

# **WORKING TOGETHER: GUIDANCE ON RAISING CONCERNS AND CHALLENGING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

## **Guidelines**

THIS GUIDANCE IS FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS AND OUR STAFF WHO SUPPORT OR WORK  
ALONGSIDE THEM

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## Working Together: Guidance on Raising Concerns and Challenging Inappropriate Behaviour

### 1 What's the purpose of this Guidance?

- 1.1 Our volunteers make an essential contribution to our work. However, when people work together, problems can occasionally arise. If you have any concerns, including about behaviour that you feel is inappropriate, it's important to raise them, so that they can be addressed in a fair, open and consistent way.
- 1.2 As a volunteer and/or member, you are our eyes and ears. If you spot an issue that our staff are not yet aware of, we rely on you to either address it or raise awareness about it.
- 1.3 As a trusted brand, our reputation is one of our key assets. An unaddressed concern or issue could damage our reputation, making it difficult for us to engage with our members, government departments, and our academic and corporate partners. That's why if you have a concern, you must raise it quickly and effectively.
- 1.4 This document:
  - 1.4.1 Provides guidance, a simple framework and an escalation route to help you raise a concern in a timely, effective way.
  - 1.4.2 Demonstrates that there is a fair process to follow, to support you in raising your concerns.
- 1.5 Our core values – Integrity, Excellence and Teamwork – are essential elements of our culture. We also have a [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#), which all volunteers must comply with. If you want to raise a concern about something that falls short of our core values – or the standards of our Code of Conduct for Volunteers – you should do so, in a polite and timely way.
- 1.6 This Guidance is intended to accompany our [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#). It's not intended to replace our [Rules of Conduct](#) or [Disciplinary Regulations](#), or our staff disciplinary process.
- 1.7 If you're looking for tips on how to resolve a dispute or disagreement (provided that nobody has breached our policies or broken the law) see [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#).
- 1.8 If you have a query, suggestion or general complaint, please contact our Member and Customer Services team. For more information on complaints, please read our Complaints Procedure.

### 2 Who is this Guidance for?

- 2.1 This Guidance is for our volunteers and our staff who support or work alongside them. Everyone involved must follow this Guidance; if you have any concerns, you must raise them – doing nothing is not acceptable.
- 2.2 If you find it difficult to raise your concerns, you may prefer to follow the escalation procedure outlined in [section 6](#) below.

### **3 Overview of this Guidance**

- 3.1 This Guidance aims to help volunteers understand how to raise any concerns they may have and to challenge inappropriate behaviour – we have summarised the latter in a handy flowchart (see [Appendix 2](#)), which also includes tips on resolving disagreements.
- 3.2 It applies to issues affecting volunteers who are involved in IET-related activities, like running an event, carrying out an assessment or taking part in a committee meeting.

### **4 How to raise a concern**

- 4.1 If you have a concern about something that is inappropriate and/or risks damaging our reputation, you have a duty to raise that concern. It's important that any such issues are addressed in a timely and consistent way, to limit the risk of adverse consequences and prevent them from happening again.
- 4.2 Where possible, you should raise your concern privately, in conversation and with dignity and respect. We're all part of one team, so volunteers and staff should work together to help others understand the standards we expect, as well as how to achieve them.
- 4.3 Our Management team (which includes our Staff Executive and our volunteers on governing boards and committees) is responsible for helping to address serious issues through the appropriate escalation route(s) and for making sure that a satisfactory outcome is reached.
- 4.4 If you're concerned that one of our mandatory policies may have been breached, you should escalate your concern immediately ([see section 6](#))
- 4.5 If you believe that a criminal offence has been committed, you should escalate your concern immediately ([see section 6](#)) and contact the appropriate authorities.
- 4.6 You may encounter issues relating to a member's personal or professional conduct that are in breach of our [Rules of Conduct](#). Where this is the case, please provide us with full details and we will take matters forward in line with our [Disciplinary Regulations](#).
- 4.7 There are times when policies and Rules of Conduct can overlap – if you're unsure, contact our Volunteer Support Unit or our Director of Governance and External Engagement for guidance.
- 4.8 If you have a serious concern about one or more of our staff members, contact our Human Resources team to ask for advice on how to proceed.

### **5 How to challenge inappropriate behaviour**

- 5.1 Volunteers, members and staff are all responsible for upholding the high professional standards of the IET. To do that we must behave in a professional way at all times, of course, but we also have a duty to challenge others if their behaviour is inappropriate.
- 5.2 Here are our top tips for challenging inappropriate behaviour (please also see the flowchart in [Appendix 2](#)).
  - 5.2.1 Act swiftly – deal with incidents with as soon as possible.
  - 5.2.2 Maintain dignity and respect – take the individual aside if possible, or if not, be polite but firm.

- 5.2.3 Challenge the behaviour, not the individual (use a phrase like 'that word/action causes offence' rather than 'you are offensive').
- 5.2.4 Explain why the behaviour is not acceptable, the policy it breaches (if this is the case) and its impact.
- 5.2.5 Consider asking senior volunteers or staff members for advice – but first, think about whether they will be involved in any escalation route and whether getting them involved at this early stage could limit their ability to act impartially later.
- 5.2.6 Seek an apology, if possible. This may resolve the situation. However, if you believe the incident to be more serious, consider whether it stemmed from lack of awareness of our policy on appropriate conduct or from misjudging the situation. Doing this will help you to establish how to approach and support the person who has behaved inappropriately.
- 5.2.7 If you feel that the matter needs to be followed up:
  - (i) Make a note of the details
  - (ii) Ask an appropriate staff member to do a follow-up.
- 5.3 Make sure you keep records of the steps you have taken.
  - 5.3.1 Keep personal, factual notes as needed of the salient points, but do take care to respect confidentiality. Any notes you keep may be used if the matter escalates, so stick to the facts.
  - 5.3.2 Once you have escalated or addressed the issue, destroy any records you may have about the incident, in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.
- 5.4 For more detailed guidance on what you should do if you believe our Code of Conduct for Volunteers and/or other policies have been breached, please read [Appendix 3](#).

## **6 How to escalate matters**

- 6.1 Occasionally, issues may arise because of disagreements about approach or key decisions. If these issues need escalation to resolve (and there has been no inappropriate behaviour or breach of policy involved) please see [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#) for guidance on how to take things forward.
- 6.2 If you're concerned that one of our mandatory policies may have been breached, this is a serious matter and you should escalate your concern immediately.
- 6.3 If you believe that a criminal offence has been committed, this is a serious matter and you should escalate your concern immediately. You should also contact the appropriate authorities.
- 6.4 Our levels of escalation and approach for resolution apply to volunteers and staff alike:
  - 6.4.1 1st level: Department Manager (as appropriate to the activity)
  - 6.4.2 2nd level: Director (relevant to the matter) or Director of Governance and External Engagement if appropriate (for example, where the matter is broader than a single directorate)
  - 6.4.3 3rd level: Chief Executive and Secretary
  - 6.4.4 4th level: A person or body nominated by the Chair of the Volunteer Engagement Board – their decision will be final.

- 6.5 If you want to refer a matter to a senior volunteer, ask the Chair of the Volunteer Engagement Board to suggest a named volunteer who may be able to help you.

## **7 What will happen if you don't follow this Guidance?**

- 7.1 If you don't raise your concerns or fail to address inappropriate behaviour, you may expose us to greater risk in the future. Keeping quiet may lead to dissatisfaction or growing issues that have a negative impact on other activities.
- 7.2 We believe it's important to deal with issues in a consistent way, so that we can always be confident that the individuals concerned are treated fairly. Following this Guidance will help us all to achieve that – ignoring it could result in inequity, injustice and reputational damage.
- 7.3 Any non-compliance with our Code and our policies (see [Appendix 3](#)) may result in disciplinary action.

## **8 Additional reading**

- 8.1 Our [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#) sets out how volunteers should conduct themselves generally.
- 8.2 Alongside the Code, we have a range of policies in place, setting out how all volunteers who are engaged in our activities must behave, to reduce the risk of us breaking UK law and failing to demonstrate good practice. These documents provide additional guidance on appropriate behaviour in connection with equality and diversity, anti-bribery and bullying.
- 8.3 If you intend to raise a concern, you should read the relevant documents from the following list in conjunction with this Guidance:
- 8.3.1 [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#)
  - 8.3.2 [Rules of Conduct](#) (for members)
  - 8.3.3 [Disciplinary Regulations](#)
  - 8.3.4 [Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy for Volunteers](#)
  - 8.3.5 [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#) (if you are involved in the IET's governance)
  - 8.3.6 [Expenses Policy](#) (volunteer or staff, as appropriate)
  - 8.3.7 [Fundraising Whistleblowing Policy for Volunteers](#) (volunteers only) and Whistleblowing Policy (staff only – available on intranet)
  - 8.3.8 [Harassment and Bullying Policy](#) (volunteer or staff, as appropriate)
  - 8.3.9 [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for Volunteers](#).

## **9 Queries and comments**

If you have any queries regarding how this Guidance works in practice, or comments or suggestions as to how it could be improved, please email our Volunteer Support Unit ([volunteer@theiet.org](mailto:volunteer@theiet.org)).

## APPENDIX 1

### How to prevent differences of opinion from blocking progress

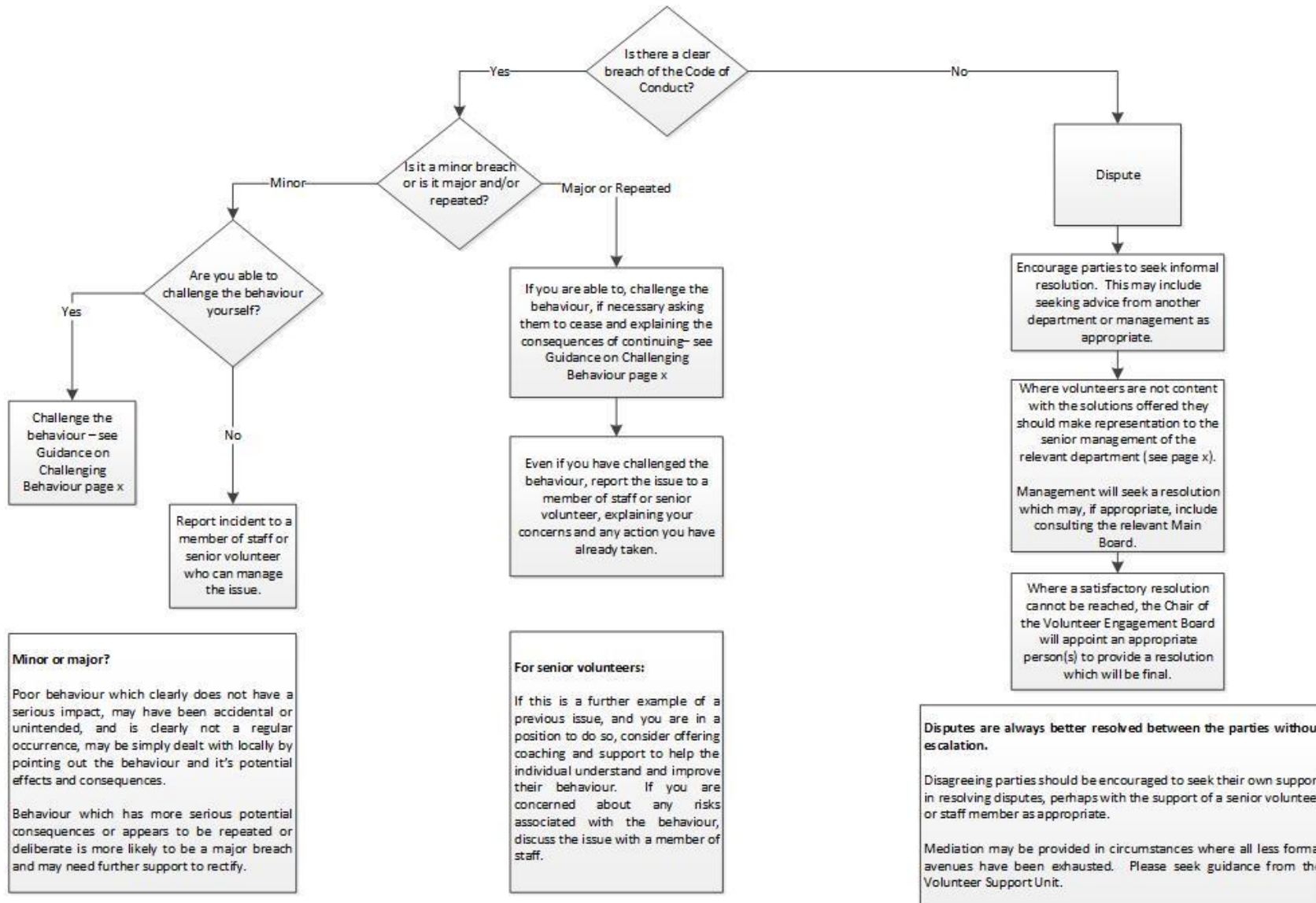
1. The scope and responsibilities of volunteer and staff roles in delivering our activities are defined in the volunteer's [role description](#) and the staff member's job description. Although these definitions are for guidance only and are not prescriptive, they can help to provide clarity on the shared and individual expectations within each role or activity.
2. Many of our volunteers are passionate about their profession and helping us to achieve our objectives. When people with strong views are working together as part of a team, it's almost inevitable that at some stage there will be a difference of opinion. There's nothing wrong with that – in fact, by exploring different points of view, we may well arrive at a better overall solution. However, it's important that disagreements are not allowed to cause a block to positive action or spiral into disruptive behaviour, which may have a negative effect on the group's productivity and morale.
  - 2.1. When a disagreement happens, you should make every effort to find a mutually acceptable solution. As a first step, create an opportunity for all the parties involved to discuss the issues, establish the facts and reach agreement on a constructive way forward. You could, for example, arrange a face-to-face meeting or a phone call/teleconference – email is an option, but in our experience it's the least effective approach.
  - 2.2. If you still can't resolve the disagreement because you need additional information or expertise, or support from someone who can act as a mediator, you may have to refer the matter to one of our departments or to a higher management level.
  - 2.3. If as a group you simply can't agree on the way forward, it's time to escalate.
    - (a) If you're a volunteer, explain to the individual(s) concerned that you are going to escalate the matter. Decide who you will escalate to, then write to them, setting out clearly what the issue is and reference this document. Make sure you also provide a copy to the individual(s). You should receive a response within two working weeks. If it turns out that further investigation is needed, this will be detailed in the response, which will also set a suitable time-frame for a fuller response to be made.
    - (b) If you're a member of staff, explain to the individual(s) concerned that resolving the matter is outside your remit or has not been possible, and that you will be escalating it. Set out the issue in writing, including notes of previous conversations or correspondence, and clearly stating the resolutions offered so far. Send the document to the relevant authority (see below), and make sure you also provide a copy to the individual(s) concerned.
  - 2.4. For guidance on escalation routes, please read [section 6](#) of this document.
  - 2.5. In order to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, use a mediation-style approach at all stages of the disagreement. This means working to understand the reasons behind all view-points, establishing agreement on the facts, finding common ground and points of agreement, and seeking a way forward that meets the needs of all parties. Contact the Volunteer Support Unit for help with mediation techniques.

- 2.6. At all levels, to resolve a disagreement, it may be appropriate for you to refer a matter (regarding a decision to be made or an action to be taken) to a relevant Board or Committee for resolution. The Chair will then decide either to take action to resolve the issue or to hold the matter for discussion at the next meeting of the Board or Committee.
- 2.7. In the very rare case where a disagreement can't be brought to a mutually acceptable resolution through this route, the final decision will rest with a person or body chosen by the Chair of the Volunteer Engagement Board, who has the delegated authority of the Board of Trustees to handle such matters.



## APPENDIX 2

### How to challenge inappropriate behaviour and resolve disagreements



## APPENDIX 3

### What to do if you believe our Code or policies have been breached

- 1 If you spot behaviour that falls below the standards set out in the [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#) and [related policies](#), you should challenge it. The action you should take will depend on the likely extent of the incident's impact on (or risk to) the IET.
- 2 Incidents with low impact or risk:
  - 2.1 At times, something may be said or done that indicates a lack of awareness or understanding of a policy or what constitutes appropriate conduct. If the incident doesn't appear to present a significant risk, it may be enough for you to address the issue on an informal basis. In our experience, it's best to do this as soon as possible.
  - 2.2 If you feel able to address the issue, you should do this yourself in an appropriate and professional way. Make sure you enable the individual concerned to retain their dignity and focus on their behaviour, not their character.
  - 2.3 When challenging inappropriate behaviour, your first step should be to ascertain the level of misunderstanding – this may range from being completely unaware of the policy or what constitutes appropriate conduct, to misjudging the situation. This will help you to work out how best to support the individual.
  - 2.4 If you feel that further action may be needed, make a brief note of the conversation and pass this on to a member of staff or an appropriate volunteer.
  - 2.5 You may need to do no more than raise awareness of the reason why the behaviour was unacceptable and ask for the individual's assurance that it won't be repeated. However, if it's clear that further support or training is required, you should highlight this in your record of the conversation and ask the appropriate staff team to follow it up.
  - 2.6 If circumstances prevent you from acting immediately, or you feel unable to take direct action, you should report your concerns to a member of staff or, where appropriate, a senior volunteer (such as the chair of the meeting or panel). You should provide as much detail as possible about the circumstances leading to the incident; the specific behaviour of the individual; and details of anyone else who was involved or witnessed the incident.
  - 2.7 If you receive an incident report, you should consider the most appropriate way to raise the concern with the individual, either directly or at a later date. Never allow an incident to go unchallenged if it indicates the potential risk of a further breach.
- 3 Incidents with significant impact or risk, or repeated incidents:
  - 3.1 If you witness a significant breach to our [Code of Conduct for Volunteers](#) or receive a complaint, make sure you have understood the situation correctly and then adopt the following procedures.
    - 3.1.1 If appropriate, challenge the behaviour immediately, to mitigate the risk of further breaches. If you believe a law has been broken (eg theft or safeguarding), inform the relevant authorities and escalate to a member of staff. Seek further guidance from a member of staff or a senior volunteer if you are unsure.

- 3.1.2 If you can't challenge the behaviour immediately, make a note of the details and arrange a conversation with the individual as soon as possible.
- 3.1.3 Think about what you can do to minimise the risk of further incidents in the interim. If you think there is a risk of a further incident, make sure you inform relevant staff and volunteers.
- 3.1.4 In your conversations about the incident: highlight the specific behaviour that was inappropriate; explain any actual or potential consequences; listen to the individual's side of the story; and note down any extenuating circumstances.
- 3.1.5 When you challenge the behaviour, your first step should be to ascertain the level of misunderstanding – from being completely unaware of the policy or of what constitutes appropriate conduct, to misjudging the situation. This will help you to work out how best to support the individual.
- 3.1.6 Keep a written record of the conversation and follow it up with an email or letter as appropriate. If you're a volunteer, you should pass on the record for follow-up by a senior member of staff in the relevant department.
- 3.1.7 You may find that raising the individual's awareness of the reason why the behaviour was unacceptable (and seeking their assurance that it won't happen again) does the trick. However, if it's clear that the individual needs further support or training, you should highlight this in your record of the conversation and ask the appropriate staff team to follow it up.
- 3.1.8 If we become aware of very serious or repeated incidents, our staff will recommend support in the form of coaching or training, to help the individual understand the standards of conduct we expect them to demonstrate.
- 3.1.9 From this point, we will monitor the individual's behaviour and address any issues with training and support. In rare cases, the volunteer may be suspended or removed from their role.

## APPENDIX 4

### Control Sheet

## Working Together: Guidance on Raising Concerns and Challenging Inappropriate Behaviour

**Document owner:** Head of Volunteer Support Unit  
**Document reviewer:** Head of Volunteer Support Unit & General Counsel  
**Document adopted on:** 16 September 2013  
**Next review date:** **1 December 2022**

<b>Distribution</b>	All staff via intranet All volunteers via Volunteer Gateway and InfoAware
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### Review/change history

Date of Review/Change	Summary of changes	Version no.
14 June 2013	S Godman - Initial draft for input.	0.1
1 July 2013	S Godman - Updated to include references to other policies and the use of mediation.	0.2
13 Aug 2013	S Godman - Updated to include paragraph on volunteer-to-volunteer, and add MyIdeas details.	0.3
16 Sept 2013	S Godman - Approved by Volunteer Support Working Party.	1.0
18 July 2018	S Godman - Significant revision to incorporate new processes and revised escalation paths, plus change to guidance title.	2.0
20 Feb 2019	S Godman - Updated language in line with new brand and for clarification. Sections moved to improve flow and clarify difference between managing disputes and inappropriate behaviour.	2.1
03 August 2020	K Bunting - Reviewed, no changes	2.1
17 December 2021	Reviewed – no changes	2.1