

PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A DEATH OF A STUDENT

It is fortunately relatively rare that the College is faced with the death of one of its students. Nevertheless, it is essential that there are procedures in place which observe the following principles:

1. the need for an appropriate level of response from the College, which should be neither overwhelming nor inappropriately understated in relation to the event;
2. the need for a sensitive and compassionate approach which recognises the distress for the person finding the body, the next of kin, the distress or potential for distress for staff and students close to the deceased student;
3. the need to avoid confusion by developing clear lines of responsibility which support and make coherent, rather than centralise, the valuable contributions of a number of College staff and students;
4. the need to observe legalities, and to protect the interests of the College in cases where negligence might be alleged;
5. the need to act with applied common-sense.

Factors which may determine level and type of response

The death of a student is most frequently an unexpected event. The location in which the death occurs will have a significant bearing on the degree of involvement of the College and its staff members. The locations may be listed as:

- in a Hall of Residence
- on Campus, in a non-residential location
- off Campus, but while engaged in a College activity
- off Campus, but while living in local lodgings away from the (parental) home
- off Campus, in the permanent (family) home or in a public place in the UK or overseas
- in hospital

The degree, to which the College becomes involved, in ways other than being supportive, may be affected by the manner of death, which may fall into one of the following categories:

- accidental
- suicide or possible suicide
- natural causes (with or without infectious disease implications)
- crime

It is important that the College foresees and plans around different scenarios. It should consider:

- the ways in which the College may become aware of the death of a student
- the names and roles of people within the College who MUST be informed of the death
- the roles and responsibilities of other members of College staff following a death
- the procedures and practice for informing next of kin, students and staff of the death
- the ways in which the life of a student and his/her contribution to the College might be overtly recognised and marked

On the first discovery or notification of a death:

1. Death, unless it occurs within a controlled environment such as a hospital, must always be notified to the Police.
2. If a corpse is discovered, nothing should be touched or moved (other than to secure the area) until the Police have arrived and their guidance has been sought.
3. If it is a “violent, unnatural death, or sudden death of which the cause is unknown...”, then the Coroner’s Act 1988 imposes on the Coroner a duty (usually delegated to the Police at the scene) to establish:
 - who the deceased was
 - where, when and how the deceased met their death
 - details required for the registration of the death
4. The Police will also normally arrange for the removal of the body and any necessary post-mortem.
5. The Police (or hospital) will also normally arrange that the next of kin are informed. The College must check with the Police whether this has been done and which person(s) have been informed. The College may need to assist the Police by making available that information from its Student Records system.
6. In the unlikely event that the Police do not undertake this duty, responsibility may fall to a College Senior Officer. It is essential that the officer confirms the veracity of the information about the death before making any contact with the next of kin.

7. If there are witnesses whom the Police will wish to interview, they should be taken to a private area removed from the immediate scene as soon as possible, and provided with appropriate comforts.
8. In most cases, the sudden death of a student will become common knowledge to at least a portion of the community within a short space of time. Basic information should be disseminated without delay: there is no merit in trying to conceal a death on or off Campus, by whatever cause, but equally there is no merit in disseminating information about an incident to a wider public than is consistent with “need to know” and “need to support”. Failure to communicate can lead to rumour and unnecessary anxiety in the College community.
9. An apparent or alleged suicide is not a suicide until a Coroner says so. It is important that people acting in an official capacity within the College know this and do not pre-empt the Coroner’s verdict in public utterances.
10. It is appropriate to be cautious in disseminating information when an event is possibly a suicide. There are specific best-practice reporting guidelines - available via the Support and Advisory Services - to ensure that the possibilities of imitative action and unnecessary additional distress to those close to the deceased are minimised, while ensuring adequate transparency to limit unnecessary rumour or anxiety.

WHO MIGHT DISCOVER A DEATH ON CAMPUS?

Potentially, any member of staff or any student. The most likely people will include security staff, cleaning staff, Hall Wardens, fellow students; additionally, where medical help is sought prior to death, first-aiders and Health Centre staff.

WHO, TYPICALLY, MIGHT RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF A DEATH OFF CAMPUS?

- The Principal, the College Secretary, or another senior Manager
- The Head of Department, Personal Adviser / Supervisor or Department Administrator
- The Health Centre, Press Office, the Director of Facilities Management, Security Office, Switchboard
- The Chaplaincy
- Student Support and Advisory Officers
- The Academic Registrar, the Head of Support and Advisory Services.

ON DISCOVERY OF A DEATH ON CAMPUS, WHO MUST BE INFORMED BY THE “FINDER” (or his/her representative)?

One of the following should be contacted immediately – s/he then undertakes to inform the other four:

- The Principal
- The Health Centre
- The College Secretary & Head of Governance
- The Head of Support and Advisory Services
- The appropriate Head(s) of Department

WHO MUST IN TURN BE INFORMED, through communication from the above?

- The Vice-Principals and College Senior Officers
- The Director of External Relations /The Press & PR Co-ordinator
- The Switchboard Operators
- The Academic Coordinator(s) or Director of Graduate Study
- The Personal Adviser(s)/Supervisor
- The Senior Student Counsellor
- Students on the same course and others in the deceased's social circle
- The President of the Students' Union

WHO MAY NEED TO BE INFORMED (depending on the circumstances)?

- The Health & Safety Adviser
- The Director of Human Resources
- The Director of Facilities Management
- The Head of the Student Housing Bureau and staff / Residential Support Co-ordinator / Community Liaison Officer, Accommodation Services Management staff / students in Halls

WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF SENIOR POSTHOLDERS?

First Tier Responsibilities:

The following post-holders should form the nucleus of a small team, the role of which is to ensure as far as practicable:

- (a) the appropriate people in the College and externally are informed of the event
- (b) that the legal requirements surrounding the event are being followed
- (c) that appropriate people are consulted and involved with the further inputs that the College may wish or need to make

College Secretary & Head of Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inform Principal, Academic Registrar, Head of External Relations, Safety Officer, as appropriate - liaise with Police, Coroner's Office, legal representatives, as appropriate
Head of Support and Advisory Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inform Student Counselling Service, Chaplaincy, International Student Support Office, Educational Support Office, Human Resources, Community Liaison Officer and Residential Support Co-ordinator, Residence and Catering Services (if applicable), Student Housing Bureau, Director of Library Services, IT Director, President, Vice-President (Education & Welfare) and General Manager of the Students' Union - Coordinate offers of support to affected students/staff and liaison with statutory services listed above
Head(s) of Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inform Course team, tutors and Department administration/technical staff - inform fellow students - liaison with next of kin
Health Centre	<p>In consultation with the Health & Safety Adviser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to take any action required by law as the result of a possible death by reason of infectious disease - to collaborate (if appropriate), with the local health authority - to ensure that appropriate information is disseminated to affected staff and students

Second Tier Responsibilities:

The following post-holders may have responsibilities stemming from the death of a student. The aim in all cases is:

- (a) to create the time and space for those affected to adjust to and recover from the news of the tragedy
- (b) to ensure that all concerned have confidence that the College is acting in a responsible, compassionate and sensitive manner

(c) to ensure that no routine administrative procedure is continued which may cause embarrassment to the College and additional distress to relatives/friends of the deceased

(d) to ensure that follow-up enquiries, internal or external, are channelled to someone with first-tier responsibility or someone delegated by that group

The Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in consultation with those with first-tier responsibilities, to write a letter of condolence to the family/partner - to write to member(s) of College staff who had direct involvement with the death/nature of the death - to arrange an appropriate College tribute at the funeral or cremation of the deceased (taking advice from those in contact with the family and/or Chaplain, and with particular attention to cultural sensitivities)
The Switchboard Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure that all external enquiries are channelled to the Press Officer, or named person as agreed
The Academic Registrar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure that the student's record is immediately updated, and that all internal administrative enquires are referred - to ensure that no College communications, including invoices, are sent to the deceased's address - to ensure that the Library, Computer Services and other registrations in the name of the student are cancelled - to ensure the student's LEA/sponsor/Research Council is informed - to inform the Student Loans Company (if appropriate)
Head(s) of Department	<p>To collaborate in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to assist with informing staff and students connected with the deceased - to confirm the availability of follow-up support for staff - to make appropriate contact with, and send a letter of condolence to, the family/partner of the deceased - to arrange and assist appropriate representation by staff and students at a funeral and/or memorial service - to consider with others, but especially the family of the deceased, an appropriate memorial to the student
The Academic Coordinator / Director of Graduate Studies / Supervisor	<p>To collaborate in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure that students on the Programme are informed in a timely and sensitive manner, and that questions are answered openly - to ensure availability (if appropriate) of other staff to any student who wishes to talk - to inform students of arrangements/availability for confidential talks with Student Counselling Service and other professional staff - to ensure the continuation of the Course without delay, but being sensitive to possible distress of some students

The Personal Adviser/Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure his/her availability to students in the deceased's tutor/research Group - to contribute to the Department's discussion on funeral arrangements, memorials and contacts with the family/partner
President of the Students' Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in consultation with those with first-tier responsibilities, to write a letter of condolence to the family/partner - To ensure Students' Union registrations and memberships are cancelled

Third Tier responsibilities:

The following may have particular responsibilities arising from the death of a student. This will be determined by the nature and location of the death:

International Student Support Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to liaise with consulate/embassy - to arrange (where appropriate), the involvement of College representatives in the home country - to make appropriate arrangement for the arrival of relatives - to ensure that cultural requirements relating to burial and funeral arrangements are taken into account
Director of Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for staff to seek help or support, internally or externally, following a traumatic event - to ensure that staff involved in a traumatic event are thanked and/or praised for their involvement
Press & PR Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to handle, or delegate the handling, of all media enquiries - where practicable, to assist with shielding the relatives from the excesses of the media - to arrange, where appropriate and in consultation with the first-tier group, dissemination of information to the College at large
Health & Safety Adviser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to assess Health and Safety implications of any incident - to follow the reporting procedures laid down by the HSE - in consultation with the Police or other statutory authority, to implement immediate closures or changes in practice where necessary
Director of Facilities Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In consultation with the Safety Officer to implement (as appropriate), immediate closures or modifications to premises
Senior Student Counsellor / Counselling Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In consultation with the Department(s) and others to arrange and disseminate the availability of counselling for distressed students
Wardening Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to arrange support for residence staff and students if the deceased was a Hall resident
Community Liaison Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if the student lived in private accommodation, to liaise with the landlord on rental, deposit, unpaid bills and with students sharing the property

Chaplain(s)	-	to consult with the family and Department(s) on College inputs to a funeral service
	-	to consult with the family and Department on the desirability of a memorial service and/or commemorative tribute
	-	to arrange follow-up contact with the family

*Support & Advisory Services
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