



Step-by-step plan and checklist: What to do when an employee dies

Introduction

It is important to know what steps have to be taken when an employee dies. Not only is the death of an employee a highly emotional time for co-workers and employer alike, it also entails obligations for the employer. One of these obligations is that the employment contract has to be properly processed in the administration system. This step-by-step plan outlines how to deal with the emotional aspects involved in the death of an employee and how to handle administrative procedures relating to the death.

If the deceased is a close relative of an employee, the employee concerned and their co-workers also need to be given support. Supervisors and co-workers should be proactive in offering support to the bereaved/co-workers: approach the bereaved person, make contact, and let them talk about their loss. Listening and recognition are more important than advice, and people tend to find poorly chosen words less hurtful than silence.

Exceptional situation due to the coronavirus

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Dutch government has taken measures to minimise social contact. This limits an employer's options in the event of an employee's death. Contact with the family is limited to telephone and e-mail. Co-workers and students can only be informed via e-mail or the University's private internal website.

Memorial services are limited to virtual environments, and may not involve gatherings of people. It goes without saying that you can still plan a memorial service for a later date, once measures limiting social contact are lifted.

General principles

- The death of an employee is such a dramatic event in the life of their family that we do everything in our power to show compassion and take responsibility for providing support.
- A general principle underlying all the guidelines below on how to deal with the death of an employee is the importance at all times of acting as much as possible in accordance with the family's wishes.
- Responsibility for all aspects of the process should be explicitly assigned.

Death announcement and notification

The first step is to confirm the death announcement. As soon as it is clear that the death announcement is correct, the recipient should notify the following:

- The Scientific Director or Head of Department, who in turn notifies the Faculty Board/Director of the Expertise Centre.
- The Faculty Board/Director notifies the Executive Board
- The employee's supervisor and co-workers at the department
- The Head of HRM/HRM adviser
- The head of the communications department

Depending on circumstances, the following are then notified:



- The University doctor
- The relevant embassy

Step-by-step plan and checklist

1. Designate a person responsible for the process and notifying co-workers

The Dean/Director of the Expertise Centre designates one person responsible for taking the necessary steps. This is usually the employee's supervisor. The designated person maintains contact with the family and keeps co-workers informed of developments. They distribute the death announcement among co-workers and enquire into the family's wishes. Designating a single contact person for the process prevents the family from being contacted by various co-workers and ensures that they have a single contact person for all their questions about processing the employment contract. If necessary, the crisis team can be brought in.

The death of an employee may be a great shock for their co-workers. Inform co-workers of the death as soon as possible and help them deal with any emotions or memories the death may elicit. The death of a colleague may remind co-workers of the death of their own loved ones, reviving their own grief.

○ Notify close colleagues

Ideally, close colleagues should be notified in person, or at the very least via a personal e-mail explaining what happened, who they can contact if they have any questions, and what the next steps are, such as some form of assembly. Make sure there is time at the end of the day for co-workers to come together, or organise a joint gathering on the same day (maybe to drink a cup of coffee).

○ Notify students

If the deceased was involved in teaching, notify their students and the relevant study association and involve them in all steps of the process.

○ Commemorating the deceased

In addition to a personal notification, it is important to give co-workers and students an opportunity to connect with others in their grief. It is a good idea to organise a gathering and designate a space where co-workers and students can come together or leave a message for the family. These messages can be passed on to the family at a later stage (usually after 2 to 3 weeks). Invite the HRM adviser to attend the gathering for close colleagues.

As long as the coronavirus measures are in force, it is not possible to organise an in-person memorial service. If necessary, you can plan one for a later date, once the measures are lifted.

2. Contact with the family

The designated person keeps in touch with the family and makes sure they receive the condolences of the Faculty/Department. Try to find out whether the family needs an interpreter. Keep in mind that every culture and religion has its own mourning rituals (for example, the Chinese avoid the colour red). Especially in times of grief, people have a strong need to organise the farewell according to their own customs, which is why it is crucial to discuss the family's wishes in detail. When talking to the family, the following matters should be addressed:

- Would the family appreciate the University contributing a branch/wreath/flowers for the funeral?
- Would the family appreciate co-workers attending the funeral?



- Would the family like someone from the University to speak at the funeral? And if so, who?
- If a gathering is organised for close colleagues, would the family like to attend?
- Will the family publish an obituary in the newspaper and would they like an obituary to be published on behalf of the University?
- If no photograph of the deceased is available, ask the family for a recent one to put on the website.
- Inform the family that an HRM officer will contact them a few days after the funeral to finalise a number of formalities (pension claim, death allowance, etc.). The outcome of this conversation should be reported to the designated person, who then carries out any required actions as soon as possible. Inform the family and close colleagues that the PSSC protocol dictates that in case of death the deceased's profile page on the University website will be deactivated as soon as the death is processed in the administration system.

If co-workers plan to attend the funeral, they should give notice of absence via the website, their answering machine, or an out-of-office message. If the department or service is temporarily closed because of the funeral, the designated person should make sure co-workers and external relations are informed of this.

As long as the coronavirus measures apply, co-workers will probably not be able to attend the funeral. It is a good idea to ask the family how much they want co-workers to be involved. Think for example of an invitation to organise a memorial service at a later time.

- The designated person makes sure a letter of condolence is sent on behalf of the Faculty Board/Director of the Expertise Centre, or the Executive Board.
- The designated person makes sure, if desired, a eulogy is written and read at the funeral, in consultation with the family and in accordance with their wishes.

3. Communication

The family is always involved in and informed of any internal or external communication by the University concerning the death. Depending on the job and position of the deceased, other organisations may have to be informed, for example if the deceased held several administrative positions. In consultation with other relevant organisations, the communications department determines the content and timing of all communication, including the content and publication date of the in memoriam and the publication of an obituary in the press. The designated person coordinates personal communication with external relations.

Website announcement

Once close colleagues and students have been personally notified, a brief informative announcement is published on the department's website. This announcement can later be replaced by an in memoriam. The designated person submits the announcement text to the communications department and provides an English translation.

E-mail

Once close colleagues have been personally notified, more people can be informed if so desired by e-mail. It is a good idea to include in this e-mail a link to the website announcement. It is also



important to make sure that as little time as possible elapses between the announcement on the website and the sending of the e-mail.

If the e-mail is addressed to all Faculty/Expertise Centre employees, the sender should be the Faculty Board/Director.

In memoriam

If the family would appreciate it, an in memoriam can be written. The text should be agreed by the family before it is published on the website. The family should also be asked beforehand whether the in memoriam can include a photograph of the deceased, and if so, whether it should be black and white or colour. If no photograph of the deceased is available in the image database of the Faculty, ask the family for a photograph.

The in memoriam is published on the department's website, whether or not this is a public website. The announcement can also be published on the staff and student website. The designated person coordinates this with the communications department responsible for publishing the in memoriam.

Social media

Depending on the position and role of the deceased within the University and its networks, co-workers and relations can be expected to comment on the death and express their sympathy on social media. The communications department and designated person should jointly decide whether and when the University will publish an announcement on its own social media channels.

Obituary

If the family wants the University to publish an obituary in the newspaper, the University obituary should follow that of the family. Regarding content and signature, the following guidelines apply:

- 1) If the deceased was a member of the Faculty Board or Director of an Expertise Centre, the obituary is signed by the Executive Board.
- 2) If the deceased held an administrative position, the obituary is signed by the Faculty Board/the Director of the Expertise Centre. Alternatively, it can be signed by both the Executive Board and the Faculty Board/Director of the Expertise Centre.
- 3) In all other cases, the announcement is signed by the Director of the Expertise Centre/Scientific Director or the Director of Operational Management, and/or the employee's supervisor.
- 4) If the deceased was a professor emeritus, specific conditions may apply and the matter of the signature is determined in consultation with the Faculty Board.

If the obituary is signed by the Faculty Board or the Executive Board, it can be signed by the Dean or Rector, respectively, or by all board members.

4. Dealing with work-related appointments

When an employee dies, depending on their position, their diary could be filled with work-related appointments and obligations. These appointments should be postponed until co-workers can take over. External parties working on ongoing projects with the deceased should be notified of the death. The deceased's ongoing projects and other activities should be transferred to co-workers or staff hired for this purpose. The employee's e-mail address should be redirected so incoming e-mail can be processed by co-workers.



- Go through the deceased's diary, possibly with the help of the secretary or a co-worker
- Notify external parties of the death
- Transfer ongoing projects and activities
- Cancel or redirect e-mail address to the department's general e-mail address, or to the e-mail address of a co-worker. Apply for permission for this from the Director of Operational Management.
- The deceased's e-mail account remains active for 60 days after death. Their digital property/legacy can unfortunately not be shared with co-workers or family under the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG).

5. Funeral and aftercare

The funeral

This is handled as much as possible in accordance with the family's wishes. Unless the family wishes otherwise, a management representative attends the funeral. The designated person coordinates funeral attendance on behalf of the University. Depending on the family's wishes, co-workers can also attend the funeral.

If the family wishes, a speech can be given on behalf of the University.

Restrictions on social contact as a result of the coronavirus measures may mean that attendance at the funeral is not possible. In that case, contact from management will be via telephone, letter, or e-mail.

Aftercare

There are two forms of aftercare

- Material aftercare
- Immaterial aftercare

The HRM department is responsible for material aftercare, including finalising financial matters (death allowance, final settlement, and pension). If needed, the designated person makes sure that someone (either they or a designated HRM representative) helps the family complete the required forms.

If needed, immaterial care for co-workers can be provided by the University Health and Social counsellor or University doctor. The designated person should discuss the matter with the HRM adviser, who can then put people in touch with a counsellor. The Health, Safety and Environment Department (University doctor and University Health and Safety counsellor) are responsible for determining the counselling frequency and duration. For long-term grief counselling, employees are likely to be referred to external counsellors.

6. Salary after death

The deceased's employment contract ends by operation of law upon death. Beneficiaries are entitled to salary payment until the end of the month plus an additional remuneration of 3 months, in accordance with Article 7.4 of the Collective Labour Agreement of Dutch Universities. The salary administration is responsible for paying out the death allowance. The death allowance is exempted from both income tax and employee insurance premiums.

The salary administration records the employee's death and the termination of their employment in



the wage tax return for the relevant time period, under employee information. The salary administration is required by law to keep a copy of the employee's ID and income tax declaration or the form containing all information concerning their payroll tax for at least five calendar years after the year in which the employment contract is terminated.

7. Retrieving University property

The designated person makes an appointment with the family to retrieve University property, which could include a mobile telephone, keys, etc. The deceased may also have kept personal items at work or in their office, and these should be returned to the family.

When making an appointment to retrieve and return property, the limitations on social contact as a result of the coronavirus measures should be taken into account.

8. Social counsellor

As mentioned above, the death of an employee, whether sudden or not, may have a big effect on their colleagues. This could result in a member of staff experiencing emotional difficulties that are outside the scope of the Faculty/Institute. In this case a referral can be made to a University Health and Safety counsellor or University doctor via the Health, Safety and Environment Department to help resolve the employee's problems.

Death of an Employee Checklist

Report the death	
If you are the first to receive the news, tell the family they will shortly receive a call from the deceased's supervisor or a designated person. Ask where and when the family can be reached.	
Ask how the employee died and notify their supervisor.	
The supervisor ascertains that the death report is correct.	
As soon as the death is confirmed, notify the relevant Scientific Director and Faculty Board, and the Executive Board.	
A person should be designated to be responsible for handling the process, usually the supervisor.	
The designated person contacts the family and relatives.	

Communication	
The designated person establishes a communication plan in consultation with HRM and the communications department. The communications department is responsible for carrying out this plan.	
The designated person first notifies the Scientific Director and Institute Manager, who assemble co-workers and inform them personally of the death. In doing so, they should allow room for people's initial responses. If necessary, they should inform colleagues of the availability of University Health and Safety counsellors.	
After this, the death can be officially reported, for example via a newsletter. Here, too, the availability of counselling should be mentioned.	
The designated person considers whether a gathering of colleagues is desired and, if so, organises this. The designated person contacts the family to ask whether they wish to attend this gathering.	



Make it clear who people can contact for initial counselling and aftercare (social counsellor via Health, Safety or HRM).	
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Contact with the family	
A single designated person is responsible for all contact with the family.	
As soon the family's wishes for the funeral are clear, the designated person passes this information on to the department so they can decide how they can take part in the funeral.	
The Institute or Faculty writes an obituary in consultation with the Scientific Director/Institute Manager and/or co-workers.	
The obituary is published in consultation with the family and funeral director.	

The funeral (taking coronavirus measures into account)	
Be mindful of cultural differences: prepare co-workers as much as possible for a funeral that may be different from what they are used to.	
Decide who will stay behind at the Institute and who will attend the funeral.	
Decide who will speak at the funeral.	
If needed, organise transport from the University to the funeral location.	
Communicate internally about co-workers' availability/absence.	

After the funeral	
The designated person makes an appointment with the family to retrieve University property and return personal belongings.	
The designated person offers help in applying for the beneficiary pension.	
The designated person handles all administrative and legal matters, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Payment of final salary and death allowance ➤ Cancellation of parking and other University-related subscriptions 	
The designated person contacts the family a few more times on behalf of the Faculty/Institute.	
The designated person enquires whether the family would appreciate further contact in the form of continued staff association membership, subscription to the staff magazine, etc.	

Aftercare within the Faculty/Institute	
Be patient and show empathy for emotions; a death can be very distressing for close colleagues.	
Discuss with co-workers when to look for a replacement for the deceased, and how this should be done.	