

# PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO THE DEATH OF A STUDENT

## 1. Introduction

In the tragic event of the death of a student, it is vital that the University has clear and coherent procedures in place, thus facilitating a response which is both compassionate and efficient.

It is important that the University reacts to the death in a way that fully acknowledges the loss and that deals sensitively with the aftermath in a way that supports the bereaved - both the student's immediate family and friends, as well as the wider university community.

A rapid and sensitive response to the death of a student not only fulfils the need to observe the requisite legalities, but also ensures that an ethos of comprehensive care and compassion is engendered and communicated to students, staff and to all those who have been in some way affected by the sad news.

The University, by responding in a sincere, culturally sensitive and well-organised way, can demonstrate itself to be very much a unified entity, an institution greater than the sum of its parts.

This protocol provides a framework of principles that should be followed in the case of the death of a student either on a University campus or off campus.

The circumstances surrounding each death will be different and we therefore cannot write procedures which detail how we respond to all possible eventualities. It is expected that the Senior Managers involved in dealing with the University's response should use their knowledge and experience collectively to respond to the situation as circumstances dictate.

## 2. Initial Communication

In the management of such an incident, **it is imperative that accurate information is relayed quickly to a range of people**. News of a student death may be communicated to the University from a wide variety of off-campus sources or the death may have occurred on-campus.

A diverse range of scenarios is possible, therefore it is important to have a clear set of guidelines in place to avoid confusion, duplication, or misinformation which can lead to extra distress at an already fraught time. It is vital that these procedures are quickly accessible.

By using this protocol, the appropriate staff members should be contacted. It is important that the skills and expertise available across the campus are used, and decisions quickly made on a rapid and accurate division of duties in accordance with the exigencies of the particular situation.

## 3. Death on a University Campus

In the event of a student's sudden death on campus, **CAMPUS SECURITY (extension 3300)** should be informed immediately by the staff member who is first aware of the death.

**N.B.** No one should be allowed to interfere with the body or the scene of the incident until police authority is given. Arrangements for formal identification of the body and notification of next of kin are the responsibility of Kent Police.

### Campus Security will:

- Inform the Head of Security, or deputy, **who will direct the operations at the scene**.
- Call the Police and Ambulance.
- Inform the Director of Student Services (PA tel: 824130), or Out of Hours Duty Student Services Manager (the rota is held by the Director of Student Services and Campus Security).

A Senior Manager of Campus Security and Student Services will attend the scene as soon as possible.

**The Head of Security (or Deputy) will:**

- Ensure the scene is secure and enable access for relevant personnel.
- Liaise with relevant external parties and agencies at the scene.
- Gather any immediately attainable information about the circumstances of the event to assist the authorities.
- Check for any Campus Security records relating to the student
- In the case of an accident report this to the Head of Health, Safety and the Environment immediately.

**The Director of Student Services (or On-Duty Student Services Manager) will:**

- Immediately inform the DVC (Education and Student Experience) and the Head of Communications and Gold team of the incident if deemed necessary
- **Lead on the aspects of the response**, in particular, providing any known background information to the police and supporting other students at the scene.
- As soon as possible on the day/night of the incident, but after the initial situation has been responded to and contained, inform relevant colleagues of the death, sample list below:
  - A member of the Executive Group (usually Deputy Vice Chancellor Education and Student Experience)
  - Vice-Chancellor
  - Head of Communications
  - Head of Student Support and Wellbeing
  - Head of Student Engagement
  - Head of Accommodation
  - President of the Students' Union
  - The appropriate Pro Vice-Chancellors and Heads of School
  - The appropriate Engagement Support Manager
  - Head of International office (if applicable)

**Head of Health, Safety and the Environment will, in the event of an accident on campus:**

- Contact Health and Safety Executive and report the accident, if appropriate
- Initiate an investigation into the accident

## **4. Death off Campus**

In the event of a student's sudden death off campus, **Campus Security (extension 3300)** should be informed immediately by the staff member who is first aware of the death. The Head of Security will inform the **Director of Student Services** or **Duty Student Service Manager** immediately, who will then lead the University's response.

**The Director of Student Services or On-Duty Student Services Manager will:**

- Gather as much information as possible from relevant parties, to ensure that the report is accurate. To achieve this, it is important to speak as soon as possible to the person who informed the University of the death of the student and/or someone closely associated to the student.
- Ensure support is available to the students most immediately affected.

- Inform relevant colleagues of the death. Sample list below:
  - A member of the Executive Group (usually Deputy Vice Chancellor Education and Student Experience)
  - Vice-Chancellor
  - Head of Communications
  - Head of Student Support and Wellbeing
  - Head of Student Engagement
  - Head of Accommodation
  - President of the Students' Union
  - The appropriate Pro Vice-Chancellors and Heads of School
  - The appropriate Engagement Support Manager
  - Head of International office (if applicable)
  - Deputy Director of Strategic Planning and performance (Central Administration)
  - Head of Student Finance
- Ensure that those receiving the initial notification of the student death are reminded that the information is confidential and must not be circulated to a wider audience until approval is given.
- Include a web link to the guidelines in the communication to staff on the circulation list, who will also be reminded that it is not appropriate to engage in an e-mail discussion about the circumstances surrounding the death of the student on receipt of that communication. It should be accepted that any information that is appropriate for sharing has been included.

## 5. Individual Roles and Responsibilities

After these initial tasks, the following offices will be responsible for the tasks listed.

The Director of Student Services, Head of Security, Head of Student Support and Wellbeing, Head of Student Engagement and Head of Communications will work as a co-ordinating team to manage the University's response.

### The Director of Student Services will:

- Ensure that the procedures are carried out as set out in this document and to monitor each incident, with a view to ensuring a compassionate response to all affected parties as well as to consider wider institutional implications.
- Offer assistance to any of the above mentioned staff, in order to help them carry out their responsibilities.
- Contact the family and/or partner of the deceased (after the Coroner / Police have informed the relevant persons).
- Ensure appropriate practical and pastoral support is in place for family members as appropriate.
- Liaise with the Chaplains and appropriate parties to provide support and/or input for the funeral and/or commemorative service, and, when a period of time has elapsed, an appropriate memorial to the student (with the agreement of the family of the deceased).
- Liaise with Pier Quays staff (Medway only).

### Head of Security

- Continue to ensure the security of the scene for as long as is necessary.
- Continue to liaise with police, if relevant. It is not unusual for the scene of a sudden death to be initially treated as a potential crime scene until forensic work has been completed. However, it

is important that this does not result in any speculation about possible cause of death.

### Head of Communications

- Ensure that all enquiries from the press or media, are directed to the Press Office so that they can be dealt with in such a way as to protect the bereaved relatives, fellow students or staff and to safeguard the interests of the University.
- Work closely with the Director of Student Services to support the Heads of School with transmitting information to other areas of the University.
- Support the Pro Vice-Chancellor or Head of School in drafting a letter of condolence to the family and /or partner of the deceased

### Head of Accommodation

- Liaise with Head of Student Engagement in relation to any housemates who need rehousing on a temporary or permanent basis.
- Ensure housekeeping and maintenance are aware not to access the room until clearance is given.

### Head of Student Support and Wellbeing

- Ensure availability of 'in the moment' support from appropriate professionals in SSW and external partners.
- Ensure that an appropriate adviser follows-up directly with any affected student for whom it is recognised that the incident might have a particular impact.
- Check for any engagement by the student with Student Support and Wellbeing and ensure appropriate support for any affected staff.
- Liaise with Engagement Support Officers in relation to any impact on the academic work of the students being supported by SSW, without breaching confidentiality relating to the circumstances.
- Inform the University Medical Centre, if the student is a registered patient there.
- Inform relevant out of hours services are aware that there may be an increase in calls from students.

### Head of Student Engagement

- Liaise with Head of Student Support and Wellbeing to provide ongoing practical support to affected students and/or for students who would benefit from non-specialist pastoral support (e.g. check-ins) for as long as a student requires this.
- Liaise with Engagement Support Officers in relation to any impact on the academic work of the students being supported by Student Engagement, without breaching confidentiality relating to the circumstances.

### Pro Vice-Chancellors and Heads of School, in conjunction with relevant colleagues

- Communicate the news regarding the student death to the relevant staff and students in the School, supported by the Director of Student Services and Head of Communications.
- Consider, in consultation with the Head of Communications, whether any communications should be sent to academic and professional services staff and students, for information, more widely within or outside the School.
- Confirm the availability of follow -up support for staff and students

### Deputy Director of Strategy, Planning and Performance (Head of Central Student Administration)

- Ensure that the student's record is updated as soon as clearance is given for this to happen (updating too promptly could inadvertently inform others who have not yet formally been notified).
- Ensure that no routine administrative procedure is continued which may cause additional distress to relatives/ friends of the deceased
- Ensure that the Library, IT and other registrations in the name of the student are cancelled

### Head of Student Finance

- Ensure that all offices within Finance are informed and all steps taken to ensure that the student's record is updated as soon as clearance is given
- Ensure any refunds are processed and debt collection is cancelled

### President of the Students' Union

- Ensure information to the student population/media is consistent with that being given by University
- Co-ordinate any support available or requested from Kent Union

## 6. Steps to be taken after immediate response phase.

After the death of any student, it is important that appropriate opportunity is given for staff to debrief, including those involved in handling the incident and staff who may have been involved in supporting or teaching the student previously. Options for ongoing support, if required, should be made available to staff and students affected but no-one should be required to take up support that they do not wish to have at that time.

As soon as possible after the initial response to the incident (usually the next day), a meeting of those most closely involved in supporting the student (e.g. academic adviser, adviser in SSW, if relevant) and those most closely involved in responding to their death will be convened by the Director of Student Services. In some cases, it is helpful, or more appropriate, for this to be followed up with a further meeting several weeks later.

This meeting should aim to:

- Review the circumstances of and the University's response to the death. It can often help for relevant parties to provide a brief timeline of their involvement. This will be requested by the Director of Student Services, if required.
- Consider which groups of students, beyond those identified in the immediate response, might also be affected.
- Provide an opportunity for staff attending to debrief and raise any queries or concerns.  
Review any potential changes to this protocol, which should be done on a continuous basis to ensure that it is effective for those who may need to be involved in a response and that it achieves the aim of a compassionate and coherent response.

## 7. Serious Incident Reviews

In the event of a confirmed or suspected death by suicide we are required to complete a serious incident review. This will be led and managed by the Director of Student Services and the Head of Student Support and Wellbeing who will lead and support all staff involved in this process. These meetings should be convened within 3 months of the incident. Some conversations and meetings may be held individually or with different teams at separate times. The Director will decide upon the

individual circumstance and situation.

Further information of Serious Incident Reviews can be found under the [UUK guidance pages](#)

The meeting should aim to:

- Review the circumstances of what happened before and after relating to the individual students experience related to their time at the University.
- Consider all information contained across all relevant professional services and academic teams relating to the student.
- Review a completed timeline relating to the student's time at the University leading up to the event, including all relevant communications.
- Consider lessons learnt and changes to be implemented, if any, following the review.
- Ensure that any changes identified on practices following a serious incident review are implemented. The Director of Student Services will ensure these are completed and logged.
- Where appropriate involve the input including feedback and concerns of family members and loved ones

Any request from the Coroner for a report from the University, will be provided by the Director of Student Services, who will gather the required information from the relevant parties.

**Updated by LJF (Head of  
Student Support and  
Wellbeing- Sept 2024)**