

INVESTIGATION GUIDELINES

Management Practice Guide

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a practical guide for managers responsible for conducting investigations ('Investigating Officers'). Managers are strongly encouraged to obtain support and guidance from a relevant member of the Human Resources team (referred to as HR Investigation Support) in relation to individual cases. From here on, 'you' refers to the manager responsible for conducting an investigation.

1.1 Purpose

Investigations are conducted to gather information in relation to an allegation or issue. Employers are required to demonstrate how and why they reached a particular decision, or recommended course of actions and whether or not they acted reasonably in accordance with the relevant internal policy or procedure.

Whilst the guide is primarily focused on dealing with allegations of misconduct under the relevant University Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure, the guidelines can also be used for investigations under other University procedures (for example, Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Statement, Procedure for Managing Staff Disclosures and Formal Allegations of Sexual Violence and Misconduct (Staff), Grievance Procedure, Dignity and Respect Policy and Procedure) and adapted for use where appropriate to meet the needs of the circumstances.

Where the investigatory process considers an allegation(s) of harassment or sexual misconduct of a University student, the investigation must consider and comply with the University's Never OK Hub (Condition of Registration E6: Harassment and Sexual Misconduct single comprehensive source of information).

A thorough investigation, carried out fairly and consistently, will demonstrate that the Employer has acted reasonably and in line with the relevant University policy or procedure. This guidance is intended to ensure consistent, fair, and impartial treatment for all parties.

The Essential Elements of a Fair and Thorough Investigation

- a) It is important to conduct investigations thoroughly and within a reasonable timescale.
- b) Investigations must be conducted in an impartial and non-judgmental manner.
- c) The primary objective of an investigation is to establish the facts i.e. what has happened and the full circumstances of the case.
- d) In the course of the investigation, confidentiality must be maintained as far as is consistent with the matters being investigated.

- e) The Investigating Officer will not be involved in hearing or determining the case if it proceeds to a formal disciplinary interview but will normally attend to present management's case.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 These guidelines are applicable to all staff.

1.2.2 All parties involved in the procedures which this guidance relates to must ensure that they maintain, as appropriate, the confidentiality of the process within and outside the University.

2. PROCEDURE

2.1 Conducting Investigations – The Basics

In most cases the immediate line manager/supervisor will undertake the investigation. In circumstances where this isn't feasible, i.e. they are materially involved in the matter under investigation or absence due to annual leave or otherwise would unduly delay the process, an alternative manager who could be from within, or outside of, the management line will be appointed to undertake the investigation. Alternative Investigating Officers will normally be from within the same School/Faculty/Directorate.

Individuals who are the subject of an investigation may be accompanied by a colleague or Trade Union official at any investigatory meetings.

You will receive support and assistance from HR in preparing and conducting the investigation, and they may also assist you by asking questions in interviews. The HR Investigation Support will also ensure that notes are taken of any interviews and if necessary, will appoint someone to undertake this task.

Investigation interviews should be conducted as promptly as possible before memories fade. There may also be a need to re-interview witnesses during the investigation process. Additional witnesses are likely to be identified during the investigation and should also be interviewed, where appropriate. In certain circumstances witnesses may be contacted for information without the need to attend an interview.

The individual(s) against whom an allegation has been made will ordinarily be advised of the allegation before the formal investigation is commenced.

All witnesses (including the individual against whom an allegation has been made) must be advised of a suitable interview date and be given reasonable notice. The witnesses should be advised that the purpose of the interview will be to discuss in detail their account of a particular issue, and that their account may be shared with relevant parties should the matter progress to a formal hearing.

2.2 Investigation Process

2.2.1 Preparing for Investigation Interviews

2.2.1.1 At the outset of the investigation you should, with your HR Investigation Support, identify:

- a) details of the precise issue to be investigated, e.g. details of allegations made, etc;
- b) evidence to be collected, (where evidence is likely to perish or be removed it must be gathered promptly). There are three main types of evidence (see box below). Note that where a criminal offence may have been committed, the evidence gathered for the disciplinary investigation may also be required for a criminal investigation and there may be a legal requirement to inform other agencies (e.g. Police, Health and Safety Executive, Disclosure and Barring service, Social Services). Your HR Investigation Support will guide you in these circumstances;
- c) under which University policy or procedure the investigation is being held;
- d) for what purpose and by whom will any subsequent investigation report be used.

2.2.1.2 Evidence

- a) Records – e.g. records of discussions outlining and reinforcing expected standards, records of training provided, records of timekeeping, attendance, etc, copies of University policies that have been breached, computer records etc.
- b) Management Statements – e.g. statements relating to specific, observed incidents, statements relating to level of performance and how this is below the required standard, statement of the consequences/effect of the alleged behaviour/conduct, statements of discussions that have taken place with the individual or others relating to the allegation, etc.
- c) Witness Statements

You must plan to interview any person identified who may be able to provide information relevant to the investigation (witnesses) including the person against whom the allegations have been made. There are five main categories of witnesses (see below).

2.2.1.3 Witnesses

- a) Witnesses (including the person against whom the allegations have been made) who were directly involved in the alleged incident;
- b) Witnesses who were present at/observed the alleged incident but were not directly involved (e.g. other members of staff within a unit);
- c) “Professional witnesses”, i.e. individuals with specialist knowledge of a particular area/field. Such witnesses may be required in cases where the issues are of a technical nature and where you do not have expertise in that area;
- d) Relevant line managers;
- e) Any other person who is identified to have information relevant to the investigation.

2.2.1.4 In preparation for any investigation interview(s) you should:

- a) ensure that a suitable private room is available where the interview is to be held in person, to ensure confidentiality and no interruptions. Where the meeting is to be held via MS Teams, you should set up an online meeting ensuring the details of this remain private in your calendar;
- b) ensure that all necessary information is available during the course of the interview, e.g. relevant documentary evidence etc.;
- c) identify precisely what needs to be established from each interviewee.

Depending on the circumstances of the case you may be able to prepare a list or structure of questions in relation to the alleged incident / allegation, however it is important to remain flexible in order that the answers given can be fully explored.

Managers should refer to Annex A, and contact their HR Investigation Support, for guidance on a standard structure for an investigation interview.

2.2.2 Notes / witness statements

Notes taken during an investigation interview should record the facts, and be written (within reason) in the language used by the witness following the train of events. Any ambiguity or gaps in the account should be clarified with the witness. The notes should be typed, and the witness must be given the opportunity to review the notes and asked to sign them to confirm it as a true and accurate version of events.

Where the individual disagrees with the notes of the interview, you should record the details of any disagreement and store this with the note-taker's version of the notes. Where the changes are not agreed the notes will not be changed. Refusal to sign the notes/statement should also be recorded. The witness should be made aware that if the notes are not returned within the specified timescale, and they do not make contact to discuss them, then they will be assumed to be an accurate reflection of the discussions that took place and that they do not wish to make any changes.

You may, in addition to an investigatory interview, wish to request witnesses to provide a written statement describing the alleged incident and any relevant background information in their own words and/ or ask specific questions of them to respond to.

2.2.3 Preparing a Written Outcome

On conclusion of the investigation, you will (with assistance from your HR Investigation Support) produce a written outcome. Where this is in report format, i.e. for Disciplinary Investigations, the report will summarise the issues investigated, what you have found, and include relevant documentation and written statements gathered in the course of the investigation. The report should normally be submitted to the next manager in the line who will, with assistance from HR, decide whether there is a case to answer and whether a disciplinary hearing should be convened.

Your HR Investigation Support can provide templates and guidance to assist you in producing a written outcome.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility for applying the provisions of this guidance lies with the Investigating Officer, and the Deans/Directors/Heads of School/Heads of Departments, with HR support as appropriate.

4. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure for Academic Staff
Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure for Staff
Grievance Procedure

Dignity and Respect Policy Statement and Procedure for a Member of Staff to Raise a Complaint of Bullying or Harassment

Never OK Hub (Condition of Registration E6: Harassment and Sexual Misconduct single comprehensive source of information)

Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Statement

Procedure for Managing Staff Disclosures and Formal Allegations of Sexual Violence and Misconduct (Staff)

Personal Relationships Policy Statement and Procedure for Disclosing Relationships or to Raise Concerns (Staff & Student Relationships)

5. REVIEW, APPROVAL & PUBLICATION

5.1 As a general principle, this guidance will be reviewed by Human Resources, in consultation with recognised Trade Unions after three years or where operational and/ or legislative requirements change.

5.2 This guidance will be published on the University policy zone web page and will also be accessible via the Human Resources web pages.

6. ANNEXES

Annex A: Structure of the Investigation Interview

7. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

Document Name	Investigation Guidelines
Owner	Chief People Officer, Human Resources
Version Number	1.1
Equality Analysis Form Submission Date	01 December 2022
Approval Date	July 2025
Approved By	Chief People Officer, Human Resources
Date of Commencement	02 February 2023
Date of Last Review	July 2025
Date for Next Review	July 2028
Related University Policy Documents	Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure for Academic Staff Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure for Staff Grievance Procedure Dignity and Respect Policy Statement and Procedure for a Member of Staff to Raise a Complaint of Bullying or Harassment Never OK Hub (Condition of Registration E6: Harassment and Sexual Misconduct single comprehensive source of information) Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Statement Procedure for Managing Staff Disclosures and Formal Allegations of Sexual Violence and Misconduct (Staff) Personal Relationships Policy Statement and Procedure for Disclosing Relationships or to Raise Concerns (Staff & Student Relationships)
For Office Use – Keywords	

Annex A – Structure of the Investigation Interview

A1. Introduction

Explain the context of the interview, for what purpose the interview notes and subsequent statement will be used, how and when the individual will be able to check the notes / statements and the importance of confidentiality (witnesses should be advised that they should not discuss any details of the case outside of the investigation interview). Explain to interviewees that the investigation interview is not a formal hearing but inform witnesses that if the case results in a formal hearing, they may be required to attend to give evidence and that their witness statement may be shared with relevant parties.

A2. Questioning

This involves a technique of using open questions (who, what, why, when, how, etc.), with closed questions (requiring a yes or no answer) being used to clarify points. Leading questions should always be avoided. When meeting with the member of staff against whom the allegation has been made, it is useful to ask whether they admit the misconduct. Where misconduct is admitted, the scope of the investigation will typically be reduced to consideration of the full circumstances including any mitigation.

Discuss and enquire into any additional information / evidence presented, whilst always returning to the prepared list / structure of questions.

Ensure specific examples are provided.

All questions should aim to encourage interviewees to recall their version of events in their own words.

When meeting with the member of staff against whom the allegations have been made, it may be useful to ask them to identify possible witnesses, questions, or issues to be raised with witnesses and to provide any documentation relevant to the issues being investigated. Consideration should then be given to whether these suggestions should be pursued.

A3. Information Gathering

At the end of the investigation interview you should have obtained from each witness:

- a. the names of those present or involved; date / time / place of the alleged incident / allegation;
- b. details of what took place, and the order in which they happened;
- c. response(s) to any other documents or witness evidence which is inconsistent with their account;
- d. the steps taken since the alleged incident / allegation, including any steps taken to resolve;
- e. where the investigation relates to a complaint/grievance, a preferred resolution should also be explored.

A4. Summarising

Once questioning is complete, re-cap and clarify the main points of discussion and answer any appropriate questions or concerns raised.

A5. Closing Statement

Explain the next steps: the individual will be issued with a copy of their statement and will have the opportunity to review this for accuracy, and to suggest amendments. They will be asked to sign the statement. Explain when the investigation is expected to be completed. Ensure that your contact details are provided and ensure that the member of staff understands that they need to maintain confidentiality.