Sexual Harassment Policy for Volunteers

1. Introduction

This policy relates to IPEM's commitment to providing a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

Purpose of the Policy

The aim of the Policy is to take action to effect long-term change by:

1.1 Educating members and volunteers about sexual harassment and their role and expected behaviour in developing a culture free from harassment.

1.2 Fostering a safe volunteer environment that supports the dignity of all and is free from any form of discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence.

1.3 Providing a clear process if harassment does occur including a specific reporting and investigation procedure.

2. Scope for Volunteers and members

We expect Volunteers and members to adhere to the principles of this policy if they are engaged on IPEM business or represent IPEM. This is in addition to the guidance IPEM provides for volunteers in the Volunteer policy and the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure. Volunteer members are subject to IPEM's Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct.

3. General Guidance

3.1 We will not tolerate any form of sexual harassment, will take all reports seriously and take appropriate action.

3.2 There is no time constraint around reporting an incident of sexual harassment under this Policy

3.3 Sexual harassment will be treated as a breach of the Code of Professional Conduct for members and volunteers. Appropriate action in accordance with the Code of Conduct procedure may be taken against any person who violates this policy.

3.4 No one will be treated adversely for making a complaint of sexual harassment or for helping another person to make such a complaint even if their complaint is not upheld as long as it is not done maliciously.

4. What is Sexual Harassment?

4.1 Sexual harassment is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010. Under international law, sexual harassment constitutes a breach of a person's human rights. There has been further guidance in the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and Employment Rights Act 2025 which places a legal obligation on all employers to take proactive measures and all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. Volunteers have fewer rights and legal protections than paid staff.

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4.2 Sexual harassment occurs when a person is subjected to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or the effect of:
• violating the person's dignity, or
• creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

4.3 Anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity or that of the harasser. Sexual harassment may also occur between people of the same sex and those with non-binary gender identities.

4.4 We also recognise that certain vulnerable or minority groups may be more at risk from harassment. Individuals who experience intersectional harassments are subjected to multiple forms of harassment which will be taken into consideration.

5. What is 'unwanted conduct'?

5.1 Unwanted conduct covers a wide range of behaviour which is unwanted or unwelcome and can be harassment even if the effect was not intended. Sexual harassment does not have to be targeted at one individual and even a single one-off event can amount to sexual harassment. A person can be affected by sexual harassment even if the conduct is not targeted at them.

5.2 In determining whether conduct amounts to sexual harassment, consideration will be given to the perception of the person affected, the circumstances of the case, and whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have had the effect described.

6. Responsibilities

All volunteers are required to:

6.1 Read, understand and comply with this policy, and treat colleagues and others with dignity and respect.
6.2 Refrain from any behaviour that could constitute sexual harassment.
6.3 Challenge inappropriate behaviour where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
6.4 Report any concerns or incidents of sexual harassment, whether experienced personally or witnessed, through the appropriate reporting channels.
6.5 Cooperate with any investigation carried out under this policy.
6.6 Maintain confidentiality and refrain from any form of victimisation or retaliation against individuals who raise concerns or participate in investigations.

7. Reporting Sexual Harassment

In the first instance follow the procedure described in the Problem Solving for Volunteers Policy. Sexual harassment constitutes Gross misconduct under this policy.

8. Governance

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8.1.1 The Board of Trustees will ensure this policy complies with IPEM's legal and ethical obligations.

8.2 The Chief Executive Officer will ensure this policy is effectively integrated and that it is subject to monitoring and review.

9. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees at least every three years, when there is a change in UK law and/or best practice or when an incident occurs that highlights a need for change – whichever occurs first.

10. Other relevant policies

The following policies of IPEM may also be relevant to sexual harassment matters:

- EDI policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct and disciplinary policy
- Data Protection and Confidentiality
- Volunteer problem solving policy