GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COLLEAGUES AND MANAGERS ON DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

Practical points for management of domestic abuse

1. Recognise the problem

- Recognising the signs that someone may display if they are subjected to domestic abuse could help towards identifying it early and prevent the situation from escalating.

- Look for sudden changes in behaviour or the way an employee dresses and/or changes in the quality of work/performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record.

- The greater the number of symptoms that are displayed (see below), the more likely it is that something is wrong. Please note however it would be wrong to automatically assume a situation of domestic abuse or violence without querying further in a sensitive and confidential manner to gain further details.

Possible warning signs and symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Increased alertness or vigilance, jumpiness
- Occasional lateness or arriving early on several separate occasions
- Leaving work later than usual on an ongoing basis
- Absenteeism or presenteeism i.e. being present even when they are not well enough
- Leaving work early several times in the month
- Increased use of earned or paid time off
- Reduced performance or productivity for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record
- Several injuries or time out due to injuries on several separate occasions
- More telephone calls than normal, including on the mobile
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Becoming reserved or withdrawn
- Wearing long sleeves/excessive clothing in warm weather
- Sudden change in make-up routine or clothing to conceal bruises
- Avoiding windows and main entrances to the office
- Receiving gifts/flowers for no apparent reason

The list above is not exhaustive.
2. Response

There are five steps taken from Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) that one can follow to initiate a conversation about domestic abuse. ALGEE is a mnemonic borrowed from MHFA to help remember the five steps below:

1. **Assess** the risks of harm to staff by asking or enquiring about things in a sensitive manner.
2. **Listen** to the individual without judging or making assumptions about them.
3. **Give** them reassurance and information on sources of support that may be available to them.
4. **Encourage** them to take up the support offered internally through the College and to try and help themselves by engaging in activities to reduce stress.
5. **Encourage** them to get external support and professional help, e.g. visit their GP as well as access support offered through the various charities and helplines outlined in this list.

- If symptoms of distress or domestic abuse are present and have been so over two-three weeks and seem to be ongoing, then encourage the person to talk about what is going on. Suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable – not an office/desk area.
- Make it clear that your wish is to try and support that person. Let them know you have noticed several changes (explain the changes) and wondered if they might be willing to tell you more in order that you might help them.
- Acknowledge the courage of the employee and how difficult it must be to talk.
- Confirm confidentiality (exceptions are imminent threats to life, harm to children).
- Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful.
- Believe an employee if they disclose experiencing domestic abuse – do not ask for proof.
- Do not be judgmental – avoid language that indicates blame/fault ("why don't you leave?"/"how can you let this happen?"/"why haven't you told anyone before?")
- Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak.
• Reassure the employee that the College has an understanding of how domestic abuse may affect their work performance and the support that can be offered.

• If there is disclosure of high risk, contact an HR Manager for advice.

• Following disclosure, contact an HR Manager for a debrief whilst respecting the individual’s confidentiality.

3. Provide support as a manager

You may wish to explore the options below to assist the individual. Discuss these first with an HR Manager before implementing:

• A change in the individual’s shift pattern through flexible working or even some of their responsibilities might be helpful. Re-assigning certain tasks to others to ensure the individual is not overloaded and is able to leave work on time or earlier, if needed.

• Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls.

• Agree with the employee on what to tell colleagues, how this should be communicated and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace.

• Ensure the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home.

• Keep a record of incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace.

If both the alleged perpetrator and victim/survivor are College employees:

• Minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim.

• Offer impartial support and where possible ensure both the victim and perpetrator have different line supervisors who are able to provide appropriate information to each party.

• Ensure that the individuals are not advised by the same HR staff.

• Consider relocating the victim to another floor, building or even another campus.
4. **Signpost to the appropriate help**

- Use the list of national support services – see the College’s Domestic Abuse and Violence Policy for details.

5. **Ways in which close colleagues may respond and provide support**

- Encourage the individual to seek help, but do not force them to do so. Refer them to the sources of support mentioned in the guidance.

- If the member of staff does talk to you about their situation, do empathise and acknowledge the difficulty they are having.

- Keep the information confidential. Unless the person is at high risk of taking their own life. Use both ALGEE and the CPR method to assess the level of risk. Confidentiality can be breached if there are serious concerns around children or vulnerable adults.

- If confidentiality is to be broken then explain to the individual that you are going to have to let someone know due to the risks posed.

- Offer what reasonable practical help you can such as sharing workload, swapping lunch times answering certain calls, chaperoning them during lunchtimes or to station after work, encouraging the person to divert emails to a certain folder or to HR (preferably not to yourself) etc.

- Offer encouragement and moral support.

- Do be mindful of how all this is affecting you and look at sources of support for yourself.