

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

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01. What legislation, guidance and/or policies govern a workplace investigation?

Austria

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Austrian law does not impose an obligation on employers to conduct internal investigations and they do not have to follow a specific legal pattern when doing so. However, an obligation to conduct internal investigations may arise out of certain provisions of criminal, company or even labour law – in particular, an indirect obligation arising from an employer's duty of care, which requires them to act against employee mistreatment, such as bullying.

If such internal investigations are initiated, compliance with labour law and data protection regulations is mandatory. According to section 16 of the Austrian Civil Code (ABGB), the employer must also protect the personal rights of the individual. It is important to emphasise that a company's internal investigation is a private measure and differs from official investigations.

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Ireland

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In Ireland, employees have a constitutional right and an implied contractual right to natural justice and fair procedures. If a workplace investigation is not conducted in accordance with these principles, an employee may allege that the investigation is fundamentally flawed. If such an allegation is made then an employee may seek recourse from the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) or potentially the High Court. The WRC is the body in Ireland tasked with dealing with employment law-related claims, including unfair dismissal.

The constitutional rights that employees enjoy were specified in the Supreme Court case of *Re Haughey* in 1971. That case held that where proceedings may harm the reputation of a person, public bodies must afford certain basic protections of constitutional justice to a witness appearing before it. It further stated that article 40.3 of the Irish Constitution is a guarantee to the citizen of basic fairness of procedures. These

protections, known as “Re Haughey rights” are implied in each contract of employment.

A Code of Practice was introduced in 2000, namely S.I. No. 146/2000 - Industrial Relations Act, 1990 (Code of Practice on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures) (Declaration) Order, 2000 (the Code). The Code set out the procedures for dealing with grievances or disciplinary matters, which must comply with the general principles of natural justice and fair procedures and include:

- that employee grievances are fairly examined and processed;
- that details of any allegations or complaints are put to the employee concerned;
- that the employee concerned is allowed to respond fully to any such allegations or complaints;
- that the employee concerned is given the opportunity to avail of the right to be represented during the procedure; and
- that the employee concerned has the right to a fair and impartial determination of the issues concerned, taking into account any representations made by, or on behalf of, the employee and any other relevant or appropriate evidence, factors or circumstances.

Further Codes of Practice on the prevention and resolution of bullying at work and on dealing with sexual harassment and harassment at work were published in 2021 and 2022, respectively. The provisions of these codes are admissible in evidence before a court, the WRC and the Labour Court.

In addition to the above, the Data Protection Commission published Data Protection in the Workplace: Employer Guidance in April 2023.

All employers should have specific and up-to-date policies dealing with how workplace investigations will be carried out that are suitable for their organisation. These policies may vary, depending on the subject of the investigation and the size and type of employer. However, all should adhere to the principles identified above to ensure that a robust policy is in place and can be utilised.

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Switzerland

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There is no specific legal regulation for internal investigations in Switzerland. The legal framework is derived from general rules such as the employer's duty of care, the employee's duty of loyalty and the employee's data protection rights. Depending on the context of the investigation, additional legal provisions may apply; for instance, additional provisions of the Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection or the Swiss Criminal Code.

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United Kingdom

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In the UK, the primary employment legislation of relevance to a workplace investigation includes the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996), the Equality Act 2010 (EA 2010), and the Employment Relations Act 1999 (ERA 1999).

Other legislation includes the retained EU law version of the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA 2016) and the Investigatory Powers (Interception by Businesses etc for Monitoring and Record-keeping Purposes) Regulations 2018 (IP Regs 2018), and the Humans Rights Act 1998 (HRA 1998).

In terms of guidance, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) have produced a [Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures](#) (the ACAS Code) as well as a [Guide to conducting workplace investigations](#). The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) have their [Employment Practices Code](#), and other pieces of guidance on the data protection aspects of investigations (see question 7).

Most employers will have internal policies governing how workplace investigations should be conducted. The level of detail may vary considerably; public sector and regulated employers may be more prescriptive in their policies, which may even have contractual force. There may also be provisions of the employment contract that are relevant (particularly as regards suspension – see question 3).

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02. How is a workplace investigation usually commenced?



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In general, an internal investigation is only initiated if there is suspicion of a violation. The decision to commence an internal investigation is up to the company, and it has to weigh the pros and cons. For limited liability companies, which are subject to the Association Responsibility Act, an internal investigation may exempt them from criminal liability. Disadvantages may include investigation costs, disruption of operations, discovery of information requiring later disclosure, possible negative media coverage and increased risk of exposure to external parties.

Investigations can relate to specific individuals, departments, or the entire company. An investigation may include various measures, such as obtaining and analysing files and documents, conducting questionnaires and employee interviews, monitoring internet use, video or telephone surveillance of employees and setting up whistleblowing hotlines. Not all measures are acceptable without restrictions. The provisions of labour law and data protection law must always be complied with.

To avoid wasting resources, the objectives of the investigation should be defined in advance. In addition, the selection and sequence of instruments to be used should be determined. A legal assessment of the chosen measures is essential to avoid legal complications.

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Ireland

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Investigations can start in multiple ways. They usually stem from an employee raising a grievance, a bullying complaint, or a possible protected disclosure. Investigations may also stem from the employer in a disciplinary context, or indeed can be commenced if an external complaint or issue is raised by a third party of the organisation.

The first thing the employer must consider is whether an investigation is necessary. It may be that the issue at hand can be resolved informally or is of such a nature that it cannot be investigated, either through a lack of detail or simply because the subject of the complaint is no longer an employee. Any such decision to investigate or not should be carefully documented.

The next step to determine is the nature of the investigation. It should be clear at the outset whether the investigation is simply a fact-gathering exercise or if the investigator will be tasked with making findings on the evidence. The distinction is significant as a fact-gathering investigation can proceed without prompting the full panoply of rights, but the basic principles of fairness should still be applied. A fact-gathering investigation should determine whether there is or is not, a case to answer. If a disciplinary hearing follows then the rights outlined in question 1 will apply at that stage. If it is a fact-finding investigation, the rights apply from the outset of the process. The employee who is required to respond to the issues (the respondent) should be fully aware of the extent of the investigation. The investigator appointed to do the investigation should be clear about what is expected of them.

If the employer believes an investigation is necessary, it should be acknowledged and started without delay. In particular, according to the Protected Disclosures legislation, a report should be acknowledged within seven days.

An employer should consider and identify the scope of the investigation and establish who will investigate the matter. Terms of reference under which the investigation will be carried out should be established by the employer and shared with the employee raising the issue (the complainant). An employer should not seek agreement on the terms, but invite commentary to ensure that the full scope of the investigation is captured within the terms of reference. Robust terms of reference that lay down the clear parameters of the investigation will assist the investigator and all parties involved in the process.

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Switzerland

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Internal investigations are usually initiated after reports about possible violations of the employer's code of conduct, applicable laws or regulations have been submitted by employees to their superiors, the human resources department or designated internal reporting systems such as hotlines (including whistleblowing hotlines).

For an internal investigation to be initiated, there must be a reasonable suspicion (grounds).^[1] If no such grounds exist, the employer must ask the informant for further or more specific information. If no grounds for reasonable suspicion exist, the case must be closed. If grounds for reasonable suspicion exist, the appropriate investigative steps can be initiated by a formal investigation request from the company management.^[2]

^[1] Claudia Fritsche, *Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz: Ein Handbuch für regulierte Finanzinstitute und andere Unternehmen*, Zürich/St. Gallen 2013, p. 21.

^[2] Klaus Moosmayer, *Compliance, Praxisleitfaden für Unternehmen*, 2. A. München 2015, N 314.

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United Kingdom

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The trigger could come from several sources, such as a grievance from a current or former employee, a complaint from external sources, a whistleblowing disclosure, or as the result of internal governance

measures.

In each case, the employer will need to decide if an investigation is warranted. It may be required by internal policies or regulatory requirements in some circumstances. Consideration must be given to whether an investigation is feasible; for example, is the evidence still in existence and accessible? Are key witnesses still employed or contactable?

If the employer concludes that an investigation is warranted, it should start without unreasonable delay. The first step would usually be to set terms of reference, which outline the purpose and remit of the investigation. These should be closely drafted and continually referred to, to avoid the investigation's scope expanding when new points arise (as they almost always will). An investigator will also need to be appointed (see question 4).

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03. Can an employee be suspended during a workplace investigation? Are there any conditions on suspension (eg, pay, duration)?



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Yes. An employer may always, and without legal restrictions, temporarily suspend an employee during an internal investigation, provided he or she continues to be paid.

However, suspending the employee does not release the employer from an obligation to terminate employment without notice. It must be clear to the employee that the suspension is a temporary measure in preparation for dismissal. A suspension does not entitle the employer to postpone the reasons for dismissal for any length of time. The longer the suspension lasts, the more likely it is that the employer intends to keep the employee.

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Ireland

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Workplace suspensions in Ireland are a contentious issue and can result in an employer defending injunction proceedings in the High Court before an investigation has started.

In the case of *Governor and Company of the Bank of Ireland v Reilly*, the judge stated: "The suspension of an employee, whether paid or unpaid, is an extremely serious measure which can cause irreparable damage to his or her reputation and standing."

In the 2023 case of *O'Sullivan v HSE*, the Supreme Court held that the Health Service Executive acted fairly and reasonably as an employer in suspending a consultant doctor after he had performed experiments on patients without their consent. This ruling overturned the Court of Appeal's earlier decision that previously found the suspension to be unlawful, as the consultant did not represent an immediate threat to the health of patients.

The Supreme Court considered whether the employer's decision to place the consultant on administrative leave met the test set out in the English case of *Braganza v BP Shipping Limited & Anor*. In that case, the court held that the decisionmaker's discretion would be limited "by concepts of good faith, honesty and genuineness and the need for absence of arbitrariness, capriciousness, perversity and irrationality."

In relying on the principles set out in the *Braganza* case, the Irish courts have reinforced the right of a decision-maker in an employment context to have discretionary power when implementing a suspension and that any decision to do so must be made honestly and in good faith. Employers should obtain legal advice when considering whether to suspend an employee in any circumstance.

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Switzerland

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It is possible to suspend an employee during a workplace investigation.^[1] While there are no limits on duration, the employee will remain entitled to full pay during this time.

[1] David Rosenthal et al., *Praxishandbuch für interne Untersuchungen und eDiscovery*, Release 1.01, Zürich/Bern 2021, p. 181.

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United Kingdom

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In the UK, suspension is not seen as a neutral act, so should not be a default approach at the start of an investigation. It may be appropriate if, for example, there is a risk to the health and safety of the employee in question (or any other employee), a risk that their continued presence in the business could prejudice the investigation, or risk of continued wrongdoing.

The employer should always check the individual's employment contract to see if it contains the power to suspend. Suspension should generally always be with pay to avoid any breach of contract. It should also be regularly reviewed and kept to a minimum duration.

Employers should not suspend employees under investigation as a knee-jerk reaction to bare allegations. There must be at least some evidence to support the need for suspension (which may require a preliminary investigation before deciding to suspend). Alternatives to suspension should always be considered, such as a temporary transfer to a different area of work, if the employee agrees or it is otherwise permitted by their contract.

If authorities such as regulators or prosecutorial agencies are involved in the investigation, they may have an opinion about an employee's suspension, particularly if they wish to conduct interviews. Consider whether or not to involve the authorities in the suspension discussions at an early stage.

ACAS have produced a [guide to suspension during investigations](#) (last updated Sept 2022) which gives further guidance on these issues.

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04. Who should conduct a workplace investigation, are there minimum qualifications or criteria that need to be met?



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There are no prescribed minimum standards for this procedure. The responsibility for conducting these investigations lies with the employers. Internal compliance or legal teams are often entrusted with this task, as they are familiar with internal protocols. In practice, these investigations are often overseen by an internal team, occasionally with the assistance of law firms or auditing firms. Those involved in the investigation must remain impartial. Potentially biased persons, such as those under investigation and their close associates, should be excluded from participation.

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Ireland

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An investigator does not have to hold any minimum qualifications. More often than not it is an employee's manager or HR manager who is carrying out the investigation. Crucially, the person carrying out the investigation must not be involved in the complaint, as an argument of bias could be made before the investigation begins. The investigator should also be of suitable seniority to the respondent and have the necessary skills and experience to carry out an investigation. If a recommendation by the investigator is made to progress the matter to a disciplinary process, which may in turn be the subject of the appeal, there should be adequate, neutral personnel within the organisation to deal with each stage. Again if the investigator and the disciplinary decisionmaker are the same person, an argument of bias will be made that will usually lead to a breach of fair procedures and any decision being unsustainable. Frequently, employers outsource the investigation to an external third party as there may simply not be adequate personnel within the organisation to carry out the process. Employers should ensure that within their policies the right to appoint an internal or external investigator is reserved.

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Switzerland

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The examinations can be carried out internally by designated internal employees, by external specialists, or by a combination thereof. The addition of external advisors is particularly recommended if the allegations are against an employee of a high hierarchical level^[1], if the allegations concerned are quite substantive and, in any case, where an increased degree of independence is sought.

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The investigator would typically be a line manager or HR representative. Complex cases, particularly if criminality is suspected, or cases where a senior employee is accused of misconduct, may require the investigator to be someone more senior within the organisation, or someone from the in-house legal team. Employers should bear in mind the need for someone more senior than the investigator to act as a disciplinary decisionmaker, if disciplinary action is found to be warranted.

Check the organisation's policies and procedures, which may stipulate who can act as an investigator.

The investigator should be someone without any personal involvement in the matters under investigation, or any conflict of interest, but with sufficient knowledge of the organisation and where possible with both training and experience in conducting investigations.

The business should consider how any prospective investigator may appear if they are called as a witness in court, or to give evidence before any governmental committee or regulatory panel. They should also consider whether the employee accused of wrongdoing should have any say in the choice of investigator; this would not typically occur, but having the employee's buy-in can increase the chances of a successful outcome to the investigation.

It is becoming increasingly common for businesses to use an external consultant or lawyer to conduct workplace investigations. This may be beneficial where it is not operationally viable within the employer organisation to have a different person conducting the investigation and the disciplinary hearing, or if the investigation is particularly sensitive or complex, or relates to a very senior employee. If an external investigator is appointed, the employer remains responsible for that investigation.

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05. Can the employee under investigation bring legal action to stop the investigation?



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If the investigated employee believes that individual measures violate his rights, he or she can defend him or herself against them, but he or she cannot stop the entire investigation.

In principle, the employee has various rights such as access, rectification, erasure and the right to contest the processing of his or her data (articles 12-17 and 21 GDPR). Should these principles be violated, the employee has the right to lodge a complaint with the data protection authority.

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Ireland

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Arguably yes, but it is the exception rather than the rule and it will depend upon the circumstances of the case. Generally, courts would be slow to intervene in ongoing workplace investigations. However, an employee may seek injunctive relief to prevent an investigation if they can show that the investigation is being conducted in breach of a policy or breach of fair procedures to such an extent that there is no reasonable prospect that the investigation's outcome(s) could be sustainable.

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The accused could theoretically request a court to stop the investigation, for instance, by arguing that there is no reason for the investigation and that the investigation infringes the employee's personality rights. However, if the employer can prove that there were grounds for reasonable suspicion and is conducting the investigation properly, it is unlikely that such a request would be successful.

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Not usually, unless the investigation is being conducted in breach of a contractual policy (as sometimes happens in the NHS, for example), or if the investigation is not adjourned pending the outcome of criminal proceedings, and the employee can show that failure to do so is a breach of either an express term or the implied term of trust and confidence. The latter would be rare, but possible if the employee can demonstrate a real danger of a miscarriage of justice (see question 21).

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06. Can co-workers be compelled to act as witnesses? What legal protections do employees have when acting as witnesses in an investigation?

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An essential part of an internal investigation is the questioning of employees. Their statements contribute significantly to clarifying possible violations. In particular, the legal principles that apply to criminal

proceedings, including the right to refuse to testify, do not apply directly to internal investigations.

Employees do not legally have to participate in such interviews. Their duty to cooperate arises indirectly from other legal provisions, in particular from employees' duties of loyalty and service under labour law.

Austrian law suggests there is a general principle of loyalty, which triggers a "duty to inform" under some circumstances; in principle, the employee and any witnesses are expected to provide information in the context of internal investigations. While the employee is not compelled to incriminate him or herself, he or she also may not withhold work-related information that the employer legitimately wishes to protect, for the sole reason that it might incriminate him or her. The decision as to whether the employee must disclose information depends on a balancing of interests in the specific case.

Investigators and employers must strictly adhere to the permissible limits. This requires compliance with labour law, criminal law and data protection law.

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Yes, but a qualified yes. To deny an employee who is the respondent to the complaint the right to cross-examine the complainant during a workplace investigation may amount to a breach of fair procedures. This does not mean in practice that a complainant or witness will have to physically or virtually attend a meeting to be subjected to cross-examination. What usually happens, in practice, is that specific questions of the respondent are put to the witness by the investigator for them to respond. On occasion and depending on the circumstances, the witnesses may respond in writing.

Generally, if witnesses do not wish to participate in workplace investigations and they are not the witnesses from whom the complaint originated, there is little that can be done. An employee may not want to be seen as going against a colleague, which impacts the wider issue of staff morale. An employer cannot force them to participate. Also an employee who is the respondent should be careful about seeking to compel witnesses to attend. While the respondent may request support from a colleague to act as a witness, that colleague may view things differently, which can lead to further issues.

In any event, employees cannot be victimised or suffer any adverse treatment for having acted as a witness.

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Due to the employee's duty of loyalty towards the employer and the employer's right to give instructions to its employees, employees generally must take part in an ongoing investigation and comply with any summons for questioning if the employer demands this (article 321d, Swiss Code of Obligations). If the employees refuse to participate, they generally are in breach of their statutory duties, which may lead to measures such as a termination of employment.

The question of whether employees may refuse to testify if they would have to incriminate themselves is disputed in legal doctrine.^[1] However, according to legal doctrine, a right to refuse to testify exists if criminal conduct regarding the questioned employee or a relative (article 168 et seq, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code) is involved, and it cannot be ruled out that the investigation documentation may later end

up with the prosecuting authorities (ie, where employees have a right to refuse to testify in criminal proceedings, they cannot be forced to incriminate themselves by answering questions in an internal investigation).[2]

[1] Nicolas Facincani/Reto Sutter, *Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten*, published on [hrtoday.ch](https://www.hrtoday.ch), last visited on 17 June 2022.

[2] Same opinion: Nicolas Facincani/Reto Sutter, *Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten*, published on [hrtoday.ch](https://www.hrtoday.ch), last visited on 17 June 2022.

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Employees may be reluctant to be interviewed or act as witnesses as part of an investigation, perhaps due to fear of reprisals. The investigator should discuss any concerns with the employee and attempt to alleviate any fears.

In general terms, an employer should not compel any employee to provide a witness statement. There may be circumstances in which this could be seen as a reasonable management instruction (and any refusal to comply treated as a disciplinary matter), but these will be rare. Evidence that is compelled is unlikely to be particularly useful to the investigator.

It may be possible to establish an express or implied obligation for senior managers to report on another employee's misconduct – as a feature of either their employment contractual duties, their fiduciary duties or their implied duty of fidelity. However, it is unlikely, in the absence of an express obligation, that a junior employee would be compelled to give evidence against a colleague.

Employees who act as witnesses benefit from their usual employment protections, and must be treated as per their contractual and statutory rights, as well as any policy governing the investigation. If the investigation involves allegations which could involve discrimination, the EA 2010 extends protection from victimisation to “giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under this Act”. Witnesses should therefore not be subject to any detrimental treatment because they have acted as a witness in this type of investigation. Witnesses may also be entitled to protection as whistleblowers if their evidence amounts to a protected disclosure (see question 9).

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07. What data protection or other regulations apply when gathering physical evidence?

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All data processing must comply with the principles of article 5 GDPR (lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, data minimisation, accuracy, storage limitation and integrity). Personal data may only

be collected and processed for specific, lawful purposes.

The admissibility of data processing depends on whether the suspicion relates to a criminal offence or another violation of the law. If the data processing is relevant to criminal law, article 10 GDPR or section 4(3) of the Austrian Data Protection Act (DSG) applies. If the investigations are exclusively to clarify violations under civil or labour law, such as an assertion of claims for damages or if they are general investigations to establish a criminal offence, the permissibility of data processing is based on article 6 or, for data covered by article 9 GDPR, on this provision.

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Under the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject. The Data Protection Commission published Data Protection in the Workplace: Employer Guidance in April 2023, which is a useful guide.

Employers should exercise caution when gathering physical evidence that may involve the use of CCTV or other surveillance practices. The Irish Court of Appeal in the case of *Doolin v DPC* examined the use by an employer of CCTV footage for disciplinary purposes and found such use constituted unlawful further processing. The original reason for processing the CCTV footage was to establish who was responsible for terrorist-related graffiti that was carved into a table in the staff tearoom. It subsequently transpired Mr Doolin, who was in no way connected to the graffiti incident, had accessed the tearoom for unauthorised breaks and a workplace investigation followed. The original reason for viewing the CCTV related to security, but further use of the CCTV footage in the disciplinary investigation was not related to the original reason. This case confirms that employers must have clear policies in place in compliance with both GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 specifying the purpose for which CCTV or any other monitoring system is being used. Not only that, but these policies must be communicated to employees specifying the use of such practices.

It is not only data about the investigation that must be processed fairly, but any retention of the data, which can only be further processed with good reason. It is a legitimate business reason to retain data to deal with any subsequent requests or appeals under various internal or statutory processes, provided employees have been advised of the relevant retention period.

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The Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection applies to the gathering of evidence, in particular such collection must be lawful, transparent, reasonable and in good faith, and data security must be preserved.^[1]

It can be derived from the duty to [disclose and hand over benefits received and work produced](#) (article 321b, Swiss Code of Obligations) as they belong to the employer.^[2] The employer is, therefore, generally entitled to collect and process data connected with the end product of any work completely by an employee and associated with their business. However, it is prohibited by the Swiss Criminal Code to open a sealed document or consignment to gain knowledge of its contents without being authorised to do so (article 179 et seq, Swiss Criminal Code). Anyone who disseminates or makes use of information of which he or she has obtained knowledge by opening a sealed document or mailing not intended for him or her

may become criminally liable (article 179 paragraph 1, Swiss Criminal Code).

It is advisable to state in internal regulations that the workplace might be searched as part of an internal investigation and in compliance with all applicable data protection rules if this is necessary as part of the investigation.

[1] Simona Wantz/Sara Licci, Arbeitsvertragliche Rechte und Pflichten bei internen Untersuchungen, in: Jusletter 18 February 2019, N 52.

[2] Claudia Fritsche, Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz, Ein Handbuch für Unternehmen mit besonderem Fokus auf Finanzinstitute, p. 148.

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Most forms of workplace surveillance involve the processing of personal data that is regulated by the UK GDPR and DPA 2018. The UK GDPR requires that personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner; it also must be adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary concerning the purposes for which it is processed.

Employers should ensure that they have undertaken a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) to document the lawful basis for processing data, and informed employees that their files may be searched before proceeding. They should also ideally have a clear policy on the use of electronic communications systems, detailing when, how and for what purpose they may be monitored by the employer. In Q3 2023 the ICO produced new guidance on monitoring workers (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/employment/monitoring-workers/>) and on email and security (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/security/email-and-security/>) which employers should bear in mind during investigations. Employers should also be prepared to make the data collected through employee monitoring available to employees, should the employee submit a data subject access request under the DPA 2018.

The IPA 2016 makes it unlawful in certain circumstances to intercept a communication (such as one on an employer's telephone or computer network) in the course of its transmission in the UK. The IPA Regs 2018 set out the circumstances where, in a business context, such interception will be lawful. These include monitoring or recording communications without consent to: establish the existence of facts; ascertain compliance with the regulatory or self-regulatory practices or procedures relevant to the business; ascertain or demonstrate standards which are or ought to be achieved by persons using the system; and prevent or detect crime.

Covert surveillance can lead to a breach of an employee's right to privacy under the HRA 1998. The employer will need to consider if covert surveillance is proportionate, which will depend on the facts of each case. Employers should be careful not to use the investigation as an excuse to undertake a "fishing expedition", and should avoid gathering material that is obviously personal, such as private messages and diary entries (see question 8).

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08. Can the employer search employees' possessions

or files as part of an investigation?



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In general, it is advisable to back up data, documents, emails and other records promptly to prevent their deletion. Admissibility depends on whether the data originates from personal or professional records and whether they are legally relevant. If internal investigations are carried out based on a specific suspicion of a criminal offence, it is the processing of legally relevant data. In general, the processing of professional emails or documents is permissible. If there is no professional connection, access to private files and documents is only permitted in exceptional cases.

If, for example, using a business email account for private purposes is not allowed, the employer can usually assume that the data processed is only "general" data within the meaning of article 6 GDPR and that such data processing is justified by a balancing of interests. However, if private use is allowed, the data may still be part of a special category within the meaning of article 9 GDPR. In such cases, the justification for its use must be based on one of the grounds explicitly mentioned in article 9(2) GDPR.

The employer must protect the employee's rights under section 16 of the ABGB and must consider the proportionality of the interference. Only the least restrictive means – the method that least interferes with the employee's rights – may be used to obtain the necessary information. The employer's interest in obtaining the information must outweigh the employee's interest in protecting his or her rights. The implementation or initiation of controls by the employer does not automatically constitute an interference with personal rights, as being subject to the employer's rights of control is part of the position as an employee.

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The first consideration here is what constitutes "employees' possessions". More often than not, employees will be using employer property and there should be clear policies in place that specify company property.

The difficulty arises if an employee is using personal equipment such as a mobile phone for work purposes. While there may be specific applications dealing with work-related matters that are accessible by the employer remotely, some applications may be device-specific and that is where issues may arise. In such instances, it is not unreasonable to ask the employee to provide such information or consent to a search of their personal property. However, this is the exception rather than the rule and all other legitimate avenues of obtaining such information should be explored first. Further, such requests for information should not be a fishing expedition as an employee has a reasonable expectation of privacy at work, which must be balanced against the rights of the employer to run their business and protect the interests of their organisation.

A search of physical items such as a desk or drawers should only be conducted in exceptional circumstances, even where there is a clear, legitimate justification to search and the employee should be present at the search.

Last updated on 11/10/2023

Switzerland

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The basic rule is that the employer may not search private data during internal investigations.

If there is a strong suspicion of criminal conduct on the part of the employee and a sufficiently strong justification exists, a search of private data may be justified.^[1] The factual connection with the employment relationship is given, for example, in the case of a criminal act committed during working hours or using workplace infrastructure.^[2]

^[1] Claudia Fritsche, *Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz: Ein Handbuch für regulierte Finanzinstitute und andere Unternehmen*, Zürich/St. Gallen 2013, p. 168.

^[2] Claudia Fritsche, *Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz: Ein Handbuch für regulierte Finanzinstitute und andere Unternehmen*, Zürich/St. Gallen 2013, p. 168 et seq.

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United Kingdom

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It may sometimes be difficult to draw a clear distinction between the property of the employer and employees' personal property, both physical and electronic, particularly where employees are increasingly working from home. Employers should ideally have a clear policy to delineate what is the employer's property.

Employees typically have a reasonable expectation of privacy at work, although how far this extends will depend on the circumstances of each case and the employer's policies.

When it comes to employees' personal possessions, a search should only be conducted in exceptional circumstances where there is a clear, legitimate justification. The employer should always consider whether it is possible to establish the relevant facts through the collection of other evidence. Even if the employee's contract specifies that it is permitted, employers would usually require explicit employee consent for the search to be lawful. The employee should be invited to be present during the search; if this is not feasible, another independent third party (such as a manager) should be present.

If the employee refuses to consent to a search of their personal possessions, their refusal should not be used to assume guilt; the investigator should explore why the employee has refused and seek to resolve their concerns if possible.

If the employer believes that a criminal offence has been committed it should consider involving the police, since they have wider powers to search individuals and their possessions.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

09. What additional considerations apply when the investigation involves whistleblowing?

Austria

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The provisions of the Whistleblowing Directive must be respected. In Austria, these have been implemented through the Whistleblower Protection Act (HSchG). If the whistleblower or the persons concerned fall within the scope of the Directive, their identity must be protected. Only authorised persons may access the report. Retaliatory measures are invalid or must be reversed. Within a maximum of seven days, the whistleblower must receive a confirmation of his or her complaint. Feedback to the whistleblower must then be provided within a maximum of three months.

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Ireland

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Most whistleblowing policies will include a section that provides for an initial assessment of the complaint as to whether it meets the definition of a protected disclosure. This assessment, which ought to be carried out by a designated person who has been appointed to deal with disclosures, is a useful tool as some matters which may be labelled as whistleblowing may fall under the grievance procedure.

Where there are grounds, an investigation will be commenced. Under the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022, whistleblowers are protected from penalisation for having made a protected disclosure, under the Act.

Penalisation may include; suspension, lay-off or dismissal; demotion, loss of opportunity for promotion or withholding of promotion; transfer of duties, change of location or place of work; reduction in wages or change in working hours; the imposition or administering of any discipline, reprimand or other penalty (including a financial penalty); coercion, intimidation, harassment or ostracism; or discrimination, disadvantage or unfair treatment.

If an employee (which includes trainees, volunteers, and job applicants) alleges that they have suffered penalisation as a result of making a protected disclosure, they may apply to the Circuit Court for interim relief within 21 days of the date of the last act of penalisation by the employer.

A claim for penalisation may also be brought before the WRC within six months of the alleged act of penalisation. If an employee alleges that they were dismissed for having made a protected disclosure, the potential award that the WRC can make increases from the usual unfair dismissal cap of two years' pay to up to five years' gross pay, based on actual loss.

Where a complaint of whistleblowing is made, employers should ensure that they appoint investigators with the appropriate knowledge and expertise to deal with such a matter and comply with the time limits set by legislation.

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Switzerland

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If an employee complains to his or her superiors about grievances or misconduct in the workplace and is subsequently dismissed, this may constitute an unlawful termination (article 336, Swiss Code of

Obligations). However, the prerequisite for this is that the employee behaves in good faith, which is not the case if he or she is (partly) responsible for the grievance.

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United Kingdom

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The employer should first identify which individuals may have protection as whistleblowers. This could be a current or former employee who raises the initial complaint, a co-worker who gives evidence as part of the investigation, or the accused employee.

In each case, consider whether a “protected disclosure” has been made (under Part IVA ERA 1996). This requires analysis of the subject matter of the disclosure, how it is made, and a reasonable belief that it is made in the public interest.

Employers must then ensure there is no detrimental treatment or dismissal of any worker on the grounds of their protected disclosure. Although the causation test for these purposes is not straightforward, as a general rule if the protected disclosure has a “material influence” on the decision to discipline or dismiss, there may be liability. Individual managers may be personally liable alongside the employer. Compensation for whistleblowing cases is uncapped, meaning businesses and individuals can face significant financial and reputational exposure.

What this means in practical terms is that the employer should promote a “speak-up” culture and, where protected disclosures are made, ensure they are handled by a team who are properly trained in how to do so.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

10. What confidentiality obligations apply during an investigation?



Austria

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If the report and the whistleblower fall within the scope of the Whistleblowing Directive, his or her identity must be protected. From a data protection perspective, the principles of the DSG must be observed to protect the legitimate confidentiality of the individuals concerned.

Furthermore, the employer should ensure that information is only disclosed to trustworthy persons to avoid pre-judgements.

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Ireland

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This will depend on the nature of the investigation but, generally, investigations should be conducted on a confidential basis. All who participate in the investigation should be informed and reminded that confidentiality is a paramount consideration taken very seriously. However, it should be borne in mind that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed by an employer as the respondent in an investigation is entitled to know who has made complaints against them. Furthermore, the respondent is entitled to cross-examine the complainant and any witnesses, although in practice this right is rarely invoked strictly and is facilitated by the investigator, with questions from the respondent being put to the complainant and other witnesses.

On occasion, a breach of confidentiality may warrant disciplinary action, but this will depend on the circumstances. Exceptions to the requirement to keep matters confidential will of course apply where employees seek support and advice from others such as companions, trade union representatives or legal advisors. It may also not be possible to maintain confidentiality where regulators or the authorities are informed of the investigation.

Also, confidentiality may not be maintained if it is in the interests of the employer to communicate the complaint and any subsequent investigation, for example on a health and safety basis.

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Switzerland

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Besides the employee's duty of performance (article 319, Swiss Code of Obligations), the employment relationship is defined by the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations) and the employee's duty of loyalty (article 321a, Swiss Code of Obligations). Ancillary duties can be derived from the two duties, which are of importance for the confidentiality of an internal investigation.^[1]

In principle, the employer must respect and protect the personality (including confidentiality and privacy) and integrity of the employee (article 328 paragraph 1, Swiss Code of Obligations) and take appropriate measures to protect the employee. Because of the danger of pre-judgment or damage to reputation as well as other adverse consequences, the employer must conduct an internal investigation discreetly and objectively. The limits of the duty of care are found in the legitimate self-interest of the employer.^[2]

In return for the employer's duty of care, employees must comply with their duty of loyalty and safeguard the employer's legitimate interests. In connection with an internal investigation, employees must therefore keep the conduct of an investigation confidential. Additionally, employees must keep confidential and not disclose to any third party any facts that they have acquired in the course of the employment relationship, and which are neither obvious nor publicly accessible.^[3]

^[1] Wolfgang Portmann/Roger Rudolph, BSK OR, Art. 328 N 1 et seq.

^[2] Claudia Fritsche, *Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz, Ein Handbuch für Unternehmen mit besonderem Fokus auf Finanzinstitute*, p. 202.

^[3] David Rosenthal et al., *Praxishandbuch für interne Untersuchungen und eDiscovery*, Release 1.01, Zürich/Bern 2021, p. 133.

Last updated on 15/09/2022



United Kingdom

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at Slaughter and May

Workplace investigations should usually be conducted on a confidential basis, so that only those involved in the investigation are aware of its existence and subject matter. The need to maintain confidentiality about both the fact of the investigation, and any content discussed with an investigator, should be emphasised to all those involved. It may also be necessary to explain that a breach of confidentiality could be viewed as a disciplinary matter. Appropriate exceptions must, however, be made to allow employees to speak to any relevant employee or trade union representative, legal adviser and potentially the police or other regulators. Confidentiality provisions cannot override the rights of workers to make protected disclosures (see question 9).

In some situations, such as those involving a wide-ranging investigation into the organisation's working practices and culture, it may be more appropriate to investigate a more "open" basis, and inform employees and other stakeholders.

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11. What information must the employee under investigation be given about the allegations against them?



Austria

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The purpose of internal investigations would be jeopardised by fully informing a suspected employee beforehand, as it would allow him or her to hide or destroy possible evidence, plan his testimony or coordinate with other employees.

There is no legal requirement to inform the employee of the allegations or suspicions.

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Ireland

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Under the fair procedures outlined above, details of the allegations or complaints against the employee should be put to them to enable them to fully respond to the allegations raised. The employee should also be provided with any relevant policies pertaining to the allegations against them, along with all documentary evidence of the allegations and the specific terms of reference that define the scope of the investigation. The employee should also be informed of their right to be represented, see question 15.

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Switzerland

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As a result of the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations), employees under investigation have certain procedural rights. These include, in principle, the right of the accused to be heard. In this context, the accused has the right to be informed at the beginning of the questioning about the subject of the investigation and at least the main allegations and they must be allowed to share their view and provide exculpatory evidence.^[1] The employer, on the other hand, is not obliged to provide the employee with existing evidence, documents, etc, before the start of the questioning.^[2]

Covert investigations in which employees are involved in informal or even private conversations to induce them to provide statements are not compatible with the data-processing principles of good faith and the requirement of recognisability, according to article 4 of the Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection.^[3]

Also, rights to information arise from the Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection. In principle, the right to information (article 8, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection) is linked to a corresponding request for information by the concerned person and the existence of data collection within the meaning of article 3 (lit. g), Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection. Insofar as the documents from the internal investigation recognisably relate to a specific person, there is in principle a right to information concerning these documents. Subject to certain conditions, the right to information may be denied, restricted or postponed by law (article 9 paragraph 1, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection). For example, such documents and reports may also affect the confidentiality and protection interests of third parties, such as other employees. Based on the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations), the employer is required to protect them by taking appropriate measures (eg, by making appropriate redactions before handing out copies of the respective documents (article 9 paragraph 1 (lit. b), Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection)).^[4] Furthermore, the employer may refuse, restrict or defer the provision of information where the company's interests override the employee's, and not disclose personal data to third parties (article 9 paragraph 4, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection). The right to information is also not subject to the statute of limitations, and individuals may waive their right to information in advance (article 8 paragraph 6, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection). If there are corresponding requests, the employer must generally grant access, or provide a substantiated decision on the restriction of the right of access, within 30 days (article 8 paragraph 5, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection and article 1 paragraph 4, Ordinance to the Federal Act on Data Protection).

^[1] Roger Rudolph, *Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht*, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

^[2] Roger Rudolph, *Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht*, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

^[3] Roger Rudolph, *Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht*, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

^[4] Claudia Götz Staehelin, *Unternehmensinterne Untersuchungen*, 2019, p. 37.

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United Kingdom

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The employee must be able to effectively challenge the allegations against them. They should be given the terms of reference for the investigation, and any relevant documentary evidence, including copies of witness statements.

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12. Can the identity of the complainant, witnesses or sources of information for the investigation be kept confidential?

Austria

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When dealing with reports and persons covered by the HSchG, the provisions on identity protection must be followed. In all internal investigations, only authorised persons should receive information.

Last updated on 29/09/2023

Ireland

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Failure by an employer to provide the identity of the complainant, witnesses or sources of information seriously impinges upon the employee's right to fair procedure and could result in a flawed investigation.

Last updated on 11/10/2023

Switzerland

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As mentioned under Question 10, the employer's duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations) also entails the employer's duty to respect and protect the personality (including confidentiality and privacy) and integrity of employees (article 328 paragraph 1, Swiss Code of Obligations) and to take appropriate measures to protect them.

However, in combination with the right to be heard and the right to be informed regarding an investigation, the accused also has the right that incriminating evidence is presented to them throughout the investigation and that they can comment on it. For instance, this right includes disclosure of the persons accusing them and their concrete statements. Anonymisation or redaction of such statements is permissible if the interests of the persons incriminating the accused or the interests of the employer override the accused' interests to be presented with the relevant documents or statements (see question 11; see also article 9 paragraphs 1 and 4, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection). However, a careful assessment of interests is required, and these must be limited to what is necessary. In principle, a person accusing another person must take responsibility for their information and accept criticism from the person implicated by the information provided.^[1]

[1] Roger Rudolph, *Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht*, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

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United Kingdom

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Only in exceptional circumstances, such as where there is a genuine risk of retaliation. Anonymising a complaint puts the employee under investigation at a significant disadvantage, as they may be unable to properly challenge the evidence against them. It can also impair the effectiveness of the investigation. Employers should, therefore, not provide any guarantees of confidentiality to complainants or to employees who are to act as witnesses. That said, employers should think carefully about any necessary disclosure of names or facts. This can be particularly relevant where the witness is subordinate to the employee being investigated.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

13. Can non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) be used to keep the fact and substance of an investigation confidential?

Austria

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According to section 6(1) of the DSG, employees who have access to personal data in the course of their professional activities must maintain data confidentiality and continue to do so even after termination of their employment.

Non-disclosure agreements can generally be used to achieve this but are subject to certain restrictions. They may not be used to conceal criminal activity, violate the privacy rights of individuals, circumvent legal disclosure obligations, prevent the exercise of legal rights or contain clauses that violate existing laws, in particular data protection regulations.

Last updated on 29/09/2023

Ireland

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There is no legislation regarding NDAs, but there is a Bill before the legislature proposing to “restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements as they relate to incidents of workplace sexual harassment and discrimination”. It is currently at the report stage. Whether it passes remains to be seen, but there has in recent times been strong criticism of the use of NDAs to cover up matters that ought to be fully investigated and dealt with in an organisation.

Settlement agreements, however they arise, may include confidentiality clauses which may, depending on the terms of the agreement, extend to the fact and substance of an investigation, but as in the UK an employee's right to make a protected disclosure or report a criminal offence cannot be waived by signing an NDA.

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Switzerland

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In addition to the above-mentioned statutory confidentiality obligations, separate non-disclosure agreements can be signed. In an internal investigation, the employee should be expressly instructed to maintain confidentiality.

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United Kingdom

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at Slaughter and May

Only to a limited extent. As a matter of law, NDAs cannot prevent a worker from making a protected disclosure, or reporting a crime to the police. As a matter of the regulatory obligations of solicitors, NDAs should not be used in other ways, including as a means of influencing the content of disclosures, or by using warranties, indemnities and clawback clauses in a way that is designed to, or has the effect of, improperly preventing or inhibiting permitted reporting or disclosures (see the [SRA's warning notice on the use of NDAs](#)).

Last updated on 15/09/2022

14. When does privilege attach to investigation materials?

Austria

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If a lawyer is involved in the investigation, communication between the lawyer and client is subject to legal professional privilege. These communications must not be disclosed. Any documents collected by an internal audit can be seized and used. However, a document created by a lawyer can only be seized. The same applies to other professional representatives of parties, such as notaries and auditors, as potential holders of professional secrecy.

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Ireland

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It would be difficult to assert privilege over materials that relate to the investigation itself.

Privilege may arise before the instigation of an investigation where an employer may seek legal advice from their legal advisors over the initial complaint and appropriate next steps. Subject to the relevant tests being met, Legal Advice Privilege arises in respect of a confidential communication that takes place between a professionally qualified lawyer and a client. Who the client is will be of significant importance as they must be capable of giving instructions to their lawyer, on behalf of the employer. Caution should be exercised by employers if advice to "the client" is disseminated further within the business to other members of management. If such a scenario arises, then there is a risk that privilege may be waived and such material could be disclosable under a data subject access request. Litigation privilege arises with respect to confidential communications that take place between a lawyer or a client and a third party for the dominant purpose of preparing for litigation, whether existing or reasonably contemplated.

It is also prudent to consider whether an external investigator should have access to their own independent legal advisor, and the funding arrangements for such advice would have to be considered by the employer.

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Switzerland

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As outlined above, all employees generally have the right to know whether and what personal data is being or has been processed about them (article 8 paragraph 1, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection; article 328b, Swiss Code of Obligations).

The employer may refuse, restrict or postpone the disclosure or inspection of internal investigation documents if a legal statute so provides, if such action is necessary because of overriding third-party interests (article 9 paragraph 1, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection) or if the request for information is manifestly unfounded or malicious. Furthermore, a restriction is possible if overriding the self-interests of the responsible company requires such a measure and it also does not disclose the personal data to third parties. The employer or responsible party must justify its decision (article 9 paragraph 5, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection).^[1]

The scope of the disclosure of information must, therefore, be determined by carefully weighing the interests of all parties involved in the internal investigation.

^[1] Claudia M. Fritsche, *Interne Untersuchungen in der Schweiz*, Ein Handbuch für Unternehmen mit besonderem Fokus auf Finanzinstitute, p. 284 et seq.

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United Kingdom

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There are two limited types of privilege which may be relevant to investigations:

- Legal Advice Privilege (LAP), which protects communications between lawyers and their clients provided they are confidential and made for the dominant purpose of obtaining or giving legal advice; and
- Litigation Privilege (LP), which can extend to communications between a lawyer and client or third parties, but only where the dominant purpose of the communication is to prepare for or conduct

existing or contemplated litigation.

If the relevant tests for privilege are met and apply to materials generated in the course of the investigation, the employer retains greater control over their subsequent disclosure to third parties. The materials would, for example, be protected against disclosure in any subject access request under the DPA 2018.

That said, privilege can be difficult to maintain in investigations, particularly where litigation is not active or in contemplation. Interview notes and witness statements may not attract privilege, particularly if these were conducted with employees who do not fall within the narrow definition of “the client” for LAP purposes (which is limited to employees who are capable of seeking and receiving advice on behalf of the employer).

If privilege applies to investigation materials, the investigator should keep tight control on what documents are created and how they are circulated, to avoid inadvertent disclosure and potential waiver of privilege.

Bear in mind that even if privilege applies to certain investigation materials, there may be a need to create disclosable documentation at a later stage, particularly if there is a decision to instigate disciplinary action.

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15. Does the employee under investigation have a right to be accompanied or have legal representation during the investigation?



Austria

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In general, an employee is not entitled to have a representative present during investigations. However, he is free to reach out to the works council or independently contact a lawyer for advice. The employer must hear the works council upon his or her request on all matters concerning the interests of employees at the company. Once disciplinary proceedings begin, the employee has the right to be represented by a lawyer.

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Ireland

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This depends on the nature of the investigation. If the complaint originates from an employee as a grievance, then the employee would have the right to representation during the investigation. Representation in this context is more akin to the right to be accompanied, as in the UK by either a colleague or trade union representative.

If the investigation is a fact-gathering investigation originating from the employer, then the employee would not have the right to be represented during the investigation. That right would apply only at any subsequent disciplinary hearing.

If the investigation is a fact-finding investigation as part of a disciplinary process originating from the employer, then the employee ought to be given the right to be represented at that investigation stage. Again the right is akin to the right to be accompanied. There was concern from employers that the right

had been expanded to legal representation in disciplinary matters with the case of McKelvey v Irish Rail. However, the Supreme Court in that case clarified that the right to legal representation in disciplinary processes is only in exceptional circumstances.

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Switzerland

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In the case of an employee involved in an internal investigation, a distinction must be made as to whether the employee is acting purely as an informant or whether there are conflicting interests between the company and the employee involved. If the employee is acting purely as an informant, the employee has, in principle, no right to be accompanied by their own legal representative.[\[1\]](#)

However, if there are conflicting interests between the company and the employee involved, when the employee is accused of any misconduct, the employee must be able to be accompanied by their own legal representative. For example, if the employee's conduct might potentially constitute a criminal offence, the involvement of a legal representative must be permitted.[\[2\]](#) Failure to allow an accused person to be accompanied by a legal representative during an internal investigation, even though the facts in question are relevant to criminal law, raises the question of the admissibility of statements made in a subsequent criminal proceeding. The principles of the Swiss Criminal Procedure Code cannot be undermined by alternatively collecting evidence in civil proceedings and thus circumventing the stricter rules applicable in criminal proceedings.[\[3\]](#)

In general, it is advisable to allow the involvement of a legal representative to increase the willingness of the employee involved to cooperate.

[\[1\]](#) Claudia Götz Staehelin, Unternehmensinterne Untersuchungen, 2019, p. 37.

[\[2\]](#) Simona Wantz/Sara Licci, Arbeitsvertragliche Rechte und Pflichten bei internen Untersuchungen, in: Jusletter 18 February 2019, N 59.

[\[3\]](#) Roger Rudolph, Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht, SJZ 114/2018, p. 392; Niklaus Ruckstuhl, BSK-StPO, Art. 158 StPO N 36.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

United Kingdom

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There is no statutory right to be accompanied at a disciplinary investigation meeting; the right only applies to disciplinary hearings (section 10 ERA 1999). There is, however, a right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative at any grievance investigation meeting, under section 10, although this is only in respect of the person who raises the grievance (not any person who is the subject of the grievance or other witnesses).

That said, the employer's policies and contracts should be checked to see if they contain a broader right to be accompanied. Employers may also need to allow a broader right to be accompanied as a reasonable adjustment for disabled employees (for example, to allow family members or medical professionals to be present). Equally, where the allegations are sufficiently serious (eg, criminal, especially if the findings are

likely to be shared with the police), it may be appropriate to allow legal representation during the investigation.

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16. If there is a works council or trade union, does it have any right to be informed or involved in the investigation?



Austria

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The Austrian Labour Constitution Act (ArbVG) does not contain any provisions regarding workplace investigations. The employee has the right to address the works council but is not entitled to have the works council comply with his or her request.

The works council's opportunities for participation are conclusively regulated. Certain investigative or control measures may require the consent or co-determination of the works council.

Under section 96(1)3 ArbVG, the consent of the works council is required if the employer wishes to introduce and maintain control measures or technical systems for monitoring employees that affect human dignity, such as video surveillance or specific staff questionnaires. If there is no works council, the consent of each individual employee is required.

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Ireland

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This will depend on the agreement with the works council or trade union. The employee who is the respondent to the investigation may have views on their trade union being informed, aside from any agreement, which should be taken into account under GDPR provisions.

Last updated on 11/10/2023



Switzerland

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In general, works councils and trade unions are not very common in Switzerland and there are no statutory rules that would provide a works council or trade union a right to be informed or involved in an ongoing internal investigation. However, respective obligations might be foreseen in an applicable collective bargaining agreement, internal regulations or similar.

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United Kingdom

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Aside from the statutory right to be accompanied (see question 15), any further involvement by the works council or trade union would depend on the terms of the relevant works council or trade union recognition agreement.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

17. What other support can employees involved in the investigation be given?

Austria

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There is no additional support for the employees concerned. However, the employer may offer support measures to the employees to ensure better cooperation. The choice of support measures is at the employer's discretion. For example, the employer could offer to bear lawyer's fees, if the employee is cooperative. Such decisions must always be made on a case-by-case basis.

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Ireland

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If an employee assistance programme is in place, an employee irrespective of their role in the investigation should be directed to the programme and encouraged to avail of the services. Investigations can become protracted and employees should be kept informed as to progress and what is required of them regarding participation. Regular checks of the health and well-being of employees should also be made. Even if such a programme is not in place, occasionally and depending on the issues giving rise to the investigation, it may be appropriate for the employer to cover the cost of counselling to a certain extent.

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Switzerland

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The employer does not generally need to provide specific support for employees that are subject to an internal investigation. The employer may, however, allow concerned employees to be accompanied by a trusted third party such as family members or friends.^[1] These third parties will need to sign separate non-disclosure agreements before being involved in the internal investigation.

In addition, a company may appoint a so-called lawyer of confidence who has been approved by the employer and is thus subject to professional secrecy. This lawyer will not be involved in the internal investigation but may look after the concerned employees and give them confidential advice as well as inform them about their rights and obligations arising from the employment relationship.[\[2\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Roger Rudolph, Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht, SJZ 114/2018, p. 390.

[\[2\]](#) David Rosenthal et al., Praxishandbuch für interne Untersuchungen und eDiscovery, Release 1.01, Zürich/Bern, 2021, p. 133.

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United Kingdom

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The employer needs to consider the health and wellbeing of all staff involved in the investigation, since this can be a very stressful process. The employer and investigator can assist by ensuring that all parties are aware of what is expected of them. Timings are also important; having a clear and expeditious timetable and providing updates if the timetable slips will help. Regular catch-ups by managers can be used to monitor how employees are coping. They should be reminded about any resources to help support them, such as employee helplines or employee assistance programmes.

Where an employer has particular concerns about an employee's health, a referral to occupational health can assist. The employer may also wish to consider whether employees should be given additional time off, or whether any other adjustments can be made to the investigation process. For particularly serious allegations, the employer may consider facilitating the provision of independent legal advice for the employee, or making a contribution towards legal fees.

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18. What if unrelated matters are revealed as a result of the investigation?



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The employer must decide how to deal with this information. Possible options are to initiate separate and unrelated investigations or to extend the ongoing investigations.

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Ireland

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If an investigator finds other issues that are outside the scope of the terms of reference, these should not be ignored but equally should not be included as part of the investigation, as they are beyond the remit of the investigation that was established at the beginning. An investigator should identify the other matters that may require further action and report these to the employer separately so as not to conflate issues.

Last updated on 11/10/2023

Switzerland

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There are no regulations in this regard in the Swiss employment law framework. However, in criminal proceedings, the rules regarding accidental findings apply (eg, article 243, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code for searches and examinations or article 278, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code for surveillance of post and telecommunications). In principle, accidental findings are usable, with the caveat of general prohibitions on the use of evidence.

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United Kingdom

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These should typically be disregarded by the investigator. From a data protection perspective, the ICO's position is that other information collected during an investigation should be disregarded and, where feasible, deleted unless it reveals information that no reasonable employer could be expected to ignore. In those circumstances, the employer should arrange for an independent third party to determine whether a separate investigation into unrelated matters is needed.

Last updated on 15/09/2022

19. What if the employee under investigation raises a grievance during the investigation?

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Provided the employer complies with labour law and data protection regulations, internal investigations are lawful and are not regarded as administrative or judicial proceedings. If legal consequences for not cooperating, such as dismissal, are threatened by the employer or his investigators, the offence of coercion under section 105 of the Austrian Criminal Code could be fulfilled.

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Ireland

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If the subject of the grievance relates to the subject of the investigation, the employee should be reassured that all the matters that they wish to raise concerning the matter under investigation will be dealt with in full as part of the investigation.

If the employee raises a grievance that is unrelated to the matter under investigation, then that can be dealt with concurrently, albeit by a separate investigator.

The initial investigation does not automatically need to be halted upon receipt of a grievance. Frequently, grievances are submitted in the hope that they derail or delay the original investigation. Careful consideration should be given as to the nature of the grievance and the appropriate course of action adopted.

Last updated on 11/10/2023

Switzerland

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In the context of private internal investigations, grievances initially raised by the employee do not usually have an impact on the investigation.

However, if the employer terminates the employment contract due to a justified legal complaint raised by an employee, a court might consider the termination to be abusive and award the employee compensation in an amount to be determined by the court but not exceeding six months' pay for the employee (article 336 paragraph 1 (lit. b) and article 337c paragraph 3, Swiss Code of Obligations). Furthermore, a termination by the employer may be challenged if it takes place without good cause following a complaint of discrimination by the employee to a superior or the initiation of proceedings before a conciliation board or a court by the employee (article 10, Federal Act on Gender Equality).

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United Kingdom

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This is a relatively common tactic. The employer will need to decide whether to suspend the investigation to deal with the grievance, or conclude the investigation first, depending on the circumstances. It would usually be difficult to deal with both the grievance and the investigation concurrently, unless the facts overlap significantly.

If the employee becomes uncooperative and refuses to take part in the investigation, they should be told that the investigator may need to make a decision in the absence of their account based on all the other evidence available. The employer may decide to treat it as failure to comply with a reasonable management instruction and take disciplinary action on that basis.

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20. What if the employee under investigation goes off sick during the investigation?



Austria

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The involved employee's sick leave does not affect the internal investigation. Most investigative measures can be carried out without the employee's presence.

Last updated on 29/09/2023



Ireland

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If an employee goes off sick during the investigation, it is reasonable to adjourn the investigation until the employee is fit to return to work. Difficulties arise if it is a prolonged absence. The absence may necessitate a referral to an occupational health expert and it may be necessary to seek medical advice as to whether the employee can continue to participate in the investigation. It may be that reasonable accommodations should be considered to ensure that the employee can continue to participate. Such situations may impinge on the investigator's ability to conclude the investigation. In that instance, it would be prudent for the investigator to document all attempts to involve the employee in the investigation and to assess whether it can be concluded without the further involvement of the employee.

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Switzerland

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The time spent on the internal investigation by the employee should be counted as working time^[1]. The general statutory and internal company principles on sick leave apply. Sick leave for which the respective employee is not responsible must generally be compensated (article 324a paragraph 1 and article 324b, Swiss Code of Obligations). During certain periods of sick leave (blocking period), the employer may not ordinarily terminate the employment contract; however, immediate termination for cause remains possible.

The duration of the blocking period depends on the employee's seniority, amounting to 30 days in the employee's first year of service, 90 days in the employee's second to ninth year of service and 180 days thereafter (article 336c paragraph 1 (lit. c), Swiss Code of Obligations).

^[1] Ullin Streiff/Adrian von Kaenel/Roger Rudolph, Arbeitsvertrag, Praxiskommentar zu Art. 319–362 OR, 7. A. 2012, Art. 328b N 8 OR.

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United Kingdom

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This is a relatively common occurrence. It would usually be appropriate to suspend the investigation temporarily, to determine how serious the health issue is and when the employee may be fit to return. The investigator should consider what adjustments or allowances can be made to progress the investigation despite the employee's absence. If their evidence has not yet been gathered, the employee may be invited to provide a written statement instead of attending an investigation meeting, or the meeting could be held remotely or at a neutral location. If none of this is possible, it may be difficult to fully conclude the investigation.

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21. How do you handle a parallel criminal and/or regulatory investigation?



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Private investigations differ from criminal or regulatory investigations. Nevertheless, even for internal investigations, it is advisable to collect evidence in a way that can be admitted in court, as it may have to be presented to the authorities during the investigation process. Generally, any evidence obtained in the course of an internal investigation may be admitted in subsequent administrative or judicial proceedings.

If the evidence is not voluntarily surrendered, seizure or confiscation is possible. Since official proceedings are often lengthy, suspension is not always recommended.

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Ireland

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Workplace investigations can originate from criminal investigations or proceedings. It may be that an employer only becomes aware of a matter through the involvement of the police (An Garda Síochána) or regulatory bodies.

If a criminal investigation is pending it can complicate a workplace investigation, but it will be specific to the nature of the complaint. Likewise, where a regulatory investigation is in scope, an employee may argue that any internal investigation should be put on hold, on the basis that it will harm any regulatory investigation. Such matters will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis as it may be some time before any regulation investigation commences, by which time the workplace investigation and any subsequent process may have been concluded.

Employers will also have to consider their reporting obligations to An Garda Síochána. If the matter relates to fraud, misuse of public money, bribery, corruption or money laundering, for example, reporting obligations arise under section 19 of the Criminal Justice Act 2011. A failure to report information that an

employer knows or believes might be of material assistance in preventing the commission of an offence, or assisting in the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of another person may be guilty of an offence.

Also, the Irish Central Bank's (Individual Accountability Framework) Act 2023 (the Act) was signed into law on 9 March 2023 but has not yet been enacted. The framework provides scope for a senior executive accountability regime, which will initially only apply to banks, insurers and certain MiFID firms. However, its application may be extended soon. The Act forces employers to engage in disciplinary action against those who may have breached specific "Conduct Standards".

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Switzerland

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The actions of the employer may carry through to a subsequent state proceeding. First and foremost, any prohibitions on the use of evidence must be considered. Whereas in civil proceedings the interest in establishing the truth must merely prevail for exploitation (article 152 paragraph 2, Swiss Civil Procedure Code), in criminal proceedings, depending on the nature of the unlawful act, there is a risk that the evidence may not be used (see question 27 and article 140 et seq, Swiss Civil Procedure Code).

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United Kingdom

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This situation needs to be handled with caution. It is important to remember that regulatory or criminal proceedings, and employment proceedings, are separate; while there may be an overlap of alleged misconduct, they are usually addressing different questions, with different standards of proof. The outcome in one should not, therefore, be treated as determinative of the other.

Where the employee is suspected of, charged with, or convicted of, a criminal or regulatory offence, the employer should still investigate the facts as far as possible, come to a view about them and consider whether the conduct is sufficiently serious to warrant instituting the disciplinary procedure.

In terms of timing, there are no concrete rules governing how an employer must proceed in the circumstances of a parallel criminal investigation. Much will depend upon the circumstances of the case, the length of delay, the size of and resources available to the employer, and the preferences (if expressed) of the external authority. If the employer is concerned about prejudicing the regulatory or criminal proceedings or otherwise prefers to wait for their conclusion before instigating internal proceedings, they are unlikely to be criticised for delaying. The accused employee may also be advised not to provide a statement in the workplace investigation for fear of a negative impact on the criminal investigation. This would make it difficult to proceed with the workplace investigation, unless the employer is confident it has strong enough evidence to justify any disciplinary action subsequently taken.

On the other hand, regulatory or criminal investigations may take months or years to progress; it may not be realistic for the employer to keep any investigation in abeyance for so long. This is particularly true when the accused employee is suspended on full pay, witness recollections will grow less reliable, and the alleged victim may feel unable to return to work until the matter is resolved.

In these circumstances, the employer may continue with their investigation if they believe it is reasonable to do so, and consultations have commenced with the external agency. The court will usually only intervene if the employee can show that the continuation of the disciplinary proceedings will give rise to a

real danger that there would be a miscarriage of justice in the criminal proceedings.

Employers should consider carefully whether and when to involve the police in allegations of employee misconduct. Employers must be careful not to subject their employees to the heavy burden of potential criminal proceedings without the most careful consideration, and a genuine and reasonable belief that the case, if established, might justify the epithet “criminal” being applied to the employee's conduct.

Where the police are called in, they should not be asked to conduct any investigation on behalf of the employer, nor should they be present at any meeting or disciplinary meeting. The employer should, however, communicate with the police to see if they have a strong view about whether the internal process should be stayed, or whether they should interview witnesses first.

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22. What must the employee under investigation be told about the outcome of an investigation?



Austria

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The employee has no general right to be informed of the results of an investigation. However, if the employer is considering consequences under labour law based on the result of the investigation, such as termination or dismissal, the employee must be informed accordingly.

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Ireland

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The employee whose actions are the subject of the investigation must be advised of the outcome of the investigation. They are usually provided with a copy of the investigator's report.

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Switzerland

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Workplace investigations often result in an investigation report that is intended to serve as the basis for any measures to be taken by the company's decisionmakers.

The employee's right to information based on article 8, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection also covers the investigation report, provided that the report and the data contained therein relate to the employee.^[1] In principle, the employee concerned is entitled to receive a written copy of the entire investigation report free of charge (article 8 paragraph 5, Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection and article 1 et seq, Ordinance to the Federal Act on Data Protection). Redactions may be made where the interests of the company or

third parties so require, but they are the exception and must be kept to a minimum.[\[2\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Arbeitsgericht Zürich, Entscheide 2013 No. 16; Roger Rudolph, Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht, SJZ 114/2018, p. 393 et seq.

[\[2\]](#) Roger Rudolph, Interne Untersuchungen: Spannungsfelder aus arbeitsrechtlicher Sicht, SJZ 114/2018, p. 394.

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United Kingdom

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The employee would usually get a copy of the investigation report (which would typically have the relevant evidence considered by the investigator annexed to the report, unless the report is privileged). It is not usual practice to allow the employee to make representations on the report before it is finalised.

The report will set out what facts the investigator was able to establish by reference to the available evidence. The investigator's role is to gather and consider evidence about what did or did not happen, so the employer can understand if there is a case to answer. This is distinct from determining culpability, which is something for the manager conducting the disciplinary hearing (not the investigator) to determine, in addition to deciding any disciplinary sanction.

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23. Should the investigation report be shared in full, or just the findings?

Austria

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The employer should determine the intended recipients and format of the report in advance. In many cases, it may be advisable to publish only the results of the investigation to protect the privacy and reputation of the individuals concerned, as this may help to minimise any potential negative impact on them.

However, under certain circumstances or due to legal requirements, full disclosure of the investigation report may be required, especially if transparency and disclosure are necessary to maintain public or investor confidence.

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Ireland

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The investigation report should be shared in full, unless there is some specific reason for not doing so. One example is where there is a possibility of a criminal investigation; in that instance, it may be appropriate not to share the full report. Occasionally, there may be several respondents involved in the complaint, and each respondent may only be entitled to the report that relates to them.

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Switzerland

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In principle, there is no obligation to disclose the final investigation report. Disclosure obligations may arise based on data protection law vis-à-vis the persons concerned (eg, the accused). Likewise, there is no obligation to disclose other documents, such as the records of interviews. The employee should be fully informed of the final investigation report, if necessary, with certain redactions (see question 22). The right of the employee concerned to information is comprehensive (ie, all investigation files must be disclosed to him).^[1] Regarding publication to other bodies outside of criminal proceedings, the employer is bound by its duty of care (article 328, Swiss Code of Obligations) and must protect the employee as far as is possible and reasonable.^[2]

^[1] Nicolas Facincani/Reto Sutter, Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten, in: HR Today, to be found on: <Interne Untersuchungen: Rechte und Pflichten von Arbeitgebern und Angestellten | hrtoday.ch> (last visited on 27 June 2022).

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United Kingdom

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The answer to this depends on whether or not privilege attaches to the report, as well as whether criminal proceedings are contemplated – if so, there may be a danger of waiver of privilege, or witness evidence being contaminated if they have an opportunity to read each other's evidence as part of the report. This could inhibit the fairness of any subsequent criminal trial.

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24. What next steps are available to the employer?

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The employer may impose consequences under labour law. Consequences may include verbal or written warnings, transfers or other disciplinary measures. The employer may also implement training or educational measures if the issue is due to the employee's lack of knowledge. In serious cases, besides dismissal without notice – for example, if the employer seeks damages – legal action (civil or criminal) may be taken against the employee.

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Ireland

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The investigator will usually set out recommendations within their report. It will then be up to the employer to act on those recommendations and to accept or reject the findings (if it were a fact-finding investigation). If, for example, a recommendation is made that the matter should proceed to a disciplinary hearing, the employer should then arrange such a hearing and nominate an impartial member of management to carry out the disciplinary hearing. In some instances, recommendations are made by investigators to provide training or update policies and such recommendations should be acted upon without delay. It may also be appropriate to notify a specific regulator of the outcome of the investigation.

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Switzerland

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If the investigation uncovers misconduct, the question arises as to what steps should be taken. Of course, the severity of the misconduct and the damage caused play a significant role. Furthermore, it must be noted that the cooperation of the employee concerned may be of decisive importance for the outcome of the investigation. The possibilities are numerous, ranging, for example, from preventive measures to criminal complaints.^[1]

If individual disciplinary actions are necessary, these may range from warnings to ordinary or immediate termination of employment.

[1] David Rosenthal et al., *Praxishandbuch für interne Untersuchungen und eDiscovery*, Release 1.01, Zürich/Bern 2021, p. 180 et seq.

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United Kingdom

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The investigator may recommend further action, but should not decide whether allegations are true, or suggest a possible sanction or prejudge what the outcome of any subsequent disciplinary process would be.

The employer will need to consider whether it is necessary to commence disciplinary proceedings. For

regulated businesses, there may be an obligation to inform their regulator of the investigation outcome. In some circumstances, the employer may feel the need to make an internal or external announcement about the outcome, and any action it intends to take to implement any recommendations made by the investigator. There may also need to be certain updates to policies or procedures as a result of the investigation.

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25. Who can (or must) the investigation findings be disclosed to? Does that include regulators/police? Can the interview records be kept private, or are they at risk of disclosure?



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It is up to management to decide which results should be disclosed and to whom. It is important to know who the persons concerned are and who has an interest in disclosure.

From a legal perspective, disclosure must follow the GDPR. Internal policies can specify how the results are to be handled. Works Council Agreements (WCAs) may also contain regulations on how to deal with internal investigations and the disclosure of results.

There is no requirement to publish the results of the investigation, but it may be advisable to cooperate with the authorities. This is particularly the case if the employer has suffered damage or is himself threatened with prosecution. The release of investigation results can be compelled through the courts.

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Depending on the nature of the subject matter of the investigation, it may be appropriate to notify the Garda Síochána or a specific government body such as Revenue. Also, if the employee occupies a regulated position, it may be necessary to inform the relevant regulator. Again, compliance with GDPR obligations should be borne in mind.

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The employer is generally not required to disclose the final report, or the data obtained in connection with the investigation. In particular, the employer is not obliged to file a criminal complaint with the police or the

public prosecutor's office.

Exceptions may arise, for example, from data protection law (see question 22) or a duty to release records may arise in a subsequent state proceeding.

Data voluntarily submitted in a proceeding in connection with the internal investigation shall be considered private opinion or party assertion.^[1] If the company refuses to hand over the documents upon request, coercive measures may be used under certain circumstances.^[2]

^[1] Oliver Thormann, Sicht der Strafverfolger – Chancen und Risiken, in: Flavio Romerio/Claudio Bazzani (Hrsg.), Interne und regulatorische Untersuchungen, Zürich/Basel/Genf 2016, p. 123.

^[2] Oliver Thormann, Sicht der Strafverfolger – Chancen und Risiken, in: Flavio Romerio/Claudio Bazzani (Hrsg.), Interne und regulatorische Untersuchungen, Zürich/Basel/Genf 2016, p. 102 et seq.

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United Kingdom

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Primarily, the investigation findings are disclosed to the employer and the employee under investigation. In scenarios involving allegations of a breach of regulatory duty or criminal law, the authorities may have the power to compel disclosure of any non-privileged materials generated in the investigation. Powers of compulsion do not apply to privileged materials.

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26. How long should the outcome of the investigation remain on the employee's record?



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Data protection law requires that personal data should not be kept longer than necessary for the purpose it was collected. Once the purpose of the internal investigation is fulfilled and the data is no longer needed, it should be deleted or anonymised. Regulations regarding this matter may also be subject to WCAs or internal policies. In any case, it is advisable to keep the results for as long as they may be needed in possible subsequent administrative or judicial proceedings.

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Ireland

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Irrespective of the outcome of the investigation, the fact that an employee was subject to an investigation is not the key issue. The key concern is whether any further action was taken as a result of the investigation. If a disciplinary process ensued, then it is the outcome of that disciplinary record and any subsequent appeal that would or would not be noted on an employee's record. If a disciplinary sanction were imposed then the length of time the sanction remains on the employee's record would depend on what is specified in the disciplinary policy.

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Switzerland

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From an employment law point of view, there is no statute of limitations on the employee's violations. Based on the specific circumstances (eg, damage incurred, type of violation, basis of trust or the position of the employee), a decision must be made as to the extent to which the outcome should remain on the record.

From a data protection point of view, only data that is in the interest of the employee (eg, to issue a reference letter) may be retained during the employment relationship. In principle, stored data must be deleted after the termination of the employment relationship. Longer retention may be justified if rights are still to be safeguarded or obligations are to be fulfilled in the future (eg, data needed regarding foreseeable legal proceedings, data required to issue a reference letter or data in relation to a non-competition clause).^[1]

^[1] Wolfgang Portmann/Isabelle Wildhaber, *Schweizerisches Arbeitsrecht*, 4. Edition, Zurich/St. Gallen 2020, N 473.

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United Kingdom

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The investigation outcome may not need to be noted on the accused employee's record at all. Usually only the outcome of any subsequent disciplinary or grievance process would be noted, rather than the prior investigation.

The employer should keep the investigation report for as long as it remains relevant. This would usually be no longer than six years, unless regulatory obligations dictate otherwise. The report along with all documentation and witness statements gathered during the investigation should be retained securely and confidentially but for no longer than is absolutely necessary under the requirements of the DPA 2018 and the employer's data protection policies and procedures. There may be additional retention requirements in a regulated context; the position for each particular business and employee should be checked.

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27. What legal exposure could the employer face for

errors during the investigation?



Austria

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This relates to the severity of the error. Data protection violations can lead to fines by the data protection authority or claims for damages. If consequences under labour law, such as dismissal, have taken place due to erroneous investigations or incorrect results, the employee concerned can assert claims under labour law or seek damages.

Furthermore, there may be consequences under criminal law. This is particularly the case if documents have been falsified in the course of the investigation. It is, therefore, crucial that employers exercise diligence and due process in internal investigations. Investigations must be conducted transparently and lawfully.

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Ireland

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A failure to follow fair procedures in the investigation can have significant consequences.

Although the exception rather than the rule, an employee could challenge the investigation through injunctive proceedings if there is a breach of fair procedures. Such action would be taken before the High Court. Injunction proceedings may be brought while the investigation is ongoing, or just before its conclusion to prevent publication of a report making specific findings against an employee. A successful injunction may curtail any subsequent attempt to investigate the matter as allegations of penalisation, prejudice and delay may arise.

Errors during the investigation can also give rise to a complaint of constructive dismissal, with allegations that flaws in the procedure have fundamentally breached the implied term of mutual trust and confidence.

A flawed investigation can also undermine any disciplinary process and sanction that is imposed as a result. This commonly occurs when an employee has been dismissed following a disciplinary process launched on foot of the investigation. While dismissal may be an appropriate sanction, the dismissal can still be found to be unfair if there is a failure to follow fair procedures. An employee may challenge their dismissal before the WRC and the employer should be alive to not only an unfair dismissal complaint, but allegations of discrimination and penalisation.

Overall, to carry out a successful workplace investigation, an employer should consider taking advice at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the investigation can withstand challenges.

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Switzerland

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As there are no specific regulations for internal investigations, the usual legal framework within which the

employer must act towards the employee derives from general rules such as the employer's duty of care, the employee's duty of loyalty and the employee's data protection rights.

But, for example, unwarranted surveillance could conceivably result in criminal liability (article 179 et seq, Swiss Criminal Code) for violations of the employee's privacy. Furthermore, errors made by the employer could have an impact on any later criminal proceedings (eg, in the form of prohibitions on the use of evidence).[1]

Evidence obtained unlawfully may only be used in civil proceedings if there is an overriding interest in establishing the truth (article 152 paragraph 2, Swiss Civil Procedure Code). Consequently, in each case, a balance must be struck between the individual's interest in not using the evidence and in establishing the truth.[2] The question of the admissibility of evidence based on an unlawful invasion of privacy is a sensitive one – admissibility in this case is likely to be accepted only with restraint.[3] Since the parties in civil proceedings do not have any means of coercion at their disposal, it is not necessary, in contrast to criminal proceedings, to examine whether the evidence could also have been obtained by legal means.[4]

Unlawful action by the employer may also have consequences on future criminal proceedings: The prohibitions on exploitation (article 140 et seq, Swiss Criminal Procedure Code) apply a priori only to evidence obtained directly from public authorities. Evidence obtained unlawfully by private persons (ie, the employer) may also be used if it could have been lawfully obtained by the authority and if the interest in establishing the truth outweighs the interest of the individual in not using the evidence.[5] Art. 140 paragraph 1 Swiss Criminal Procure Code remains reserved: Evidence obtained in violation of Art. 140 paragraph 1 Swiss Criminal Procure Code is subject to an absolute ban on the use of evidence (e.g. evidence obtained under the use of torture[6]).[7]

[1] Cf. ATF 139 II 7.

[2] ATF 140 III 6 E. 3

[3] Pascal Grolimund in: Adrian Staehelin/Daniel Staehelin/Pascal Grolimund (editors), *Zivilprozessrecht*, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2019, 3rd Edition, §18 N 24a.

[4] Pascal Grolimund in: Adrian Staehelin/Daniel Staehelin/Pascal Grolimund (editors), *Zivilprozessrecht*, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2019, 3rd Edition, §18 N 24a.

[5] Decision of the Swiss Federal Court 6B_1241/2016 dated 17. July 2017 consid. 1.2.2; Decision of the Swiss Federal Court 1B_22/2012 dated 11 May 2012 consid. 2.4.4.

[6] Jérôme Benedict/Jean Treccani, CR-CPP Art. 140 N. 5 and Art. 141 N. 3.

[7] Yvan Jeanneret/André Kuhn, *Précis de procédure pénale*, 2nd Edition, Berne 2018, N 9011.

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A reasonable investigation is a key component of a fair disciplinary process. Errors in the investigation could therefore expose the employer to liability for unfair dismissal under ERA 1996.

Failure to follow the ACAS Code does not automatically make an employer liable in any proceedings taken against it. However, an employment tribunal will take the ACAS Code into account when deciding whether an employer has behaved fairly, and has the power to increase awards by up to 25% where it believes an employer has unreasonably failed to follow the ACAS Code's provisions.

There may be liability for breach of the employee's contract of employment if the employer breaches aspects of the investigation policy that are contractual, any contractual provisions relating to suspension, or otherwise conducts the investigation in a manner that breaches the implied term of trust and confidence.

There may be liability under the EA 2010 if the investigation is conducted in a discriminatory manner, which could include not making reasonable adjustments to the process for disabled employees.

Where the investigation involves protected disclosures, there may be liability under the whistleblowing provisions of ERA 1996 if the whistleblower is subjected to detriment or dismissal on the grounds of their protected disclosures.

Improper evidence gathering or processing may be actionable under the DPA 2018, IPA 2016 or the IP Regs 2018.

Finally, there may be common law claims in some circumstances (for example where reports need to be made to regulators, which in turn may affect the relevant employee's future employment prospects) for defamation, or, more unusually, for stress-related personal injury.

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