# Sticks and Stones: Bullying in Museums

## Executive Summary

## Introduction

People make museums, and that includes everyone - staff, freelancers, trustees, volunteers and of course, our communities. We have long acknowledged that museums need a workforce that is more diverse and representative of our communities – in order to achieve that we also need a workforce that is supported, respected, and rewarded fairly. This research highlights that there is, unacceptably, a significant issue of bullying in the sector. It is an issue that we need to address openly, collectively and urgently for the sector's wellbeing.

Sharon Heal, Director, Museums Association

## Background

The Sticks and Stones research project was developed as part of the Museums Association's (MA) commitment to wellbeing and equality in the sector to raise the profile of issues of 'bullying[1]' and bullying behaviours therein, signpost online information and support and undertake preliminary research.

Research participation was high with a profile representative of the workforce and sector, enabling us to confidently make a number of recommendations for the sector and beyond.

## Commitment

Everyone within the sector must reflect on these findings and recommendations and puts them into practice.

Creating a culture where those that work in and with museums feel and know they are in a safe environment and are fully enabled to meet their maximum potential is a priority, addressing needs across the whole of the museums sector:

- attracting and retaining the best diverse talent – by supporting and nurturing all staff

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[1] Where bullying was defined as - 'offensive, abusive, malicious, insulting and/or intimidating behaviour that occurs on more than one occasion.' Anne-Marie Quigg, 'Bullying in the Arts'

- creating a culture of creativity and supporting idea generation – by valuing the views and opinions of all
- enabling agile and flexible working – by trusting and empowering staff.

## Key Findings

- Targets were most likely to be bullied by their direct line manager, and this bullying continued for more than nine months.
- Most common bullying behaviours were minimising role and contribution; limiting access to essential information; being overly critical of work without justification; and/or micromanagement or undermining individuals in public and private.
- 25% of respondents felt they were being bullied as a result of a protected characteristic with the most common being gender, followed by age and disability.
- Other underlying factors were also described for example, class, position in the hierarchy and having higher levels of competence.
- Bullying had negative impacts in work and home domains and affected psychological and physical health, 95% and 75% of respondents respectively.
- There was a lack of awareness of and trust in formal policies and procedures.
- Only 13% of respondents raised a formal grievance and only 8% of respondents had a facilitated meeting with a manager or participated in mediation.
- 90% of all respondents were not satisfied with the outcome of the actions, formal or informal taken.
- As a result of being bullied 44% of respondents stopped working with the organisation and 11% left the sector.

## Recommendations

The recommendations have been grouped as follows:

- for the sector and organisations, including funders
- for line managers or leaders, including trustees
- for targets
- for peers or colleagues
- for perpetrators.

For example, organisations should:

- have a bullying policy and procedure that is highlighted to staff
- understand the impact of bullying and offer or signpost support where applicable
- ensure bullying, bullying behaviours and good practice are covered in training and development.

Detailed research findings, recommendations and resources are available on the Museums Association website. If you wish to discuss this research and recommendations, please contact us [cpd@museumsassociation.org](mailto:cpd@museumsassociation.org)