

# Abuse of Power

A wooden mannequin is standing over another wooden mannequin that is lying on its back on a dark surface. The standing mannequin's legs are spread apart, and its feet are positioned near the head and torso of the fallen mannequin, suggesting a sense of dominance or control.

Abuse of power occurs when an individual misuses their authority (sometimes called their position of power) to exploit, manipulate, or unfairly influence others i.e. for their own personal gain. This can happen in various settings, including: academia, workplaces, and social environments.

---

## Recognising Abuse of Power

A silhouette of a large hand is shown on the right side of the frame, reaching out and touching the swings of a row of children. The children are standing on a platform, and their shadows are cast on the ground. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the silhouettes.

Abuse of Power might involve:

### **Harassment & Bullying**

Harassment involves repeated, unwanted behaviour that causes distress or intimidation. Bullying is aggressive, often repeated behaviour intended to hurt someone emotionally or physically.

### **Discrimination**

Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, age, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.

### **Coercion, Control & Manipulation**

Tactics used to pressure, control, or exploit others, often through threats, guilt-tripping, or emotional blackmail.

### **Nepotism & Favouritism**

Nepotism is giving jobs or advantages to relatives or close friends, regardless of merit.

Favouritism is giving unfair preferential treatment to certain individuals.

### **Blackmail**

Threatening to reveal damaging information about someone unless they meet certain demands. It's

a criminal offense.

## **Slander** —

Making false and damaging spoken statements about someone, which harms their reputation. (If written, it's called libel).

## **Physical Violence** —

Any act involving force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. It is a criminal act and a violation of personal safety.

## **Sexual Violence/Harassment** —

Sexual violence involves any sexual act committed against someone without their consent. Sexual harassment includes unwanted sexual advances, comments, or behaviour that creates a hostile environment.

This list is not exhaustive and there are many other actions, both physical and psychological, that can be classed as abuse if they are causing harm or distress to the victim

Abuse of power can happen in any setting and can take many forms and may not be obvious to anyone other than the victim. Those who misuse power are often skilled at hiding their behaviour, making it seem like a normal part of their working life or causing the victim to feel too ashamed, afraid or unsafe to speak up about it.



A woman with curly hair is sitting at a desk, looking down at papers with a distressed expression. Her hands are on her head, and several papers are floating in the air around her, suggesting a chaotic or overwhelming situation. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, yellowish light source in the background.

## **Abuse of Power: Scenarios**



## **Abuse of Power in the Workplace**

Consider the following scenarios of abuse of power in the context of the workplace.

Select 'Start' to begin.

## Step 2

### Manipulation



A manager does not want one of their employees to apply for an upcoming promotion due to a personal dislike and hopes the employee will resign. To achieve this, the manager begins withholding key information, avoids discussing career development, and deliberately omits any mention of the available promotion. Instead, they tell the employee they are underperforming and suggest they may be in trouble. This creates pressure on the employee to start job hunting elsewhere.

The manager is misusing their authority to manipulate the employee into leaving the company.

### Step 3

## Discrimination



A female CEO believes women make better managers and leaders. Acting on this bias, she prioritises promoting and coaching female employees while deliberately excluding male colleagues from employment, training, and advancement opportunities.

By favouring one gender over another, she is misusing her authority to make discriminatory decisions based on gender.

#### Step 4

## Embarrassment



A team leader publicly humiliates a colleague by retelling an embarrassing story from a past Christmas party, aiming to make the team laugh. They mock the employee's behaviour and even imitate them for comedic effect. This is done to gain social approval and appear fun or entertaining, but it comes at the expense of the employee's dignity.

The leader is misusing their position to belittle a team member for personal gain.

## Sexual Harassment



A male manager consistently hires female employees for his team and frequently engages in inappropriate behaviour, such as touching their arms or backs when walking past and making comments about their partners and sex lives. He often asks invasive personal questions, disguising them as harmless "jokes" or "banter."

Despite knowing the discomfort he causes, he relies on his position of authority to avoid accountability, making it difficult for employees to speak up.

## Step 6

### Blackmail



A team supervisor secretly installs monitoring software on an employee's computer to track their communications. Upon discovering private, critical comments about senior leadership, the supervisor uses this information to coerce the employee into working extra, unpaid hours.

They threaten to expose the messages if the employee doesn't comply; using their position unethically to blackmail and exploit the employee.

## Step 7

### Intimidation



A line manager routinely shouts at their team, using aggressive language and tone to enforce obedience. They frequently issue threats - such as being easily replaceable - when mistakes are made. This behaviour creates a hostile work environment rooted in fear.

The manager is misusing their authority to intimidate employees and maintain control through aggression.

**CONTINUE - Abuse of Power in Higher Education**

## **Abuse of Power in Higher Education**

Consider the following similar scenarios of abuse of power in the context of Higher Education.

Select 'Start' to begin.



## Step 2

### Manipulation



A lecturer dislikes a student who challenged them during a seminar. To make things difficult, the lecturer subtly undermines the student's work, delaying feedback, withholding important resources, and refusing to answer questions. They begin implying that the student may not pass unless they "put in more effort" without giving clear guidance.

The lecturer is misusing their academic authority to manipulate the student's confidence and academic progress.

## Discrimination



An administrator is responsible for allocating placements but consistently gives the most prestigious or conveniently located ones to students who match their own ethnic or cultural background, while others are overlooked or given less favourable options without justification.

The administrator is using their position to discriminate based on race or cultural bias, denying equal access to opportunities.

## Step 4

### Embarrassment



During a lecture, a professor reads aloud a student's assignment to the class as an example of "what not to do," mocking it's content and tone without the student's consent. The student is visibly uncomfortable, but the professor continues, claiming it's a "learning experience" for everyone.

The professor is abusing their authority to publicly humiliate the student, damaging their confidence for the sake of entertainment or control.

## Step 5

### Sexual Harassment



A member of professional support staff who provides pastoral support often compliments a student on their appearance, lingers in conversations, and uses inappropriate humour during one-to-one appointments. They frequently find reasons to initiate out of hours communication. When the student tries to create distance, the staff member becomes cold and unhelpful.

The staff member is exploiting the imbalance of power to engage in unwanted and inappropriate behaviour under the guise of providing support.

## Blackmail



A tutor discovers that a student has been late submitting assignments due to personal issues disclosed in confidence. Instead of offering support, the tutor threatens to escalate the matter through academic penalties not in accordance with university policies, unless the student agrees to assist with unpaid research tasks outside their course requirements.

The tutor is using private information to coerce the student, leveraging institutional power for personal gain.



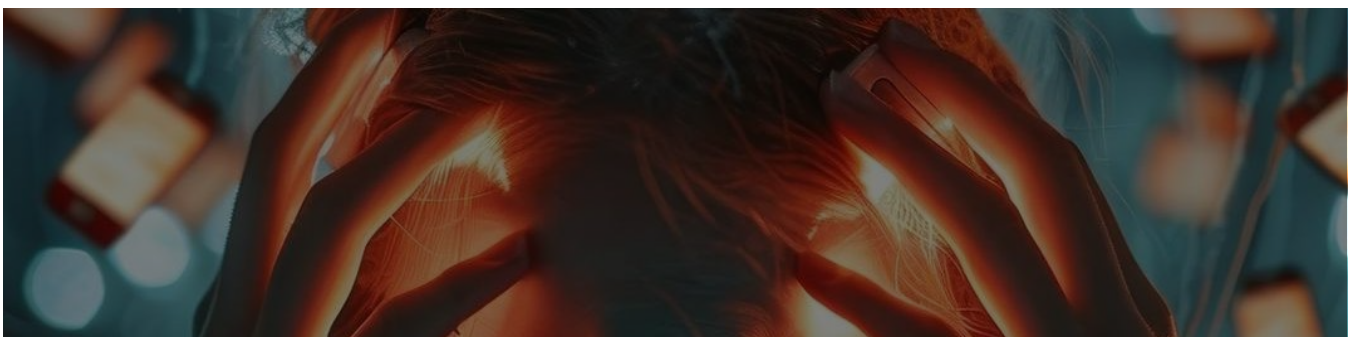
## Step 7


### Intimidation



A programme lead regularly speaks harshly to students in emails, threatening academic penalties for minor infractions and implying that complaints will “go nowhere.” In group settings, they single out students with critical questions, making sarcastic remarks and reminding them who holds the authority over grades.

The programme lead is abusing their position to intimidate students into silence and submission.





---

## Harmful Effects of Abuse of Power

Abuse of power can have severe and long lasting negative effects on more than the just the victim. It will almost certainly harm the victims wellbeing, but it can have wider impact on whole teams or groups, productivity and the culture of the organisation.

Victims may experience:

1

Reduced productivity

2

Increased absenteeism

3

Hostile workplaces

4

Reduced mental wellbeing and anxiety

5

Reduced physical wellbeing including less sleep more frequent illnesses

6

Sense of isolation and/or feelings of hopelessness

7

A disconnect from people around them

8

Feeling unsafe

Organisations, including universities, may experience:

1

High turnover in staff

2

Higher withdrawal rates

3

Low attendance from staff and students

4

Low morale


5

Low productivity

6

Harassment claims and complaints





## Preventing an Abuse of Power

Preventing being the victim of Abuse of Power is not always in your control.

It is often difficult if you are the victim to speak out and look for resolutions, it may feel easier to leave.

There are proactive steps you can take to protect yourself and reduce the risk of being isolated or vulnerable to Abuse of Power:

1

Completing this tutorial so you understand and can recognise what Abuse of Power is

2

Become familiar with other University Policies such as Dignity at Work

## **Remember it's not your fault!**

If someone abuses their power, they are the one in the wrong, not you. You are never to blame for someone else's misconduct, and you deserve to be heard, respected, and safe.



## **University of Greater Manchester Staff and Student Relationships**

The University actively values good professional relationships between employees and students that are based on mutual trust and respect. Although the University recognises that human beings do become attracted to and involved with one another without deliberate intent and that such relationships may be desired by both parties and genuinely affectionate, with the exception of some limited excluded relationships, the

University prohibits intimate personal relationships between staff and students, and considers it as unprofessional for an employee to seek to initiate or pursue a relationship of this kind. An intimate personal relationship means a relationship that involves one or more of the following elements:

i. physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity;

or

ii. romantic or emotional intimacy

See the University Policy on Consensual Relationships within the [Student Policy Zone](#) for the current academic year and this tutorial on Abuse of Power for further information.

---

## How to Report

The University of Greater Manchester takes a zero tolerance approach towards harassment, bullying, discrimination, victimisation, and sexual misconduct in any form. All allegations of such behaviours where the perpetrator is a member of the University

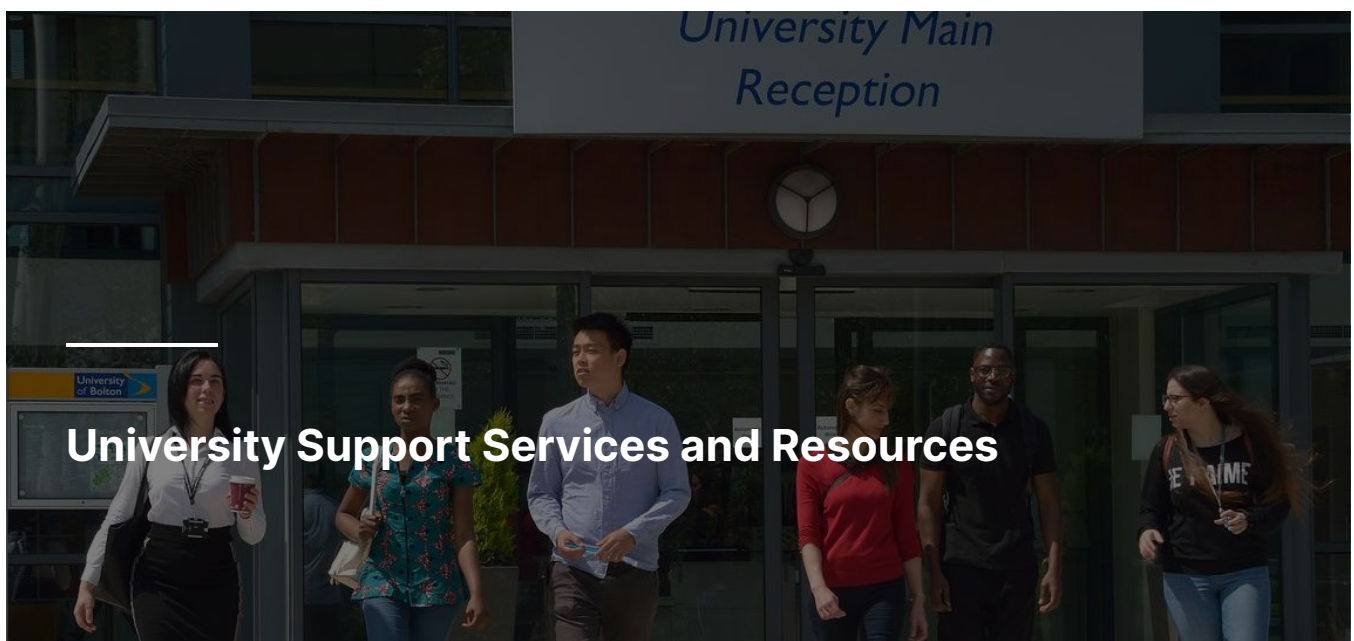
community will be investigated at the request of the victim guided by our Dignity at Study Policy and Procedure, ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address and prevent recurrence.

The University is committed to addressing concerns promptly and fairly. We aim to handle issues impartially and effectively, with sensitivity to all parties involved. Furthermore, the University is committed to protecting individuals from victimisation or retaliation for raising concerns about harassment, bullying, discrimination, victimisation, or sexual misconduct in good faith. We strive to create a safe and supportive environment where all members of our community can learn, work, and thrive without fear of mistreatment or discrimination.

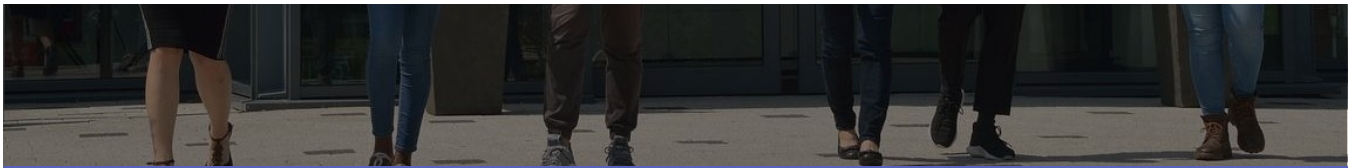
### **Student Safety Webpage**

If you have experienced any unwanted behaviours from others outside of the University community, you can find out more information about the support available to you, including external services and resources via our Student Safety webpage

[VISIT WEBPAGE](#)







## The Life Lounge —

The University's Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Service provides free, confidential mental health and wellbeing support for all current students studying at the University of Greater Manchester; including a Wellbeing Team, Mental Health Advisor Service, Counselling Service and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Service.

For further information:

- Website: [Life Lounge](#)
- Telephone: 01024 903566
- Email: [lifelounge@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:lifelounge@bolton.ac.uk)
- Call in person: The Life Lounge, Chancellors Building, Eagle Tower, T2

## Chaplaincy and Multi-faith Service —

The University's chaplaincy team provide free pastoral support for students and staff, irrespective of religion and belief. You do not have to be of religious faith to seek support from the chaplaincy. They provide a safe, confidential space to discuss concerns, alongside signposting advice and guidance. If needed the chaplain can put you into contact with someone of your faith.

- Chaplain: Dr Gill Smart
- Email: [chaplain@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:chaplain@bolton.ac.uk)
- Telephone/Text: 07967585670
- Call in person: Chaplaincy, Chancellors Building, the bottom of Eagle Tower - Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 10:00am- 1:00pm.

## Dignity at Study —

The University of Bolton is firmly committed to fostering an environment of equality, respect, and inclusivity for all students. We firmly believe that every member of our community deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. The University has a zero-tolerance approach towards harassment, bullying, discrimination, victimisation, and sexual misconduct in any form.

If you have experienced any incidents of bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation and/or sexual misconduct, by a member of the university community, we would encourage you to report this to the University's Dignity at Study Champions, via the [Dignity at Study Reporting form](#).

If you have experienced any unwanted behaviours from others outside of the University community, you can find out more information about the support available to you, including external services and resources via our [Student Safety](#) webpage.

In the case of an emergency, If you or someone you know is at immediate risk of harm please contact the police on 999. For non-urgent concerns please contact 101.

## Spectrum.Life —

Offers a 24/7 confidential in the moment service that provides support to students. The service is available 24/7, 365 days a year covering numerous topics such as: Stress, Anxiety, Low mood, Loss & Grief, Relationship problems, and much more. You can access it through a confidential, freephone telephone line, an online chat function through the platform or by requesting a call back.

- Telephone: 0800 031 8227
- Website: <https://uniofbolton.spectrum.life/login?org=UoBWell>
- WhatsApp: Text 'Hi' to 07418 360 780
- Opening Hours: 24/7

## Students' Union —

The Students' Union (SU) is run by students and represents all University of Greater Manchester students. The SU has an elected President and is independent of the University to

ensure student's interests are recognised and voiced. The Students' Union provides support, advice and guidance on a range of topics including academic matters, health and welfare, student voice and community-based events and activities to support your general wellbeing. The Students' Union is also a hate crime reporting centre to which a trained advisor is available to support students who have directly experienced or witnessed hate crime.

You can find out more information about what support is available at the Students' Union via the contact details below:

- Website: [Bolton Students' Union](#)
- Telephone: 01204 900850
- Email: [info@boltonsu.com](mailto:info@boltonsu.com)
- Call in person: The Students Union, Chancellors Building, Chancellors Mall

## Key Take Aways

Abuse of power happens when someone in a position of authority (like a manager or teacher) use their role unfairly or harmfully, often to control or take advantage of others.

This can include:

1

Bullying or intimidation

2

Favouritism or unfair treatment

3

Manipulating rules to suit themselves

4

Silencing or punishing people who speak out

Power should always be used responsibly - to support, protect, and lead fairly - not to dominate or control. Everyone has a right to feel safe, respected, and treated equally, no matter who is in charge. Speaking up or reporting abuse of power is important, and there are policies and support systems in place to help.