Zero Tolerance to LGBT+ Harassment and Bullying

Proposer: Sean Richardson (Student)
Seconder: Genna King (Students' Union LGBT Representative Mile End)

QMSU notes:

1. The Union’s Equality and Diversity Policy states, the Union and QMSU Services Limited are both fully committed to complying with all provisions of the [Equality Act 2010] Act applicable to them, and in particular to ensuring that those involved in or participating in their services and activities are protected against unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct in relation to protected characteristics, as referred to in the Act.

2. Stonewall’s definition of bullying is “offending, persecuting or excluding someone.” A legal definition of Harassment is the “causing [of] alarm or distress.”

3. Queen Mary University of London harassment policy and procedure states, the University is committed to providing a learning environment free of discrimination and harassment. The primary consideration is to ensure that the maximum and appropriate support is made available to any subject of alleged harassment and that the action to resolve a complaint is tactful, sensitive, sympathetic and prompt.

4. LGBT+ students can experience bullying and harassment because of their sexual orientation/gender identity, or perceived sexual orientation/gender identity.

QMSU believes:

1. That no student at this institution should be forced to tolerate harassment and bullying, and that action must be taken to ensure that all students should be able to enjoy the Union without harassment and bullying.

2. That harassment and bullying of LGBT+ students should not be tolerated by the Union, and those who commit acts of harassment and bullying should be stopped and disciplined for their actions.

QMSU resolves:

1. To use the above definition of LGBT+ harassment and bullying.

2. To develop the welfare section on the website to include information on what harassment and bullying is and what students should do if they experience harassment and bullying.

3. To create a "zero tolerance to LGBT+ harassment and bullying" strategy.
What is bullying and harassment?

Bullying is offending, persecuting or excluding someone and harassment is usually defined as constant interference or intimidation that violates people's dignity or creates a hostile, degrading humiliating or offensive environment.

LGBT+ students can experience bullying and harassment specifically intended to demean them because of their sexual orientation/gender identity, or perceived sexual orientation/gender identity. Bullying and harassment of this sort can be highly personal; and therefore students can find it difficult to report.

What is the impact of bullying and harassment?

Bullying and harassment can have a negative effect on a student's well-being and academic performance. If it is not tackled, this behaviour can have serious consequences for the individual bullied and those that may witness the incident. Students, who experience bullying and harassment may develop, low self-confidence, demotivation, stress, anxiety, depression and ill health, which can impact on students' retention at university.

Why do LGBT+ students find it hard to report bullying or harassment?

There are a number of factors which can discourage LGBT+ students from using the existing policies and procedures to report bullying and harassment. Some students may feel that it will have an effect on their studies; they may think it is just part of the culture of the university. Others may not want to come out to senior staff and may feel that if they challenge this behaviour their peers will look at them differently. So may think that homophobic/transphobic bullying is not as serious as other forms of bullying, as there is a lack of knowledge about their rights.

What we can do?

Queen Mary University of London has an obligation to protect its students against bullying and harassment. As a Union we follow the equality and diversity act and therefore have a duty to ensure that those that are involved in or participating in our services and activities are protected against unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

However, even with anti-harassment and bullying policies in place; LGBT+ students still face barriers when it comes to reporting homophobic and transphobic harassment.

Therefore, it is vital that as a Union we recognise bullying and harassment of LGBT+ students as a specific form of bullying. We need to be clear about the nature of the problem and the way that it occurs. By publicising examples of unacceptable behaviour we can insure that both students and staff recognise bullying behaviour and that as a union we will not tolerate it. We should strive to ensure that all students are aware of their roles and responsibilities in maintaining an inclusive a welcoming campus.

What to do if you are being bullied or harassed?

The University has a complaints procedure, which can be found here - http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/student-appeals/complaints/
The Students Union also has an internal complaints procedure, which can be found here - http://www.qmsu.org/pageassets/governance/Bye-Law-21-Complaints-procedure.pdf

If you are not comfortable initiating such procedures yourself and wish for further help with the matter you can contact Annie Mitchell who is the Advocacy and Representation Manager for all Queen Mary Students. Her email address is annie.mitchell@qmsu.org and you can find more information on what services she can offer here - http://www.qmsu.org/advice/academic/