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Casework will almost always involve handling sensitive material and information – that is to say, material and information about a member who has a legitimate expectation that the information given is treated as strictly confidential.

With this in mind, it is important to take stock of the arrangements you make when undertaking casework. For example, where do you meet the member, where do you store their information and how? A good trade union facilities agreement should address many of these issues, such as a locked office space and use of the



## *Ideally, reps should have a secure place for their own casew*

- 5 If you use a laptop, whether your own or your employer's, UCU recommends that the whole of the drive is encrypted, and certainly any files relating to UCU casework must be encrypted and kept separated from your employer's business files and folders.
- 6 Whatever you use, you should ensure that files relating to one member's case are not intermingled with another member's case (or your work files). Files should be strictly segregated and kept properly ordered.
- 7 If you use email to send and receive casework-related emails it may be appropriate to create and use a specific email account, rather than your work email account. Remember to check with the member which email address they would prefer you to use. It is usually best if you do not use their work email account.
- 8 When sending sensitive documents via email, it may be appropriate to send them using a secure method, such as an encrypted zip file. Using cloud storage applications does not obviate the need for additional security, such as encryption. We also recommend that you select the option to receive a 'delivered' and 'read' report.
- 9 If you access emails and documents on a smart phone/tablet, you must ensure the device is locked when not in use.
- 10 If you need to copy emails to others then you should consider whether you use the 'bcc' option which withholds the addressee's email address (particularly if the email address in question is a personal email address).





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It's important to understand t





# Handling casework: a guide for UCU reps

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You should also avoid venturing a personal viewpoint, eg if the member complains about X, don't say that you know X and think s/he is incapable of acting improperly.

In some cases, by the end of the first meeting you may need to consider escalating the member's case to a more experienced branch caseworker, and notifying the regional office – this would normally be appropriate in any case where dismissal is threatened or the complaint is one of discrimination.

By the end of the first meeting you should aim to:

- identify and agree the issues so that specific action points can be also agreed and taken forward by the union

- agree a narrative and submit it to the relevant bodies (e.g. the relevant union, the relevant authority, the relevant court, etc.)



## *Being a rep often means advising the member of choices <sup>A</sup>/<sub>A</sub> e.*

them but in the end the member is responsible for their own actions, or inactions.

- 5 Always maintain a paper trail of your actions and advice. If you give any advice orally, follow it up with an email or written note.
- 6 Be conscious of, and avoid, conflicting interests. If a member seeks help about another member, or another non-union employee, reflect on whether you, or UCU, may have any conflicting interests. If you think you may have, it will usually require you, or UCU, to step aside from advising the member.
- 7 If you are asked by management to have an 'off the record' or 'without prejudice' conversation, make sure that you tell the member beforehand and obtain their agreement. Also, make it clear to the manager that anything they say will be reported back to the member.
- 8 As the casework progresses it is usually worthwhile checking back against what was agreed at the first meeting. Have you covered all the issues and have any new ones been raised?
- 9 When offering technical advice, eg what the law is on a particular point – take your time and look it up, or contact the regional office for guidance. Don't be tempted to offer the advice based on a hazy recollection.

*Establishing informal arrangements within a branch which allows casework reps to share and discuss issues is likely to be helpful.*

- 10** Your employer will usually keep a set of internal policies and procedures and it is worth finding out where these are kept and familiarising yourself with the contents. It is also worth exploring the possibility of resolving a case informally before invoking these local procedures or seeking legal remedy.
- 11** Finally, every caseworker is likely to face a case where their own experience or knowledge is pushed to the limit – establishing informal arrangements within a branch which allows casework reps to share and discuss problems and issues is likely to be helpful. Remember this should always be on a confidential basis unless the assisted member agrees to their information being shared in this way.



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## *At the conclusion, if you have any original documents belonging*

Data should not be held for longer than is necessary, and so at the end of the designated archive period you should have a system which reminds you to securely delete the case file.

Paper documents should be shredded and electronic files should be securely deleted. If you are not sure what this involves seek guidance from your IT support team.





# Useful links and further support

The sites listed below offer a good source of employment law and related information:

## **UCU Support Centre**

<https://ucu.custhelp.com/>

## **Thompsons Solicitors**

[www.thompsons.law.co.uk](http://www.thompsons.law.co.uk)

## **Slater & Gordon Lawyers**

[www.slatergordon.co.uk](http://www.slatergordon.co.uk)

## **Government Services Information**

[www.gov.uk/browse/working](http://www.gov.uk/browse/working)

## **ACAS**

<http://www.acas.org.uk>

## **Further support**

Your UCU regional office can provide further support and advice on handling casework and representing members. For contact details see: [www.ucu.org.uk/yourcontacts](http://www.ucu.org.uk/yourcontacts)

We recommend that UCU reps conducting casework receive appropriate training. You can access our full range of courses at:

[www.ucu.org.uk/training](http://www.ucu.org.uk/training)





