



Document name	Guidance for Investigating Officers
Responsible Team	Human Resources
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1. Purpose

This guidance is designed to support Investigating Officers in carrying out their role with fairness, consistency and confidence.

2. The role of an Investigating Officer

The Grievance Manager will provide a Terms of Reference (TOR) outlining the scope of the investigation and will appoint an Investigating Officer to conduct it accordingly. The Investigating Officer's role is to remain fair and objective, focusing on establishing the key facts to determine what did or did not happen. This includes seeking evidence that both supports and contradicts the allegations.

3. Key principles of an investigation

Investigating Officers should uphold to the following principles:

- Conduct a thorough, fair and proportionate investigation, concentrating on relevant and significant details.
- Ensure that all investigations are carried out ethically and within a reasonable timeframe.
- Be mindful of the needs of those involved in the process, making reasonable adjustments as required and raising any wellbeing concerns with the Grievance Manager.
- Provide regular updates, to the Grievance Manager, who will then update key stakeholders.

4. Unconscious bias

To promote fairness and objectivity, Investigating Officers should:

- Recognise that unconscious biases exist and take proactive steps to identify and mitigate them.
- Follow established procedures to maintain consistency and fairness in decision-making.
- Continuously review their decisions to ensure they remain objective and free from bias.
- Base conclusions on factual evidence rather than intuition or assumptions.
- Consider multiple perspectives and acknowledge that addressing unconscious bias is an ongoing process requiring reflection and effort.

5. Preparing for an Investigation

Draft an investigation plan from the TOR

The TOR provides the framework for the investigation. It is recommended that the Investigating Officer, with support from HR, develop an investigation plan to ensure a structured approach. This plan should:

- Clearly outline the key facts to establish.
- Identify the required evidence, its location, and how it will be gathered.
- Break the overall timeframe into manageable stages, prioritizing time-sensitive evidence such as witness availability or documents that may be routinely deleted.

Gathering additional evidence

In addition to interviews, other forms of evidence may be relevant, including written records (e.g., timesheets), physical evidence (e.g., CCTV footage), and policies or documents. The timing of collecting this evidence, before or after interviews, should be considered based on the specific needs of the investigation.

6. Preparing for an investigation meeting

The TOR will specify who needs to be interviewed. When arranging interviews, the Investigating Officer should consider:

the appropriate time, place, and duration. Interviews should be conducted in a private, confidential, and comfortable setting, preferably in person, though virtual interviews may be conducted using the University's chosen video conferencing platform if necessary.

- Scheduling meetings at a suitable time and place that ensures privacy and comfort.
- Conducting interviews in person whenever possible, though virtual interviews may be appropriate using the University's designated video conferencing platform.
- Preparing thoroughly by determining what information the interviewee can provide and identifying any areas requiring clarification.
- Addressing any reluctance from interviewees to participate by exploring concerns and offering reassurance.

7. Conducting an investigation interview

Key principles

- Help the interviewee feel comfortable and at ease.
- Minimise communication barriers.
- Build rapport to encourage open and honest responses.

Effective Questioning Techniques

- Encourage the interviewee to describe events in their own words.
- Allow them to speak freely, even if their account is not in chronological order.
- Keep questions focused on the facts and allegations.
- Avoid making assumptions or interpreting their responses.
- Use clear and neutral questions, avoiding:
 - Leading questions that may influence responses.
 - Interrogative questioning, as the goal is to gather facts rather than challenge the interviewee.

- Multiple questions at once, which can lead to confusion.

Question Types		
Type	Purpose	Example
Open questions	Encourage an interviewee to open up. They can provide a rich source of information that an investigator can then go on to explore in more Detail. Ask questions using the 5 W's and H: who, when, what, why, where and how.	Talk me through what you witnessed/heard Tell me your version of events about the incident on [DATE] In your view, XX is not a good manager. Can you elaborate? How did it make you feel? Who else may have relevant information? What happened? Where/when did it happen? Who did it? Are you aware of any other information that might be relevant?
Closed questions	Usually give a Yes, No, or definite answer. They can be helpful to gather specific facts and can help focus an overly talkative interviewee.	Did you hear what was said? Did you see what happened? Has it happened before? When did this occur? What time did you leave? Did you speak to your manager about that? Who was present? How many people were involved in the incident? Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Do you know of any reasons that might have prompted this incident? Do you know of others who might have information that is relevant?
Probing questions	Can test the strength of an interviewee's account and challenge any inconsistencies. However, it is important to phrase these questions so they are inquisitive rather than interrogative.	Could you tell me more about XX How would you describe your relationship with XX? Describe XX behaviour towards XX?

		<p>What did the complainant tell you?</p> <p>When you say XX was aggressive, what do you mean by this?</p> <p>You said that this has impacted on your work. In what way?</p> <p>What exactly did you mean by XX?</p> <p>When did the complainant tell you this?</p> <p>Tell me more about this....</p> <p>How can your evidence be corroborated?</p>
<i>Feeling questions</i>	Can help to focus an interviewee on what is important to them and reveal their beliefs. However, they should be used sparingly as the meeting is mainly to establish the actual facts of a matter.	<p>What was important to you about that?</p> <p>What is your main concern about what happened?</p>
<i>Asking what else question</i>	Helps an investigator to probe deeper beyond the initial information provided. However, care needs to be taken to ask this sensitively.	<p>What else can you tell me about what happened?</p> <p>What else do I need to know about the matter?</p>
<i>Summary</i>	Provide an opportunity to check that the correct information is recorded. They also allow the interviewee to reflect on what they have said, to correct any inaccuracies and to give further details where there are gaps.	<p>So can I clarify that what you are telling me is that you left your workplace at 10am because there was a problem at home and you did not return to work. Have I got that right?</p>

Body Language

- Whenever possible, try to maintain open and attentive body language with a relaxed posture. Avoid crossing your arms, nod steadily, and maintain eye contact without staring.
- Recognise that individuals, particularly those who are neurodivergent, may find it challenging to engage in this way. It's important to remain flexible and not assume discomfort or disengagement based on body language alone.
- If you, as the Investigating Officer, find it difficult to maintain these body language cues, that's completely okay, focus on ensuring that the interview environment remains comfortable and supportive for all parties involved. The most important thing is to foster open and respectful communication.

Listening

- Use a checklist to guide your focus, clarify points, and confirm details.
- Stay engaged with the interviewee and the purpose of the meeting.

- Pay close attention to their words, and ensure you are actively listening to what is being said, not just waiting for your turn to speak.
- Approach the interview with an open mind, acknowledging that all perspectives are important.
- Show empathy and understanding by acknowledging their viewpoints, using phrases like “I understand,” “Thank you for sharing that,” or “Can you help me understand that a bit more?”
- Be aware of any points the interviewee may avoid and gently probe further if needed to clarify important aspects.
- Give equal attention to all versions of events and refrain from making assumptions or jumping to conclusions before all the facts are heard.
- Allow the interviewee to finish their points fully before you respond or ask further questions.
- Don’t be afraid to pause and reflect on what has been said before continuing. It can be helpful to take a moment to consider their words thoughtfully.
- If something isn’t clear, ask for clarification or repetition to ensure you fully understand the information being shared.

8. Reviewing the evidence

Accurate collection and analysis of evidence is essential to the success of an investigation. Evidence by itself does not prove or disprove a case, it needs to be connected to and cross-referenced with relevant policies, procedures, codes of practices and the specific issues being investigated.

As the Investigating Officer, it’s important to ensure a thorough understanding of the evidence, being careful not to misinterpret or make assumptions about its meaning. If any part of the evidence is unclear, avoid drawing conclusions prematurely. Instead, seek additional information from relevant sources to fill in any gaps.

When reviewing evidence consider the following:

- What facts are undisputed or clearly established?
- What remains unclear due to insufficient evidence or conflicting accounts that cannot be corroborated?
- Are there other factors or perspectives that should be considered to ensure fairness in the investigation?

9. Preparing an Investigation Report

Once the Investigating Officer has gathered and assessed the facts to the best of their ability, they should compile a report using the designated template. The report should:

Clearly outline both established and unestablished facts.

Include any mitigating circumstances that may be relevant to the case.

Clearly categorise the evidence as:

- Undisputed and factual
- Contested or contradictory, requiring a determination based on probability
- Unsubstantiated, making it impossible to draw a conclusion

10. After an investigation is completed

Once the investigation report is finalised, the Investigating Officer should submit their report to the Grievance Manager. The Grievance Manager will decide on further action.