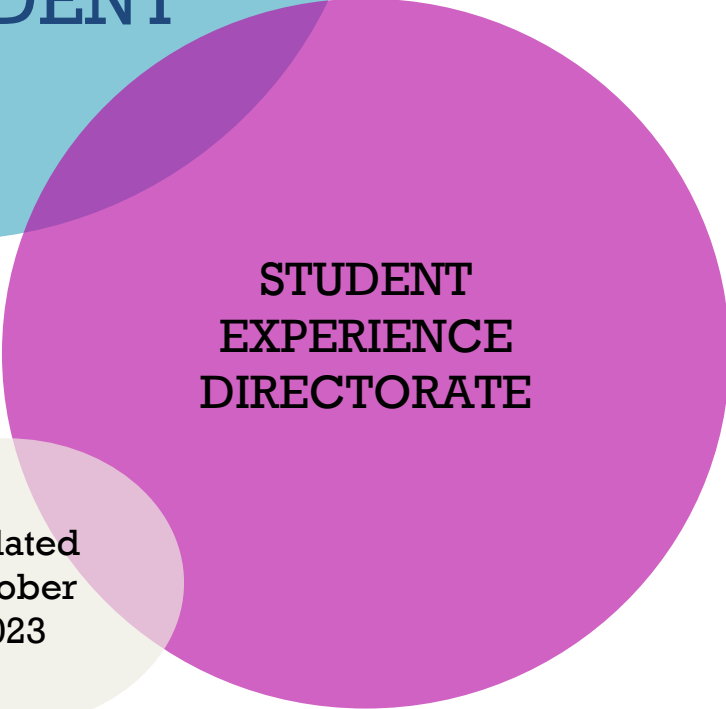


**GUIDELINES  
FOR  
RESPONDING  
TO THE DEATH  
OF A STUDENT**



**STUDENT  
EXPERIENCE  
DIRECTORATE**



Updated  
October  
2023

## **Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student**

### **Introduction**

In the tragic event that a student of the University dies, it is important that guidelines are in place and understood by key personnel to ensure an appropriate and lawful response. This document is designed to provide advice relating to the necessary immediate response of individuals hearing the news of a student death as well as guidance relating to who else should be contacted within the University for the matter to be properly handled.

The degree of involvement by the University in responding to the death of a student will depend on both the manner and location of the death. Actions may vary therefore on a case by case basis but the general principles and processes highlighted in these guidelines will still be relevant.

### **1. Death of a Student That Has Occurred Off Campus**

- 1.1 Notification of the death of a student off campus may be received by any member of staff or student within the University. **It is important that this information is passed on at the earliest opportunity to the Student Experience Executive Office via email to [student-experience@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:student-experience@qmul.ac.uk).** Notification out of hours should be done through University Security on 020 7882 5000 or by email on [mile-end-security@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:mile-end-security@qmul.ac.uk)
- 1.2 The person receiving the initial notification of the death should ascertain as much information as is reasonably possible at the time, bearing in mind they are likely to be informed by a grieving friend or relative. Taking contact details for someone else to contact them later is advisable.
- 1.3 Once notification is received by the Student Experience Directorate Executive Office they will contact the Director of Student Experience, or nominee if they are unavailable, to convene the Coordinating Group.
- 1.4 No action should be taken, including communicating the reported death to anyone else, until the Coordinating Group have met and agreed a plan of action. Communicating news like this needs to be done sensitively and appropriately, and facts are likely to be limited at an early stage so it is vital that nothing is communicated that could later be discovered to be incorrect.

1.5 If notification is received of a death at a transnational education partner institution then the Coordinating Group will be convened but may take their lead from the local processes at the partner institution.

## **2. Discovery of a Death on Campus**

2.1 A death, unless it is of a patient within a hospital, must always be notified without delay to the Police in the first instance. **If a death occurs on campus, University Security should be alerted immediately on the QMUL Emergency Number on 020 7882 3333.**

2.2 If a body is discovered, first aid possibilities should be the first option to be considered. When first aid is no longer possible the area in which the body has been found should be secured as a potential scene of crime. It is important to remember anything that may have necessarily been moved or disturbed when trying to render first aid. No access other than for medical staff should be allowed to the area or any items disturbed until Police clearance has been given to the contrary.

2.3 In order to prevent groups of interested parties interfering with the scene a cordon should be maintained around the area of the scene by university security to sustain privacy and prevent photography etc.

2.4 The Police will arrange for the body to be removed, and for any necessary post mortem to be undertaken.

2.5 University Security will ensure that the Head of Security and Emergency Planning as well as the University Co-ordinating Group is contacted, and will consider if the Emergency Management procedures need to be triggered.

**Under no circumstances whatever should information regarding a death be communicated to next of kin, the media or any other unauthorised third party unless this has been cleared by the Police or the Coroner's Office. Even when such clearance has been given, care must be taken regarding the language used with such sensitive issues as possible suicides that may ultimately be shown not to be. The cause of a death may only be ruled upon by a Coroner.**

2.6 In the event that there are witnesses then the Police may wish to interview them, they should be taken to a private area removed from the immediate scene as soon as possible, and provided with appropriate comforts and supported by a colleague if possible.

2.7 The Police or Hospital will, in most cases, make arrangements for the next of kin to be informed. The University should prepare to assist in this process by making available any data from student records that may be of use. This will be provided by Registry Services and recorded via the Coordinating Group.

2.8 Whilst news and knowledge of the death of a student may become known to a portion of the University community, it is important in the early stages to adopt the principles of 'need to know', and 'need to support' as may be required.

2.9 The Communications team and Security should take reasonable steps to monitor social media and gather information being passed in relation to what is going on. Such intelligence will enable rumours to be quelled and responded to as may be required to provide advice and facts using official University social media.

### **3. Receiving Notification of a Death Outside of Normal Working Hours**

3.1 Should a notification be received in the evening or at a weekend then the news should be reported via Security and escalated to a member of the Emergency Management Team, ideally the Director of Student Experience via email. The Coordinating Group will be convened as soon as is practicably possible, but some actions may take place before they do, for example amending the student record. The Emergency Management procedures may be enacted if appropriate.

### **4. The Convening of the Coordinating Group**

4.1 Once notification is received about the death of a student the Coordinating Group will be convened.

4.2 This group would operate in an advisory capacity and report to the Principal through the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Governance Officer.

4.3 Depending on the circumstances it may be appropriate for the university Emergency Management Plan to be enacted. This will be raised with the Chief Operating Officer following the first Coordinating Group meeting unless the Emergency Management Plan has already commenced.

4.4 The normal composition of the Group would be as follows:

- Director of Student Experience (Chair)
- Administrator (Student Experience Executive Office)
- Head of Student Wellbeing
- Head of Advice and Counselling Service
- Director of Student Registry
- Head of External Communications and Campaigns
- Assistant Director Estates and Facilities (Security & Business Continuity)
- The relevant School or institute Manager
- A senior member of QMSU staff

And where relevant:

- An appropriate academic from the school
- Director of Campus Commercial Services
- Chaplaincy
- Head of Residential Services
- A member of the Research Degrees Office and Doctoral College
- A colleague from the student's placement, educational delivery partner or distance learning provider

4.5 If the student is on a field trip or at a partner institution then the student's supervisor should be invited to the University coordinating group and the associated appropriate risk assessments used as a key information resource.

4.6 If the student is on a placement or is a distance learner then decisions will be made in full liaison with the other provider.

4.7 It is important that information is not passed to Student Officers of QMSU until it is ascertained if they were known to them by the QMSU staff member on the group in order to prevent causing them any undue distress.

4.8 It is hoped that the adoption of this simple procedure will minimise communication problems and facilitate an appropriate and sensitive response to the death. It is also important that everyone in the University is aware of the support and counselling available to individuals and groups.

4.9 If the death is believed to be by suicide then the Postvention Section of the Safer Suicide Strategy will be utilised by the Coordinating Group.

4.10 The brief of the Group is as follows:

#### **Information gathering**

- To agree the composition of the Group and co-opt other colleagues as necessary.
- To gather all relevant information including what happened and who knows what.
- To contact the Health and Safety Directorate in the event of the death having occurred on University property or as a result of something that happened on University property.
- To identify who may need to be informed if the student was involved in any clubs or societies

#### **Communication**

- To decide who needs to be informed, by whom, in what order and by what means, and when, taking responsibility for informing relevant parties about the death as appropriate.
- To develop communication for external stakeholders/press.
- To agree communication for internal stakeholders.
- To ensure the Principal's office coordinates a response to the deceased's family on behalf of QM.

#### **Supporting Students and staff affected**

- To support the school or institute concerned including arranging counselling for students through the Advice and Counselling Service and for staff via Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme
- To assist the school or institute concerned with bereavement support as well as help and advice on issues such as attendance at funerals and the organising of memorial services etc. through the Chaplaincy team
- To liaise with relevant outside parties who may include relatives and Police about funeral arrangements, accommodation on campus and possessions.

## Practical Steps

- To ensure the student is taken off administrative mailing lists.
- To offer support with Extenuating Circumstances to students who are directly affected by the death
- To arrange for someone to call the next of kin on the student's record within 48 hours of the university being informed of the death
- The University will consider whether it is appropriate in the circumstances to give an academic award posthumously. The Director of Registry Services, in liaison with the relevant School or Institute Manager, will gather information about the deceased student's academic progress and any relevant context and present it to the Chair of the Senate, who will make the decision
- To offer PR support to the family if the death is likely to attract media attention
- To ensure that University and school or institute staff who manage phone lines are given a brief about the death in order that they may field and direct calls and enquiries as required.
- To make contact with the Coroner's Office
- To consider refund of tuition fees to the family

## 5. Who within the University should be informed of a death

5.1 University Security staff will often be part of the channel through which the University is alerted to a death but where this has not happened they must be contacted to keep them informed on Extension 5000. It is essential to keep them informed in order to equip them to deal with any enquiries they are likely to receive relating to the death. It is essential that they are briefed how to respond. Security may also be called upon to control or limit access as required to prevent further harm and to protect those suffering from grief etc.

5.2 Prior to official confirmation from the Coroner's office or Police to the University Coordinating Group, school or institute leaders will often be put under significant pressure by staff and students to share details of the incident. It is best practice in these situations to confirm only that an incident has been reported to the institution and that formal confirmation is still awaited.

5.3 The Head of Public Relations will need to brief security to ensure that University and school or institute staff who manage phone lines are given a brief about the death in order that they may field and direct calls and enquiries as required.

5.4 Members of the student's academic school or institute have a key role to play as they will usually know the student, and personal knowledge is very important when contacting friends and relatives. Members of the school or institute will also be best placed to decide who needs to be told and by whom. But a broader response is also required and the Co-Ordinating Group's task is to ensure that all aspects are considered and acted upon where necessary.

## **6. Support**

6.1 The school or institute often has a key role at these times. School or institute staff usually take responsibility for passing on information and spending time with those touched by the death. They may also invite a member of the Advice and Counselling Service to speak with a group of students, if appropriate.

6.2 The Advice and Counselling Service provides one to one and group support for students affected by the death. Extension 8717. Resources and further information are available at [www.qmul.ac.uk/welfare](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/welfare)

6.3 Bereavement Support - The chaplaincy team have a wealth of experience in working alongside the dying and their families, as well as providing practical support for those who have been bereaved. Between them they have conducted hundreds of funerals and memorial services. They are available as a pastoral resource for the provision of care to individuals and groups - staff or student - whether those concerned are religious or not. The Chaplaincy may also help to organise a memorial service if needed. They are contactable by email on: [e.sharples@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:e.sharples@qmul.ac.uk)



6.4 Students who would like to talk to someone about how they have been affected should be advised to contact the Advice and Counselling Service <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/welfare/>. Staff in need of similar support should be advised to contact the Employee Assistance Programme at Freephone 0800 243 458 or at [assistance@workplaceoptions.com](mailto:assistance@workplaceoptions.com)