

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In the event of the death of a student, it is vital that the University has clear and coherent procedures in place. This will facilitate a response that is appropriate to the circumstances, supports the role of those with a statutory responsibility, is sensitive to the distress of those most closely involved and does not raise unnecessary distress or anxiety within the student body.
- 1.2 The circumstances surrounding each death will be different and therefore these are general guidelines which cannot 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. The University's Response

- 2.1 All responses will be overseen by the Associate Provost Student Experience and Academic Services (or nominated deputy) who will co-ordinate any actions required. The Associate Provost will delegate specific roles within the process to other staff members. The Associate Provost will maintain a detailed record of all information and decisions taken to aid coordination and in case of any further investigation.

3. Factors that will influence the level and type of response

- 3.1 The death of a student will most commonly be an unexpected event, and this guidance is written on that basis. Where a death is anticipated the grief will be no less profound for those close to the deceased; however some planning may have taken place, and the initial shock associated with an unexpected death is likely to be less intense.
- 3.2 **Location.** The location in which the death occurs will have a significant influence on the degree to which members of the University are involved in the early stages of dealing with the discovery of the body and notifying the authorities. The location will probably be one of the following:
- In a university Hall of Residence
 - In a university building or other non-residential part of the university estate
 - Off campus, whilst engaged in university activity
 - Off campus, whilst living in local accommodation away from their permanent or family residence.
 - Off campus, in their permanent home or in a public place.
 - Whilst abroad, either on university placement or for vacation.
- 3.3 **Circumstances of death.** The degree to which members of the University become involved, in ways other than being supportive of those distressed, may be affected by the manner of death, which may fall into one of the following categories:
- Accidental
 - Possible suicide
 - Natural causes (with or without infectious disease implications)

- Crime or suspected crime
- Substance related.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the coroner to determine the cause of death. Therefore, when giving out any information about the death, care must be taken not to assign a cause prematurely.

3.4 Circumstances of student. There are significant differences in how we respond to, for example, the death of a full-time student living in our accommodation and the death of a student living with their family. Therefore, it is important to gather basic facts about the student and their circumstances from the outset and to avoid making any assumptions about what the family will want or expect from the University.

4. If a body is discovered

4.1 Do Not touch or move anything (other than to confirm that the person is deceased).

4.2 **If the location is on campus:** inform the University Security Team on extension 7700 and ask them to call the police.

4.3 **If the location is off campus:** inform the police and, separately, inform the University Security Team.

4.4 Where appropriate those present should secure the scene pending the arrival of the police; security staff will usually take the lead in this.

4.5 There may be other people at the scene, and they need to be dealt with in a sensitive manner. Generally, they should be asked to remain in the vicinity until the police arrive, preferably together in a suitable nearby room. Wherever possible immediate care and comfort should be provided by those on the scene and the names and contact details of those present should be recorded.

5. When information about the death of a student first comes to the University

5.1 Information that a student has died can arrive at the University in a wide variety of ways. Quite often it is from other students or from statutory services seeking next of kin details; less frequently from the student's family.

5.2 Upon hearing of, or suspecting a death of a student, staff should report this to the Security Team on +44 (0) 20 7487 7777 as this is a 24-hour operation. Information received from the police, or other external authorities, will be given to Security who will forward the information to the Associate Provost Student Experience and Academic Services or the on-call Major Incident Manager (MIM). If the death has occurred on university grounds, the Director of Estates will also be informed at this stage. Please refer to the Major Incident Management Plan.

5.3 It is important that the facts are recorded accurately and the contact details of the person providing the information taken, so that follow-up can take place.

5.4 The Associate Provost Student Experience and Academic Services will verify the accuracy of the information and gather the relevant information, including details of next of kin.

6. Case Conference to coordinate and assign roles

6.1 Following notification to the University that a Regent's student has died, the Associate Provost Student Experience and Academic Services will call a case conference to manage the University's response. The members of the case conference meeting will vary according to the circumstances and facts under consideration.

6.2 The decision on the make-up of the case conference will rest with the Associate Provost, but may consist of the following members:

- Head of Student Experience & Wellbeing
- Head of Registry
- Director(s) of Content
- Course Leader(s)
- Director of Marketing and Communications
- Chief People Officer
- Director of Estates
- Director of International Partnership Development
- Head of Governance
- Chief Financial Officer
- Accommodation Manager
- Representatives of relevant partner agencies.

6.3 The Case Conference has a number of key responsibilities in managing the University's response to a student death. These are set out in the following sections of this guidance.

7. Communicating the news to others

7.1 When someone has died it is the responsibility of the police (or sometimes the hospital if the death has occurred there) to inform the immediate family. This is the priority: it is important that we do nothing to interfere with this process and that we do not release information prematurely. This is increasingly important as online social networking accelerates the rate of communication.

7.2 The only people who have a right to information following a death are the next of kin, so we must request information sensitively.

8. Informing students

8.1 The process of informing other students is very important. Typically, this should start with identified close friends, flat or house mates and those studying the same course(s). Wherever possible this is best done in person rather than by email. For example, telling a cohort at the end of a lead event may be the best option. However, sometimes an email is the only way to reach a cohort in a timely manner.

9. Media enquiries

9.1 All media enquiries should be directed to the University Communications Team, who will prepare a brief statement to release to enquirers.

10. Liaison with the Police or Coroner's Officers

- 10.1 In the event of a sudden death, the police have two quite distinct roles. They may be part of the initial emergency response, and they gather evidence which will be reported to the Coroner and may also be used if any criminal proceedings ensue.
- 10.2 An unexpected death is reported to the Coroner in whose area the body is found. The role of the Coroner is to determine who has died, as well as when, where and how they died. They have jurisdiction over the body until they are satisfied that they have gathered all the information available or that they require, which usually follows the receipt of the report of a postmortem examination by a pathologist.
- 10.3 Liaison on behalf of the University with the police will usually be by the Director of Estates and liaison with the Coroner's office will usually be by the Associate Provost Student Experience and Academic Services.

11. Liaison with the student's family

- 11.1 In order to offer what support we can to the family and to be able to make arrangements for those who wish to attend the funeral, it is important that we establish a single **Family Liaison Officer (FLO)**. Occasionally the family will not want any contact with the University, and we then have to adapt our responses accordingly.
- 11.2 The FLO is likely to be the Head of Student Experience & Wellbeing but can also be a member of staff at the University who knew the student, as experience has demonstrated that families also appreciate this.
- 11.3 The key responsibilities of the University family contact (FLO) are:
- To establish if there is anything the family wants from us, for example help gathering personal possessions or to visit the University.
 - To clarify funeral arrangements and whether the family would welcome students and staff attending the funeral.
 - To be a conduit for any practical information, for example about returning fees or providing a transcript and/or certificate for a posthumous award (see section 13).
 - If possible, to find out a little about the family, in particular parents, so that a letter of condolence from the Vice-Chancellor can be appropriately addressed.
 - To note the names of any students the family raise concerns about as the family may know about close friends of the deceased and we may not.
 - Sometimes the family contact may be asked to talk to the family about holding a memorial event at the University: whether they are comfortable about it taking place, wish to attend and whether there are any religious beliefs to consider.

12. Support for students and impact upon studies

- 12.1 When a student dies there will typically be a close circle of friends and possibly a partner who are deeply affected, then a wider circle who are shocked and upset. The circumstances of the death may intensify the emotional responses, for example if it is believed that the death may have been preventable.
- 12.2 These emotional reactions are normal, and it is important to treat them as such. Typically, this involves other students or staff, and sometimes their own family

members, being with the students initially whilst they adjust to the news. This is often a role the University is best placed to take on.

- 12.3 It is sometimes helpful to explain what will happen to students. For example, it may be necessary to explain the role of the coroner in determining cause of death if students are jumping to conclusions or asking lots of questions. Often sudden deaths raise questions for which there are no satisfactory answers.
- 12.4 One of the practical tasks we can offer to undertake on behalf of the students most affected is to inform their Course Leader(s) about what has happened and their relationship with the deceased. The students should also be advised to contact Student Wellbeing & Disability within a day or two to discuss any work for which they need to submit an exceptional circumstances claim.
- 12.5 All Regent's students who are affected by the death of a student can be offered counselling via our counselling provider - Spectrum Life. It will also be appropriate to establish some group support sessions through liaising with the Lead Student Wellbeing & Disability Advisor.

13. Posthumous academic awards

- 13.1 When a student dies part-way through their studies it should be established whether they are eligible for an academic award for work already completed, or whether the student has successfully completed sufficient work for a posthumous aegrotat degree to be awarded, in line with the University's Academic Regulations. The Head of Registry or their nominee will be asked to review the student's record to establish this.

14. Funeral arrangements

- 14.1 The next of kin is formally responsible for organising the funeral and it usually takes place near the family home. Often family members are very pleased to see students and staff, but that remains their choice.
- 14.2 The norm is for the University to be represented, often by the Director (Content), possibly with another colleague. Where possible, it is helpful for the School to offer to assist with travel arrangements for students who may be attending.

15. Memorial service/event

- 15.1 When the funeral is some distance away and for practical reasons not many students or staff are able to attend, a memorial event may be appropriate.
- 15.2 Whilst the University can help to arrange such an event, it is important to be sure that there are sufficient people wishing to take part for one to be successful.
- 15.3 The norm is for a memorial service to be arranged and to take place after the funeral, typically in the following few weeks. It does not have to be religious, but it is usually helpful to have someone conduct the event, and the family should be invited.

16. When an international student dies

16.1 When an international student dies, there are a number of additional practical dimensions to be addressed:

- Communication with the family may require a translation service.
- The appropriate consulate or embassy may need to be involved.
- The repatriation of bodies is subject to strict regulation, so if this is to happen a funeral director will need to be involved at an early stage. The coroner's office can assist in identifying a suitable funeral director.

17. When a student dies outside of the UK

17.1 When a student dies overseas, the responsibility for investigating and determining the cause of death generally rests with the country in which the death occurs.

17.2 The family is likely to have to be in touch with the British consulate or embassy in the country in which the student died (if it was not their home country) for assistance with the administrative requirements.

17.3 If the student was overseas on University business, the University insurance policy may cover some aspects of the costs of repatriation of their body. Where relevant, the insurance company will appoint a caseworker to facilitate this process. It is important that no assurances are given that the University can cover these costs, which can be considerable.

18. Impact of a student death on staff

18.1 Responses to a death can bring up difficult feelings for those involved in carrying out duties. Staff members are therefore encouraged to take up support from their managers and if required, contact HR to access the Employee Assist Programme (EAP).