



Wednesday, 4 September 2019

**The New Zealand Association of Scientists (NZAS) commends steps taken by the University of Adelaide to investigate bullying by a senior member of its academic staff.**

NZAS wishes to raise awareness that bullying, widely considered to be damaging in any workplace, in research institutions specifically undermines the scientific process and requests that New Zealand scientific institutions and societies intensify steps to prevent bullying in the first instance and support affected individuals.

“Science, like any other profession, suffers from bullying in the workplace,” said NZAS President Heide Friedrich, “but scientists are highly specialised in their own fields of expertise, and this can make their career advancement dependent on a small number of senior colleagues.”

“This can create situations where bullying is almost impossible to escape,” Friedrich says, “so it is crucial that our employing institutions take complaints seriously, whilst providing supporting structures for both the complainant and complaine.”

The Association highlights that further details of the alleged bullying have been brought to light through investigations published last week by the journal Nature<sup>1</sup>. The reported interviews, mainly anonymous, suggest New Zealand scientists have been affected.

The reports highlight what members of the Association’s Council have observed directly or indirectly: bullying has also been present in the New Zealand science community.

A challenge posed by bullying is that the form it takes may vary in different scientific disciplines, including excessive pressure to rush work, work unsafe numbers of hours, overstate or understate findings to please those funding the science or restricted access to resources and harassment. In these circumstances, bullying undermines the quality and trustworthiness of scientific research.

Bullying can have the greatest negative impacts in small communities, such as those scientific communities where all of Australia and New Zealand can only afford a few big labs that develop exciting new science. Directors of these labs exert excessive power over careers.

Reporting of the interviews obtained from students and staff at the University of Adelaide suggests that bullying may have been an issue for some time, but has lacked a means for affected individuals to come forward together.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02540-5>

New Zealand has lacked a clear definition of bullying that matches formal definitions of 'harassment'. Yet, the Royal Society of New Zealand's new Code of Professional Standards now calls for Members to demonstrate ethical behaviour and professional standards by "avoid[ing] falsely, vexatiously or maliciously impugning the reputations of colleagues or otherwise compromising or denigrating them in order to achieve commercial, professional or personal advantages."

NZAS President Heide Friedrich calls on New Zealand's research institutions to consider adopting similar or stronger standards of conduct, to prevent bullying. "Most importantly, open discussions on expected behaviour in science need to be facilitated. Unethical behaviour is generally not isolated to workplace harassment. Harassment is often subjective and difficult to judge, yet it is often only the additional misuse of finances or resources that leads to unethical behaviour to come to light and eventually to a course of action."

NZAS also calls on scientific institutions to enable discussions on workplace behaviour, to support affected individuals, both complainants and complainees, including by expressing a willingness to anonymously collate accounts of bullying and take action where parallel evidence suggests unaddressed issues.

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