

## RVC Response to Student Death Policy and Procedure

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

In all other (non-emergency) circumstances if you are notified of a student death you should report as follows:

**Student death**

Report the death to the Director of Learning and Wellbeing and Head of the Advice Centre.

Michele Milner, Director of Learning and Wellbeing [mmilner@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:mmilner@rvc.ac.uk) 07970181364

Steve Short, Head of the Advice Centre [sshort@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:sshort@rvc.ac.uk), 020 3905 4795

If it is urgent, we recommend calling rather than emailing. If you cannot get the Director of Learning and Wellbeing or the Head of the Advice Centre please contact the Advice Centre on 020 8051 3501

Please provide the following details (as far as possible):

- Name of the student
- Student number (if known)
- Course of study
- Manner of death (if known)
- Location of death (if known)
- The source from which you have been notified of the death
- Whether parents/ family/next of kin are already aware
- If they are aware let us know if parents/ family/next of kin would like us to contact them

In the event of notification of the death of an alumni the matter should be referred to External Relations who will manage any necessary arrangements.

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- Director of Learning and Wellbeing
- Head of the Advice Centre
- Registrar
- Vice Principal (Students)
- Director of Estates
- Director of External Relations
- Course Director
- Head of Department/Senior Tutor
- Chaplain

In all cases the following actions will be taken:

Action	Responsible person
Notify Chief Operating Officer (COO) providing them with the details available at that stage.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing to contact COO.
Notify Principal providing with relevant details at this stage.	COO to contact Principal
Agree with COO who will contact family/next of kin. Act as a point of contact for COO and also liaise with other parties on their behalf where appropriate.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing and COO to agree. Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominee.
In the case of a suicide or other suspicious/traumatic death there is likely to be a need for a named liaison person for police and the media.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing, Director of External Relations and COO to agree named liaisons for media and police and communicate this to PAG, relevant colleagues, including the Students Union.
Ensure CEC/ Course Director/Academic Department/Professional Service is informed (usually to the Senior Tutor/Head of Department). Make the Course Director/Academic Department aware of how contact with the family will proceed and who the liaison contacts are in the event of any enquiries coming directly to the department or service. <i>Act as a point of liaison for the Academic Department</i>	Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominated representative.

<p>Notify other areas of the RVC e.g. Advice Centre, Chaplain, Accommodation (if applicable) Security, Academic Registry (who can update the students record), and Students Union</p>	<p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominated representative</p>
<p>Agree wording of emails/comms as appropriate with the COO and the Principal</p> <p>Prepare notices and communications to go to students, staff and student and staff noticeboards</p> <p>Wording of notices can also be checked with the Chaplain to ensure they are culturally appropriate.</p>	<p>Director of External Relations, Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre, Director of HR to liaise with family and agree notice to students.</p>
<p>Coordinate support for staff and students affected, giving clear information on how the support can be accessed.</p>	<p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing and Director of HR (or nominees) to liaise with relevant parties</p> <p>Support can be offered by Advice Centre, Chaplain and HR.</p> <p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of Advice Centre, Director of HR to ensure any appropriate third parties are notified.</p>

Act as main liaison with family throughout the initial response and ongoing

*After contact with the family/next of kin is made, the offer is made of a Book of Remembrance and contact with the Chaplain.*

*Make the student's work and academic progress information available to the family.*

Arrange any visits to campus including working with colleagues in Estates to accommodate the family on campus if they wish to stay.

#### 4) 72 hours review

A review meeting should be arranged within 72 hours to review steps taken, look at what else needs to be done and plan next steps moving forward. Appendix 1 provides a checklist with additional guidance for attendees of a case conference meeting to work through.

Appendices 2 and 3 contain best practice guidance from Universities UK and SamartiidT.001 Tc 0.n601 Tc

Appendix 2 - Response to student death checklist and supporting guidance

**(Note – timing of specific actions will be dependent on the specific situation and the table does not necessarily imply a specific order of actions but rather issues to consider.)**

Issue to consider	Supplementary questions	Action /further information
Was the death on campus?	Follow advice from emergency services. Is the scene secure? Are there any immediate practical steps needed to rehome any students? Have we arranged for student's belongings to be collected by family?	
Is the family aware?	Named contact to get in touch with the family to break	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff who knew the deceased student or have dealt with other campus tragedies</li> <li>• professional services staff who knew deceased student</li> <li>• student services staff that may have had close relationship with individual(s)</li> <li>• students who have a history of previous suicide attempts</li> <li>• students in the same accommodation</li> <li>• students in the same club/student activity</li> <li>• students on the same sports team</li> </ul> <p>Send follow up email to them giving them details of support services.</p>	
Is the department aware?	Discuss with Head of Department or relevant senior colleague the best way to break the news to students. This should involve communications being sent out and informing the student's direct cohort face to face if possible.	
Is Academic Registry/Student Records aware?	Important that they are notified so they can update the students record and ensure that no further communications are sent out that could cause distress.	
Inform External Relations	Director of External Relations to support with the internal and external communication of the student's death (with input from Senior Management) and co-ordinate any communication with the media.	Samaritans have useful information on <a href="#">handling the media</a> .
Inform Chaplain	Chaplain can offer support to those affected and be involved in planning around any 'book of remembrance' and consider whether any 'service or memorial' may be offered.	

Appendix 3 - UUK Suicide Safer Universities guidance

- Contact the bereaved, offering to meet and provide compassionate support
- Support affected students and staff: ensure individual approaches for anyone identified as being at risk of contagion,



HANDLING THE MEDIA – Who will be your spokesperson? – How will others know who the spokesperson is? – How will communications be disseminated? – How will the next of kin be consulted or kept informed?

#### Appendix 4 - Samaritans guidance on suicide postvention

The Samaritans have detailed good practice guidance for HEI's available at <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/universities/>

Communicating sensitively and appropriately about suicide

Suicide is complex. There is never a single reason or circumstance that leads to a person taking their own life.

Time and consideration should be given to how and when to communicate information, to whom, what to include and where information should be shared.

When discussing any suspected suicide, it is strongly recommended the information given:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicide or the method used
- does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- includes messages of hope (eg talking helps)
- focuses on the person and where those affected can find support and help should they need it

Memorials information

Following any death, there is a natural wish to pay tribute to the person who has died. After a suspected suicide, there's a need for careful planning and management of any memorial.

It is important to acknowledge the desire for the memorial but also to recognise the potential risk of glamorising or sensationalising a death rumoured or known to be by suicide.

## Temporary memorials

Some people will want leave flowers, messages or other mementos. The institution can take partial control of this by choosing the place where a memorial is sited. Placement of any flowers or memorials needs careful consideration. Temporary memorials should not be placed at the location of the death or in a place that is very public.

Samaritans' Step by Step service can provide further support and information about memorials.

## Social media and online memorials

Institutions cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suspected suicide.

However, staff and students should be warned about the risks of inappropriate messages, warning signs to look out for, what to do if you are concerned with a post or message, and the benefits of online memorials.

Information about memorialised accounts on Facebook can be found [here](#)

Some points for consideration to enable a safe response to a suicide and reduce the risk of contagion are:

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