



Arts and media unions call for industry-wide code to tackle bullying

An industry-wide code for media, arts and entertainments organisations is needed, following a report which showed the creative industries to be a hotspot for bullying, a conference of the Federation of Entertainments Unions concluded.

The conference, *Creating without Conflict*, launched the report examining bullying, harassment and discrimination in the entertainment and media industries, based on a survey of more than 4,000 people. Those who replied, ranged from household names, top screenwriters and performers to those at the beginning of their careers.

The results showed shocking levels of ill-treatment and inappropriate behaviour and a culture of silence, with only a third of those suffering bullying and harassment reporting the incidents. More than half of those questioned (56per cent) said they had been bullied, harassed or discriminated against at work.

Eight in 10 women (81per cent) who reported bullying, harassment and discrimination said their gender was a factor. The respondents reported incidents from lewd comments to sexual assault and commented on pressure from superiors to enter sexual relationships in return for promotion.

The high prevalence of freelance workers in the sector was named as a major contributing factor to the level of bullying and the culture of silence. Respondents to the survey said they dared not speak out in case they earned a reputation as troublemakers. The report said freelances were 14 per cent less likely to report ill-treatment and were often not covered by employers' bullying policies.

The conference of members of Bectu, Equity, Musicians' Union, National Union of Journalists and Writers' Guild of Great Britain, heard details and analysis of the survey from the report's author, Cathy John, senior lecturer in cultural theory and policy at Arts University Bournemouth, and from Anne-Marie Quigg, author of *Bullying in the Arts*. Members then formed discussion groups to look at the role trade unions can play in tackling the problem.

Christine Payne, general secretary of Equity, said: "The FEU, with more than 2,000 members, has clout and we should be a strong and powerful voice within the creative industries. We need to take the idea of a code of conduct forward. The code will be a part of our campaign's aim of changing workplace cultures to allow creating without conflict."



John Smith, general secretary of the Musicians' Union, said: "We would need to get the major arts companies on board, but the code would also be suitable for small organisations and production companies. We would publish the list of the signatories and celebrate the fact they have joined."

Delegates recommended a number of other ways to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination. The FEU will now develop these ideas. They include:

- Training for managers and workers in dealing with unreasonable behaviour and education on awareness of bullying.
- Confidential bullying hotlines.
- The inclusion of workers on arts and media organisations' governing bodies and boards.
- Counselling services provided by the unions.
- Clear guidance provided for freelance workers by employers.
- Union recognition in workplaces so reps can negotiate anti-bullying policies and represent victims.
- Specific training for students and young entrants in the arts and media.
- Sharing good practice.
- FEU unions acting collectively in the workplace to promote the message of non-tolerance of bullying by managers and between co-workers.
- Helping people to challenge the perpetrators of bullying and providing information on how to log and complete "bullying diaries".
- Using celebrity endorsement of the Creating without Conflict campaign to get maximum publicity.
- Working with organisations such as Skillset to establish programmes to change workplace cultures and garner examples of good practice.
- Recruit more members so unions have a strong voice in the workplace and can advise reps on how to confront bullying practices.

Anne-Marie Quigg, said: "The effects of bullying can be severe, involving both physical and psychological harm. Workers in the arts and media have reported stress and stress-related illnesses that affect performance at work, health, emotional and wellbeing and home life. Bullies may be a person or a group of people in the workplace, but there is also corporate bullying. This is when an organisation imposes unfair working terms or conditions on an employee, such as long or unsocial hours, poor pay and heavy workloads."



She also discredited the notion of the "artistic temperament". She said: "The myth persists that the greater the artist, the less rational or sane or ordinary they are likely to be." This was taken up in the discussion groups, particularly by musicians, who described the behaviour of conductors who believed that shouting and humiliating members of the orchestra was the best way to improve a performance.

Cathy John said the bullying, discrimination and harassment uncovered by the survey showed the problem was worse than in other sectors where similar research had taken place, such as among teachers and health workers.

The report's main findings were:

- On average 56per cent of respondents had been bullied, harassed or discriminated against at work.
- 52per cent of respondents across all sectors had witnessed bullying, harassment or discrimination in their workplace.
- While managers were the main perpetrators of bullying and harassment, half the respondents identified co-workers and colleagues as offenders. Almost three-quarters (74per cent) of musicians said abuse came largely from co-workers.
- More than two-thirds of respondents working in television, radio, film, national and local newspapers reported ill-treatment.
- All respondents in local newspapers reported being bullied, harassed or discriminated against at work.
- Women were more vulnerable to direct experiences of bullying and discrimination than men, with 64per cent compared to 49per cent of men; 34per cent of women who identified gender or sexuality as a factor in their ill-treatment and disclosed details of it, reported experiences of sexual harassment.
- One in 10 workers in theatre, television and film witnessed sexuality-related harassment.
- Age was a significant factor, with those in the youngest and oldest age groups being most affected; just over half (51per cent) of those aged 51-60 and 16-30 experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination because of age.
- 45per cent of those who were happy with the outcome of their case had involved their union.

The role of the BBC, as a major employer, was seen as important in turning round the bullying culture prevalent in the media and arts. But the FEU is concerned that it is not doing



enough to redress the major failings of the corporation identified in the Rose inquiry, led by Dinah Rose QC.

Luke Crawley, assistant general secretary of Bectu, said: "The role the BBC plays is critical. Its response to the Rose review will have a ripple-effect throughout the wider creative industry. The Rose review was an opportunity to look at this problem and to adopt a transparent procedure which staff can have faith in. It is not enough for the BBC to say it will bring in managers from other departments and divisions to investigate allegations, an outside body is needed.

"We all thought the BBC had finally got it, but we could be heading towards a dispute if it continues to police itself on allegations of bullying."

The conference was introduced by Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary. She said she had put together the testimonies of members who had been bullied and sexually harassed for the Leveson Inquiry and the Rose review.

She said: "It was heart-breaking to hear from members whose dreams had been shattered because of the behaviour of their managers and of failure of employers to tackle bullying and bullies.

"As we discussed the issue with the FEU it became clear that these situations were not confined to the BBC and national newspapers. A Bectu survey showed that than one in five of its members said bullying was a major concern. Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild were aware of the problems their members faced in their very competitive, high pressure worlds, with tight deadlines, punishing schedules and big egos.

"We chose Creating without Conflict as the title of this campaign because we want to promote workplaces where workers and managers learn to be constructive with their criticism during the creative process. The FEU will now be taking forward the recommendations of the conference and will be making them a priority in 2014."