E9. Death of a Student

Guidelines/Policy: Procedures for Managing the Response to the Death of a Student

Use of this document

This document describes the procedures to manage the response to the death of a student although a number of them may be adapted for use in the event of serious injury or illness.

1. Principles

   1.1 The need for an appropriate level of response from the University, which should be neither overwhelming nor inappropriately understated in relation to the event;

   1.2 The need for a sensitive and compassionate approach which recognises the distress of the next of kin, and distress or potential distress for staff and students close to the deceased student, and if on campus, the distress for the person finding the body;

   1.3 The need to avoid confusion by developing clear lines of responsibility which support and make coherent the contributions of a number of University staff and students;

   1.4 The need to observe legalities, and to protect the interests of the University in cases where negligence might be alleged.

2. Factors which may determine level and type of response

   2.1 The location in which the death occurs will have a significant bearing on the degree of involvement of the University and its staff. The locations may be listed as:

      - on campus, in hall of residence
      - on campus, in non-residential location
      - on-campus, in HKSC
      - on campus while employed by University or Students’ Union
      - off campus, while engaged in University activity
      - off campus, while engaged in Students’ Union activity
      - off campus, while living in University managed property
      - off campus, while living in private accommodation
      - off campus, in permanent home
<p>| | |</p>
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|   | off campus, while engaged in non-University activity  
|   | off campus, in a public place  
|   | in hospital |

### 2.2 The degree to which the University becomes involved

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

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

### 2.3 It is important that the University

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

- the ways in which the university may become aware of the death of the student
- the names and roles of people within the institution who must be informed of the death
- the roles and responsibilities of other members of university 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 institution might be overtly recognised and marked.

### 3. On the discovery or notification of a death:

#### 3.1 Death

Death, unless it occurs within a controlled environment such as a hospital, must always be notified to the Police.

#### 3.2 If a corpse is discovered

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.

#### 3.3 If there 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

#### 3.4 The Police will also normally arrange for the removal of the body and any necessary post-mortem.

#### 3.5 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.

### 3.6 The Police (or Hospital) will also normally arrange that the next of kin are informed. A representative of the University (see below) must check with the Police whether this has been done and which person(s) have been informed. The University may need to assist the Police by making available information from its student records system. In the unlikely event that the Police do not inform next of kin, responsibility may fall to a representative of the University. It is essential that the representative confirms the veracity of the information about the death before making any contact with the next of kin.

### 3.7 Any member of University staff who learns of the death of a student (eg by a call from the Police to Site Services Control Point) should immediately contact one of the following, at any time. Site Services 24 Hour Control Point holds call-out numbers and, in the event of difficulty, assistance or advice in contacting an appropriate member of staff can be obtained by calling (01865 48)3060. Whoever on the call-out list is contacted first will take responsibility for informing the others:

**Call out numbers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Student Services</td>
<td>01865 484654</td>
<td>07831 414870 or #6413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Academic and Student Affairs</td>
<td>01865 483021</td>
<td>07900 138213 or #6625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Public Relations</td>
<td>01865 484453</td>
<td>07919 258789 or #6313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### 3.8 After consultation between these members of staff, one or more of them will take responsibility for immediate action in relation to relevant items on the following checklist:

- inform Academic Management Office
- inform Deputy Head of Library
- inform Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors
- inform the relevant Dean
- inform the relevant Field Chair(s)
- inform Personal Tutor
- inform Head of Counselling
- inform Medical Centre and/or relevant General Medical Practices
- inform the Income Office
- inform the General Manager of OBSU
- inform the President of OBSU
- inform Students’ Union Welfare Officer
- inform Chaplain
- inform the relevant Hall Manager
- inform Students’ Union Advice Centre
- inform Switchboard staff
- inform Reception Desk staff, Main Foyer, Gipsy Lane
- inform Head of Site Services
- make appropriate contact with the student’s family and make arrangements for maintaining contact
- set-up liaison arrangements with any police officer(s) involved
- convene a meeting of the Student Death Incident Group (SDIG)
- where appropriate produce a press release and web site notice agreed with the student’s family
- make arrangements for informing fellow students and preliminary arrangements for supporting them
- make preliminary arrangements for supporting members of staff traumatised by the nature of the death.

4. **Student Death Incident Group (SDIG)**

4.1 The SDIG (normally chaired by the Director of ASA or the Head of Student Services) should be convened as soon as possible if it is deemed necessary to convene it.

4.2 Membership of SDIG will vary according to the circumstances of the death but may include

- Head of Public Relations or nominee
- Head of Residential and Conference Services
- Head of Legal Services or nominee
- Dean of School or nominee
- Field Chair(s)
- Personal Tutor
- Hall Manager
- Duty Warden
- OBSU President
- OBSU Welfare Officer
- OBSU General Manager or nominee
- Ecumenical Chaplain or nominee
- Head of International Students’ Advisory Service
- Health and Safety Officer
- Head of Counselling
- Head of Student Disability Service
- Manager, Financial Aid Office
- SUAC representative
- Head of Personnel or nominee
- Member of Executive Board
- Income Services Manager or PA to the Director of Finance and Legal Services
- Member(s) of General Medical Practice(s) serving the student population

4.3 Tasks undertaken by members of this group will be drawn from the following checklist; priority of tasks will be determined according to the circumstances:
• Liaison with the family and assisting, wherever necessary, in making arrangements for family members to travel to and stay in Oxford.
• Liaison with placement or other employer
• Liaison with the Police
• Letter of condolence to the family from the Vice-chancellor and/or other senior member of staff and/or Students’ Union.
• Liaison with the Coroner’s Office
• Liaison with the press, radio, television
• Making arrangements for refund of Tuition fees and Accommodation charges
• Continuing arrangements for informing fellow students
• Continuing arrangements for supporting fellow students affected by the death
• Continuing arrangements for supporting any members of staff affected by the death
• Funeral arrangements, (or repatriation of the body) including University representation at the funeral, publicising funeral arrangements within the University, transport for students attending funeral
• Informing MMT/teaching staff about any students whose academic performance is likely to be affected by the death or who need Approved Time Out
• Agree content of press releases and web pages based on consultation with family
• Memorial service arrangements, publicity and transport
• Ensuring that no routine administrative procedure is continued which may cause additional distress to relatives/friends of deceased
• Arrangements for posthumous award
• Informing external professional bodies or placement organisations
• Making arrangements for next of kin to collect deceased’s personal belongings from Hall of Residence or rented accommodation or, when necessary, arranging for them to be packed and transported
• To ensure that staff involved in a traumatic event are thanked and/or praised for their involvement
• To ensure that any Health and Safety implications of the death are assessed
• In consultation with the Police or other statutory authority, to implement any necessary and immediate closures or changes in practice
• To initiate any action required by law as the result of a death arising from an infectious disease
• To make decisions and initiate action required to address any financial issues arising from the death, e.g. in relation to fellow residents of the deceased who are living in privately rented accommodation and may have to bear the cost of his/her rent, cost of packing and posting personal belongings or the cost of repatriating a body
• Liaison with the landlord if the deceased was living in privately rented accommodation
| • Co-ordinate hospital visits to any other students injured in an incident that caused the death  
| • Co-ordinate the drawing up of brief biographical notes on the deceased for use by family or for internal publications  
| • Making arrangements to provide interpreters and translators  
| • Maintain a record of action taken Initiating an inquiry as to whether the University could have done anything to prevent the death |

Keith H Cooper, Head of Student Services
Appendix 1

Death of UCAS applicant

UCAS will inform the Head of the Admissions Office of the death of an applicant. Additionally, UCAS will delete the electronic record of the applicant from their own and our systems. Admissions will then notify the relevant Admissions Tutor and request that any paperwork, including the application form, relating to the applicant is returned to them or destroyed. The destruction of paperwork relating to the applicant is undertaken in order that no correspondence can to be sent to the applicant's address in error.

Appendix 2

Death of an International Student (text from 'International Students in crisis: a guide for institutions' reproduced with permission from UKCISA; pages 49-58)

Much of the advice below will also apply if a member of a student's family dies while in the UK, although the student will probably take care of arrangements himself or herself.

The first issue to resolve is the extent to which the institution is going to get involved in responding to a death. This is a policy matter with implications for staff and resources. There is no legal obligation to take charge of all the arrangements, and consular offices can take care of the formalities concerning disposal of the body and dealing with a student's family in the home country. However, many institutions have decided to take on the role. This has the advantage that you can make sure that the institution's response is 'official' and co-ordinated, that the public relations aspect is properly handled, with the institution able to present a caring and responsible image.

Mitigation

It is assumed that you will have done all you reasonably can to prevent the death of a student, including following the advice on pre-arrival information and induction in this publication.

Preparation

There is a lot of preparation work that can be done, so that if a student dies, you have information to hand and are able to act straightaway.

1. Students

- Keep a record of next of kin and/or emergency contact details, and update it annually. Students may have family or friends in the UK whom you could contact immediately and who can help with contacting family abroad and advise on appropriate disposal arrangements (see section 3Bvi)
• Encourage students to take out health and/or travel insurance which covers repatriation in the event of death.
• Keep a list of local places of worship and representatives of the different religious communities. Where appropriate, such contacts can advise on the appropriate customs to be followed, and may conduct a memorial or funeral service, particularly if the body is remaining in the UK. They may also know about legal requirements and local undertakers. See appendix A for references on religious and cultural practices associated with death.
• Have a list of temporary accommodation for use by visiting relatives. This should include a mix of hotel-type and self-catering, short-term and long-term.

2. Institution

• Decide who will co-ordinate the response and who needs to do what and when. Involve counsellors and chaplains in this process. Think through all the different people in the institution who will need to know, so that records can be amended and any necessary administrative action taken (see appendix D for a model procedure).
• Determine how to provide cover to allow the co-ordinator to be freed up from their normal responsibilities to deal with the case.
• Wherever possible identify a colleague with whom the co-ordinator can work. This could be the person responsible for counselling or a chaplain. A man and woman team works best as this enables you to respond to almost any situation immediately.
• Identify contacts who can help arrange a translator if required.
• Prepare an internal incident support form for recording the circumstances and action taken (see example in appendix C).
• Decide how you wish to commemorate a death in the institution, though bear in mind the need to be flexible to respond to the wishes of family in particular cases. This could include an obituary in the institutional bulletin, a donation to or collection for the family, a memorial service or the bestowal of an honorary award. A representative of the institution could attend the funeral proceedings in the home country if appropriate, but check on the cultural and religious customs first.
• Decide in advance whether you are prepared to commit institutional finances. Repatriation can cost up to £5000. Normally the family of the deceased or possibly an employer or sponsor will pay this, but they may not be able to. If the student has no insurance policy then the institution has to decide whether it will pay. It is not the responsibility of the consulate to meet the costs.

3. Legal formalities

• Make sure that you know the procedures involved. Registrars of births, Marriages and Deaths and Coroners can advise and provide you with leaflets.
Some funeral directors specialise in repatriation. They are generally based in London, but have local agents. Identify local agents or directors in advance. See appendix B for the relevant professional associations.

Response

1. Family

- It will usually be most appropriate for the family to hear of the death directly from a senior member of staff. However, if there is a student who knew the deceased particularly well you may ask them to break the news, especially if they are from the same culture and the relatives do not speak English. The cause of death will influence to a large extent your choice of an appropriate person to contact the family. Do not express any opinion about the cause unless it is beyond all doubt. If it is suicide, then special skills are required.
- If the student was accompanied by a partner or spouse, they may wish to take charge of arrangements, although the institution can help with knowledge of legal procedures and local contacts.
- If the student was a lone parent accompanied by dependent children, you may also need to speak to the next of kin or surviving parent about arrangements for their care.
- Contact the consulate of the student's home country immediately, and agree who will do what. They may be able to contact the family if you are having difficulty.
- Contact the next of kin immediately and ask them what they want you to do. In some societies it will be appropriate to contact a male relative rather than a female. Explain to them what you are going to do and explain the legal procedures. If you can send a fax, telegram or telex with a written explanation this should reduce the risk of misunderstandings, and gives the family a chance to absorb all the information you have given in their own time. It also gives a documentary record for the institution to keep. Students from the same background as the deceased may well be willing translators, if the family do not speak English.
- Your response should be in line with the cultural norms and personal wishes of the deceased and/or the next of kin. For example, in some religions, the funeral should take place within 24 hours, but this has to be balanced against the legal requirements of the coroner, especially if the death is sudden or accidental and a post-mortem is required.

2. Institutional procedures

The personal responsible for co-ordinating the institutional response should:

- Circulate a notice of the student's death to all relevant personnel (see Appendix D), including the Health and Safety Officer if the death has happened on campus.
- Liaise with external agencies, staff, students and family throughout the case as required (see Appendix D for a list).
- Find out all they can about the circumstances of the death and record it.
Find out who discovered the body and who last saw the student alive.
Modify events/conversations as they happen.
Record personal information, anecdotes etc.
Keep a copy of any press articles or press releases.
Try to write a daily report (for their own use, it helps to plan the next day), and a final report at the end of the process.
Give a daily report to all key people.
Make sure funeral arrangements are made, if it is taking place in the UK.
Advise Vice-Chancellor/Principal how the institution should respond to the situation.

3. **Formal procedures**

All the following tasks need to be carried out. The next of kin may wish to take responsibility for some of them. The following is based on procedures in England and Wales. There are some slight differences in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A Benefits Agency leaflet, *What to do after a death in England and Wales* (ref 049) gives detailed advice on the procedures. The Civil Law Division of the Scottish Executive produces a leaflet, *What to do after a death in Scotland* (see appendix B for website). We have not been able to find an equivalent publication for Northern Ireland.

- Make sure someone has called an ambulance.
- Make sure the police are informed, and someone is available to talk to them if they want to carry out inquiries.
- Was the student registered as an organ donor? If you are not sure, check with the next of kin whether they know. There may be cultural reasons why donation is out of the question. This has to happen straight away for the organs to be of use.
- In a case of repatriation, contact the funeral directors and warn them in advance. They will then liaise with the consulate and the airline. They need to know the details of the consignee, ie the person who will formally receive the body at the destination.

**Coroner**

- In order for a body to be moved out of the country, a coroner has to give permission. Permission has to be obtained at least four days before the body is to be moved, but it can be given in 24 hours if necessary, and if there is no inquest to be held. The coroner will issue a Removal Notice once he or she is satisfied. If a funeral is to be held outside the UK this permission must be obtained.
- Make sure someone is available to deal promptly with any requests from the coroner. A post mortem may be necessary. An interim hearing will normally be held within 48 hours and then adjourned with an interim death certificate to allow the release of the body. The body will normally be released except in rare cases, perhaps if the coroner believes there are suspicious circumstances or there may be criminal proceedings relating to the death.
Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths

- Clarify with the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths exactly what information they need in order to issue a Death Certificate.
- Obtain six copies of the death certificate. There is a fee for this service. Two copies are for the student's family, one is for the funeral director, one is for the consulate and two are for use in sorting out the student's affairs. It is wise to obtain them straight away, as they will cost more if you request them later.
- You may have to get the death certificate translated into the official language of the student's home country. Check which is the appropriate language. The consulate of the student's home country should be able to help. There will be a cost for this, which you may wish to recoup from the family.

Other Legal Formalities

- The student's affairs need to be wound up. Bank accounts should be closed, after any money belonging to the student has been banked. You will require a death certificate to do this. The bank can then transfer the money to the next of kin. In some cases you may have to establish who is the legal next of kin. It may not always be obvious. For instance, if the student's father is dead, it may be another male relative and not the mother.
- Try to establish whether the student had made a will. Formalities relating to wills and the estate of the deceased vary from country to country, so you will need to liaise with the student's family. There have been cases in the past where institutions have acted as executor in the absence of anyone else.
- Return the student's passport to the relevant consulate.
- Inform the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in writing.
- Carry out an inventory of the student's possessions, with a witness for support, before getting them packed up. Establish with the next of kin what is to happen to the possessions. If they are to be transported to the family the undertaker can arrange for them to go back with the body, otherwise they can be sent later. You need to decide who will pay. The deceased's estate or family will normally pay, but this is not easy to arrange quickly.

3. Media

- Deal promptly with any media interest. Give them a press release as soon as you can.
- Only give them factual details and do not speculate.
- Release details of the student's identity only with the permission of the next of kin.
- Make sure they know what steps the institution is taking.

Recovery

The recovery process will include all or some of the following:
- A memorial service or other event. Involve the student's friends in agreeing what form this will take. Ask your audio-visual department to record it, either on video or as sound only. Offer to send a copy to the next of kin.
- Support for the student's friends and staff. Bereavement counselling may be offered by your own counselling service or by an outside organisation, such as CRUSE (see appendix B for details). Chaplains can play a role, especially for students with religious beliefs. In the case of a suicide, those close to the student may well need extra support. Counselling may not be available immediately. In the interim, you could organise a "debriefing" for staff and students who knew the student, offering them the opportunity to talk about what has happened. This may be particularly important for those students who have not been involved in other arrangements.
- An internal inquiry as to whether the institution could have done anything to prevent the death, leading to possible changes in policy and procedures. This is not a blame-apportioning exercise, rather an open discussion in order to identify gaps in communication or welfare provision and how to plug them.

Counselling

The offer of bereavement counselling should be made to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Academic Department</th>
<th>Students' Union</th>
<th>Evening Classes</th>
<th>Front Line Staff</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Friends Boyfriend/Girlfriend Residence Staff</td>
<td>Staff Students Cleaning Staff Refectory Staff</td>
<td>Members of any clubs or societies student was involved in</td>
<td>Staff Classmates</td>
<td>Secretaries/Support Staff who have to deal with 'all callers' throughout your handling of the case</td>
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<td>Registry Staff</td>
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<td>Finance Staff</td>
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<td>Accommodation</td>
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NB Some people may wish to use Professional Counselling Services outside the institution. This should be borne in mind and arrangements made accordingly.

Suicide

If a student has taken his or her own life, this will clearly require sensitive handling. Bear in mind the following:

- Suicide carries varying degrees of stigma across different societies. The student's family and friends may flatly deny the possibility of suicide, even if that is the coroner's verdict.
- The family could disown the student and refuse to have anything to do with the funeral arrangements, leaving you to arrange and possibly pay for a funeral. Students close to the deceased could be in need of support and sensitive handling. You may well need their co-operation in order to find out why it happened.
• The institution could be portrayed as uncaring in the media. Your response should respect the dignity of the deceased and the family.

Appendix 3

Fees Refunds Policy

a) If a student dies during Semester 1, then all tuition fees paid for that academic year will be refunded

b) If a student dies in the vacation between Semester 1 and Semester 2, then only Tuition fees already paid in advance for Semester 2 will be refunded

c) If a student dies during Semester 2, then the Tuition fees for that Semester will be refunded

d) Accommodation charges will be refunded from the day of the death

Appendix 4

Relevant web-sites

CRUSE

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk