

Fact Sheet: Guide to Workplace Neutral Assessment

What is a neutral assessment?

Neutral assessment is a process where an independent and neutral person is appointed to assist in understanding the causes of complex employment issues and helping to identify potential solutions.

It is not the assessor's role to impose any solution or make a judgement on the issues and it is not about apportioning blame or deciding who may be right or wrong. Rather the assessor reviews the relevant information and background, explores the issues, identifies potential causes and solutions and makes recommendations. It is not part of any formal process.

The focus is on future solutions, which allows greater freedom and flexibility to both clarify the real issues and explore creative solutions that would not be possible in a formal process.

Any recommendations made will depend on the individual circumstances but these could, for example, include mediations with individuals, small group facilitation, organisational learning or acknowledgements regarding contributory factors.

When can neutral assessment be used?

Neutral assessment can be used to explore complex HR issues. For example, this may include situations where there are no specific allegations but it is clear that there is something wrong such as team members appearing stressed and relationships becoming strained. It is also particularly useful where there are a large number of employees involved.

Potential benefits

- It allows employees an opportunity to be listened to and talk to someone who is empathetic; this may in itself enable people to move on and think about the future.
- It allows an opportunity to test the impact of possible options or solutions and to discuss these with those concerned.
- It may help to overcome barriers to finding a solution.
- It allows organisations to demonstrate their commitment to their values and to positively resolving conflict.
- Provides an opportunity to confront conflict but in a way that allows people to talk confidentially about their concerns.

The process

The process includes the following:

- Obtaining a background briefing to the issues and / or reviewing any relevant documentation. This will include information regarding how long the dispute has been ongoing and the current situation.
- Agreeing the objectives; for example, resolving issues between individuals where relationships have broken down, team facilitation.
- Communicating the process and timescales with those involved.
- Interviewing the key individuals confidentially on a face to face basis. The notes of the interviews will remain confidential and will not be shared or disclosed. The interviews will aim to identify the issues and needs and explore future solutions.
- For those who do not wish to be interviewed there is an option for others to provide written submissions.
- The information will be analysed and a report prepared which will include risk assessed recommendations. An executive summary which preserves confidentiality will be shared with all concerned.
- Opportunities for feedback will also be provided.