



## **Guidelines for dealing with the death of an employee**

### **1. Introduction and purpose**

Instances of death in service are fortunately rare but when they occur, it can obviously be very difficult and distressing. We recognise the need to balance sensitivity in dealing with the death of an employee with the practical need to administer pay, benefits and other arrangements during a difficult and emotional period for the next of kin. In addition, it is accepted that the death of a colleague has a major impact on colleagues. Consideration should also be given with regards to how to notify the wider College of the death of employee where appropriate.

The purpose of these guidelines are to:

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

### **2. Notification of the death of a member of staff outside of work**

In the event that a member of staff is informed of the death of a colleague, they should inform the appropriate line manager and Head of Department or Senior Officer immediately. If this is not possible, another senior member of staff should be informed as well as the HR Department. Various responsibilities are as outlined:

#### 2.1 Head of Department or Senior Officer and Line Manager Responsibilities:

- Notify the relevant line manager or Head of Department/Senior Officer and the HR Department as appropriate, if they have not already been informed.
- 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
- Ensure timely communication with students, where appropriate
- Ensure appropriate support is in place for affected colleagues, contact HR for assistance.
- Ensure all calls and correspondence relating to the death are dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.
- Contact should be established with the next of kin to offer condolences and answer any initial queries. A member of staff who knew the deceased employee 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 Department/Senior Officer or HR should contact the next of kin.

- Ensure that the appropriate condolences are expressed at a senior level from the College to the next of kin and the deceased member of staff's team.
- Should access to the deceased's email /computer account be required, a request for access should be made to IT, from the Head of Department/Senior Officer.
- Respond appropriately to requests of the next of kin and organise tributes as appropriate, working with the Communications Department and HR where appropriate.
- Oversee the return of personal property and the collection of College property from the deceased employee's next of kin.
- Arrange the removal at the appropriate time of the deceased employees' details from all distribution lists/documents, where appropriate. Liaise with IT and HR where necessary.

### 2.2 HR Department responsibilities:

- Provide support and guidance to the Head of Department and line manager in the practical application of these guidelines.
- Human Resources will act as point of contact for the next of kin to discuss any entitlements to death in service benefits, pensions, any outstanding pay issues.
- Liaise with payroll manager and benefits providers in relation to any claim for benefit or payments to be made to the next of kin/estate.
- Complete all necessary leaver notification paperwork to advise the payroll manager to enable appropriate payments to be made in final salary, such outstanding annual leave and overtime etc due to the deceased employee.

### 2.3 Communications Department responsibilities:

- Where appropriate, make arrangements for any staff obituary and press releases and internal announcements, working with the line manager, next of kin, external communications and HR where appropriate.

## **3. Discovering or dealing with the death of an employee on site**

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:

- It is essential to seek medical assistance immediately by contacting the Porters Lodge, if available, and to call an ambulance;
- The Porters will follow internal procedures for the discovery and dealing with a death on campus;
- Where needed, take any action that is safe and necessary to prevent harm or injury to any other person and following instructions received from Porters;
- Once medical help has been summoned, Porters will need to secure the area immediately. Porters will liaise with witnesses required to remain onsite and identify an appropriate waiting area in a safe location accessible by emergency services.

- Where the employee's medical status is not confirmed at the scene and he/she is taken to hospital for further medical attention, Porters will inform the HR Department.
- 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 HR Department will inform the Head of Department/Senior Officer and line manager so that any appropriate action may be taken, in line with the responsibilities outlined in paragraph 2 above, as appropriate.
- If the Police do not intend to notify the next of kin, the Head of HR or relevant HR Business Partner will consult with the appropriate parties to agree which Senior Officer or Head of Department of the College should inform the family. 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.
- The discovery of a death can be a very distressing experience and HR should ensure that any member of staff involved in such a discovery are advised of the support available including counselling and if needed, immediate access facilitated.
- Detailed procedures for dealing with a death on-site is outlined in the College's Emergency Response and Crisis Management Plan, and a summary as provided as Appendix A.

#### 4. Special Circumstances

When the death of a member of staff occurs whilst working abroad the HR Department will also inform the College Accountant who will liaise with the College's Insurers regarding any necessary arrangements.

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

#### 5. Support Information

We recognise that the death of a colleague can be difficult and distressing. Employees can get support from the following resources:

The HR Department can refer employees to the [University of Cambridge Staff Counselling Services](#).

Helpful information and further resources are available on the College [website](#).

Employees can also access the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) on the website.

#### **Other Helplines/ Support:**

*Cruse Bereavement Care* have helpful information on their website and a helpline number and email: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) or 0808 808 1677

The Samaritans offer a free 24/7 helpline and email support: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) or 116 123

NHS Choices 'Grief after bereavement or loss' has information about how to cope and mental health and wellbeing. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

What's Your Grief offers an online supportive community, resources and discussion about grief: <https://whatsyourgrief.com>

The Good Grief Trust offers support and resources by others who have been bereaved: [www.thegoodgrieftrust.org](http://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org)

Policy change history (owner: HR Department)		
Date	Summary of Changes	Date of next review
October 2020	New policy	September 2025
September 2025	Review with minor job title and support information changes	September 2028

**ACTIONS IN THE EVENT OF DEATH ON SITE**

Priority	Person Discovering Incident	Duty Porter 1	Duty Porter 2	Porters Lodge	IMT (When activated)	
1	Inform Porters Lodge immediately 01223 747111, explain the situation and where you are in College. Insist a porter comes to meet you immediately.	Investigate incident with Duty Porter 2. Initially treat incident as a Medical Emergency/First Aid situation. Call Emergency Services 999 and report the incident. Seal off the area and stand guard. Do not let anyone else enter and do not disturb the scene further in any way.	Investigate incident with Duty Porter 1	Take initial control of incident	Porters' Lodge	Retain control of incident, until passed upwards to SMT. Activate HCERCMP and critically appoint Incident Controller, Recorder and Communicator
2	When the porter arrives please give your name and contact details and then leave the scene and do not discuss the situation with anybody else.	Instruct the second Duty Porter/Lodge Member to return to the Lodge and follow the Emergency Procedure to contact the relevant management support (SMT and PT) and to manage the initial plan of action	Follow Emergency Procedure to contact the relevant management support and to manage the initial plan of action	Execute initial incident control form, activate HCERCMP and stand up the team	Senior Management Team	Use the HCERCMP to communicate correctly. Pass upwards to PT
3	If you require any support straight away or at any time in the future	Take names and contact numbers of all involved in discovery of the incident			Principal Team	PT (or appropriate representative of) to take control of incident. IMT to meet initially in the primary location – alternate location to be used if required and instructions given by

	please contact Wellbeing Coordinator in the first instance					IMT Incident Controller. Incident Management Team to fill their assigned roles
4		Hand over incident to Emergency Services on their arrival and follow their guidance			Principal Team	Set up Pastoral Care facility as defined in HCERCMP and that it's appropriately equipped. If required ensure facility is staffed to provide Pastoral Care 24/7 by trained personnel
5					Principal Team	Establish with the Police who should be the College Point of contact (ideally a welfare specialist) with Next of Kin – ideally this would not be the Incident Controller
6					External Relations	Control the media agenda. Consider threat to Homerton reputation. Ensure communications are sent out to all students and staff and fellows as soon as possible and as often as is required Coordinate with police, coroner and next of kin before issuing statement confirming cause of death
7					HR	Communicate with relevant staff where required
8					Tutorial	Communicate with student body
9					Student Union	Communicate with student body
10					Welfare	Trained College staff or professionals in place to support Distressed students and/or staff Consider establishing a place of reflection if appropriate. Point of contact for family and next of kin