

A Guide for Trusted Supporters

This guide is for you if you are supporting someone involved in an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) complaint, to help you understand your role and responsibilities.

What is the ICGS?

The ICGS is Parliament's independent mechanism for handling complaints of bullying, harassment, or sexual misconduct. It applies to all current and former members of the parliamentary community and is an important step forward in tackling inappropriate behaviour in Parliament.

All ICGS complaints follow a four-stage process:

1. **ICGS Helpline:** Someone contacts the ICGS Helpline for information, guidance, support or to make a complaint
2. **Initial Assessment:** If a complaint is made an independent investigator is appointed and they conduct an Initial Assessment to check that the complaint meets required criteria to be investigated under the Scheme
3. **Full Assessment (investigation):** If the complaint meets the required criteria an independent investigation is conducted, and evidence is gathered
4. **Completion and Final Outcome:** Once the investigation is complete a Final Assessment report is produced notifying if the case has been upheld or not upheld

The ICGS investigator will be in direct contact with the person making the complaint (the complainant), the person complained about (the respondent) and any witnesses.

You can find out more about the Scheme and how it works [here](#).

Who are trusted supporters and what are your responsibilities?

Making a complaint or being involved in an investigation can be a difficult process for all involved and it is important that people are supported.

We encourage those involved in an investigation to access a range of support services made available to them through the ICGS and Parliament. However, we also understand that in many cases they will also want to speak to someone close to them, that they trust, about what has happened.

Trusted supporters do not have a formal role in an ICGS investigation. However, you make a valuable contribution by supporting people involved in a complaint. You may be approached by a complainant or a respondent because you already have an existing relationship with them and/or they wish to make you aware of the situation for support.

Witnesses cannot also be used as trusted supporters. A witness is a person who can provide evidence in an ICGS investigation. That evidence may help determine the outcome of a complaint.



There are two types of trusted supporters, personal and professional.

Personal supporters include:

- A colleague
- A friend
- A family member

The main ways you might support in this role are by providing ongoing emotional support, helping to explore options (such as considering informal resolution), helping the person you are supporting to understand information shared as part of an investigation (e.g. emails/letters and reports) and encouraging them to access existing support services made available as part of the process.

Whilst it will usually only be permissible for a trade union representative or colleague to attend investigation meetings (e.g. interviews), it might be possible to consider allowing a friend or family member to accompany the person they are supporting in exceptional circumstances, or as a reasonable adjustment.

Professional supporters include:

- A staff / trade union representative / Members' and Peers' Staff Association (MAPSA) representative
- A line manager
- Party whips
- HR service

In addition to being able to provide the same support as personal supporters, as members of the parliamentary community, professional supporters are also able to provide more direct support at work. This can include discussing actions that you could take or explore with the person you are supporting during and after an investigation such as temporary changes to working practices, hours and accompaniment to investigation meetings during working hours.

If you are accompanying the person you are supporting to an investigation meeting or interview, please keep the following in mind:

| DOs | DONTs |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that your primary function is to provide support for the attendee • Ask for a break in the meeting/interview if you feel the attendee needs it either for welfare reasons or to consult with them • Provide clarity for the attendee if they are unsure of the question being asked | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions on behalf of the attendee • Prompt the attendee • Intervene to disrupt the flow of the meeting/interview • Prevent the investigator from asking questions |

These meetings and interviews can be a significant part of the complaint process and therefore the independent investigator will do everything they reasonably can to ensure that the attendee feels appropriately supported. However, in exceptional circumstances, if the independent investigator feels that the presence of the supporter is unhelpful or distracting, they may ask the supporter to leave.

It is for colleagues and union representatives to decide whether to accept a request to attend investigation meetings as a professional supporter. If you agree to attend, the person you are supporting should have notified the investigator in advance.

It is important that *all* trusted supporters, both personal and professional, provide support in a way that facilitates the progress of an investigation. For example, ensuring you are available for any planned meetings you have agreed to attend. Any delays to an investigation can negatively impact on the wellbeing of those involved. So, the investigator may decide, on balance, to progress an investigation if your circumstances are delaying the process.

What are the benefits of being a trusted supporter?

In your role as a trusted supporter, you can provide important support for someone going through a difficult time. In addition, your support can help the complainant or respondent:

- engage with the investigation process with more confidence and understanding
- plan and organise to allow the investigation to progress in a timely way
- ensure the process considers any adjustments or changes to allow parties to participate fully
- feel safe at work whilst their complaint is being investigated

Why is maintaining confidentiality important?

An important responsibility you will have in this role will be to keep the information shared with you about the complaint and the investigation confidential. This means that you should not discuss any information about the complaint with anyone else.

Confidentiality is vital to all ICGS cases. Sharing the details of an ongoing investigation can pose a risk to the wellbeing of those involved in that process, negatively impact the progress of an investigation and cause reputational damage before a fair and thorough investigation is carried out. Breaching confidentiality could also have unintended consequences for the investigation outcome and for the person you are supporting, for example a breach of confidentiality may be taken into account by the investigator in their final report or affect decisions on sanctions once an investigation has finished.

The requirement to maintain confidentiality applies even after an investigation has completed. Everyone involved in an investigation will have these requirements made clear to them and has agreed to follow them as part of their involvement in the ICGS process.

You may need to remind the person you are supporting of their responsibility to maintain confidentiality during an investigation, as well as being mindful of your own.



Where can I go for more information and support?

If you are supporting someone involved in an ICGS investigation as a trusted supporter, there is support available to you if you are unsure about your role or have any questions.

The ICGS have a dedicated Improvement and Inclusion Manager who can answer any questions you may have and explain the process. You can contact Lucy Brighty at brightyl@parliament.uk.

The person you are supporting will also be able to contact the Improvement and Inclusion Manager for support and all trusted supporters can attend these meetings if that would be helpful.

Complaints about Members of the House of Lords and their staff are investigated under the Code of Conduct by the Lords Commissioners for Standards and their team, who may be assisted by an ICGS investigator. For more information on how the process works in these cases you can contact the Commissioners' office:

General Enquiries: 020 7219 7152

Email: lordsstandards@parliament.uk