

Liaison Officer/Contact Officer

Introduction

The role of a Liaison Officer (usually a work colleague) is to be an employee's main point of contact at a time when the employee requires impartial support. This could be during an investigation, whether the employee is suspended or not, or when an employee has raised an issue under the Whistleblowing procedure. (*The Whistleblowing Policy refers to the role of 'Contact Officer' and for the purposes of this protocol this role is interchangeable with the role of 'Liaison Officer.'*)

A Liaison Officer is distinct from the role of 'companion' as defined in the Disciplinary and Grievance processes. All employees under the above circumstances, and in cases where they are temporarily moved onto alternative duties, may be provided with a Liaison Officer.

Who can be a Liaison Officer?

The line manager, or HR Advisor in consultation with the service area, will be responsible for identifying and nominating a Liaison Officer. The employee requiring support will also be consulted. The Liaison Officer will not be involved in the investigation or process involving the employee.

What will the Liaison Officer do?

The Liaison Officer will provide impartial support and will maintain regular contact with the employee during the period when the employee may require assistance. The Liaison Officer will act as an intermediary and will be the first point of contact for the employee. The support could be to –

- maintain communication channels, particularly where the employee may not be at work or is suspended, disseminating information between all parties;
- provide feedback or updates on progress where possible;
- signpost the employee to other sources of advice or services;
- keep a record of visits or contact with the employee together with any issues raised and following up issues as they occur;
- assist the employee in setting out any concerns they may have in writing. The Liaison Officer can do this for the employee where there are reasonable and sufficient grounds for the concern. This will entail expressing the background and history of any concern, giving names, dates and places where possible and the reason why the employee is particularly concerned about the situation;
- receive and where permissible, provide feedback and seek to address any concerns raised by the employee with the employee's line manager, Investigating Officer, Occupational Health, HR or other relevant personnel; and
- maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of the supported employee wherever possible.

The frequency of contact between the Liaison Officer and employee will depend upon individual needs and the nature of the matter(s) under consideration. Timescales will be determined by agreement and subject to review. Contact every two weeks will be set as a minimum standard.

Whistleblowing

Further information on the role of the Liaison Officer (titled 'Contact Officer') can be found in the Whistleblowing Policy. The following paragraphs provide a summary.

In whistleblowing cases, the Liaison Officer may –

- seek further information from the employee on behalf of the Investigating Officer;
- arrange for the employee to receive advice on procedure and in giving evidence at formal hearings, including criminal or civil court hearings and tribunals; and,
- in accordance with policy guidelines, will notify the employee of the outcome at the conclusion of the matter and any further action to be taken.

The Liaison Officer will not

- undertake the role of advocate on behalf of any party, remaining professional, independent and impartial at all times;
- provide advice or opinions on any part of a process or procedure involving the employee being supported;
- attempt to resolve or investigate an issue, confront or talk to other parties while in the role of Liaison Officer; or
- engage in counselling the employee

Qualities of a Liaison Officer

A Liaison Officer is designated on the basis of their professionalism, communication skills, credibility and in having the respect of their colleagues. An ability to be discreet, retain confidentiality, and a genuine interest in maintaining a safe and discrimination free workplace are essential to this role.

The Liaison Officer role is performed in addition to those of a normal, substantive position.