CaseCenta
CASE MANAGEMENT WITHOUT LIMITS

PERSPECTIVES / 2026

The Future of Workplace Investigation Management

Why smarter workflows, stronger accountability and simpler technology matter

CLARITY
Define the mandate

ACCOUNTABILITY
Show the reasoning

CONFIDENCE
Verify the controls

For investigators, HR teams, business owners and advisers

Australia / New Zealand / United States / United Kingdom

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Better systems. Accountable people.

An investigation is a sequence of consequential human decisions. Technology earns its place when it makes those decisions easier to understand, review and explain.

For investigators, HR teams, business owners and advisers, the practical challenge is to keep a reliable record while treating people fairly. A beautifully organised folder is not enough if nobody can explain who approved the scope, whether an account was challenged or why a finding follows from the evidence.

This paper proposes a connected operating model: clear commissioning, controlled evidence, considered responses, reasoned findings and deliberate closure. It is an educational framework, not a product comparison, legal opinion or claim that software guarantees an outcome. Small teams can adopt the principles incrementally.

Priority	What to put into practice
Clarify authority	Name the commissioner, scope approver, investigator and decision-maker.
Preserve the record	Keep originals, versions, sources and material changes traceable.
Design for fairness	Plan notice, response, adjustments and review before conclusions.
Keep AI supervised	Treat generated material as a draft to verify, never as evidence.
Buy with evidence	Test access, export, recovery and workflow using fictional cases.

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Published by CaseCenta, a software project in development. Recommendations describe design principles, not a list of production-live CaseCenta features. The jurisdiction notes are starting points for qualified local review.

A workplace concern is more than a case file

The same concern can raise questions about conduct, health and safety, employment relations and personal information. Those questions need coordination, but they need not have the same owner or process.

A distributed workplace can leave the relevant record across messages, meetings, shared drives and personal recollections. The task is not to collect everything indiscriminately. It is to identify the questions that matter, preserve relevant material and explain the limits of what can reasonably be established.

Begin by separating immediate protective action from fact-finding and from any later employment decision. A temporary change to reporting arrangements may manage a risk without determining an allegation. Record its purpose, review date and practical impact so a precaution does not silently become a punishment.

Track	Question	Accountability
Safety and support	What needs attention now?	A designated safety or people lead
Investigation	What happened within the agreed scope?	An appropriately appointed investigator
Employment response	What action is justified after considering the record?	The authorised decision-maker
Organisational learning	What systems should improve?	The relevant operational owner

An Australian distinction that matters

Safe Work Australia's model psychosocial-hazards code distinguishes identifying hazards and improving controls from disciplinary inquiries into conduct. Its legal effect depends on local adoption; check the relevant state or territory regulator. Do not assume that completing an investigation discharges every work health and safety responsibility. [1]

A practical intake conversation

Ask what has been reported, what is urgent, who may be affected and which records could be lost. Identify conflicts before distributing sensitive information. Decide whether an investigation, another resolution process or specialist advice is appropriate. Record why that route was selected and who will reassess it if circumstances change.

> Design principle: connect the work without collapsing distinct decisions into one status called 'resolved'.

Sources: [1] Safe Work Australia. Full links: pp. 17-18.

02 / FRAGMENTED RECORDS

The risk lives between the tools

Email, spreadsheets and documents can support good work. The weakness appears when the links between them depend on memory, forwarding chains or one person's private filing habits.

A spreadsheet may show that an interview is complete while the signed correction sits in an inbox. A report may cite a draft attachment after a replacement has arrived. A shared drive may grant access to a colleague who has left the matter. These are process failure modes, not proof that every general-purpose tool is unsuitable.

Break in the record	Potential consequence	A practical control
Several 'final' documents	Wrong version used in a decision	Identify the governing version and preserve superseded copies.
Evidence forwarded as attachments	Context and access become harder to control	Index originals and share controlled working copies.
Status maintained separately	A missed response looks complete	Link milestones to the record that satisfies them.
Team membership never reviewed	Unnecessary access persists	Review access on assignment, departure and closure.
Knowledge held by one person	Handover loses reasons and exceptions	Keep a decision log and a concise handover checklist.

Test the handover, not just the search box

Give an authorised colleague a fictional matter and ask them to identify the current scope, the outstanding questions and the evidence supporting a draft finding. If they need the original investigator to reconstruct the story, the record is not yet self-explanatory. Improve the naming, index and decision links before adding more automation.

A dedicated platform may reduce those gaps, but it can also create new ones through poor configuration, overbroad permissions or difficult exports. Compare the total operating method: people, procedure and software together. Buying a specialised label is not a substitute for demonstrating a controlled workflow.

> A useful minimum record: stable matter ID; current scope; named owners; indexed evidence; dated decisions; outstanding actions; access review; closure and retention decision.

Make the reasoning visible

Defensibility is the ability to explain the process and the reasons for a conclusion. It is not a software certification, a promise of litigation success or a perfectly formatted report.

Separate an allegation from a finding. Record the issue in neutral terms, identify the evidence needed to explore it and consider material that may contradict the initial account. A useful assessment distinguishes direct observation, reported information, inference and unresolved uncertainty. A confidence score cannot replace that explanation.

Impartiality needs an active record

Before appointment, consider relationships, prior involvement, financial interests and practical pressures. Record who assessed any conflict and why the arrangement is appropriate. Revisit the assessment when the scope, parties or team changes. A declaration is evidence that a question was considered; it does not establish impartiality by itself.

- **Question** — Define the issue neutrally
- **Material** — Gather and test relevant accounts
- **Response** — Give the appropriate opportunity to answer
- **Reason** — Explain the evidence and remaining limits

Create a meaningful opportunity to respond

Plan what information a person needs to understand the issue and how they can respond. Consider time, language, disability-related adjustments, representation and the sensitivity of disclosure. Document what was provided and when, the response received and how material points were evaluated. The precise duties and exceptions must be checked locally.

For law firms and external investigators, distinguish the investigation mandate from legal advice and the employer's decision. Do not assume that engaging a lawyer makes every document privileged. Agree communication channels and seek matter-specific advice about privilege, disclosure and document handling.

> Review question: could someone unfamiliar with the matter follow the path from each material issue to its evidence, response and conclusion?

03 / JURISDICTION NOTES

Shared principles, different obligations

Use a common framework for organisation and accountability, then adapt it to the employment relationship, legal system, policy and facts. These notes are not a complete statement of any country's law.

Australia

In the unfair-dismissal context, the Fair Work Commission considers matters including notification of a reason and an opportunity to respond. Its guidance on support persons addresses unreasonable refusal of a request in discussions relating to dismissal; it is not a universal positive duty to offer a support person at every interview. Coverage and the particular circumstances matter. The Fair Work Ombudsman's workplace-problems guidance is an additional starting point. [2, 3]

New Zealand

Employment New Zealand describes good faith and natural justice as foundations of disciplinary investigations. Its guidance calls for a reasonable opportunity to respond and genuine consideration of explanations. It also makes clear that using an independent investigator does not remove the employer's responsibility. A separate external investigator is not compulsory for every matter. [4]

United States

The EEOC addresses harassment and retaliation under federal employment discrimination laws. Its current harassment page emphasises context and the complete record and carries a review notice. The Commission rescinded its 2024 harassment guidance in January 2026; this paper does not rely on that withdrawn guidance as current authority. Check applicable federal, state and local requirements with counsel. [5, 6]

United Kingdom

Acas guidance for disciplinary and grievance investigations calls for fair, objective fact-finding, evidence from both sides and appropriate confidentiality. Its preparation guidance includes planning and informing the worker, with timing considerations where evidence or witnesses could be affected. Acas employment guidance principally concerns Great Britain; Northern Ireland has a distinct framework that requires local checking. [7, 8]

> Do not copy one country's interview, disclosure or disciplinary template into another jurisdiction without review. Identify the applicable framework in the investigation plan, including any contract, collective agreement or sector-specific rules.

Sources: [2] Fair Work Commission; [3] Fair Work Ombudsman; [4] Employment New Zealand; [5] US EEOC; [6] US EEOC; [7] Acas; [8] Acas. Full links: pp. 17-18.

Start with an authorised mandate

Commissioning is where commercial arrangements, investigation instructions and professional independence meet. Keep them related, but distinguish what each approval actually authorises.

An external firm may need a quote or proposal before work starts. An internal HR team may not. In both cases, the commissioner should define the questions to be examined, the intended output, the reporting relationship and the limits of the engagement. A price acceptance is not automatically approval of every later change to scope.

- **1 / Intake** — Triage urgency, conflicts and suitability
- **2 / Commercial scope** — Quote or proposal where applicable
- **3 / Client-authored TOR** — Commissioner authorises the exact instructions
- **4 / Independent review** — Accept the mandate or request clarification
- **5 / Assignment** — Nominate, screen and appoint the investigator

Terms of reference as a living control

The client or commissioning authority owns the instructions. An investigator may help clarify them, but changes should be visible and authorised. Preserve the exact approved version, date and identity of the authorising person. Define how new issues, costs or timeframes will be handled, rather than allowing the scope to expand through informal messages.

A reviewer accepting the TOR is not automatically the lead investigator. Nomination is not the same as appointment, personal acceptance or authority to see every record. Where a small practice combines roles, document that choice and arrange an appropriate independent review of conflicts instead of implying that a second person exists.

> This is a recommended workflow. 'Independent review' means an appropriately separate assessment of the mandate or conflicts; it does not prescribe a universally required job title or legal process.

Preserve context, not just files

The value of a record depends on where it came from, what it represents and how it has been handled. A file name and upload date rarely answer all three.

Keep an evidence index that records the source, collection method, relevant dates, format, custodian and restrictions. Preserve originals and separate working copies, annotations and redactions. Record an unavailable source or failed collection attempt where it affects the inquiry. Technical integrity checks can support provenance, but do not prove that an underlying statement is true.

Record	Minimum useful context
Document or message	Source; original format; received date; author/date if known; limitations
Interview record	Participants; purpose; date; recording basis; corrections; agreed status
Working extract	Link to original; selection rationale; author; transformation or redaction
Allegation assessment	Issue; supporting and contrary material; response; reasons; open questions

Prepare the interview around questions

Build an interview plan around what needs to be understood, not a script designed to confirm an early view. Explain the process and confidentiality limits. Check the applicable law and policy before recording; agreement to attend is not a universal permission to record. Make arrangements for support, accessibility and breaks where appropriate.

Distinguish an investigator's contemporaneous notes from a transcript or a participant-approved statement. If corrections are offered, preserve the earlier version and explain the amendment rather than silently replacing the record. Where accounts conflict, identify what further evidence could help and what uncertainty remains if it cannot be obtained.

A useful stopping point

Before drafting findings, review each material issue for missing records, contrary accounts, outstanding responses and scope changes. Do not mark a task complete solely because a document was uploaded. Completion should mean that the responsible person has checked whether the material answers the question it was collected to address.

> Original checklist by CaseCenta. Adapt collection, recording and disclosure arrangements with qualified local advice; this is not a forensic acquisition standard.

Close the loop without closing your mind

A report should explain what was examined, what was found and why. It should also make clear what was not established and what fell outside the mandate.

Use a consistent structure: mandate, process, material considered, issue-by-issue analysis, findings and limitations. Apply the appropriate standard of proof for the context with qualified advice; do not let a platform impose a universal default. Explain how contrary evidence and relevant responses affected the reasoning.

Review gate	What the reviewer checks
Scope	Every finding answers an authorised question; variations are traceable.
Evidence	Citations resolve to the intended records and versions.
Fairness	Material responses were sought and considered as appropriate.
Reasoning	The conclusion follows from the stated material, with limits disclosed.
Release	Recipient, redactions and final version are deliberately approved.
Closure	Outstanding actions, access, retention and any hold have named owners.

Keep the investigation finding separate from the employer's decision about consequences. If recommendations are within scope, label them as recommendations and distinguish them from established facts. Employment New Zealand's disciplinary investigation guidance specifically separates the investigation report from a recommendation about disciplinary action. [4]

A change is a new decision

New information after a draft report may require further inquiry or another opportunity to respond. Record why the work reopened, which version changed and who authorised release. A defensible history preserves the change rather than trying to make the first version look as though it never existed.

Closure also has an operational side. Confirm who communicates the outcome, what can properly be shared, which risk controls remain and when follow-up will occur. Consider learning at an appropriate level of aggregation. A small team's dashboard can identify individuals even without names, so restrict sensitive breakdowns.

> A closed status is not evidence that every duty has ended. Retention, confidentiality, support, review rights and ongoing safety actions may continue.

Sources: [4] Employment New Zealand. Full links: pp. 17-18.

Assistance needs a boundary

AI can produce plausible text quickly. That speed makes source checking and clear ownership more valuable, not less.

A sensible starting point is a bounded administrative task: organising an authorised chronology, suggesting questions for review or improving the clarity of a draft. Even these uses need testing. A summary can omit a qualification; a suggested question can assume guilt; a fluent rewrite can change the meaning of an account.

Possible assistance	Human checkpoint
Draft a chronology	Verify every event and date against the cited record.
Suggest interview topics	Remove assumptions, leading questions and irrelevant issues.
Summarise a document	Check omissions, contradictions and the original context.
Improve report readability	Confirm that meaning, uncertainty and attribution survive.
Flag missing fields	Decide whether the item is actually required for this matter.

Tasks that should not be delegated to a model

Do not use generated output as a substitute for evidence, an automated credibility verdict or a final finding. Avoid inferring truthfulness from emotion, facial expression or writing style. A model should not authorise access, waive a conflict or decide that a response opportunity is unnecessary. These are accountable human decisions.

Before supplying personal information

The OAIC's guidance on commercially available AI products asks organisations to consider privacy obligations when choosing and using a product. Assess necessity, suitability and data handling before providing personal information. A consumer chatbot account or a reassuring interface is not evidence that sensitive investigation material is appropriately protected. [9]

> CaseCenta's discussion of AI here expresses a design position. This publication does not assert that live hosted AI, semantic evidence analysis or provider processing is currently available.

Sources: [9] OAIC. Full links: pp. 17-18.

Keep a human at the release point

Human supervision works only when the reviewer has the source material, sufficient time and the authority to reject the output.

Authorise	Choose an approved task and minimise input
Generate	Record the tool, version and task context
Verify	Compare claims and citations with originals
Decide	Accept, edit or reject with a named reviewer
Release	Share only the reviewed version with authorised recipients

Treat retrieved documents and messages as evidence to examine, not instructions to the assistant. A malicious or accidental instruction inside a document can try to redirect a model. Limit tool permissions and require separate human confirmation for consequential actions such as sending a report or changing access.

Build a small evaluation set

Use fictional examples that include contradictory dates, an ambiguous speaker, a corrected statement and a document with missing context. Check whether the tool acknowledges uncertainty and whether its references lead to the correct passage. Record the mistakes as well as the successes. Repeat the evaluation after a material model, prompt or configuration change.

The review record should identify the task, the authorised input set, the output retained, the reviewer and material corrections. Avoid copying sensitive content into broad diagnostic logs. Establish how the provider treats prompts, outputs, training use, retention, support access and deletion, including any subcontractors.

Define a stop rule

If a source cannot be verified, the tool behaves unexpectedly or the approved processing boundary is unclear, stop that use and return to a manual process. Preserve enough context to investigate the problem without spreading the underlying personal information. A dependable fallback is part of responsible adoption.

> Original governance model by CaseCenta. These are evaluation and design recommendations, not certification criteria or a claim that human review eliminates AI risk.

Ask for the control and its proof

Security is a collection of operating practices. A location label, a padlock icon or a certification logo cannot describe the whole service.

Control area	Evidence to request
Identity and access	Role model, authentication controls, revocation test and tenant isolation results
Audit history	Who did what, when and to which version; protection from unauthorised changes
Data handling	Documented data flows, subprocessors, administrative access and encryption scope
Recovery	Recent restore exercise, recovery objectives and tested responsibilities
Retention and holds	Configurable review rules, hold authority, deletion and backup treatment
Incident response	Reporting route, escalation owners, contractual duties and an exercised plan

Ask a vendor to show an investigator losing access after removal, including an already open session or copied document link. Then test an authorised export and a restore using fictional records. A screenshot of a permissions screen does not demonstrate enforcement, and a successful backup job does not demonstrate recovery.

Retention is a decision, not a slogan

For Australian APP entities, APP 11 addresses reasonable security steps and destruction or de-identification when information is no longer needed, subject to exceptions including legal retention requirements. New Zealand's principle 9 limits retention to what is required for a lawful purpose. Neither supports a universal 'keep every investigation for seven years' rule. [10, 11]

Assign a retention owner, document the applicable basis and set review dates. Separate normal expiry from a litigation or regulatory hold. Record how a hold is issued, reviewed and released. Consider the copies outside the main application: exports, email attachments, backups and third-party processing.

> Require the scope and date of any independent assessment. This paper makes no claim that CaseCenta holds SOC 2 or ISO certification, has completed an independent penetration test or guarantees compliance.

Sources: [10] OAIC; [11] NZ Office of the Privacy Commissioner. Full links: pp. 17-18.

Residency is only one part of the map

Ask where information is stored, processed, backed up and accessed. The answers can differ within a single service.

Australia

APP 8 addresses overseas disclosure by APP entities, generally requiring reasonable steps and accountability, with exceptions. Whether an arrangement is a disclosure and which exceptions apply requires analysis. An Australian hosting region alone does not answer questions about overseas support or subprocessors. [12]

New Zealand

Principle 12 places conditions on relevant disclosures outside New Zealand; the Privacy Commissioner's decision tree helps determine when it applies. Separately, principle 3A, effective from 1 May 2026, introduces notification duties for indirect collection subject to exceptions. Review witness-supplied information and notices against the actual circumstances rather than assuming all investigation collection is exempt. [13, 14]

United Kingdom

The ICO's international-transfer guidance was updated in January 2026 and includes a test for restricted transfers. Its employment-records guidance explains that data protection law does not prescribe one fixed retention period for all worker information. The employment-records guidance carries an update-review notice. Assess the processing, relevant safeguards and justified retention arrangements rather than importing a foreign template. [15, 16]

United States

Use a counsel-reviewed requirements map for the states, sectors, workers and information involved. This paper does not offer a single US privacy or recording rule. Ask a prospective provider to document processing locations and access so your advisers can assess the applicable obligations.

Map this	Include these locations or parties
Primary record	Application storage and document storage
Resilience	Backups, replicas and recovery environments
Service operations	Support personnel, monitoring and incident investigation
Optional processing	AI, transcription, email and integrations

> Practical rule: evaluate the full data flow and contract. Do not describe data as 'sovereign', 'local only' or 'compliant' without a precise definition and evidence.

Sources: [12] OAIC; [13] NZ Office of the Privacy Commissioner; [14] NZ Office of the Privacy Commissioner; [15] UK ICO; [16] UK ICO. Full links: pp. 17-18.

Small teams need proportionate control

The most expensive system can be the one that nobody uses correctly. Affordability includes the time and expertise required to operate it well.

A sole investigator needs fast setup and a reliable handover if unavailable. A small business owner may need to recognise when external expertise is necessary. An internal HR team needs clear escalation and separation of responsibilities. A law firm may need matter-specific confidentiality and export arrangements. An investigation firm needs consistent methods without flattening professional judgement.

Cost to evaluate	Question for the supplier
Subscription	Which users, cases, storage and features are actually included?
Variable use	How are AI, transcription, storage and other usage charged?
Implementation	Who configures workflows, migrates data and validates permissions?
Daily operation	What training, review and administrative effort is required?
Exit and continuity	What does export cost, and can another person use the record?

A staged adoption plan

First, agree a minimum record and assign owners. Next, test one fictional case through intake, scope, appointment, evidence, review and export. Then evaluate a limited pilot under approved privacy and security arrangements. Expand only when the team can explain the workflow and recover from errors without improvised workarounds.

Use measures you can actually collect: time to locate the governing TOR, overdue review tasks, missing evidence references and successful handovers. Establish a baseline before estimating benefits. Do not turn faster closure into the only target; a rushed inquiry can look efficient while leaving important questions unanswered.

Buy the right level of support

Check support hours, escalation routes and what happens when the principal investigator is absent. Confirm whether external client users can see only intended material. A low seat price does not compensate for uncertain access or an unusable export. Equally, a small team should not pay for complexity it cannot maintain.

> No savings percentage, return-on-investment claim or CaseCenta plan entitlement is asserted here. Ask for a written, current commercial schedule and test the proposed configuration.

A checklist that asks for demonstrations

Use this worksheet with every shortlisted supplier. Mark each item Pass, Partial, Fail or Not tested, and retain a dated evidence reference. A sales answer alone is not a pass.

Evaluation item	Practical demonstration	Result / evidence
Scope and authority	Change a TOR and show the exact authorised version.	_____
Appointment	Distinguish a nominee, reviewer and cleared investigator.	_____
Access enforcement	Remove access; test the existing session and file link.	_____
Evidence provenance	Trace a working copy and correction to the original.	_____
Fairness record	Show a response, its date and its treatment in findings.	_____
Report integrity	Resolve citations and identify the released version.	_____
AI boundaries	Disable AI; inspect a draft, sources and reviewer record.	_____
Audit and export	Export a usable matter with history and permissions context.	_____
Retention and holds	Apply and release a hold; explain deletion and backups.	_____
Recovery	Provide dated restore evidence and agreed objectives.	_____
Usability and access	Complete core tasks by keyboard and on a small screen.	_____
Commercial clarity	Explain entitlements, variable costs, support and exit.	_____

Before the demonstration, define your non-negotiable controls and who can accept a gap. Score only the configuration and version actually shown. Record any reliance on a future release, paid extension, manual service or third-party provider. Recheck the final contract against that record.

> Original evaluation worksheet. No vendor is scored in this paper. Apply the same evidence standard to CaseCenta as to any other supplier.

Choose progress you can verify

The useful direction is toward clearer evidence, more portable records and accountable automation. Those are priorities to evaluate, not predictions that every product will deliver them.

Traceable assistance

Prefer tools that reveal the source and limits of a suggestion over tools that simply produce polished prose. The value of an AI summary depends on whether a reviewer can efficiently check it. Useful automation should reduce repetitive work while keeping the material decision and its reasons visible.

Portable investigation records

A future-ready record should remain understandable when a staff member leaves, a supplier changes or the organisation needs to explain its process years later. Test the exit before signing. Check formats, attachments, links, redactions and audit history, as well as the cost and time to obtain them.

Measured implementation

Treat configuration as a controlled change. Review templates, permissions and regional rules after meaningful updates. Keep an owner for the workflow and a route for reporting confusing or unsafe behaviour. A useful product does not remove the need for a capable operator.

Next step	Deliverable	Owner to nominate
Map one process	Current workflow, failure points and role boundaries	Process lead
Define essentials	Required controls and acceptable evidence	Investigation and privacy leads
Run a fictional case	Documented demonstration and export	Pilot owner
Review the gaps	Remediation decisions and launch conditions	Authorised sponsor

The CaseCenta position

CaseCenta publishes this paper to explain the principles informing its development: connected records, clear authority, human judgement and proportionate administration. It is a developing software platform, not an investigation service. The local product is under testing and acceptance; this paper does not establish hosted production availability or a release commitment.

> A useful final question: when something goes wrong, can your team identify what happened, who can act and which record to trust?

Primary guidance and further reading

Source review date: 13 November 2026. Numbered references identify factual guidance; unreferenced workflows, tables and checklists are CaseCenta's original recommendations.

[1] Safe Work Australia · Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work
https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work

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[3] Fair Work Ombudsman · Workplace problems
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SOURCES / 2 OF 2

References and publication notes

Guidance can change. Check the linked official source and qualified local advice before applying it to a live matter.

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[13] NZ Office of the Privacy Commissioner · Principle 12 decision tree
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[14] NZ Office of the Privacy Commissioner · Principle 3A: Indirect collection
https://www.privacy.org.nz/privacy-principles/3a/

[15] UK ICO · A guide to international transfers; updated 15 January 2026
https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/international-transfers/a-guide-to-international-transfers/

[16] UK ICO · Collecting and keeping employment records (guidance under review)
https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/employment/employment-practices-and-data-protection-keeping-employment-records/collecting-and-keeping-employment-records/

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