**UCU Branch Casework Information and Sources of Support document**

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1. How do I request a caseworker?

To request a caseworker, you need to complete a Casework Request Form and return it to the Open University Branch of UCU (OUBUCU) at the ucu@open.ac.uk mailbox.

1. Who will my caseworker be?

Your caseworker will be a UCU member of Open University staff who has volunteered to undertaken training in casework in order to support members. Your caseworker is able to support you with information on how to utilise local OU policies and with your permission, they may also liaise with People Services (HR) and management in order to advocate for you. Most of the time, your caseworker is volunteering their time to support you, around their existing job.

1. How long will it take to be allocated a caseworker?

The branch aims to allocate a casework within 6 working days of receipt of a fully completed casework request form in the ucu@open.ac.uk mailbox. The branch handles a high volume of sensitive casework and endeavours to allocate casework support in order of need. If your case is triaged to be an emergency then we will endeavour to allocate you support within 2 working days. If your case is triaged to be urgent, then we will endeavour to allocate you caseworker support within 4 days. All other cases will be allocated a caseworker within 6 working days.

1. I have an important meeting coming up

Most formal meetings allow staff to have a UCU Representative (caseworker) accompany them. A formal meeting is one that has been called for in writing where you are given the right to have a union representative present. A People Services (HR) representative will also be present. Examples of formal meetings include: disciplinary, grievance, capability, or bullying and harassment hearings.

For formal meetings where you have a right to a UCU Representative (caseworker) to be present to support you, then in order to make time for us to find a caseworker, you are able to request that management flex the time/date/location of a scheduled meeting by 5 days in either direction. If there is a risk that you may not be allocated a caseworker in time for a currently scheduled meeting, then we recommend that you contact People Services (HR) and let them know that you are seeking a caseworker for the date offered, however you may need to reschedule if your caseworker is unable to attend the given date and you will be in touch with them shortly to confirm.

Informal meetings are ones scheduled with your line manager or other management staff in your unit or faculty, whereby you have no right to a union rep to be present. Technically, this includes Performance Improvement Plan meetings (that are deemed by management to be ‘informal’, however formal they might feel). You might still request that the timing of such a meeting allows for you to receive advice from the union beforehand, however this is not a right.

1. I’m very upset and need someone to talk to

Your branch is working hard to allocate you a caseworker with the skillset to respond to your case. If you have an urgent mental or physical health issue in the meantime, please contact your GP or emergency health services in the usual way and follow their advice.

It may also be helpful for you to know that free confidential support and information, including emotional support and counselling, is available to you 24hrs per day, 7 days per week from both The Open University and UCU. This support is entirely confidential and statistics alone are collected from the support provider, not information on individuals, i.e. you can request and receive support without your line manager or HR knowing.

### 24/7 support provided by The Open University:

[The employee assistance programme](http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources/policies-and-procedures?path=e/employee-assistance-programme#documents)

This service is provided by Health Assured (via Health Management Ltd) and can be accessed in the following ways: Online by visiting [www.healthassuredeap.co.uk](http://www.healthassuredeap.co.uk) (enter username: Open and the password is Uni). You can also call using the free phone number: 0800 030 5182.

### 24/7 support provided by UCU:

[Education support partnership](https://www.ucu.org.uk/educationsupportpartnership)

Education Support Partnership understand the unique pressures that working in FE and HE puts on people. That's why they provide independent, confidential 24/7 support, to help people deal with stress and anxiety, bullying, career and money worries, and a range of other issues. Contact Number: 0800 056 2561 (helpline) / 07909 341229 (text)

1. I don’t know what my rights are under OU policy and procedure

Your rights under OU policy and procedure are often of a higher standard than employment law requires. The majority of casework received by the branch, references OU policy and procedures.

Your caseworker can investigate and advise you on the OU policies and procedures that are relevant to your case when you meet or speak with them. In the meantime, you can find information on the OU’s HR policies and procedures directly via the links below:

### Associate Lecturer policies and procedures:

### <https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-tutor-help-centre/Pages/al-employment-policies.aspx>

### Internal staff policies and procedures:

<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources/policies-and-procedures>

1. Can my caseworker give me legal advice?

Your caseworker cannot offer you legal advice, however they are able to draw on UCU support and training on the legal framework for employment rights. The vast majority of cases that the branch deal with do not require legal support. However, your caseworker is trained to spot where legal factors may be at play in the information you provide and refer your case for consideration of legal support if necessary.

Where legal factors apply, then by law there is usually a deadline of three months minus one day, to lodge a claim with the courts. Usually, the court require early-conciliation efforts prior to tribunal. Your caseworker can give you more details on this, however please note that legally, the responsibility is yours for lodging a claim within the three months minus one day deadline.

You can find more information on UCU legal help online here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/legal>

This includes help for: employment rights, police enquiries, personal injury, immigration employment advice

1. What do your caseworkers need in order to help you?

In order to provide you with good advice quickly, your caseworker will likely request a timeline and key documentation from you. Events that took place within the last three months are of particular importance, however you may wish to go back further to provide context.

Key documents that are likely to be important include: copies of any formal letters received by you from management, occupational health reports, original PIP reports and PIP review documentation, written accounts of any complaint against you, evidence of events you are complaining about, sickness support plan or stress risk assessment documentation, copies of GP sickness/fitness to work notes, most recent CDSA (annual review) and information on any declared or undeclared disability or other equality factor (see casework request form).

It may be necessary to provide more detailed written information and email evidence to your caseworker at a later stage, but at the outset, your caseworker will be able to support you best if you are able to identify just key events and documents on a timeline. Ideally, attach all timeline and documentation to a single email and send this to ucu@open.ac.uk for attention of your caseworker as soon as possible.

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### **Example of a clear timeline you could prepare for your caseworker:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **Date** | **Notes** | **Documentation attached?** |
| Sickness Support Plan (SSP) | 15th January 2019 |  | Yes - copy of SSP |
| Occupational Health (OH) assessment | 5th January 2019 |  | Yes – copy of OH report |
| Occupational Health referral | 20th December 2018 |  | Yes – copy of OH referral form |
| Off work sick | 19th October 2018 to 10th January 2018 | GP notes cite work-related stress and recommend phased return to work | N/a |
| Problematic email/meeting with colleague | 15th October 2018 | They said “xyz”I said “xyz”Result = xyz | Yes – notes of meeting/copy of email |
| Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) meeting | 15th September 2018 | 1st PIP meeting | Yes – copy of PIP attached. |
| Problematic email/meeting that led to PIP | 1st September 2018 |  | Yes – Notes of meeting/copy of the email attached. |
| CDSA | 3rd June 2018 | CDSA meeting, no problems reported with my performance. | Yes – copy of CDSA attached. |