

# Bullying in the Arts: Vocation, Exploitation and Abuse of Power by Anne-Marie Quigg

By Piers Jackson

**It took 10 years research and writing for a new book on workplace bullying to be published and it has already started to make waves in the cultural sector.** The author, Dr Anne-Marie Quigg has considered in depth how people who work in the arts are treated in their workplace, and now *“Bullying in the Arts”* has just been published by Gower Publishing who specialise in academic work. They are promoting the book and its conclusions to academics and audiences worldwide.

Dr Quigg, who is from Northern Ireland and currently lives in the United Kingdom, runs a cultural and community sector consultancy business with her partner, and studied part-time for a doctoral thesis on her subject at City University’s Department of Cultural Policy in London. She was awarded her doctorate in 2008, and was then invited by Gower to write a book based on her research. A further two years of research followed, talking to many people working in the arts both nationally and internationally and developing a range of real-life case studies.

“The interesting aspect of the work is that although many people think that people working in, say dance, music and theatre have a wonderful time at work, the evidence I gathered shows that cultural sector workers have reported the highest incidence of bullying of any single employment sector in the country,” says Dr Quigg. “It was a bit of a shock to the system. There is little doubt that bullying in the workplace is on the rise, particularly in the current economic climate, but I found that two in five respondents reported being targets of workplace bullies, and many more had witnessed bullying incidents at first hand.”

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The initial research was carried out in theatres and arts centres in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland with the support of the trade union BECTU, and the number of respondents who reported being a target of bullies is a higher proportion than recorded by researchers investigating the police, the army and the National Health Service.

“Half of the arts workers had heard about bullying from a colleague,” said Anne-Marie. “There was compelling evidence that many managers in the sector were not trained to deal with complaints of bullying, or dealt with them by promoting the bully.”

“Bullying is profoundly damaging to people, and it doesn’t matter in which sector it happens. In the arts, there is the question of whether we tolerate behaviour which would be considered unacceptable elsewhere

because it is part of the creative process and ensures that the best performances are produced. My view is that we shouldn't. There are plenty of people who produce great art without resorting to these kind of behaviours. And there are plenty of good managers and board members who have no need or inclination to bully their staff.”

By bringing the subject out into the open and challenging these behaviours, Anne-Marie hopes that those who become targets of bullies will become more aware, more quickly, of what is happening to them and be able to deal with situations more effectively.

“It's very often the case that the target of a bully will leave the organisation, allowing the bully to move on to another target. Often bullies pick on popular members of staff who are very good at what they do, and thus the organisation can lose experienced people whose work has been exemplary.”

Anne-Marie is now following up her work with more research to look for solutions to support targets of bullying and, if possible, those who perpetrate it.

**Dr Anne-Marie Quigg**, author of *Bullying in the Arts: Vocation, Exploitation and Abuse of Power*, is Director of creative and community sector consultants Jackson Quigg Associates Ltd.

