

Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death

Approving Body: Student Experience Committee

Date of Approval: Student Experience Committee, September 2019

Policy owner: Student Experience Committee; Policy drafted by Head of Student Support and Careers Services

Other Stakeholders: Students' Union; International Office; Accommodation; CWPSI; Information Compliance, Human Resources

Policy contact: Caryl Davies; ccd@aber.ac.uk

Policy status: Final

Version: 2.2

Reason for update: Major revision 2.0 – Version 2.1 minor name changes 2.2 Significant additions to policy in light of recent student death

Review date: February 2020

Contents

1	Purpose	2
2	Scope.....	2
3	Formal Notification of the Death within the Wider University	2
4	Posthumous Awards	3
5	Unexpected Student Death.....	3
6	Death on Campus or at a University Related Activity off Campus.....	4
7	Death of a Student in Private Accommodation/off Campus not at a University Related Activity	4
8	Unexpected Death Outside of Normal Office Hours	5
9	Identifying the Decease	5
10	Notification of Next of Kin/Emergency Contact	5
11	Communication with the Police/Coroner	5
12	Communication with the Press.....	5
13	Getting the Situation Back to Normal.....	5
14	Completing an Incident Report Form	6
15	Guidance relating to International Students/Students Studying Abroad.....	6
16	Follow-up Action/Ongoing Co-ordination.....	7
17	Support for Family, Friends and Colleagues.	7

1 Purpose

1.1 These guidelines aim to provide clarity regarding the procedures to follow in responding to a student death. This is to ensure:

- the sensitive handling of the situation
- to allow for the effective communication of the death (while mindful of confidentiality and GDPR)
- to ensure appropriate support is provided to those individuals affected by the death
- to ensure compliance with the law

2 Scope

2.1 Student deaths are a rare occurrence. Nevertheless, student deaths do occur and the extent of the University's involvement will depend on the location and manner of the death. These guidelines apply to any notification of a student death regardless of whether:

- the death is expected or not
- the death is or isn't believed to be suspicious
- the death occurs on/off campus
- the death occurs while the student was actively participating in their course off campus e.g. a fieldtrip/study abroad;
- whether the deceased is an applicant, student or former student

3 Formal Notification of the Death within the Wider University

3.1 In most cases, a close relative or friend of the deceased will inform the University about a death. In all cases, best efforts must be taken to verify the death before further dissemination within the University, particularly where information has been received via social media.

3.2 Where a staff member receives information about a student, applicant or former student death, the Head of Student Support and Careers Services must be informed and will be responsible for formally notifying the following University departments about the death as appropriate to the circumstances of the case:

- Vice Chancellor's Office
- Governance
- Relevant institute and academic department
- Residences
- Facilities Management
- Communications and Public Relations team
- Health, Safety and Environment
- Academic Registry
- Human Resources
- Students' Union
- Information Services
- Student Fees Office
- Sports Centre
- DARO
- Graduate School (for post graduate students and applicants)
- International Office (for EU and international students and applicants)

3.3 On no account should University staff or students contact next of kin until officially notified by the Head of Student Support and Careers Services that it is permissible to do so.

3.4 It will be appropriate for the head of the student's academic department or any other relevant senior member of staff to contact the next of kin to offer condolences once formal notification of the death has been issued.

4 Posthumous Awards

4.1 Following the death of a student, the student's academic department might wish to consider whether it is appropriate to bestow a posthumous award:
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/posthumous-awards/>

5 Unexpected Student Death

5.1 Where a death is unexpected, it is important not to speculate about the cause or circumstances. Whether or not the circumstances are suspicious or whether a person has taken their own life is a decision only the Coroner can make. The word 'suicide' can be extremely distressing to relatives and unless and until the Coroner's findings are made public, this term should not be used.

6 Death on Campus or at a University Related Activity off Campus

- 6.1 Any unexpected death is the immediate responsibility of the police acting as 'Coroner's Officer'. The Police, acting on behalf of H.M. Coroner, will need to attend the scene of death, examine it, including the body, and make relevant enquiries in respect of the circumstances of the death.
- 6.2 Where a death occurs or is discovered on campus or at University related premises, it is important to contact both emergency services and Campus Security. It will usually be the responsibility of Campus Security to notify the emergency services but this will vary according to the circumstances of the case. Where the death has occurred off campus at a University related activity such as a fieldtrip, it will usually be the responsibility of the most senior member of staff present to notify the emergency services.
- 6.3 Care should be taken to ensure that the body is not moved and that the scene secured until the emergency services arrive. Where a death occurs on campus, Campus Security usually take responsibility for securing the scene. Where a death has occurred off campus, but on a University activity, the course of action to be taken to secure the scene until the emergency services arrive will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. However, the most senior staff member present should arrange for this.
- 6.4 As soon as the emergency services and Campus Security have been contacted the Head of Student Support and Careers Services (or nominee) should be notified via the Head of facilities Management during office hours or via the Estates, Residences and Facilities Tier 2 on call rota out of hours. The Head of Student Support and Careers Services will then notify the PVC for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience or the out of office hours Tier 3 Executive emergency rota contact.

7 Death of a Student in Private Accommodation/off Campus not at a University Related Activity

- 7.1 Where a student death occurs in private accommodation or occurs off campus and not in a University related activity (whether or not the death is expected) those resident in the accommodation/present at the death are likely to contact the emergency services direct.
- 7.2 When the death is subsequently notified to the University, the Head of Student Support and Careers Services must be informed at the earliest opportunity.

8 Unexpected Death Outside of Normal Office Hours

- 8.1 Outside of normal office hours, Campus Security will escalate to the Estates, Residences and Facilities Tier 2 on call rota who will in turn escalate to the Head of Student Support and Careers (or depute).

9 Identifying the Deceased

- 9.1 The correct identification of the deceased is vital and staff should endeavour to help the police in this respect. It may be appropriate to identify someone acquainted with the deceased (not specifically a close friend) to take on this role but it will be necessary to be mindful of the effect this might have on them. The requirements of GDPR /confidentiality do not usually apply in such circumstances.

10 Notification of Next of Kin/Emergency Contact

- 10.1 It will usually be the responsibility of the police or hospital to notify next of kin. Where emergency/next of kin contact details have been provided to the University, the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will provide these details to the police/hospital on request.

11 Communication with the Police/Coroner

- 11.1 No staff member should release any official University records to the police/coroner (including incident forms/case notes etc) without first consulting with Head of Student Support and Careers Services or the University's Information Governance Manager

12 Communication with the Press

- 12.1 All press/external enquiries should be directed to the Head of Communications.

13 Engaging Legal Advisors

- 13.1 Depending on the circumstances of the death, it may be appropriate for the University to engage legal advisors at the earliest opportunity. Advice should be sought from the University Secretary on which of the institution's engaged legal advisors to approach.
- 13.2 Where legal advisors have been engaged, their advice shall normally be sought in relation to any interaction between the University and the police/coroner/other external bodies.

14 Getting the Situation Back to Normal

- 14.1 Once the deceased has been removed from the site, Campus Security will, where appropriate, make arrangements in conjunction with the relevant head of department to return the site to normal as soon as possible. If this is not possible, Campus Security will restrict access to the location, thus preserving evidence and protecting property.
- 14.2 Where a death has occurred off campus but at a University activity the course of action to be taken to return the situation to normal will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. The most senior staff member present should assume responsibility for making any necessary arrangements. The Head of Student Support and Careers Services can be consulted for advice if necessary.

15 Completing an Incident Report Form

- 15.1 Following the discovery of a death on campus (or University premises) or at an University activity, it will be the responsibility of the most senior staff member present to complete a University incident report form <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/proc-prac/incident-reporting/> and return it to the University's Health, Safety and Environment Team. This is a legal requirement.
- 15.2 The Head of Student Support and Careers, in consultation with the Head of Health, Safety and Environment shall decide whether a University incident report form should be completed following any other student deaths.

16 Guidance relating to International Students/Students Studying Abroad

- 16.1 In the event of the death of an overseas student/student studying abroad, the University will co-ordinate arrangements in light of the particular circumstances. The Head of Student Support and Careers Services, in consultation with the PVC for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience will be responsible for this working closely with the International Office.
- 16.2 Where an international student is funded through a funding body e.g. the British Council, the funding body may wish to take responsibility for the arrangements and should be informed immediately by the Head of Student Support and Careers Services. Where there is no funding body and the student is privately sponsored, the Embassy or High Commission should be contacted. The Embassy or funding body will normally assist in informing the next of kin and this information should be given to the Coroner's Officer.

16.3 The University should be alert to the possibility of specific cultural and religious requirements in dealing with the body and should seek advice from appropriate sources. It may be necessary for the University to make contact with a specialist who can arrange for the deceased to be taken back to their home country and who is aware of the practices of different religions.

17 Follow-up Action/Ongoing Co-ordination

- 17.1 Following an unexpected/sudden death there may be a coroner's inquest. The Head of Student Support and Careers Services will maintain liaison with the police/doctor/hospital/coroner/other relevant bodies and will ensure that relevant staff and students are kept informed as appropriate.
- 17.2 Wherever possible, the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will endeavour to obtain details about the funeral arrangements. However, it is important to not intrude unnecessarily on the grief of the family and it may be that the University is unable to obtain details. Members of the student's department residence, or Students' Union might wish to attend the funeral service; the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will check with the family whether the presence of staff or students would be welcome and will pass on any information, such as requests for flowers or donations, to friends and staff.
- 17.3 Promises regarding permanent memorials on campus, for example tree planting, or benches should not be made but requests can be directed to the Head of Student Support and Careers who will liaise with the Director of Estates, Residences and facilities..

18 Support for Family, Friends and Colleagues.

- 18.1 Relatives or friends of the deceased may visit the University or Aberystwyth following the death. This could be for:
- Formal identification of the deceased , in which case the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will make arrangements to welcome the relatives/friends and to accompany them to the Coroner's Officer at the police station or mortuary if requested;
 - Collection of personal possessions – in which case the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will offer whatever assistance is possible. In the case of a death in University Residences, arrangements should be made with the Head of Residences for packing and removal of personal possessions but it will always be necessary to ensure that at least two staff are present to avoid accusations should property be found to be missing.

- 18.2 Relatives and friends often find it helpful to meet and talk with acquaintances of the deceased and if requested arrangements should be made for them to visit the student's academic department, University residences etc. The Head of Student Support and Careers Services will make these arrangements.
- 18.3 The University may be able to help with the provision of short-term accommodation of close family/friends during these visits and the Head of Student Support and Careers Services will arrange for this where appropriate. Care should be taken in the choice of accommodation; e.g. locations related to the cause of death should be avoided wherever possible.
- 18.4 The Head of Student Support and Careers Services will consider arranging for relatives to meet local sources of support should this be considered beneficial, e.g. members of faith organisations.
- 18.5 Arrangements may also be made for students who have been affected by the death to receive support from the Student Wellbeing Service in the Department of Student Support and Careers Services..
- 18.6 Support for staff will be available from the Employee Assistance Programme <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap-carefirst/>

Student Death and Responsibilities of Individuals

This policy should be read alongside the University’s Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death

Who must Be Informed by the “Finder”

In the event of a sudden/unexpected student death on campus (or off campus at a University related activity such as a fieldtrip) whether the circumstances are suspicious or not, it is important that immediate contact is made with both emergency services and Campus Security (01970 622900) .

Campus Security must then contact one of the following three senior staff members who will in turn inform the other two.

<p>Pro Vice Chancellor for learning, teaching and Student Experience via the Vice Chancellor’s Office</p> <p>01970 622008</p> <p>Out of hours: Tier 3 for on call contact should be notified – contact details are held by Estates, Residences and Facilities Tier 2 on call contact via Campus Security</p>	<p>Head Student Support and Careers Services or depute</p> <p>01970 621761</p> <p>Out of hours: contact details are held by Estates, Residences and Facilities Tier 2 on call contact via Campus Security</p>	<p>Head of Facilities Management</p> <p>01970 622437</p> <p>Out of hours: contact reverts to Estates, Residences and Facilities Tier 2 on call contact via Campus Security</p>
--	---	--

Who Must be Informed In Turn

(Through rapid dissemination by the Head of Student Support and Careers Services or one of the two senior colleagues above)

Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death: Appendix 1

Vice Chancellor	Head of Communications	Head of Academic Department	Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor	Health, Safety and Environment Manager	Chief Exec Students' Union	Academic Registrar
-----------------	------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	--	----------------------------	--------------------

Who May Also Need to Be Informed
(Depending on the circumstances/location)

Head of Sports Centre	Director of International Office	Director of Human Resources and Organisation development	Head of Health, Safety and Environment	Director of Information Services
Staff in Student Support and Careers Services	Staff in Fees Office	Head of Residences and Residential Development	Head of DARO	Graduate School
University's Legal Advisors				

Responsibilities of Individual Staff Members

Please note:

Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death: Appendix 1

- No staff member should release any official University records to the police/coroner etc (including incident forms/case notes etc) without first consulting with the Pro-Vice Chancellor or Head of Student Support and Careers Services
- All press/external enquiries should be directed to the Head of Communications
- Staff members should not inform next of kin – this will usually be the responsibility of the police/hospital
- Any unexplained death (e.g. potential suicide/suspicious circumstances) should be referred to only as a sudden death until the Coroner has made a determination.
- Following the discovery of a death on Campus (or University premises) or at an University activity, it will be the responsibility of the relevant head of department/most senior staff member present to complete an University incident report form <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/proc-prac/incident-reporting/> and return it to the University’s Health, Safety and Environment Team. This is a legal requirement.

	Immediately	Ongoing
Senior staff member receiving initial report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm the veracity of the information reported by the “Finder” • Confirm that emergency services have been informed if appropriate • Confirm whether the next of kin have been informed where appropriate • Notify the two other senior colleagues as above • Initial liaison with emergency services if appropriate • Assist the police/hospital/emergency services to identify an emergency contact if necessary 	

	Immediately	Ongoing
<p>Pro Vice Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience or out of hours Executive contact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the Vice Chancellor who will decide whether or not to notify the Chair of Council. • Seek advice on any immediate legal issues relating to the incident if necessary (in consultation with the University Secretary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the University Secretary who will decide whether to notify Council • Arrange for a letter of condolence to be sent by Vice Chancellor • Work with the Head of Communications to arrange for an all staff message to be drafted and sent, if appropriate. • Support the monitoring of any communications around the death • Support the Head of Student Support and Careers Services re liaison with the police/coroner if necessary/appropriate •

	Immediately	Ongoing
Head of Student Support and Careers Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinate an appropriate University response • If appropriate, establish an incident response group (to include representation as appropriate to the individual case) • Formally notify academic Head of Department and Heads of Professional Services Department re the student death to ensure no unnecessary communications are received by the students next of kin • Liaise with next of kin as appropriate to the circumstances • Liaise with staff in the Wellbeing Service to ensure support is available for any students affected • Liaise with Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development to ensure support is available for any staff affected • Where appropriate, appoint a University liaison officer from within Student Support and Careers Services for those students directly affected • Liaise with the Conference Office re emergency accommodation for the family if required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain contact with next of kin/police/other relevant agencies and colleagues re any arrangements/funeral/memorial etc • Organise review of actions at end of process if appropriate • Notify Director of Communications regarding funeral arrangements if known • Take any action as required where the death may be as a result of a notifiable disease • Arrange for relatives of the deceased to meet with academic staff/friends as appropriate • Liaise with DARO/academic department/SU re any fundraising as appropriate and notify Director of Communications to disseminate information. • Liaise with staff in Student Support and Careers services regarding any staff support needs. • Co-ordinate, the release of any records in conjunction with the Information Governance Manager and University solicitors.

	Immediately	Ongoing
<p>Head of Facilities Management (for death on Campus/University premises) or out of hours on call contact.</p> <p>Senior staff member present (for death off campus on University activity)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure the scene (where the death has taken place on Campus, in University premises or on University activities) • Where necessary, identify any obvious immediate risks to staff/students and notify Head of Health, Safety and Environment and Head of Student Support and Careers Services of action taken • Consider appropriate escalation of the incident as required • Ensure that any immediate needs of students affected are considered e.g. emergency accommodation, food and drink • Brief staff such as Campus Security and Residences staff about the incident, along with guidance in respect of any contact they may receive from staff, students or external individuals • Ensure incident report form has been returned to Health, safety and Environment • Consider support options for first responders and whether it is appropriate for them to return to working • If acting as Tier 2 on call contact out of hours ensure responsibilities allocated under this policy to Head of Residences and Residential Development are carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with the Head of Student Support and Careers Services re the support needs of any students affected • Liaise with Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development re support needs of any security or other staff affected •

	Immediately	Ongoing
Academic Registrar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately update Student Record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with academic department re any posthumous award • Where the deceased was an applicant to the University send a letter of condolence to the family if appropriate
Head of Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with academic department re an appropriate tribute as appropriate • Ensure switchboard direct all press enquiries to the Communications Department • Prepare draft statement defining facts and what can be said to whom • Respond to any press enquiries • Obtain details re support available to staff and students from Head of Student Support and Careers Services and Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development • Monitor social media and liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any issues of concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to any press enquiries • Disseminate details of support available to staff and students who may have been affected by the death • Monitor social media and liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any issues of concern • If necessary and where practicable, assist with shielding relatives from press enquiries • Discuss appropriate communications to Council members with the University Secretary • Work with the Vice Chancellor’s office and PVC Learning, Teaching and Student Experience to send an all staff email if appropriate

	Immediately	Ongoing
Director International Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with any immediate advice/support requested by Head of Student Support and Careers Services • Liaise with the Head of Student Support and Careers Services where necessary, re any consultation with the relevant embassy or funding body for assistance with informing the next of kin/repatriating the deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure cultural requirements relating to burial/funeral are taken into account • Liaise with director of Human Resources and Organisation Development re the support needs of staff affected
Head of Residences and Residential Development or out of hours on call contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If necessary, arrange for emergency accommodation for those students who may be directly affected • Consider appropriate escalation of the incident as necessary • Ensure that any immediate needs of students affected are considered e.g. emergency accommodation, food and drink • If acting as Tier 2 on call contact out of hours ensure responsibilities allocated under this policy to Head of Facilities are carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development re the support needs of any residences staff affected • Where the deceased was resident in University accommodation, provide assistance, where requested by the family, with collection of the deceased's belongings

<p>Head of Academic Department/Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with the Head of Student Support and Careers and the head of Communications, notify staff and students in the department/institute re student death • Help identify students who were close to the deceased and who may be most vulnerable immediately post incident aftermath • Identify named departmental/faculty contact to liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Academic Registrar re any posthumous award • After formal notification of the death within the University, send a letter of condolence to the family (this may also be appropriate where the deceased was an applicant) • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services and head of Communications to provide a tribute to the student • In liaison with Head of Student Support and Careers Services , facilitate appropriate representation/tribute by staff and students at the family/memorial service • Raise awareness among staff and students of the support available • Liaise with the Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development re support needs of staff affected • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re support needs of any students affected • In liaison with Head of Student Support and Careers Services , contribute to any discussions regarding funeral/memorial service • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any contact with
---	--	---

Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death: Appendix 1

	Immediately	Ongoing
		family or re any family request to visit the department to meet staff/students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any requests/proposal for fund raising

	Immediately	Ongoing
Chief Executive of Students' Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform sabbatical officers and SU staff of the death • Identify whether the student was involved in any SU societies/clubs and update records • Help identify students who were close to the deceased and who may be most vulnerable immediately post incident • Liaise with Head of Communications re announcements to the press • Monitor SU social media sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If appropriate, send a letter of condolence to the family • In liaison with Head of Student Support and Careers Services , facilitate appropriate representation/tribute by SU staff and students at the family/memorial service • Raise awareness among Students' Union staff and students of the support available • Liaise with Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development re support needs of SU staff affected • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re support needs of any students affected • In liaison with Head of Student Support and Careers Services , contribute to any discussions regarding funeral/memorial service • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any contact with family • Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any requests/proposal for fund raising

Guidelines on Responding to a Student Death: Appendix 1

	Immediately	Ongoing
Head of Health, Safety and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where the death has taken place on Campus, in University premises or on University activities, attend the scene if appropriate and take action re any immediate risks identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess any ongoing/long term health and safety issues Invoke any reporting procedures required by law Advise on the implementation of building closures/changes in practice where necessary
Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure support is available for any staff affected Check all staff records to identify whether the deceased student was also a member of staff and if so, inform payroll once formal notification had issued by the Head of Student Support and Careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any queries/issues of concern as appropriate
Director of Development and Alumni Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure DARO records are updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any requests/proposal for fund raising
Other Heads of Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure departmental records are updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Head of Student Support and Careers Services re any queries/issues of concerns