

## R.E.S.P E.C.T....find out what it means to me

Mental health has never been so high on the agenda for businesses (and individuals) as it is since Covid-19 reared its ugly head. Covid has had a big impact on work, unemployment and people's health. To that end maintaining dignity and respect at work is essential.

How many of you reading this know that bullying has no legal definition? Harassment though does and has got its own place on the UKs anti-discrimination laws.

The Equality Act defines harassment as unwanted conduct that is related to a protected characteristic (sex, age, race, sexual orientation, etc). That conduct must have the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating and intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment is quite broad in its meaning. Fundamentally it focuses on what the person who feels harassed individually thinks. The person does not have to be the subject of the conduct or the comment: it is the taking of offence that is the trigger. A harmless remark to one person might be something deeply offensive.

The legal test for harassment requires having regard to the other circumstances of the case as well as whether it is reasonable for that conduct to have that effect. In simple terms, what would a reasonable observer think of the conduct or comments. That is why it is difficult to know, without knowing much more.

The moral of this story is, all staff, regardless of rank or level, should think before they speak. Ensure you work with HR to ensure your policies and procedures stack up and are fit for purpose.

If you want your policies reviewed to make sure they are fit for purpose during the pandemic and beyond, please contact us at IHRS.

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## About the Author

### KATHERINE WATKINS

Katherine has over 20 years' international experience working in HR, across various sectors, including financial services, insurance and regulated environments. Over the years, she has collaborated with some exceptionally talented HR professionals, with whom she has joined forces on special projects. Her network of HR professionals provides advice and training to companies and other HR teams.

In her role with UKGI Group, Katherine heads up the Human Resources Consultancy and provides objective support to firms on employment law and HR issues. She uses her extensive skills and knowledge to work with firms to help them develop strong and resilient HR strategies and establish healthy organisational cultures.

Katherine holds a degree in Business Administration and Management from the University of Northampton and a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Strategies from London Metropolitan University. She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (FCIPD).

