abuse or misuse of power by an individual or group towards another person, which causes harm or distress emotionally or physically. Bullying can be overt or covert and can involve a power imbalance where the perpetrator holds more power, whether physical, social, or organisational, over the recipient.

Bullying can manifest in various forms, including but not limited to:

- Physical bullying: Hitting, kicking, pushing, or any other form of physical aggression.
- Verbal bullying: Teasing, name-calling, taunting, or making inappropriate comments about someone's appearance, intelligence, or other personal attributes.
- Relational bullying: Spreading rumours, exclusion from groups, social isolation, or other actions intended to harm someone's social relationships or status.
- Cyberbullying: Bullying that occurs through digital platforms such as social media, email, messaging apps, or websites. This includes sending threatening messages, spreading false information, or sharing private information without consent.
- Psychological bullying: Actions aimed at causing psychological distress, such as intimidation, threats, or manipulation.
- Workplace bullying: Persistent and unreasonable behaviour directed towards an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety. This can include overloading someone with work, denying opportunities, undermining someone's work performance, or spreading malicious rumours.

In the annex of this policy, a glossary of terms related to harassment and bullying is provided, in addition to the already existing YUFE ED&I Glossary.

Procedures

YUFE is committed to maintaining a safe and respectful environment across all its partner institutions. In the event of harassment or bullying, it is crucial that clear and effective procedures are in place to support individuals and address incidents promptly. This section outlines the responsibilities of both the YUFE Alliance and its

partner institutions to ensure that anyone experiencing harassment or bullying can access the necessary support and report the incident with confidence. By defining these procedures, we aim to create a cohesive and responsive framework that upholds the values of respect, accountability, and equality within the YUFE community.

Responsibility of Partner Institutions

A harassment or bullying incident within a YUFE Partner Institution

The partner institutions within the YUFE Alliance are guided by the following principles:

- **Zero Tolerance:** Adopt and promote a zero-tolerance stance toward harassment and bullying.
- **Visibility of support and report services:** Provide comprehensive information on and easy access to the available support and report services to all members of the YUFE community.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure that reporting mechanisms are easily accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities or language barriers.
- **Confidentiality:** Maintain strict confidentiality regarding all reports and the individuals involved. Ensure that information is shared only with authorised persons.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement a system for monitoring the number and nature of reports, as well as the outcomes of investigations. Use this data to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures and to identify areas for improvement.
- **Training and awareness raising:** Regularly train staff and students on recognising, preventing, and responding to harassment and bullying and to conducting proceedings.

In the event of a harassment or bullying incident involving a student, exchange student, or staff member within a partner institution, the institution is responsible for providing support and enabling the submission of a report. The reporting procedures of the respective institution must be followed.

Institutions must clearly communicate where the individual can receive support and outline the steps to submit a report. This includes providing detailed information on the available services, contact points, and the specific process to follow.

Role of YUFE Alliance

Providing an overview of services and reporting mechanisms

Members of the YUFE Alliance have compiled and provided an overview of the services and reporting mechanisms available at each partner institution. This will include contact information for support services and instructions on how to report incidents within each institution. YUFE Central Office will monitor these resources and update them when needed.

Role of Work Package 9

The role of Work Package 9 can manifest itself in the following ways:

- Informing the YUFE community about the anti-harassment and bullying policy: WP 9, together with the YUFE Communications Team will implement a communications plan for this policy that focuses on increasing awareness of reporting mechanisms for students and staff. Ensuring that those who are in direct contact with students and staff (first points of contact) and might be approached with questions about reporting mechanisms, are aware of this policy.
- Supporting first points of contact: WP9 has the expertise to support first points of contact with a warm referral to existing reporting mechanisms or other needs that might arise during the evaluation process.
- Exchanging best practices: WP9 members can use this policy to optimise their institutional reporting mechanisms.

Role of the YUFE Central Office

YUFE Central Office acts as a coordinator and facilitator across the YUFE network to ensure a consistent approach to harassment and bullying issues. The YUFE Central Office can aid in:

- Coordinating Support Services: YUFE Central Office maintains the overview of support services available across all partner institutions. This includes referral services, contact persons, and procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of harassment or bullying.
- Handling centralised reports: In cases where an event, activity, or service is organised by the YUFE Central Office. The YUFE Central Office will take responsibility for handling the report or contact the partners where the incident should be reported.

- **Providing a Mediator Role:** If individuals are uncomfortable reporting incidents directly within their institution, the YUFE Central Office can act as a mediator to facilitate communication between the individual and the partner institution. The YUFE Central Office's role here includes ensuring the report is processed appropriately and following up on the case.

False Reporting

The YUFE Alliance recognises the importance of addressing allegations of harassment and bullying with seriousness and sensitivity. However, it is equally important to emphasise that false reports undermine the integrity of the reporting process and may have serious consequences for individuals who are wrongfully accused.

To maintain a respectful and supportive environment, all individuals are encouraged to report incidents of harassment or bullying in good faith. Any individual found to have intentionally submitted false information or fabricated claims may face appropriate disciplinary actions in accordance with the regulations of YUFE and its partner institutions.

This policy aims to protect both the individuals making reports and those accused, ensuring that all concerns are addressed with fairness and respect for all parties involved.

Monitoring

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, YUFE Central Office will implement a monitoring system for harassment and bullying reports. By integrating these monitoring and oversight measures, the YUFE Alliance aims to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in addressing harassment and bullying incidents across its partner institutions.

The YUFE Central Office will maintain a centralised database where all records of individuals seeking support due to harassment and bullying from partner institutions that have been reported to the YUFE Central Office will be recorded. This database will track the number and nature of incidents, and the institutions involved. Personal data will be collected to the minimum extent necessary and in accordance with applicable European data protection legislation and will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. Personal information, if any, will be anonymised to protect the privacy of individuals involved, and access to the data will be restricted to authorised personnel only.

An annual review of the anti-harassment and bullying policy will be held. We will reflect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the policy and enhance efforts to prevent and address harassment and bullying across the YUFE Alliance. Stakeholders and first points of contact will be asked whether they need more support to refer students or staff. Accordingly, the evaluation will be used to inform policy updates, training programmes, and preventive measures.