

The Young ME Sufferers Trust

No Reported Harassment at Bristol University (Information Obtained Under FOI)



**There has been no reported harassment of staff at Bristol University.
Yes, you read that correctly.**

We have all become accustomed to the increasingly shrill ‘harassment’ accusations against ME patients and ‘activists’, both via the media and in lectures. This campaign appears to have originated at that now infamous meeting of the Science Media Centre, revealed by our original 2014 Freedom of Information Report, now updated under the title *Shining a Light on the CMRC Setup* (<http://www.tymestrust.org/pdfs/shiningalight.pdf>). Members of the UK Research Collaborative have continued to spread these allegations ever since its launch.

In *Shining a Light* we stated: *In the records of the meeting where ‘harassment’ of researchers was discussed, no mention was made of personal threats such as have been reported in the media. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were listed as the most damaging type of ‘harassment’. The 2016 tribunal appeal Judgement ordering QMUL to release the PACE trial data highlights that Professor Trudie Chalder accepts that “no threats have been made either to researchers or participants”.*

And yet the accusations persist and have even escalated. Tymes Trust has found this constant narrative so abhorrent that we have sought some answers. We have, once again, sought evidence.

A Freedom of Information request was submitted to Bristol University, as that is where many of the accusations are coming from, to find out just how bad this claimed harassment has become. Was it just in the field of ME and CFS that this was happening, or was it more widespread?

The request was submitted to Bristol University on 19th March 2017 asking for: *the number of reports of harassment that members of staff have officially recorded with Bristol University between July 2015 and January 2017. I am only interested in those reports where the harassment came from outwith the university.*

Five days before the deadline for the FOI response on 13th April, the University emailed back: *The University has made an initial assessment of your request, and in order to progress it further we first require clarification from you. Specifically, can you please confirm whether you require details of a third party harassing members of staff at the University, or matters where members of staff at the University have been harassed by a third party?* [SIC]

Confirmation was provided on the 17th April that the harassment should be by a third party.

Bristol University finally responded to the 19th March FOI request on 9th June, stating:

We have received no recorded instances of harassment of staff by a third party between July 2015 and January 2017.

We decided that this response required further investigation and a second FOI was then submitted to Bristol University on 12th June asking: *Can you please provide the number of reports of harassment that members of staff have officially recorded with Bristol University between September 2010 and June 2015? I am only interested in those reports where the harassment came from outwith the university; that is, harassment of university staff by a third party.*

After the 20 day statutory deadline passed with no response, a request for an internal review by Bristol University was submitted on 11th July.

Again, no response was received from the University and on 9th August an email was sent to the Information Commissioner (ICO) requesting that the appeal process be started with regard to this failure to respond.

The ICO replied on 12th August, saying that they had: *written to the public authority to provide them with a copy of your original request, reminding them of their responsibilities and asking them to respond to you within 10 working days of receiving our letter (that is, by 29 August 2017).* The ICO added that *if you do not receive any response within 10 working days, please contact us.*

By the 30th August, one day after the 10 working day deadline, no response had been received from Bristol University and a further email was sent to the ICO advising them of this fact.

At 5.21pm that same day, Bristol University then responded to the FOI request of 12th June, stating: We have received no official reports of harassment of University staff by a third party between September 2010 and June 2015.

Conclusion

The 2016 tribunal appeal Judgement ordering QMUL to release the PACE trial data, which had found, in the Judge's words, *no threats have been made either to researchers or participants*, taken together with this new information that Bristol University have *no reports of harassment* of University staff by a third party between September 2010 and January 2017 raises questions about such accusations and about those who make them.

Why did we use Freedom of Information?

Freedom of Information requests provide the public with access to information held by public authorities. The aim of the Freedom of Information Act was *a more open government based on mutual trust.*

The ICO website states that *Public authorities spend money collected from taxpayers and make decisions that can significantly affect many people's lives.* The decisions and actions of researchers in the field of ME and CFS do significantly affect many people's lives. The Government White Paper *Your Right to Know: Freedom of Information* 1998 stated: *Unnecessary secrecy in government leads to arrogance in governance and defective decision making.*

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