



Maynooth University  
Human Resources Office

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# **Maynooth University**

## **Protocol for**

# **Dealing with the Death of a Colleague**

**(May 2022)**

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## Introduction

The University acknowledges that it has a clear responsibility to provide help and support to employees who are affected by grief and loss, directly related to the death of a colleague or student. In the case of the death of a student, the [Maynooth University Student Death Protocol](#), will be followed. Some individuals are both colleagues and students and therefore Student Services and HR will liaise with each other under these circumstances to ensure an appropriate response.

The individual nature of grief and stress requires flexibility and discretion in the University's response. This protocol aims to provide a coordinated response to recognise the individual range of circumstances in which it can occur.

## Aim

The aim of this protocol is to set out a basic standard to enable the University to:

- Provide an important foundation on which a supportive response to grieving colleagues can be developed, in the case of the death of a colleague.
- Provide a reference for Heads of Department/Line Managers, which can support them in dealing with what is a difficult and challenging workplace issue.

## Protocol & Process

In the case of the death of a colleague the following is recommended.

Information on the death of a colleague may reach the University from a variety of possible sources and come to the attention of any one of several people in the University. It is vital that whoever receives notification of the death, in the first instance, seeks to obtain as much essential information as possible. This could include, for example, details of the colleague such as their department and the contact details of the person who they are talking to.

No matter who receives the information, it is essential that they immediately **inform the relevant Head of Department and the Director of Human Resources**, so a support plan can be put in place.

## Contact Person

<b>MU Contact Person</b>	
Human Resources Director, Rosaleen McCarthy (primary contact)	Email: Rosaleen.mccarthy@mu.ie 01 708 3866
In the unfortunate circumstances where the death occurs on campus, HR will contact Director of Estates (Michael Rafter) / General Services Manager, Campus and Commercial Services (Ivan Griffin).	087 251 7004 01 474 7781.

## **Immediate Response Plan**

Circumstances will differ and no two colleagues will have the same experience or needs at a time of loss. Adopting an organisational approach to supporting employees following a tragic event should involve both representation from the person's Head of Department and Human Resources.

- The person who first receives the information should notify the Head of Department and the Director of Human Resources (HR).
- If the death occurred on campus HR will contact the Director of Estates in the first instance, prior to contacting the next of kin or family as relevant.
- HR will notify the President's Office and relevant colleagues.
- The Communications Office will be informed in the case of media queries.
- A Response Team will be established including HR, Head of Department/Line Manager, Chaplain and if required, the Director of Estates (who will inform Security and Facilities) and the Director of Student Services.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Person who first receives the information**

- Immediately, inform the relevant Head of Department and the Director of Human Resources, so a support plan can be put in place.

### **Head of Department(s) or nominee(s)**

The role of the Head of Department will be to,

- Make contact with the Contact Person in Human Resources, initially to advise that an incident has occurred, if they are the first person to receive information of the death
- Engage with the Response Team
- Ensure to maintain regular contact with those impacted by the death within their department and verbally agree on the frequency of catchups
- Ongoing review to ensure that appropriate supports remain available

### **Human Resources**

The role of Human Resources will be to,

- Contact the Head of Department, of the employee, to inform them. (If HR is the first to be informed of the death)
- If the death occurred on campus HR will contact the Director of Estates in the first instance, prior to contacting the next of kin or family as relevant
- Notify the President's Office
- Convene a Response Team meeting
- Assign tasks to the relevant Response Team members
- Contact the colleagues impacted in writing in the first place or it may be appropriate in some cases to visit the department to acknowledge the event and to ensure that appropriate organisational support can be provided, making them aware of existing relevant supports that are available both within the University and externally
- Arrange support plan to address any known staff welfare considerations. It is envisaged that there may be a need to provide some bereavement specialist support to colleagues in the days following a loss. A member of HR will talk to the impacted individual(s) to understand how the University can cater to their specific needs, and to discuss how and when they

should be contacted. A bereavement specialist will be sought from Inspire Workplace services.

- Ensure that ongoing follow-up support is made available as required and continue to review any interim arrangements over time.

It may be that the colleagues would prefer not to discuss the incident in detail within the workplace, which is their right. In that instance, it is still important for both the Head of Department and HR to acknowledge the situation, assure the person that they are available to talk and provide support, and to remind the person that other external supports are available, such as those referenced below, if required.

Further discussion and consultation with HR may be required if there is deemed to be a genuine need to deviate from existing policy or if additional flexibility is required.

## **The Response Team**

The role of the Response Team is to agree who will undertake the required tasks in the hours and days following the death, such as,

- Inform the immediate colleagues and in the case of the death of an academic/technical officer/department administrator, inform students in relevant course groups
- Consider staff welfare supports required and organise immediate support required for affected staff
- Decide on who the MU contact is for the family of the deceased colleague and contact the family
- Issue a communication to inform colleagues across the University, as appropriate
- Inform the Communications Office in the case of media queries
- Determine whether to establish a book of condolence and communicate to staff. / Close book of condolences. If the death is on RIP.ie a link to this should be communicated to staff if they wish to add their condolences instead of opening a book of condolences
- Offer to hold a moment of remembrance and communicate to staff
- Decide on attendance at funeral to represent the University
- Organise flowers for funeral/or donation
- Decide who in the department is responsible for gathering the deceased colleagues' belongings and contacting the family on how they would like to receive them and when (within 6 months).

## **Bereavement Specialist**

- Offer emergency appointments to colleagues identified as being in particular difficulty.
- Facilitate a group for bereaved staff members, as appropriate.

## **Further Information and Supports**

- [Maynooth University Student Death Protocol](#)
- [Inspire Workplace Support Services – Employee Assistance Programme](#)  
The Inspire Workplace Services is a support programme provided by the University for employees. The programme provides a confidential counselling service, designed to assist employees in dealing with any issue that adversely affects their health, wellbeing, personal or professional life. Employees can receive help and support by contacting Inspire Workplace Services on free phone number 1800 201 346 or by clicking on [Maynooth University's Workplace Services Hub](#), by logging into the MU website.

- [Human Resources Webpage](#)
- [Employee Wellbeing Supports](#)
- [Compassionate Leave policy](#)
- [HSE Guide to Supporting Employees following an adverse event](#)

If employees prefer to avail of other external support services in the area, such as:

- Visiting their GP
- [HSE Supports](#)
- [Mental Health Ireland Supports and Resources Directory](#)

## **Summary**

This protocol will enable the University to collectively respond in an appropriate and timely manner', and in a way that demonstrates collegiality, trust, dignity and respect, in the event of the death of a colleague.

For further information please contact [humanresources@mu.ie](mailto:humanresources@mu.ie)