



University of
South Australia

Dealing with the Death of a Staff Member Guidelines

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OVERVIEW

This protocol outlines the preferred practice of the University in the management of responsibilities for dealing with the death of a staff member. This may also apply, in part, to members of the University community providing an unpaid service e.g. adjuncts and volunteers. Each situation is unique and judgment and sensitivity is always necessary.

1. PROCEDURE

1.1 Death of a Staff Member Checklist

This process is supported by the *Dealing with the Death of a Staff Member checklist* (refer to Appendix A).

1.2 Notification and Responsibilities

When the University is notified of the death of a staff member, it is important that the person being notified confirms who the family contact/next of kin is, their contact details and information about the death such as when it occurred.

Due to the sensitivity, it is recommended that this information is treated confidentially and that the Manager and Senior Managers (e.g. Executive Dean/Director of Research Institute or Central Unit ('Director')) and the Manager: Business Partnerships of the local area are advised as soon as possible. They will plan for further communication and take the following actions:

The Executive Dean/Director will notify the following key contacts:

- Vice Chancellor
- Relevant Enterprise Leadership Team member
- CMK re Media communication (if relevant)
- Identify further staff to be notified (i.e. immediate workgroup)
- Identify and manage staff member's immediate commitments (e.g. teaching, appointments).

The Manager: Business Partnerships will notify the following key contacts:

- Executive Director: People, Talent and Culture

- Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture
- Consultant: Payroll Services
- Consultant: Superannuation
- Immigration Consultant
- Associate Director: Wellbeing and Employee Benefits.

1.3 Coordination

The Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture, or delegate, is responsible for managing and coordinating the appropriate processes and will:

- provide direction, assistance and advice to the relevant Manager: Business Partnerships and local Managers.
- act as a link between the work area and the University to assure proper communication, particularly where several areas of the University are involved.

1.4 Payroll and Superannuation

The Payroll Team Leader and Consultant: Superannuation have legal obligations. The Executor of the Estate/Next of kin is responsible for contacting them.

2. COMMUNICATION

2.1 Internal Communication

The Executive Dean/Director is responsible for the initial communication to staff and to notify immediate colleagues as quickly as possible. Consideration will be given to the staff member's religious or cultural beliefs and the communication will be sensitive to this.

Ideally, immediate work colleagues will be advised in person, wherever possible, with appropriate support provided ([Employee Assistance Program](#)). The relevant manager may consider organising an informal meeting where colleagues can gather on the day of communication.

The Manager: Business Partnerships, will identify if the staff member has worked in different sites across the University and liaise with the relevant People, Talent and Culture (PTC) Business Partner(s) to identify other staff that may need to be notified.

The Executive Dean/Director will communicate the notice of the staff member's death to the Vice Chancellor, and the relevant member(s) of the Enterprise Leadership Team (ELT). These senior managers may choose to notify other staff members via an email to managers who can then inform their teams.

If the staff member was Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander, it is recommended that the Pro Vice Chancellor: Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy and the Consultant: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Development are informed and that their advice is sought on the communication strategy and cultural protocol.

If the staff member was also a student at the University, then the Manager: Business Partnerships will advise the Director: Student & Academic Services.

The Manager: Business Partnerships will inform the Chief Financial Officer, so that any invoices or other communication is not sent to the staff member's home address.

Refer to Appendix B for *Communication Examples*.

2.2 External communication

2.2.1 Acknowledgements and Expressions of Sympathy

Some family members may find comfort in condolences from friends and colleagues of the deceased. Some families may prefer their privacy. Accordingly, it is recommended that the family's preferences are followed in relation to this. It is also important to keep in mind that reactions and response to death vary among cultures.

The Manager: Business Partnerships will ask the identified family contact if and how they would like to receive communication from staff who knew the deceased.

2.2.2 Personal Notices

The University may offer its condolences and recognise the contribution of the deceased staff member by placing a notice in Personal Notices section of *The Advertiser* or other relevant publication. The Manager: Business Partnerships will notify Chancellery of the death of the staff member and coordinate necessary communication. The placing of notices in the press is a decision made by Chancellery and they will arrange the notice, in accordance with their internal procedure '*Protocols for Death Notices*' with the assistance of the Manager: Business Partnerships.

Where a staff member has worked in different sites, the Manager: Business Partnerships will liaise with each work area to ensure the staff member's contribution to the University is fully reflected and to determine the most appropriate person to liaise with Chancellery in drafting the notice.

2.2.3 Letter of Acknowledgement

Where appropriate, Chancellery may prepare a letter from the Vice Chancellor to the deceased's family, and/or coordinate floral tributes or charitable donations in lieu, dedicated to the memory of the deceased, on behalf of the University.

2.2.4 Obituary

In addition to the Personal Notices section, some publications have a dedicated Obituary section which contain photographs and detailed biographies of prominent individuals.

At the discretion of the Vice Chancellor, in consultation with the Associate Director: News and Communications (Communications and Marketing Unit), Chancellery may prepare an obituary for submission to the relevant publisher (e.g. *The Advertiser*).

2.2.5 Media Response

Should the Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture, in conjunction with the Executive Dean or Director, determine the situation may have implications for public relations or media coverage, they should make immediate contact with Chancellery and the Associate Director: News and Communications (Communications and Marketing Unit).

Any request for comment from the media must be immediately directed to the Associate Director: News and Communications (Communications and Marketing Unit).

2.2.6 Department of Immigration and Border Protection

The relevant Manager: Business Partnerships is responsible for identifying if the staff member is a holder of a temporary working visa and advising the Immigration Consultant, so that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection can be notified.

2.2.7. External Contacts

Many staff will have developed professional external networks and contacts as part of their formal role at the University. In many situations, it may be necessary to formally advise these contacts of the death of the staff member.

3. SUPPORTING STAFF

3.1 Dealing with Grief

Everyone deals with grief differently. The Employee Assistance Program can provide resources to assist.

The Executive Dean/Director with support from the Manager: Business Partnerships will:

- Inform staff about known public facts surrounding the death, including plans for the funeral or memorials and family wishes.
- Provide factual information to help suppress any rumours regarding the death or event.
- Recommend, where required, that 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 that customer facing staff are informed and prepared for enquiries directed to or regarding the deceased staff member.

3.2 Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The [EAP](#) will be offered to affected UniSA staff members and the family of the deceased. The Manager Business Partnerships will arrange for the EAP to be coordinated through the Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture or Associate Director: Wellbeing and Employee Benefits.

The EAP can offer:

- Onsite crisis counselling within 2 hours (metropolitan area) in response to a tragic event.
- Onsite counselling for the local work area on the day of the communication.
- Group sessions on grief management
- Individual counselling sessions for family members as per our service arrangement.

The Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture or Associate Director: Wellbeing and Employee Benefits will liaise with the relevant manager to discuss the options directly with the 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 before EAP services are provided.

3.3 Chaplains

Chaplains (various denominations) are available to all staff and students to provide support and pastoral care. Contact details are available on the University directory or through the Student Engagement Unit.

3.4 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 away from work for this, subject to business needs. This applies to those rostered for work on the day.

4. END OF EMPLOYMENT PROCESS

4.1 Executive Dean or Director

Taking into consideration the timing and any other sensitivities, the Executive Dean/Director is responsible for carrying out the following duties:

- Approve end of employment documentation.
- Arrange with the next of kin to return of relevant University property identified on the [Exit Checklist](#).
- Check Outlook for appointments, email and mail and manage these appropriately.
- Remove the staff member's details from local telephone lists and put an out of office on voicemail.
- Remove the staff member's name from their pigeon hole (clear out any correspondence).
- Remove the staff member's name from their office door.
- Contact relevant areas to remove access from systems (Medici, Finance 1, UniSAinfo etc).
- Finalise the Professional Development Fund (if applicable).
- Contact Help Desk to remove staff member's name from communication lists, de-activate email account, update the staff directory and remove voicemail.
- List, pack and safely store personal possessions until the next of kin 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 liaison with the next of kin to assist with communication and decision making concerning the possessions.

4.2 People, Talent and Culture

The Manager: Business Partnerships is responsible for the following general administration:

- Complete the end of employment processes and documentation.
- Process any outstanding documentation (leave forms, employment changes).
- Notify the Associate Director: Wellbeing and Employee Benefits to establish if there is an outstanding claim.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND/OR AUTHORITIES

Immediate Supervisor

The relevant manager is responsible for contacting the Executive Dean/Director and the Manager: Business Partnerships.

Executive Dean/Director

The Executive Dean/Director is responsible for their designated tasks set out above.

People, Talent and Culture

The Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture is responsible for the implementation, development and continuous improvement of this protocol.

CROSS REFERENCES

Internal Unit Procedures

Chancellery – Protocols for Death Notices

Student Academic Services – How to – Deceased Students

Payroll – End of employment procedure

FURTHER ASSISTANCE

Management and staff may seek further advice from:

- Their immediate supervisor
- The PTC Business Partner
- The People, Talent and Culture website

Further advice can be found from:

- Public Trustee

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APPENDIX A – DEATH OF A STAFF MEMBER CHECKLIST

Stage 1: Immediate Response and Communication

Responsible Officer	Action	Complete
Local Manager	Notify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Dean / Director • Manager: Business Partnerships 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Manager: Business Partnerships	Notify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director: People, Talent and Culture • Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture • Consultant Payroll Services • Consultant: Superannuation • Associate Director: Wellbeing & Employee Benefits 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Executive Dean/ Director or nominee	Notify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice Chancellor • Relevant ELT member • CMK re Media communication (if relevant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify further staff to be notified • Identify and manage staff member's immediate commitments (eg teaching, appointments) Notify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate workgroup • Academic or Central Unit/Institute 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture or nominee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Circumstances of death ○ Identify areas staff member worked in at UniSA • Identify key stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider the EAP to attend onsite for staff ○ Consider Counsellors (SEU) to provide group sessions for students (if appropriate) Notify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chancellery regarding the personal notice and an acknowledgement to family on behalf of the University • SAS (if staff member was also a UniSA student) • Immigration Consultant to contact DIBP (if visa holder) • Chief Financial Officer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare brief statement to assist staff in responding to any communications regarding the deceased staff member 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Stage 2: Handling Arrangements and Business Continuity

Responsible Officer	Action	Complete
Executive Dean/ Director or nominee	Notify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students (if applicable) • External contacts • Redirect telephone and mail communications • Arrange out of office message for voicemail and email • Arrange delegate access to inbox if required • Communicate funeral details when known • List, pack and safely store personal possessions until the next of kin is ready to retrieve them 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Deputy Director: People, Talent and Culture or nominee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement targeted EAP services if required • Communicate family wishes to interested parties 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Manager: Business Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check and process any outstanding PTC matters (eg leave bookings, casual claims, employment changes) • Check with Associate Director: Wellbeing and Employee Benefits to establish if there are any outstanding workers compensation claims • Prepare Exit Checklist • Complete end of employment process 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Stage 3: Final Procedures / Follow Up (usually after funeral)

Responsible Officer	Action	Complete
Executive Dean/ Director or nominee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange collection or delivery of personal belongings • Arrange collection of University property from family (refer to Exit Checklist) • Remove staff name from office door, pigeon hole, and telephone and email lists • Contact relevant areas to remove access from corporate systems (Medici, Finance 1, UniSAinfo etc) and deletion of home page • Finalise Professional Development Fund (if applicable) 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Payroll Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify next of kin or appropriate contact regarding payment of entitlements to estate. 	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B – COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES

External email example to notifier:

Dear

Thank you for your notification to the University regarding the passing of <staff member>. On behalf of the University, we send our condolences and offer support to you and your family and friends at this time.

I understand that this is a difficult time, however there are a number of administrative questions that we would appreciate your assistance with when you are able to respond. The University will require confirmation of probate to make payment of final monies and entitlements as per <staff member's> request. This will also include <staff member's> superannuation. The University will be able to release the funds once a copy of the will or legal confirmation of the executor and trustee has been received. This will also be the same for <staff member's> personal effects in his office.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or (insert name of Director/Executive Dean) if you have any questions.

Internal email example for notification to key stakeholders:

Dear colleagues,

We have been advised this afternoon of the death of <staff member's>, <staff member's position title and area>, on (insert date). <Staff member> has worked with the University since XXXX.

We are in contact with <staff member's> family and understand funeral details will be confirmed in the coming days.

We are working through arrangements at present and will provide an update to relevant stakeholders in due course. Please contact me if you have any queries.

Internal email example for notification to colleagues:

Dear colleagues

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death yesterday of <staff member>. <Staff member> was a valued colleague who made a substantial contribution to the <local area> over the <insert period of time>. Our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.

<Staff member's> family have advised (insert funeral details)

OR

The details of <staff member'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 seek support at this time.

External email example for notification:

Dear

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the death of <Staff member>. <Staff member> made a substantial contribution to the University and to the field of <xxx> over the last ten years and s/he will be greatly missed.

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

Internal email example to ISTS to authorise access to inbox and drives:

Dear

The University was notified on (date) that <staff member> (Employee ID: 123456 and Username Zzzpp) passed away on (date).

Can you please authorise (name of key IT contact) to liaise with the Director/Executive Dean (name) regarding an out of office message and access to critical research data on <staff member's> computer.

Thank you.

Out of Office Message:

<Staff member> email account is no longer in use. For all student enquiries please refer to (insert delegated person's name and contact details). All other enquiries to (insert Director's/Executive Dean's name).