



UK Research  
and Innovation

# A Culture of Dignity, Respect and Anti-bullying, Harassment and Discrimination

## A plan for action



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# A safe and respectful workplace for all of us



**Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser** (*Chief Executive*)

Culture plays a pivotal yet often unseen role in shaping how we feel and interact with one another. UKRI's success in delivering our ambition to 'transform tomorrow together' through a thriving research and innovation system hinges on our people's diverse talents and perspectives, and fostering an environment where safety, respect, and inclusivity are paramount.

Bullying, harassment and discriminatory behaviours have no place in our organisation. They are not only harmful, unwelcome, and incompatible with our values but can have severe consequences for individuals, teams and our collective success.

While we can never wholly eradicate incidences due to the intricacies of human behaviour, it remains imperative that we address these issues head-on. Tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach that permeates every aspect of our organisation.

Our dignity, respect and anti-BHD plan emphasises prevention, addressing the root causes of uncivil and inappropriate behaviour. Enhancing our training, policies, and processes provides a framework, but culture change must come from a consolidated and coordinated approach across all parts of UKRI. This requires the collective responsibility and action of each one of us individually.

Let us create an organisation that sets the standard for dignity, respect, and inclusivity in the research and innovation system - an environment where we support each other to thrive individually and collectively. In this kind of workplace, BHD is simply not tolerated.

It is not a task we can accomplish overnight. Culture change takes time, commitment, and collective effort. However, I am confident in our ability to create a workplace where every individual can thrive to their full potential.

***Foreword by Dame Professor Ottoline Leyser***

# Introduction

Bullying, harassment and discrimination (BHD) have no place in our organisation. In UKRI, we employ over 8,000 people across diverse roles and places, integral to the UK's world-class research and innovation system. This dignity, respect, and anti-bullying in the workplace plan embodies our commitment to ensuring that everyone feels safe, respected, valued and empowered to carry out their work.

Feedback and evidence from our People Survey, independent anti-BHD review, and other sources emphasise the need for action to foster the diverse and inclusive culture we envision, one that encourages respectful challenge, feedback, and collaboration while firmly rejecting negative behaviours.

We must tackle this from all directions and at all levels in an integrated and holistic way through an approach that:

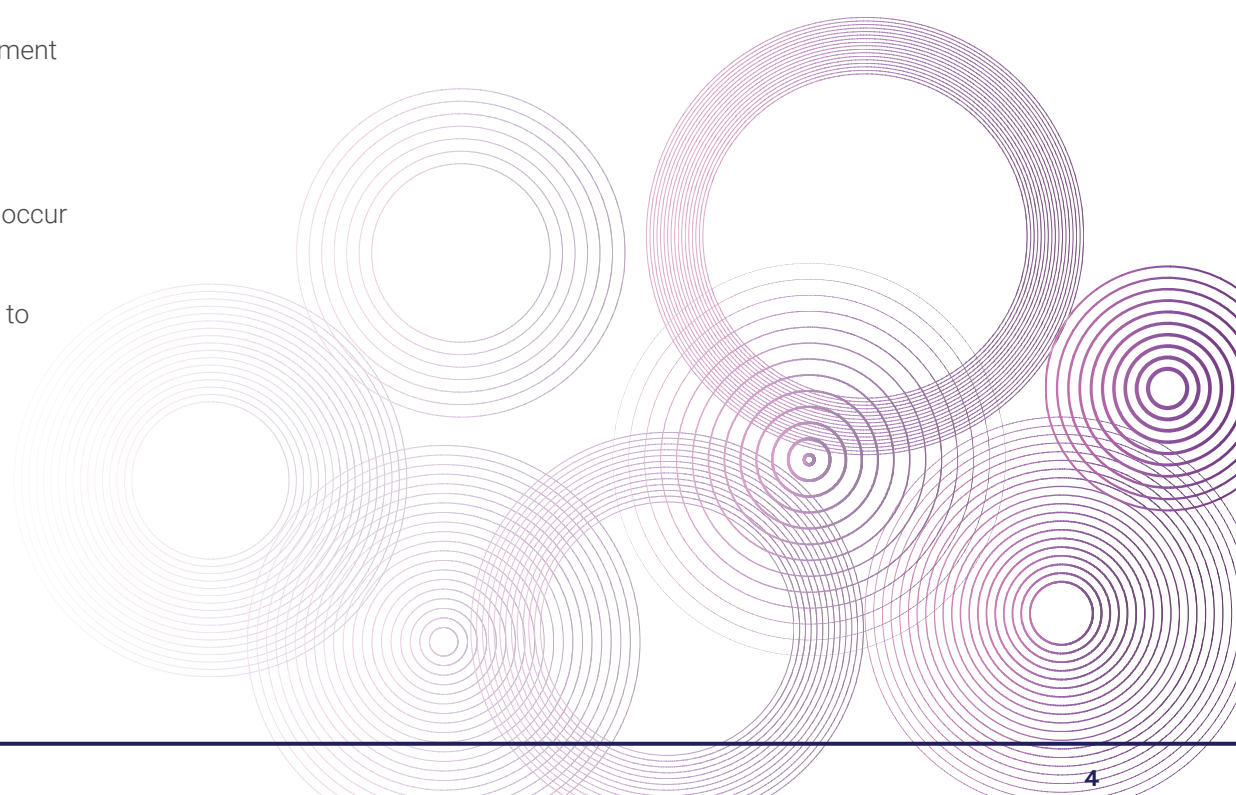
- prevents acts of exclusion and BHD by addressing their systemic causes
- demonstrates a visible commitment from leadership and senior management
- enables early intervention to offer the best possible potential for a good outcome and restoring relationships
- responds robustly, proportionately and consistently where incidences do occur

We all have a shared responsibility to create a working environment where different perspectives, skills, and experiences are valued and can contribute to our success.

# Shaping our future with every voice

UKRI aims to be a world-class organisation. Our people are crucial in bringing our strategy of transforming tomorrow together into reality. They are our greatest strength, and we value the insights our employees continue to provide to help us understand what we can do better.

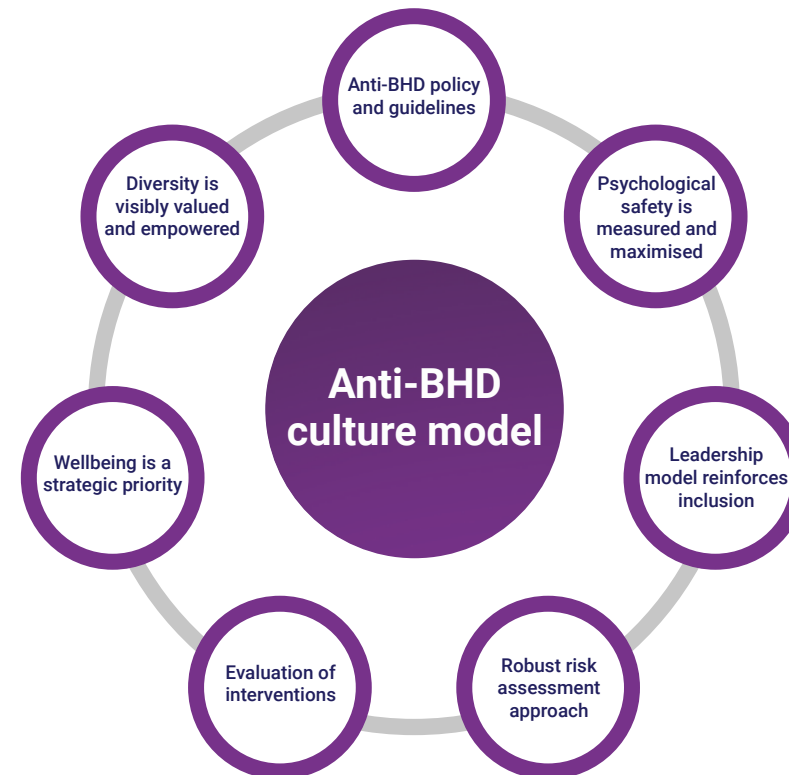
Our strategic frameworks and action plans support this in complementary ways. Our goal to have a more collaborative, diverse and inclusive organisational culture is supported by our Workforce EDI plan, People Plan and People Standards. These are rooted in UKRI's values and share common outcomes, setting out how we can effect change by taking action across our different systems, policies, processes, and practices.



# An evidence-base for action

To develop an evidence-based plan to address BHD, we needed to understand better why it happens and how it manifests in our culture. We commissioned an independent review that explored the landscape and relevant literature to create a model that brings together seven critical aspects of developing and maintaining a safe environment where BHD is actively excluded.

## The seven key components of an anti-BHD culture



The review evaluated our current practices and employee experiences against this and triangulated them into key findings. Nearly a quarter of our workforce (2,249) responded to the anonymous pulse survey, and a cross-section participated in focus groups and one to one interviews.

## Actions to take

The review identified that although there has been great progress in our work to build a solid culture of respect, dignity, and inclusion, we are at an early stage of this journey. It suggested that we need to take further action to:

- Increase trust and clarity in our policies, processes and management of BHD, including:
  - clear roles and accountability
  - prevention
  - early resolution
  - formal action where necessary
- Build inclusive leadership and management capability to:
  - counteract power imbalance and hierarchical-related BHD
  - address uncivil behaviours that impact individuals irrespective of their intent
  - enhance approaches to leading and managing others
  - provide clarity on what amounts to BHD
- Increase psychological safety so people feel confident and able to:
  - speak up, challenge and report behaviours without fear of retaliation or exclusion
  - provide and receive feedback respectfully from a place of curiosity, understanding the impact rather than intentions
  - be open about mistakes and normalising learning from what happened, not who is to blame
- Ensure that our approach to addressing BHD includes cyberbullying and the different ways we do our work, such as fieldwork, remote and hybrid working.
- Address wellbeing and a culture of overwork and provide more signposting and support to those impacted by BHD.

- Manage BHD as a risk to UKRI, improving and using data to tackle potential BHD more effectively, target interventions, evaluate their effectiveness and enable continuous improvement, especially for staff with one or more protected characteristics, whom we know are more likely to experience BHD.

Although this did not come out as a key theme in the review, we will include clear consideration of sexual harassment within actions throughout this plan due to its unique nature, severe impact and need for specialised support and management.



# Our commitment to change

The most effective way to minimise BHD is to improve our cultural 'settings' to expose and address such behaviours. Our People Standards define how we are expected to approach our work by highlighting the core behaviours and attitudes required by colleagues. It is more than a mandate; it is about how we each choose to treat others at work. We should all embrace our People Standards and make them an embedded part of how we do things.

UKRI is also uniquely positioned to influence and shape the broader research and innovation system culture in our role as a funder and partner. Our culture and how we operate set an example for others in how we engage the sector and foster the environment needed for research and innovation excellence.

We are founding members of the Forum to Tackle Bullying and Harassment. Our approach embeds and builds upon the shared principles developed by the forum, focusing on positive behaviours and culture, supporting and challenging the sector, and reflecting on and improving what we do to prevent and tackle BHD.

## How we will do this

### We will champion an anti-BHD culture by making sure:

- We are committed and transparent.
- We focus on preventing and tackling BHD where it occurs.
- Everyone, individually and collectively, has an important role.
- We create a culture of responsibility, accountability and curiosity where we learn from experience.

### We will promote good citizenship by making sure:

- We respect and model good behaviours, always being mindful and accepting of those from different functions and backgrounds.
- We encourage people to be 'good citizens', taking responsibility for the impact of their own actions and for calling out the inappropriate behaviour of others.

### We will advocate for transformative change by making sure:

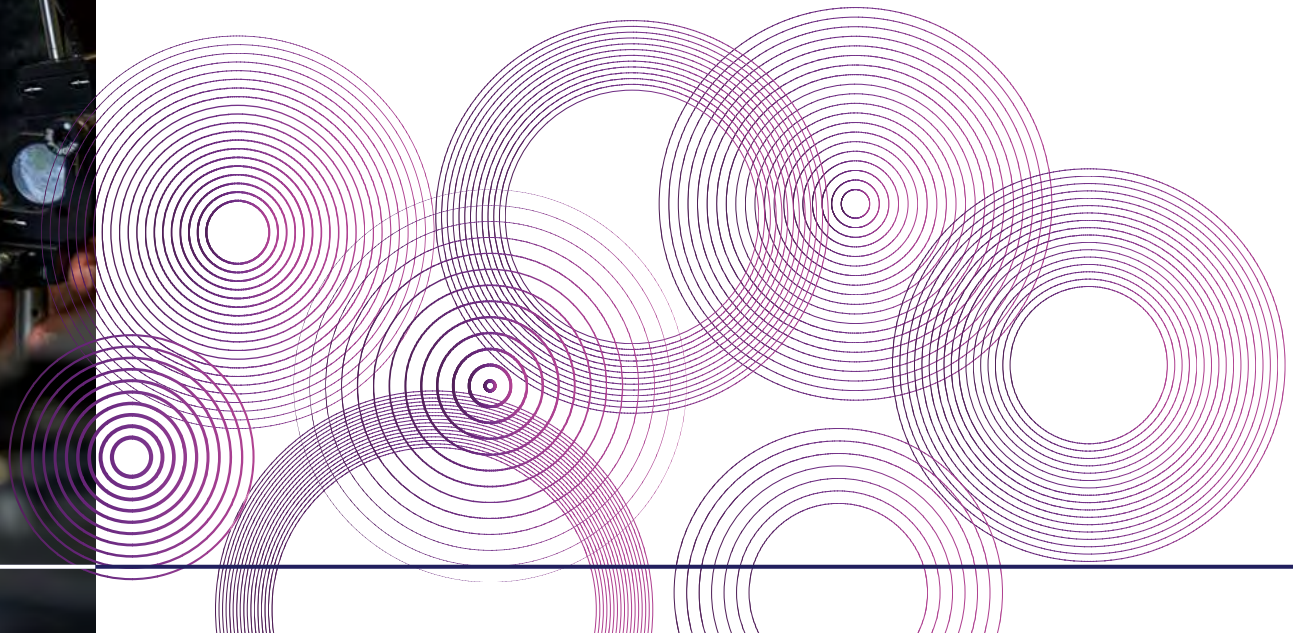
- We champion transformative institution-wide cultural change, informed by data and executed by focused resources.
- We use our experiences to influence positive change and share what we learn about anti-BHD practice to help others to build upon and create promising practices elsewhere in the sector.

# A unified UKRI approach supported by local leadership

This plan provides an overarching framework for the whole organisation. It sets out the systems and processes needed. Notably, the actions will clarify our expectations of behaviour, and provide consistency in approach and experience wherever an employee works in UKRI.

Our people work in a diversity of places – in offices, labs, at home and even onboard ships in the Antarctic. Different but strongly aligned approaches and additional actions may be needed to address context-specific challenges. Local People Plans will continue to detail these actions.

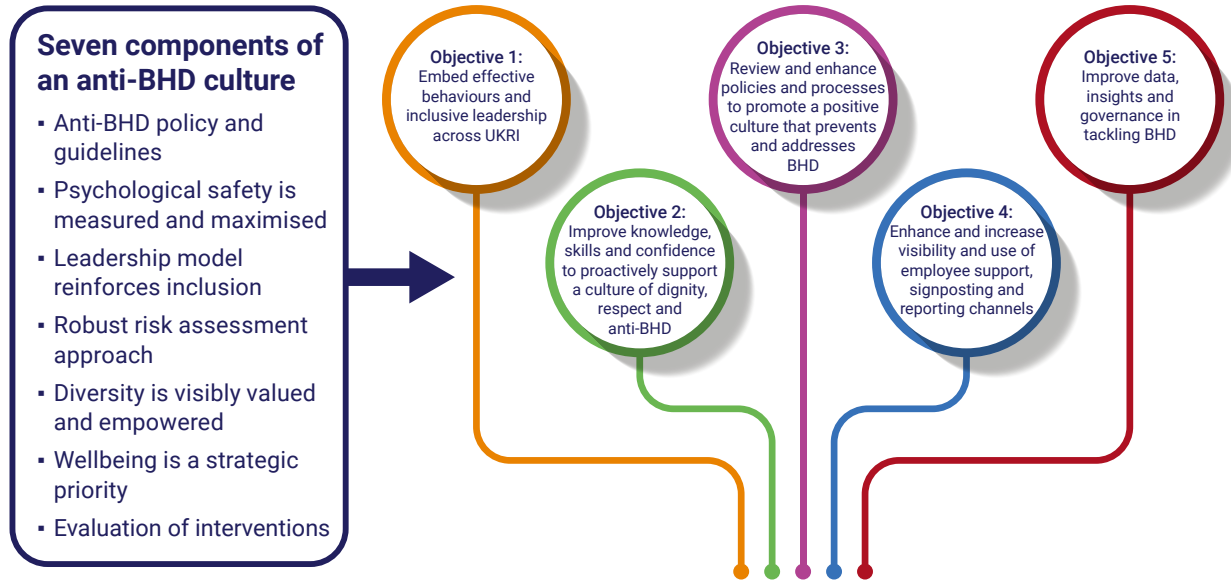
The success of our dignity, respect and anti-BHD plan relies on all leaders, managers and individuals supporting, embedding, owning and communicating actions and progress within their areas.





# Objectives and actions

Our approach focuses on five objectives underpinned by the seven overlapping components of an anti-BHD culture. The actions within each objective all contribute to a culture where BHD is not tolerated. Many of these actions are already underway or planned, and others will run over the next three years and beyond. We must be ambitious while also creating sustainable change within our existing resources. This means some changes will be quick to implement, and others will take time to do and embed.



**Culture of dignity, respect and anti-bullying, harassment and discrimination**

## Objective 1: Embed effective behaviours and inclusive leadership across UKRI

**Inclusive behaviours nurture an environment where all individuals feel respected and heard. Relationships underpin everything we do at UKRI. When we embrace diversity, demonstrate empathy towards others, and provide feedback and challenge from a place of curiosity, it reduces the likelihood of BHD occurring.**

The anti-BHD review highlighted that we must develop these capabilities in our leaders, managers and colleagues and diversify leadership at all levels. This will counteract the potential for power imbalances and hierarchical-related BHD, increase psychological safety, share responsibility for wellbeing and improve decision-making. These findings are in line with our own understanding of colleagues' experience of working in UKRI. We will continue to enhance our established work programme to embed effective behaviours, strengthen leadership and line management at all levels and build a culture of inclusion, wellbeing and psychological safety.

By embracing diversity and difference in leadership and creating avenues for under-represented groups, we enrich decision-making with many perspectives, stimulating innovation and creativity and ensuring we value everyone's voices and contributions.

Senior leaders must visibly demonstrate their commitment to improving UKRI's culture by exemplifying inclusive and anti-BHD behaviours. This involves welcoming various perspectives, seeking feedback and different views, asking what was responsible, not who, when mistakes happen, and holding themselves and their teams accountable for a respectful and safe work environment.

Effective management balances firmness with respect, ensuring clear expectations and constructive feedback are provided without causing harm or distress.

'Borderline' behaviours also do not represent the culture we want. While some colleagues' experiences reflect intentional BHD acts that require intervention, it is recognised that most employees do not intend to offend or harm. The focus, should be on the impact rather than intent. The opportunity is to support personal development so that both intent and actions support a positive anti-BHD culture.

Embedding inclusive behaviours will clearly define expected positive behaviours, aid in BHD prevention, encourage early conflict resolution and address those behaviours that fall short of this standard.

### We will

- Continue to evolve UKRI's leadership programmes – explicitly embedding inclusion into the content and widening access, and supporting participation from diverse groups
- Develop an approach to implement upskill apprenticeships for employees in leadership qualifications
- Develop and implement development programmes for diverse talent
- Embed inclusive leadership behaviours into the employee lifecycle including inclusive talent attraction and recruitment, incorporating People Standards into recruitment and assessment for UKRI roles, and piloting the People Standards in early career talent attraction
- Enhance the mentoring approach within UKRI: diversify the one UKRI mentoring approach and availability of a wide range of mentors via the UKRI mentoring platform to support role modelling for all. We will also strengthen being mentored as a development opportunity for existing and new line managers
- Introduce a reverse mentoring programme for senior leaders to enable deeper understanding of diverse staff experiences and accelerate development of a feedback culture
- Diversify the leadership talent pool within public and senior appointments including enhancing data monitoring of applicants and publishing data on leadership and board diversity
- Enhance senior leaders' active sponsorship and allyship of staff networks
- Continue working to enhance leadership visibility beyond 'seeing leaders' to include visible role modelling and leadership
- Develop a role model and allyship programme which includes dignity, respect, anti-BHD and active bystanding behaviours

## Objective 2: Improve knowledge, skills and confidence to proactively support a culture of dignity, respect and anti-BHD

**Improving our knowledge, skills, and confidence is about a collective commitment. By taking actions that equip every person in UKRI to recognise and feel safe addressing inappropriate behaviours early on; we can all play a part in a sustained change that delivers the inclusive culture necessary for our success.**

The anti-BHD review suggested there is a lack of shared understanding about what BHD is and that some uncivil behaviours are normalised within our culture or excused as 'just the way a person is'.

It identified inconsistencies in how inappropriate behaviours are managed across UKRI and that behaviours sometimes do not stop. When people experience BHD, they are not confident that managers and HR can stop it. When individuals witness BHD, they generally do not speak up or see others, including managers and leaders, challenging.

To make BHD culturally unacceptable, we need to build psychological safety, providing reassurance that people can speak up or report without fear of consequences. Constructive conflict, disagreements and feedback focused on issues rather than individuals can drive creativity and progress, contributing to our success. So we will continue to embed the effective, inclusive behaviours that drive curiosity, creativity and innovation in a psychologically safe environment. But we must also equip our workforce, especially managers, with the skills and confidence to manage performance effectively and successfully address conflicts and interpersonal issues to reduce their potential to escalate into BHD. This proactive approach in people management will not only resolve issues quickly but also help conflicts become growth opportunities rather than grounds for grievance.

We will introduce mandatory BHD training to ensure all employees, including those who may not seek out such development opportunities, have the skills to identify unacceptable behaviours and are equipped with the tools to respond to incidents effectively. A cultural shift cannot come just from training and robust processes but from embedding and reinforcing the People Standards, which will continually reset and reinforce inclusive, supportive, and respectful behaviour norms.

### We will

- Develop and implement mandatory, UKRI-specific anti-BHD and sexual harassment e-learning for all employees
- Develop and implement line manager dignity and respect, conflict management and anti-BHD training to set out expectations of managers and improve capability to spot and resolve behaviours and tension informally and early, where appropriate
- Continue to develop, promote and improve a sustainable, evidence-based core EDI curriculum that increases awareness, understanding and embracing of difference, including: redeveloping EDI fundamentals, introducing disability awareness and maximising use of our digital learning platform
- Continue and scale up provision of active bystander training and development of resources, with a focus on sustainability and scalability of learning opportunities
- Embed People Standards across UKRI's learning opportunities
- Develop and improve employee and line manager guidance and toolkits in areas where conflict and BHD can occur to support effective employee relations including areas such as inclusion, performance and hybrid working
- Expand line manager scenario workshops as a safe space to share experiences and discuss topics with peers across UKRI, including specific scenarios / case studies related to the People Standards and where conflict/BHD can occur
- Continue to develop the HR function to operate inclusively and meet the diverse needs of UKRI, including a programme of workshops and learning activities
- Redevelop the corporate and local employee inductions to include the People Standards, expectations of behaviour and how to report/manage BHD

## Objective 3: Review and enhance policies and processes to promote a positive culture that prevents and addresses BHD

**Effective policies and processes respond to BHD incidents and prevent them from occurring. They provide a clear, tangible framework for action, establish expectations, and ensure accountability to support the positive culture we want to grow.**

The review supported plans to refresh and improve the bullying and harassment and related policies and highlighted a need for more guidance to support and bring the policies to life. This includes incorporating discrimination, content on cyberbullying, the role of bystanders and spotting BHD in scenarios such as hybrid working.

The review raised a need for clear processes for third party bullying and harassment towards our employees, given UKRI's role as a funder and partner in the broader sector and how we handle complaints about staff behaviour towards others, including those who supply us with services.

We need to increase confidence in our policies and the independence of reporting and investigation processes, ensuring effective management of investigations, clear communication channels, confidentiality, and support for all parties involved, including witnesses and bystanders.

We must communicate clearly that positive behavioural competencies are valued and essential for UKRI's success. We will recognise and embed these into our culture by incorporating them into our performance, promotion and recruitment criteria.

To support managers feeling anxious about dealing with poor performance and accusations of bullying, and to ensure systems are used appropriately by all colleagues, we need clear guidance on what's okay and what's not when managing performance, setting goals, and giving feedback. It's important to encourage victims and bystanders to report bullying but clarify that false or malicious accusations may result in disciplinary action. This is usually a nuanced area where there can be a spectrum of behaviours from both managers and their staff where expectations, intent and impact can interact in complex ways.

To navigate these situations, we will support our staff, particularly managers, in building knowledge, having confident conversations and having the right tools to create safe and thriving environments for everyone in their team. This will include topics focused on the experiences of different groups, such as workplace adjustments, as we know that colleagues from under-represented groups are more likely to experience negative behaviours.

## Objective 3: Review and enhance policies and processes to promote a positive culture that prevents and addresses BHD (cont.)

### We will

- Review and revise the raising concerns suite of policies, particularly the current bullying and harassment policy in line with best practice and to reflect areas such as cyberbullying. Ensure guidance includes examples and advice to enable consistent application within UKRI
- Review relevant policies to reflect the People Standards as part of policy review and refresh, including strengthening the code of conduct to reflect an anti-BHD culture
- Create specific guidance and policy content on sexual harassment in the workplace
- Develop, implement and communicate a process/policy for third party BHD to include behaviours towards UKRI staff from third parties and UKRI staff behaviour towards third parties.
- Develop and publish externally an Anti-BHD statement and principles as part of a public statement of commitment to preventing workplace bullying
- Establish a centralised list of mediators and undertake a needs analysis for refresher training/training more mediators
- Continue to review and adapt UKRI's performance management systems and processes, including use of the People Standards, guidance on scenarios that can trigger BHD and giving/receiving feedback in a psychologically safe way
- Review the processes and support for and during claims of BHD including: the formal processes to ensure consistent application, refresher training and training more investigators, using independent services to investigate allegations where appropriate, and improving communications, check-ins and support for all parties impacted by BHD throughout and after the process
- Strengthen exit feedback mechanisms for those leaving or transferring to new roles within UKRI, including specific requests for employees to complete exit survey and interviews confidentially, reviewing questions to ensure we are capturing the right data
- Review and implement a refreshed UKRI health and safety policy to strengthen the importance wellbeing and psychological safety at work
- Develop a change toolkit and access to line manager training and support to facilitate effective organisational-level, local and team-based change
- Continue to use the activity analysis and organisational change programme to identify ways to reduce resource pressures

## Objective 4: Enhance and increase visibility and use of employee support, signposting and reporting channels

**Growing a culture of dignity, respect and anti-BHD where everyone feels respected and secure must be clearly and consistently reinforced through visible leadership, effective employee support, safe and easy ways to report concerns, and ongoing dialogue with colleagues.**

We aim to prevent instances of inappropriate behaviour proactively. In cases where such behaviour occurs, our priority is to ensure that employees feel safe and supported to address or report any negative behaviours they have experienced or witnessed and for issues to be resolved effectively, swiftly, and with care.

Workload and pressure of work continue to be a key concern for colleagues who highlight that we need to do more to prioritise and reduce work, calibrating it with resources. We know where there is poor wellbeing and stress, people are less likely to work inclusively or feel safe and resilient, both increasing incidents of BHD and further exacerbating stress and wellbeing.

Through the organisational change programme and activity analysis, we continue to identify ways to improve UKRI's design and processes to enable colleagues to do their best work and improve wellbeing.

The review highlighted that we need to increase the visibility and accessibility of our wellbeing provision and enhance employee support so all colleagues can more easily access the services they need and, in cases of BHD, are offered ongoing support throughout the reporting, investigation and resolution process.

We know there are barriers to people challenging and reporting BHD. These include feeling safe to do so in the first place, being confident that it will be addressed, and having easy ways to report BHD or concerns. It is vital to address reporting and build a culture of raising concerns to protect our employees and identify patterns and trends that can inform targeted interventions to tackle systemic issues and prevent future incidents.

Communication and employee engagement are crucial to building a positive workplace culture. This includes regular reinforcement of messages focused on dignity, respect and anti-BHD. We know that employees, especially those from under-represented groups, want us to listen, take action, and be more open in our communication to make UKRI the best organisation it can be.

### We will

- Develop, implement and embed an easy to use and accessible anonymous reporting tool for raising concerns at UKRI
- Launch the wellbeing ambassadors network and ally training
- Run UKRI wide wellbeing events, campaigns and resources
- Ensure BHD and inclusion are specific requirements and assessed as part of the procurement of the new Employee Assistance Programme provider
- Ensure BHD and inclusion are specific requirements and assessed in the procurement of occupational health providers
- Develop a network of 'first responders', trained individuals to act as a confidential first port of call for any concerns
- Long-term exploring the need for a dedicated fair treatment ambassador scheme
- Build reasonable adjustments into the workplace adjustments passport and ongoing support and return to work plans
- Continue to develop and support UKRI's staff networks as safe spaces for under-represented groups
- Improve employee access to core information, content and support relating to dignity, respect and anti-BHD
- Regularly engage staff at all levels to reinforce dignity and respect and continue building a psychologically safe and positive workplace culture through our communications, campaigns and events; including updates on our progress, visibility of how to report BHD, and campaigns to both highlight BHD issues and celebrate our people
- Introduce a regular listening circle initiative with leaders across UKRI and develop a listening toolkit to facilitate sharing of experiences and feedback in a safe, appropriate and complementary way to the People Survey

## Objective 5: Improve data, insights and governance in tackling BHD

**Further improving data, insights, and governance to tackle BHD will help us to continue to better understand and monitor its scope and impact by identifying trends, patterns, and common triggers. It will also enable us to target actions effectively, see if our actions are making a difference, and provide valuable feedback for continuous improvement.**

The review suggested improving our data collection, including centralised visibility of BHD data across UKRI. We will also more effectively triangulate different sources of evidence, such as from the People Survey, HR data and regular reviews, to give us greater insight and ensure we have measures to evaluate our actions, see what works, and embed continuous improvement.

The review reasserted the need for improved diversity data to understand better and address the risks associated with exclusion and BHD, and enhance employee experience, particularly for under-represented groups and those with protected characteristics at greater risk.

BHD is likely to be significantly under-reported at UKRI. Our actions to encourage reporting will likely look like a rise in incidences, but it will be a reassurance that there is more safety and confidence in reporting. This is paramount in giving us the data and evidence to target future activities effectively.

### We will

- Use our Employee Relations Data Working Group to review and support the central collation and triangulation of robust and meaningful data across UKRI
- Continue to publish BHD insights and progress as part of UKRI's diversity and annual reporting
- Improve the quality of UKRI's diversity data by increasing the sharing rates by employees to support the evidence-base for interventions and activities
- Continue to enhance and expand People Survey questions, feedback and insight to ensure UKRI is a great place to work – including enhanced evaluation of EDI and BHD data
- Continue the Anti-BHD Working Group of senior leaders to meet regularly to review and oversee progress of the action plan, taking personal accountability for championing a culture of dignity, respect and anti-BHD in their areas
- Establish a cross-UKRI operational group to share best practice, work and actions on work to improve culture
- Undertake a UKRI-level anti-BHD reaudit to track progress, support trust and psychological safety and identify recommendations

# Monitoring and tracking our progress

Our decision to pursue a holistic approach that aims to build an inclusive culture and tackle this issue from multiple angles is a deliberate one. Transparency and accountability are essential to our strategy.

We will clearly state our actions, report on our progress, and use evidence to inform decision-making. We will honestly acknowledge areas for improvement. This iterative process requires regular reflection on what constitutes a supportive working environment and making necessary changes accordingly.

We will evaluate our actions to assess their effectiveness and impact. To support us with this, we have refined our People Survey questions on BHD and outlined measures to provide richer data that we can benchmark against in future.

We will continue to enhance our measures and approach to evaluating this work, putting employee voices at the centre through our engagement surveys, wider feedback from staff, and a re-audit of BHD at UKRI.

And as we gain more evidence about the effectiveness of interventions, we will share these lessons with the sector to benefit everyone working in the research and innovation system.







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**Accessibility:** To request copies of this plan in a different format, please contact the Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team at UKRI:

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