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Dignity at the 2019 SfEP conference

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Foreword

It is the SfEP's aim that all of our activities, including the annual conference, should be welcoming and inclusive of *all* of our members – members from across four continents and 55 countries, who bring with them valuable diversity of life experiences and cultural norms.

We are working on policy to embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all of the SfEP's activities. As part of that work, the SfEP will deliver a more comprehensive statement on dignity and respect among members participating in all SfEP activities, both in person and online, and procedure that sets out how we will deal with instances of harassment, victimisation and/or bullying.

In the meantime, this document confirms the expectations that we have of everyone attending the 2019 SfEP conference. By outlining these expectations, the SfEP aims to foster an environment in which all members are empowered and able to participate in the opportunities that the conference offers, within both the scheduled sessions and the social activities.

This document:

- sets out a code of conduct that defines the behaviours the SfEP considers to be unacceptable, including discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying
- offers you two ways of seeking support and/or reporting an incident should you be the target of or witness to unacceptable behaviours
- outlines how any complaint will be investigated and what the consequences might be
- invites you to feed back on the document, to help us to develop a comprehensive statement that supports all members across all SfEP activities.

I thank you warmly for your help in ensuring that this a welcoming and friendly event – and I look forward to seeing you at the SfEP's 30th annual conference!

Vanessa Plaister, SfEP community director

On behalf of the SfEP Council

Code of conduct

The SfEP expects everyone attending the annual conference to treat each other with respect, within both structured and social sessions, and to be considerate and collaborative in their approach to one another. We hope that each individual will feel supported and empowered to access all conference activities.

The SfEP will consequently take seriously any reports of unacceptable behaviours, which it defines as including discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying, as well as behaviours that result in intimidation, insult or injury.

Any form of direct or indirect **discrimination** on grounds of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, maternity or pregnancy, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010 in the UK. The SfEP will not tolerate any form of harassment, victimisation or bullying on these grounds or any others, including (but not limited to) gender variance, neurodiversity and body type.

Harassment can be defined as ‘unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone’s dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone with a protected characteristic’.¹ It does not matter, under law, whether or not a person responsible for the behaviour intended it to have such an effect; rather, it is the perception of the person who experiences the behaviour that defines it as harassment. Harassment, including sexual harassment, may be persistent behaviour or it may be one single act.

Victimisation involves treating someone less favourably because they have made a complaint about such behaviours or are supporting someone who has made such a complaint.

Bullying can be summarised as unwanted behaviour that is ‘offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting ... [aiming to] undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient’.² It is generally characterised by a pattern of small behaviours, each of which may seem trivial, but which have a significant cumulative impact on the target. Again, it is the effect of the behaviour that is definitive.

Should any delegate believe that they have witnessed or been subjected to any of these behaviours while at the 2019 SfEP conference, we encourage them to alert us to the incident(s) by reporting it to any director or using the [online form](#) (see also next section).

The SfEP has a legal responsibility and duty of care to everyone attending its conference. **If any delegate is summarily found to have engaged in unacceptable behaviours, they may be asked to leave the conference without a refund at the sole discretion of the organisers.**

NB This code of conduct extends to online behaviours. Should any delegate be found to have used social media, the conference app or the SfEP forums to engage in unacceptable behaviours during the course of the event, the consequences will be the same as those applicable to such behaviours in person.

¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), ‘Equality Act FAQs’, available online at equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-faqs

² Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), ‘Bullying, harassment, victimisation: what’s the difference?’, available online at acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5535

Complaints procedure

Making a complaint

If you have witnessed or been subjected to unacceptable behaviours while at the SfEP conference and would like to make a complaint, please use the route with which you feel most comfortable. The SfEP recognises that making such a complaint can be difficult and aims to support you sensitively.

When making a complaint, you will be asked to share details including the date, time and nature of the incident, the names of the parties involved (if you know them) and any witnesses. If you choose to make a complaint after the conference, please do so as soon as possible after the incident and please record not only the date of the incident, but also the date on which you are reporting it.

If appropriate, you may feel able to address the behaviour directly with the person responsible. In this case, you may want to report the incident to the SfEP only to seek advice on how best to do this. Such a complaint will remain confidential and, unless the alleged behaviour relates to protected characteristics or is otherwise so serious that the SfEP has a duty to investigate it, further action will not normally be taken unless you request intervention or escalate the complaint.

Reporting an incident

Route 1 Reporting to a director

You may report an incident to any director in person. All of the SfEP's [current directors](#) will be in attendance at the conference. If you are unable to identify a director, you can (a) approach a member of the SfEP office or conference centre reception staff, who will help you to find one, or (b) choose to report the incident online (route 2).

The directors to whom you may report an incident are:

- Sue Browning, membership director/joint vice-chair, membership@sfep.org.uk
- Sabine Citron, chair, chair@sfep.org.uk
- Denise Cowle, marketing and PR director, marketingpr@sfep.org.uk
- Beth Hamer, conference director, conference@sfep.org.uk
- Margaret Hunter, information director, information@sfep.org.uk
- Richard Hutchinson, internet director, internet@sfep.org.uk
- Hugh Jackson, standards director, standards@sfep.org.uk
- Lucy Metzger, external relations director/joint vice-chair, externalrelations@sfep.org.uk
- Jane Moody, training director/joint vice-chair, training@sfep.org.uk
- Vanessa Plaister, community director, community@sfep.org.uk
- Martin Walker, organisational director, organisational@sfep.org.uk

At least one member of the SfEP office staff will be at the registration desk, which is located in the corridor outside the coffee lounge, during all main conference hours (excluding meals and evenings). The conference centre reception should be staffed at all hours and will be briefed to reach a director.

Route 2 Reporting online

If you would prefer to report an incident in writing, you may report it online using the SfEP's confidential [incident report form](#).

You may choose to submit this form anonymously if you want to report the behaviour but do not want the incident to be investigated.

If you do want the incident to be investigated, you must include your name and contact details, as well as the names of the parties involved, including any witnesses.

Investigating a complaint

The SfEP will investigate any complaint promptly and confidentially, fairly and sensitively.

No more than three directors will form the investigating team and the Council will be consulted should these directors recommend action as a consequence of their investigation. If a complaint is made against a director, that director will not be part of the investigating team nor will they be consulted on the team's recommendations.

The investigating team will interview all parties to the complaint, including any witnesses, and all parties, including any witnesses, have a right to be accompanied at any such interview(s).

The investigating team will assess all evidence impartially and make its recommendations to the Council based on that evidence.

Consequences of a complaint

In the event that a delegate is summarily found to have engaged in serious unacceptable behaviours, the Council and conference organisers reserve the right to ask that delegate to leave the conference without refund.

Such a summary finding may follow where behaviours are witnessed and are sufficiently serious that they would commonly amount to gross misconduct in a workplace. In such circumstances, the SfEP will not hesitate to act to fulfil its legal responsibilities, including its duty of care to other delegates.

Other incidents may be investigated after the conference and, in the event that a complaint is upheld, the recommendations of the investigating team will be proportionate to the severity of the complaint.

Right of appeal

Anyone found to have engaged in unacceptable behaviours will have a right to appeal in writing to the SfEP Council within three months of the finding and/or any sanction imposed, including summary ejection from the conference.

Confidentiality

The investigating team will take special care to protect the confidentiality of all of the parties involved in the complaint, including any witnesses. Should you be the subject of a complaint, your right to reply is not to the party making the complaint, but to the investigating team.

Any records gathered or generated during the investigation will be retained for no more than three months after any investigation or appeal is completed, or for no more than three months after receipt of the complaint in the event that an investigation is not pursued.

Dignity in all SfEP activities

As part of the ongoing work on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the SfEP, you are invited to get in touch with the community director by email to community@sfep.org.uk to give feedback on this conference-specific statement and to suggest ways in which it might be developed to suit all of the SfEP's activities, including local groups and the SfEP forums.

We thank you sincerely for your support of and contributions to this and other EDI initiatives, for the professionalism and generous spirit that characterises so many of the SfEP's member-led activities, and for joining us at the annual conference – whether it's your first time or your 30th time!