

Internships and harassment

School of Law

Our pledge of support for you

The Law School regards harassment of any kind involving students, whether on or off campus, as unacceptable. Law and Criminal Justice students often take part in work-placements in law firms or elsewhere during their studies. These are known generally as internships and within law firms, they are called clerkships. These are wonderful opportunities but it is important you understand that you are entitled to be safe and happy during any work-placements. The Law School will support you to ensure this happens.

What is harassment?

Generally harassment is unwelcome, unsought and unreturned behaviour by a person or group that tends to offend, humiliate or intimidate, and interferes with your right to work in a non-threatening environment. Forms of harassment can range from repeated apparently trivial behaviour to behaviour of such a significant nature that it has a detrimental effect on your ability to engage in normal activities.

When you go on an internship, the firm or company offering the experience is in a powerful position in relation to you because the placement may turn into a job once you finish your degree. This may mean you feel obliged to do everything you are asked to do while interning. However, you should be very clear you are not obliged to comply with any requests that are really forms of harassment and you should tell us if this happens.

Forms of harassment

Harassment can take different forms. The following descriptions should help you spot it:

Sexual Harassment – unsought, unwanted attention of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment may be intentional or unintentional and is not confined to any gender or sexuality. It may include language, visual material, or physical behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwelcome or offensive to that you and is either repeated, or of such a significant nature, that it has a detrimental effect on your ability to engage in work activities.

However, it is important to understand that harassment does **NOT** include appropriate compliments, behaviour based on mutual attraction, friendly banter which is mutually acceptable or constructive coaching and feedback.

Racial Harassment – unwelcome, unsought behaviour that seeks to denigrate, humiliate or intimidate you or a group on the basis of your race, colour, ethnic or national origins, culture or ethno-religious background.

Sex or gender identity harassment - unwelcome, unsought behaviour that seeks to denigrate, humiliate or intimidate you or a group on the basis of your gender, sexual orientation or sexual preference.

Situations to look out for

Situations which might give rise to harassment issues for you in the context of your internships are:

- You are asked to meet a partner or senior member of the firm at their home or restaurant to work on a file outside working hours;
- You are encouraged/instructed to attend drinks after work either at the firm or at a bar, and while there, encouraged to drink excessively;
- You are told to carry or purchase things for more senior members of staff when they can do this themselves and there is no reason to choose you to do it;
- A senior member of the firm keeps making comments about your appearance, character or friendliness;
- A senior member of the firm asks you for sexual intercourse, sexual contact, or other form of sexual activity together with an implied or overt promise of preferential treatment or an implied or overt threat of detrimental treatment.

NB: These are all examples in which the potential harasser is a senior member of the firm. However, it is also harassment if your fellow interns behave in these ways.

What can you do about harassment?

Don't be afraid to act. If you are harassed during a work-placement, the most appropriate course of action is to complain to the relevant firm so that they can respond, if you feel able to do that. However, you can also seek confidential advice about your options at any stage within the Law School from:

Ursula Cheer, Lynne Taylor or Neil Boister

You can, of course, speak to any other member of staff if you would prefer that.

You can also access:

- **Counselling or medical care from UC Health Centre:**
healthcentre@canterbury.ac.nz
- **Advice and support from Student Care:**
studentcare@canterbury.ac.nz
- **Advice and support from the Māori Student Development Team:**
maoridevelopment@canterbury.ac.nz
- **Advice and support from the Pacific Development Team:**
pasifika@canterbury.ac.nz

The University also has a harassment policy which covers these issues on campus and is available from the [UC Policy Library](#)