



## **ANTI-BULLYING & HARRASSMENT POLICY**

June 2025

### **Policy Statement**

Vale Musical Society (VMS) is committed to providing all of its members with an environment free from bullying and harassment. Everyone involved with the Society will be expected to comply with this policy and the committee will take appropriate measures to ensure that bullying/harassment does not occur.

VMS is committed to dealing with complaints of bullying and/or harassment in a fair and sensitive manner, endeavouring to ensure confidentiality with respect to any complaints. Appropriate disciplinary action, including dismissal from the Society for serious offences, will be taken where bullying/harassment allegations are upheld against a member.

The policy applies to members, family & friends associated with VMS for productions and social events, including meetings, whether in person or online. The policy also applies to bullying/harassment not only by members but also by a customer or supplier or association which a member might reasonably expect to come into contact with, in the course of their engagement with VMS.

### **Definition of Bullying**

“Bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual’s right to dignity at work. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity at work but as a once off incident is not considered to be bullying.”

The bullying can include conduct offensive to a reasonable person, e.g. oral or written slurs, physical contact, gestures, jokes, displaying pictures, flags/emblems, graffiti or other material which state/imply prejudicial attitudes which are offensive to fellow employees.

Other examples of bullying behaviour include:-

- Personal insults and name calling
- Persistent unjustified criticism and sarcasm
- Public or private humiliation
- Shouting at people in public and/or private
- Sneering at people
- Instantaneous rage, often over trivial issues
- Unfair delegation of duties and responsibilities
- Setting impossible deadlines
- Unnecessary interference
- Making it difficult to have access to necessary information
- Aggression in any form, verbal or non-verbal
- Not giving credit for contribution
- Continuously refusing reasonable requests without good reasons
- Intimidation and threats in general

## **Definition of Harassment**

Harassment on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability or membership of the Traveller community is defined as any unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

The unwanted conduct may consist of acts, requests, spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material.

Sexual harassment is any form of verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

The unwanted conduct may consist of acts, requests, spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material.

Examples of sexual harassment include, sexual gestures, displaying sexually suggestive objectives, pictures, calendars, sending suggestive and pornographic correspondence including text messages or e-mails, unwelcome sexual comments and jokes, unwelcome physical conduct such as pinching, unnecessary touching, same sex sexual harassment.

## **Effects of Bullying & Harassment on the victim**

Bullying can have a physiological, psychological and behavioural impact on an individual's character. Victims can lose their self-confidence and self-esteem and are at increased risk of suffering stress-related conditions that can trigger further trauma.

Apart from the direct impact on a victim's health, long-term exposure to bullying may also have consequences for the victim's livelihood, through absenteeism and even resignation from work in order to avoid contact with the bully.

## **Responsibilities**

All members have a responsibility for ensuring dignity and respect of their colleagues and contacts and to creating and contributing to the maintenance of an environment free from bullying/harassment or from conduct likely to contribute to bullying or harassment. The Committee and other in positions of authority eg: a Director or Producer of a show, have a particular responsibility to ensure that bullying, harassment and/or sexual harassment does not occur and that complaints are addressed speedily through the appropriate procedures. In particular they should:-

- Provide good example by treating all with courtesy and respect
- Promote awareness of the society's policy and complaints procedures
- Be vigilant for signs of harassment and take action before a problem escalates
- Respond sensitively to a member who makes a complaint of bullying or harassment
- Explain the procedures to be followed if a complaint of bullying, sexual harassment or harassment is made
- Endeavour to ensure that those making a complaint is not victimised for doing so
- Monitor and follow up the situation after a complaint is made so that it does not reoccur

## **Complaints Procedure**

There is both an informal and formal procedure to deal with the issue of bullying/harassment. Any investigation will be completed as quickly as possible.

## **Informal Procedure**

It is preferable for all concerned that complaints of bullying or harassment are dealt with informally whenever possible. This is likely to produce solutions that are speedy, effective and minimise embarrassment and the risk of breaching confidentiality. Thus, in the first instance a person who believes that they are the subject of bullying/harassment should ask the person responsible to stop the offensive behaviour. If a person finds it difficult to approach the alleged perpetrator directly then a person should seek help and advice on a confidential basis from the safeguarding officer of the Society. They will be able to provide advice and assistance about the Society's policy.

Having consulted with the safeguarding officer, the complainant may request the assistance of an officer on the committee in raising the issue with the alleged perpetrator(s). In this situation the approach of the officer should be by way of a confidential, non-confrontational discussion with a view to resolving the issue in an informal low key manner.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal procedures then they have the right to proceed with the formal Procedures.

## **Formal Procedures**

A complainant may decide, for whatever reason, to bypass the informal procedure. Choosing not to use the informal procedure will not reflect negatively on a complainant in the formal procedure. It is recognised that it may not always be practical to use the informal procedure particularly where the bullying or harassment is serious. In such instances the member should use the formal mechanism set out below.

- When a formal complaint is being made, contact the safeguarding officer immediately
- All formal complaints should be made in writing to the safeguarding officer, outlining as much detail as possible regarding the allegation
- The safeguarding officer will appoint an investigator who will meet for an initial meeting with the complainant to discuss the details of the complaint and ensure that the details of the complaint are fully understood
- A meeting will then be held with the alleged bully or harasser. In the interests of natural justice the alleged bully or harasser will be notified in advance, in writing of the nature of the complaint, given a copy of the allegation, informed of his or her right to representation at any meetings and will be given every opportunity to rebut the detailed allegations made
- Following from the initial meeting with both parties, the investigator will determine the appropriate course of action, in consultation with the safeguarding officer

These actions may include:-

- A: Exploring a mediated solution with a view to resolving the issue informally
- B: Carrying out a formal investigation with a view to determining the facts and the credibility or otherwise of the allegation(s)

Whilst it is desirable to maintain utmost confidentiality, once an investigation of an issue begins, it may be necessary to interview other people. If this is so, the importance of confidentiality will be stressed to them. Any statements taken from witnesses will be circulated to the complainant and the alleged bully/harasser for their comments before any conclusion is reached in the investigation. When the investigation has been completed both parties will be informed as to whether or not the complaint has been upheld. Both parties will be given the opportunity to comment on the findings before any action is decided upon by the committee. All complaints received will be treated seriously, confidentially and dealt with as soon as is practicable. Strict confidentiality and proper discretion will be maintained, as far as is possible, in any necessary consultation to safeguard both parties from innuendo and harmful gossip.

A record of all relevant discussions which take place during the course of the investigation will be maintained by the committee, but in the strictest of confidence by just the safeguarding officer and nominated investigator. Both parties will be given an opportunity to comment on the conclusions. Both parties will be given a copy, in writing, of the conclusions reached by the investigator.

### **Appeal**

Either party can appeal the decision of the formal investigation in writing within 5 working days. Appeals must be made in writing to the Chair of the Committee, outlining the grounds for the appeal. Where possible, the appeal will be heard by the chair plus nominated committee member who was not involved in the initial investigation. The appeal will focus only on the aspect of the case cited by the appellant as being the subject of the appeal. Both parties will be informed in writing as to the outcome of the appeal.

### **Action Post Investigation**

Where a complaint is upheld and a case of bullying or harassment be proven then the organisation will take appropriate disciplinary action. This can include a warning or other appropriate action up to and including dismissal from the Society.

Records of any warnings for bullying/harassment will remain in the committee's files and will be used in determining disciplinary action to be taken if any further offences of the same or similar nature occur in the future.

Regular checks will be made by the safeguarding officer, to ensure that the bullying/harassment has stopped and that there has been no victimisation for referring a complaint in good faith. Retaliation of any kind against a member for complaining or taking part in an investigation concerning bullying/harassment will not be tolerated by the Society.

### **Malicious Complaints**

If a complaint is found to be malicious, the appropriate disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the Society will be imposed.

All questions relating to the execution or interpretation of this policy should be referred to the safeguarding officer.

Agreed by Committee

June 2025

Agreed at AGM

August 2025

To be reviewed

January 2026