

Protocol for Dealing with the Death of a Member of Staff

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Policy control

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PROTOCOL FOR DEALING WITH THE DEATH OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Introduction

Instances of death in service are fortunately rare but when they occur can obviously be very difficult and distressing. This document is designed to provide guidance for managers in dealing with the death of an employee, whether in the workplace or outside.

Clearly the feelings of relatives and colleagues are a major consideration. This protocol cannot cover all eventualities; further advice and guidance for particular circumstances can be obtained from Human Resources.

Objectives

This protocol:

- provides a framework for managers dealing with this difficult and sensitive situation;
- identifies the issues and activities that have to be dealt with surrounding the death of a member of staff;
- sets out the lines of communication and responsibility.

Notification of the death of a member of staff outside of work

A member of staff informed of the death of a colleague should inform the Head of School/Department immediately. If this is not possible, another senior member of staff should be informed as well as the HR Department.

The Head of School/Department should notify the Head of Human Resources who will contact the Director and the Registrar and Secretary where appropriate. The Head of Human Resources will maintain contact and update all parties as information becomes available.

The Head of Human Resources will confirm the accuracy of the information before taking any further action.

The Head of Human Resources is responsible for then informing the following so that any appropriate action may be taken:

- Health Safety Officer
- Director of Finance and Resources
- Head of Student Support
- Director of IT
- Payroll
- Director of Marketing, Communication and Strategic Planning

The Head of School/Department (of the deceased) or their representative, in conjunction with the Head of HR, will need to consider how best to inform other members of staff. Points to bear in mind include:

- Ensuring those closest to the employee are told first;
- The news is communicated in private;
- Other colleagues and work associates of the deceased are informed appropriately;
- How to communicate to students and other staff groups as appropriate.

Consideration should be given regarding the information that can be shared. Some colleagues may be particularly affected by the death and need support. In cases of particular emotional distress, support should be offered locally with referral to Staff Counselling or Occupational Health. Advice should also be sought from the Head of Student Support and Development who may also provide guidance on the services available to students.

Contact should be established with the next of kin to offer condolences and answer any initial queries. A member of staff who knew the member of staff well, if they feel able, may be the most appropriate person to undertake this initial contact and to enquire regarding the funeral arrangements. Alternatively, the Head of School/Department or Head of HR should contact the next of kin.

The family's intentions regarding funeral arrangements should be sought and respected. If the service is private the School/Department may wish to consider organising and appropriate tribute. If the service is open to colleagues, the Head of School/Department will need to consider how best to release staff to attend.

The Head of School/Department will liaise with the Director's Office, regarding the sending of a letter of condolence to the family on behalf of the School.

Depending upon the relevant circumstances, Human Resources will make contact with the next of kin to discuss any entitlements to death in service benefits, pensions, any outstanding pay issues, and the return of any personal effects the deceased may have stored at work.

Should access to the deceased's email /computer account be required, a request for access should be made to the Director of IT, from the Head of School/Department.

Special Circumstances

When the death of a member of staff occurs whilst working abroad the Head of HR will also inform the Director of Finance and Resources who will liaise with the School's Insurers regarding any necessary arrangements.

When the death in question is of an employee working within the School but employed by another body, the Head of Human Resources will contact the employer in the first instance and any other administrative activities will be undertaken in consultation with the relevant employer.

The Discovery of a Death at Work

This section covers the possibilities of death by natural causes in the workplace or death as a result of accident or individual action. In any eventuality, the discovery of a fatality or potential fatality at work is inevitably an extremely upsetting and difficult experience.

The immediate situation should be dealt with as follows:

- In most cases, the outcome cannot be evident and it is essential to seek medical assistance immediately from a trained first aider, if available, and to call an ambulance;
- Where needed, take any action that is safe and necessary to prevent harm or injury to any other person;
- Once medical help has been summoned, Janitorial staff should be contacted immediately. The immediate area should be secured. Janitorial staff attending will liaise with witnesses required to remain onsite and identify an appropriate waiting area in a safe location accessible by emergency services. Janitorial staff will attend and secure the area and notify the Head of Human Resources.

Where the member of staff's medical status is not confirmed at the scene and the member of staff is taken to hospital for further medical attention, Janitorial staff will inform the Head of Human Resources (if not already informed) and the Head of School/Department. The Head of Human Resources will inform the Director, the Registrar and the Health Safety Officer. The Head of Human Resources will ensure that the member of staff's next of kin is informed following appropriate liaison with the Police regarding the staff members' medical status and the circumstances (see next section).

If death is confirmed at the scene by the emergency services, the Police will normally arrange for the removal of the body. The police will normally inform the next of kin.

The Head of Human Resources will inform the following so that any appropriate action may be taken:

- The Director
- The Registrar and Secretary
- Health Safety Officer
- Director of Finance and Resources
- Head of Student Services
- Director of IT
- Payroll
- Director of Marketing, Communication and Strategic Planning
- Head of Estates

If the Police do not intend to notify the next of kin, the Head of Human Resources will consult with the appropriate parties to agree which senior officer of the School should inform the family. Wherever possible this duty will be undertaken by the relevant Head of School/Department. It is essential that the relevant officer confirms the accuracy of the information about the death before making any contact with the next of kin.

HR will liaise with the Head of School/Department regarding pay and pension matters for discussion with the next of kin and will act as the point of contact for the family in respect of all practical matters including the return of personal items etc. The Head of School/Department will liaise with IT regarding the member of staff's IT accounts.

The discovery of a death can be a very distressing experience and HR should contact any member of staff involved in such a discovery to ensure that they are advised of the support available including Occupational Health/Staff Counselling and if needed, immediate access facilitated.

