



University of  
South Australia

## Guidelines for Dealing with the Death of a Staff Member

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### OVERVIEW

This guideline outlines the preferred practice of the University in the application and management of dealing with the death of a staff member. The guidelines may also be applied in part to members of the University community providing an unpaid service e.g. adjuncts, volunteers. It is important to note this procedure is a guide only as each situation is unique and individual judgment is always necessary.

Where the local area has been advised of the death of a staff member by the family or next of kin these guidelines may be used by Heads of Schools, School Executive Officers, Directors of Units and Human Resources staff,

### PROCEDURE

This procedure should be followed in conjunction with the [Death of a Staff Member checklist](#).

When a work area is notified of the death of a staff member, the following actions should be taken immediately:

The staff member receiving the call should ask for the name of a family contact and their telephone number. The staff member must then contact the relevant manager.

The relevant manager must contact the Head of School/Unit Director and their local Human Resources professional.

The Human Resource professional must notify the following key contacts in the Human Resources Unit:

- Director: Human Resources;
- Manager: HR Services
- Payroll Team Leader; and
- Superannuation Consultant.

If known, the Human Resources professional should provide the trustee, executor or next of kin details. It is important as financial assistance for funeral expenses can be provided by the deceased staff member's superannuation fund or from the final payout of accrued leave.

The Manager: HR Services is responsible for managing and coordinating the process, and should:

- supervise a response team consisting of the Divisional HR Manager or the Senior Consultant: Portfolios and the relevant Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute
- provide direction, assistance and advice to the response team
- ensure a coordinated approach by identifying key stakeholders
- act as a link between the work area of the deceased staff member and the rest of the University to assure proper communication and maintain optimal business function.

- use the checklist and judgment in each unique circumstance to ensure a compassionate and supportive response from the University.

The Payroll Team Leader and Superannuation Consultant have legal obligations and are responsible for contacting the next of kin to discuss final financial arrangements.

Response team members and key stakeholders may be personally affected by the death and the Manager: HR Services should ensure everyone is comfortable performing the delegated tasks.

## **Communication**

### Internal Communication

The Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute is responsible for the initial communication to staff and should notify immediate colleagues as quickly as possible. Consideration must be given to the staff member's religious or cultural beliefs and the communication should be sensitive and compassionate. Immediate work colleagues should always be advised in person with appropriate support provided (see Employee Assistance Program below).

The Manager: HR Services or nominated response team member should identify if the staff member has worked in different sites across the University and should liaise with the relevant local Human Resource professional(s) to identify other staff that need to be notified.

The Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute should communicate the notice of the staff member's death to the Vice Chancellor and relevant Pro Vice Chancellor/Deputy Vice Chancellor/Executive Director.

The Pro Vice Chancellor/Deputy Vice Chancellor/Head of School/Unit Director or Director Research Institute may choose to notify other staff members in the Division/School/Unit/Institute via an email (see Appendix A) to managers who can then inform their teams.

### External Communication

#### *Family*

Family members generally find comfort in condolences from friends and colleagues of the deceased. However, it is important to keep in mind that reactions and response to death vary dramatically among cultures. The Manager: HR Services or nominated response team member should ask the identified family contact if they would like to receive cards or phone calls from staff who knew the deceased, and if permission is granted to release the home address and/or phone number. Some families may prefer their privacy.

#### *Condolences from the University*

It is common for the University to offer its condolences and recognise the contribution of the deceased staff member by placing an obituary in the paper. Where a staff member has worked in different sites the Manager: HR Services or nominated response team member should:

- liaise with each work area to ensure the staff member's contribution to the University is fully reflected
- consult with each site to determine the most appropriate person to write the obituary. The UniSA logo can be downloaded from the Marketing and Development Unit and may be used in the obituary.

#### *Media Response*

Should the Manager: HR Services or nominated response team member in conjunction with Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute determine the situation may have implications for public relations or media coverage, they should make immediate contact with Chancellery and the Manager News and Media (Marketing and Development Unit).

Any request for comment from the media must be immediately directed to the Manager News and Media (Marketing and Development Unit).

### *External contacts*

Many staff will have developed external networks and contacts as part of their role at the University. In many situations it will be necessary to formally advise these contacts of the death of the staff member (see Appendix A).

## **Supporting Staff**

Everybody deals with grief differently. When the death is unexpected, the grief response can be quite strong. However, even when the death is expected, there may still be disbelief. Managers need to be flexible and understanding in responding to staff reactions. The Employee Assistance Program (see below) can provide resources to assist.

The Manager: HR Services or nominated response team member should:

- make sure staff are informed about known public facts surrounding the death including plans for the funeral or memorials, family wishes, etc.
- provide factual information to help suppress any rumours regarding the death or event.
- ensure a brief statement is prepared to assist staff members responding to telephone calls and other communication directed to the deceased staff member. It is important front office staff are informed and prepared for enquiries directed to or regarding the deceased staff member.

### Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The EAP should be offered to UniSA staff members and the family of the deceased. The EAP should be coordinated through the Manager: HR Services or Manager: Occupational Health Safety & Welfare.

EAP can offer:

- onsite crisis counselling within 2 hours in response to a tragic event
- onsite counselling for the local work area on the day of the communication
- group sessions on grief management

The Manager: HR Services should liaise with the relevant manager to discuss the options directly with EAP and to gain recommendations on the particular circumstances. For example, EAP services may not be necessary immediately following the announcement. In some instances it may be appropriate to give staff some time to comprehend the announcement before EAP services are provided.

### Informal Meeting

The relevant manager may consider organising an informal meeting where colleagues can gather on the day of communication.

### Funeral and/or Memorial Service

Staff may wish to attend the memorial service and/or funeral and it is recommended that the local area allow paid time off (subject to business needs) for those rostered for work on the day.

## **End of Employment Procedure**

### Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute

Taking into consideration the timing and any other sensitivity, the Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute is responsible for ensuring the following general administration duties are carried out:

- Sign and forward the [End of Employment HRIS004](#) to the local HR Representative.
- Discreetly arrange with the family contact the return of relevant University property identified on the [Exit Checklist](#).
- Check Outlook for appointments, email and mail and manage these appropriately.
- Remove the staff's member details from local telephone lists and put out of office on voicemail
- Remove the staff member's name from pigeon hole (clear out any correspondences)

- Remove the staff member's name from office door
- Contact relevant areas to remove access from systems (Medici, Finance 1, UniSAinfo etc)
- Any action to Professional Development Fund (if applicable)
- Remove the staff member's Home Page from the UniSA Intranet
- Inventory, pack and safely store personal possessions until the family is ready to retrieve them. Discuss arrangements for collection of personal possessions with a family representative at an appropriate time. In some instances it may be necessary to organise a courier service to deliver the personal possessions.
- In addition to personal items, there may be extensive academic and professional possessions including libraries, books and articles in progress, artefacts, collections etc. When this is the case, someone from the local area who is familiar with the subject matter should act as a departmental liaison with the family to assist with communication and decision making concerning the possessions.

### Human Resources

The HR professional is responsible for the following general administration:

- Complete the [Exit Checklist](#) and [End of Employment HRIS004](#)
- Contact telephone help desk to remove staff members name from communication lists, deactivate email account and voicemail
- Process any outstanding documentation (leave forms, employment changes)
- Notify the Manager: OHS&W to establish if there is an outstanding claim.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES AND/OR AUTHORITIES**

#### **Immediate supervisor**

The relevant manager is responsible for contacting the Head of School, Unit Director or Director Research Institute and their Human Resources representative.

#### **Head of School or Director**

The Head of School or Director is responsible for their designated tasks.

#### **The Human Resources Unit**

The Manager: HR Services is responsible for the implementation, development and continuous improvement of these guidelines.

### **CROSS REFERENCES**

[End of Employment HRIS004](#)

[Exit Checklist](#)

### **FURTHER ASSISTANCE**

Management and staff may seek further advice from:

- Their immediate supervisor
- The designated HR representative for their area.
- The Human Resources Unit
- The Human Resources website

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## APPENDIX A

### Internal email example for the death of a staff member:

*Dear colleagues*

*It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death yesterday of John Smith. John was a valued colleague who made a substantial contribution to the Library over the last ten years. Our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.*

*John's family have advised (insert funeral details)*

*OR*

*The details of John's funeral will be communicated shortly.*

*(Insert information about time off for the funeral)*

*I take this opportunity to remind you of the Employee Assistance Program should you or any of your colleagues want to talk to someone.*

### External email example:

*Dear*

*It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of Dr Peter Zzz. Peter made a substantial contribution to the School and to the field of XYZ over the last ten years and he will be greatly missed.*

*Any communication to the University that you would normally direct to Peter should now be forwarded to (insert delegated person's name).*

The information made available to internal and external parties will vary according to the individual circumstances. However communication regarding the staff member's death may include:

- Name and position
- Date of death (in some cases it may be relevant to include the cause of death)
- Survivors e.g. spouse and children (if applicable)
- Work or employment history
- Outstanding achievements, publications and/or awards
- Offices held or service to government, professional or community organisations
- Interesting hobbies or activities
- Funeral, memorial and burial arrangements