

PROCEDURES FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A STUDENT

Tactical Lead: Director of Student Services
Nominee: Head of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
Family Liaison Officer: Manager within Student Services
delegated by Director of Student Services

Rev	Date	Purpose of Issue/Description of Change
1.	February 2016	Initial Issue
2.	September 2021	Review and Update
3.	July 2023	Review and Update

Policy Officer	Senior Responsible Officer	Approved By	Date
Head of Student Mental Health and Wellbeing	Director of Student Services	Academic Board	July 2023

This Procedure will be reviewed in three years March 2026

SUMMARY OF IMMEDIATE STEPS

Step 1: A member of the Aberystwyth University community is notified of a student death:

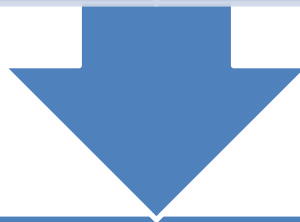
Think carefully about who you need to inform. Only share necessary and accurate information, focus on facts not hearsay.



Step 2: Consider the location of the death:

On Campus: Call 999 and Security on 01970 622649 or mobile 07889 596220. Then contact those listed below.

If a third party information (e.g. a family member has contacted the university), then contact those listed below.



Inform Tactical Lead, Nominee and Family Liaison Officer

Tactical Lead: Ian Munton, Director of Student Services
Nominal Lead: Rose Shaw, Head of Student Mental Health & Wellbeing

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PROCEDURES FOR THE DEATH OF A STUDENT

Introduction

Though the death of a student or critical incident involving a student are rare it is important to have procedures in place to ensure that Aberystwyth University responds in a sensitive, compassionate, timely and efficient manner. All circumstances and legal obligations must be considered when responding with sensitivity to the impact on those involved.

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide clarity on Aberystwyth University's response following a student death or critical incident involving a student. This is to ensure:

- A sensitive handling of the situation and avoidance of inappropriately disclosing information.
- The lines of responsibility are clear and easily accessible.
- Prevention of 'moral injury' to the staff member handling the situation.
- Appropriate support is provided to those individuals affected by the death.
- Legal compliance.

1.2 The extent of Aberystwyth University's involvement will depend on the location and manner of death or critical incident. These procedures apply to any notification of a student death or critical incident involving a current student* regardless of whether:

- it is or is not believed to be suspicious.
- occurs on or off university property (for example private halls).
- occurs while the student was actively participating in their course off campus e.g., a field trip or study abroad.

2. RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

2.1 The Director of Student Services has primary responsibility as the Tactical Lead to manage the University's response in the event of the death of a student, or a critical incident involving a student. If they are unavailable, the responsibility would go to the Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing as their nominee.

2.2 The Director of Student Services (or nominee) will work in close consultation with the Head of Academic Department, Head of Mental Health & Wellbeing, nominated Family Liaison Officer, Head of Communications and Public Affairs and relevant University Departments(s) and services.

2.3 In most circumstances there would be no need to invoke the University's major emergency response plan in relation to the death of a student or a critical incident

involving a student. However, in the event of a major emergency being identified by the Tactical Lead (or nominee), the Executive Emergency Response Team will control and manage this incident as outlined in the [Emergency Management Policy & Major Emergency Response Plan](#).

3. NOTIFICATION

Notification about a critical incident involving a student, the death (or suspected death) of a student can come from several sources. Official notification will normally come from the Police.

If a member of staff receives information of a student death or critical incident by a third party (for example a family member, a friend or via social media) they must not disclose any details and should immediately inform the Director of Student Services who can then put the necessary processes in place to confirm the report and follow appropriate next steps. Wherever possible the reporting member of staff should provide the information requested on the form in [appendix i](#).

It may be that the University receives unconfirmed reports of the death of a student (e.g., via social media) which, if correct, would require an immediate response. Should this be the case the Director of Student Services (or nominee) will lead on verifying the information by contacting the police.

3.1 In circumstances where the student is on campus

The University Security team are likely to be first notified of a student death on campus and will immediately escalate to the Director of Student Services and on-call member of Executive.

It is important to remember that the dissemination of information should be done sensitively to alleviate further distress to relatives and friends. The Director of Student Services (or nominee) will be responsible for informing other relevant members of staff as soon as is practicable, in person or via telephone where possible.

Working with the Director of Student Services (or nominee) relevant Senior Officers are then responsible, within their own spheres of responsibility, for cascading the information and delegating, as appropriate and necessary, to other members of staff within their departments to take whatever action is required in the circumstances (See [section 6](#) for individual responsibilities).

- 3.1.1** The Police are responsible for contacting the next of kin. They are trained in ensuring that the news is delivered in a dignified and appropriate setting. The news of a student death is sensitive and the information, beyond the immediate need to know, should only be shared after the next of kin have been informed and then at the discretion of the Director of Student Services (or nominee).

3.1.2 For any critical incident or death related to an incident which has the potential to give rise to a claim against the University, the Health, Safety and Environment Manager will inform the University's insurers as a matter of priority.

3.2 In circumstances where the student is not on campus

3.2.1 Notification received during normal office hours

During normal office hours, notification of the death of a student (not on campus) should be made to the Director of Student Services (or nominee) as soon as practicably possible. They will then be responsible for informing other relevant members of staff.

3.2.2 Notification received outside normal office hours.

Normally, if notification reaches the University outside normal office hours, this would be via the University Security team who will escalate to the Director of Student Services and on-call member of Executive in line with this procedure.

3.3 Concern about the whereabouts of a student

If a student is thought to be missing in circumstances which cause concern the matter should be brought to the attention of the Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing or the Duty member of staff working in the wellbeing team that day. They will then undertake further enquiries. Depending on the circumstances they will keep the Director of Student Services informed and in urgent cases raise their concerns with the Police. [See link to the University's Procedures for Responding to a Report of a Missing Student.](#)

4. COMMUNICATION

All information relating to the death of a student, or a critical incident involving a student, should only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis and should consider the formal legal steps which will usually follow a sudden death. In all cases, the family's wishes on what information is shared, beyond that of a legal requirement, are paramount.

4.1 Contacting next of kin

On no account should University staff or students contact next of kin until officially notified by the Director of Student Services (or nominee) that it is permissible to do so.

4.2 Cause of death

Where a death is unexpected, it is important not to speculate about the cause or circumstances. Under no circumstances should a member of staff make a statement or comment about a cause of death. Only a Coroner can decide whether a death is suspicious or if an individual has died by suicide. Speculation about the cause of

death, particularly suicide, can be extremely distressing to relatives and those close to the deceased. Unless and until the coroner's findings are made public, the term should not be used.

4.3 Release of official University records

No staff member should release any official University records to the police/coroner (including incident forms / case notes etc.) without first consulting with the Director of Student Services (or nominee) or the Information Governance Manager.

4.4 Communication with the press

All press enquiries should be directed to the Head of Communications.

No one outside of the Communications team is to discuss the matter with the press.

5. SUPPORT FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY THE DEATH OR CRITICAL INCIDENT

It is the University's aim to ensure that the best possible support is offered to the deceased student's family as well as other students and staff who may be affected.

5.1 Family Contact

The Director of Student Services (or nominee) can appoint a specific member of staff to act as Family Liaison Officer for the next of kin. This would be to ensure continuity, reducing duplication of information and the number of separate contacts they have within Aberystwyth University. Where possible this will be in consultation with the Academic Department, particularly where an existing relationship with the family exists, or where there is a member of staff who has had contact with the student.

The Family Liaison Officer will help provide a single contact for the family. As with all decisions about the deceased, the Family Liaison Officer will be led by the family's wishes in terms of the level of contact and support offered. As part of this they may:

- Establish what assistance the family needs from the University e.g., help to collect the student's personal possessions or assistance in finding accommodation if they visit the University.
- Clarify funeral arrangements and whether students and staff would be welcome to attend.
- Clarify whether friends of the student need any support in attending the funeral, for example transport.
- Act as a conduit for practical information where relevant e.g., refunding fees or providing a transcript.
- It may be appropriate to organise a memorial and the Family Liaison Officer may establish whether the family would welcome this. This can include establishing if the lowering of the flag at the entrance of the University to half-mast on the day of the funeral would be appreciated.

- The family may also wish to share the names of other students known to them to ensure they are offered signposting to our Wellbeing team.

5.1.1 International Student Support

Where the death or critical incident involves an International Student or takes place outside the UK (United Kingdom) (e.g., a home student on Study Abroad or a field trip) the International Student Adviser will work with the Family Liaison Officer, or take the role of, Family Liaison Officer in offering support to the family. This can include working with local funeral directors to co-ordinate repatriation, identifying translation needs, and liaising with embassies.

5.2 Support for close friends and peers

The University will direct any student affected to our Wellbeing team, from friends and peers to witnesses. This must not be pushed upon the affected students but shared as an offer. This is the case both following the initial impact of the news of a death or critical incident as well as longer term as things begin to return to normal. Though circumstances will vary it is recommended that individual and group direction to the Wellbeing Team is offered as soon as is practicable after those affected have heard about the death or critical incident. The Wellbeing Team will be made aware of potential upcoming appointments made following a student death. This will normally be coordinated by the Family Liaison Officer and can also be supported, where appropriate, by:

- Residential Life
- Senior Tutor and / or Personal Tutors

5.3 Support for staff

As with the support for students, the University's aim is to ensure that affected staff are supported appropriately. This will depend on the circumstances of the death or incident. The University has employee support that offers counselling services to staff via CareFirst.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDIVIDUALS

It is important to recognise that this procedure constitutes a framework for responding to a student death or critical incident involving a student. Circumstances will vary, and the Tactical Lead (Director of Student Services) or their nominee must lead an appropriate, coordinated response. The following constitutes a broad brush and flexible outline of the probable roles and responsibilities of individuals who may be involved in the University's response.

Staff member receiving the initial report must not disclose any details and will escalate to either (who will then ensure the other is informed): Director of Student Services (or their nominee)		
The following should be informed as a priority		
Vice-Chancellor	Head of Communications and Public Affairs	University Registrar
May also need to be informed - this will depend on the circumstances and is at the discretion of the Tactical Lead		
Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience)	Head of Student Mental Health & Wellbeing	Duty Wellbeing Practitioner
Head of Accommodation	Registrar	CEO of the Students' Union
Director of Human Resources	Faculty PVC	Director of Information Services
Director of Finance	Director of Estates and Facilities	Security Manager
Head of Health and Safety	International Student Support	Senior Tutor
University Legal Advisors	University Insurers	President of the Students' Union
Information Compliance Manager	Head of Academic Department	

Responsibilities

	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 senior colleagues as above • Initial liaison with emergency services if appropriate • Assist the police/hospital/emergency services to identify an emergency contact if necessary 	

	IMMEDIATE	ONGOING
Director of Student Services (or nominee Head of Student Mental Health & Wellbeing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as Tactical Lead • Co-ordinate and manage an appropriate University response • Convene, where appropriate, a tactical meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At an appropriate time, but not more than 4 weeks after the event, convene and chair incident review meeting to identify lessons learned and agree any changes to future practice and / or procedure.

	<p>with key individuals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If needed, and in consultation with the Faculty/Academic Department, appoint a Family Contact to liaise with the next of kin • Liaise with the Head of Communications and Public Affairs in relation to any statement or announcement • Liaise with the Head of Communications and Public Affairs to agree a strategy if press interest is likely and notify staff that no information should be given to the press and that all press enquiries should be directed to the Communications Team. • Ensure staff and students are informed appropriately after formal confirmation by the Police that the next of kin have been informed • Ensure staff and students are aware of the support available to them • Ensure the student's central record is amended • Formally notify Head of Department and Heads of Professional Services Departments to ensure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a 'Learning from Experiences' working group following the incident review meeting. • Key contact for the Police • Key contact for the coroner.
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	<p>no unnecessary communications are received by the student's next of kin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a letter of condolence is written to the family from the University (normally from the Vice Chancellor). • Ensure appropriate University representation at the funeral, subject to the wishes of next of kin 	
<p>University Secretary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Director of Student Services (or nominee) to ensure that specific legal requirements are followed and protected • Informing the University Insurance Officer as a matter of priority (for any death related to an incident which has the potential to give rise to a claim against the University). • Liaise with Chair of Council • Liaise with HEFCW and the Charities Commission where deemed necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Director of Student Services ensure that legal obligations and requirements are met.

<p>Key contact for next of kin / Family Liaison Officer</p> <p>Appointed by the Director of Student Services (or nominee) either independently or as part of a Tactical Meeting discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep the Director of Student Services (or nominee) up to date with the family's expressed wishes • To establish what the family needs, for example, help concluding University business, help gathering personal items. • Clarify funeral arrangements and establish whether the family would welcome students and staff attending. • Contact the Chaplains/faith leads to request a visit to the academic department or other part of the University. • Provide a conduit for practical information e.g., return fees, providing a transcript or if any posthumous award is given. • To note the names of students known to the family as they may know about peers close to the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be that the Family Liaison Officer is asked to talk to the family about any proposed memorials, including whether they are comfortable with them taking place, if they wish to attend and if there are any specific faith or cultural practices which should be considered. • To liaise with the Director of Student Services (or nominee) should there be future queries or contact with the family (e.g., to acknowledge anniversaries or key dates). • If the student was not in University Residences assistance to liaise with private property owners can be offered to the family through the Residential Services team.
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<p>Head of Student Mental Health & Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that no Mental Health & Wellbeing communications are sent to the deceased student or family, or inappropriate contact is made (e.g., from support workers, wellbeing practitioners, Student Services staff). • Ensure the Wellbeing Service is briefed, and staff affected have access to support in a timely and effective manner. • Ensure that friends of the student have received signposting to the Wellbeing services. 	<p>Liaise with Director of Student Services to ensure that the support offered continues to be responsive to changing needs.</p>
<p>Head of Human Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the response in relation to the impact on staff. • Ensure staff affected have information on support available to them. 	

<p>Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of Faculty / Head of Academic Department</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation / at the request of Director of Student Services (or nominee) identify contacts within the academic department who need to be informed • Help to identify students who may be most vulnerable immediately after the incident • Identify named departmental contact to liaise with either the Family Contact or Director of Student Services (or nominee) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Director of Student Services (or nominee) around any students who may be vulnerable or of concern.
<p>Registrar</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the student's records are updated • Ensure that no University communications are sent to the student's address. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If appropriate, provide a transcript for the family of the student's academic achievements • If appropriate ensure any posthumous award is in line with the family's wishes.
<p>CEO of Students' Union</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure registrations and other memberships are cancelled and that no communication is sent to the student's address • Identify groups of students (e.g., within clubs and societies where the deceased student was a member) who may be affected and ensure they have access to information about the support available to them 	
<p>Director of Information Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Library and IT accounts are rendered inactive. 	<p>In some circumstances access to accounts may be required by the Police or Coroner. This</p>

		<p>should be done in liaison with Director of Student Services as the Tactical Lead (or nominee) and the Information Governance Manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If necessary, advise on the most appropriate way of returning outstanding library items.
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Director of Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure systems are updated to ensure no inappropriate communication is sent to the student's address • Where relevant ensure information on the repayment of fees is shared with the Family Contact and / or Director of Student Services. 	
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Personal/Senior Tutor/Supervisor	<p>At the request and direction of the Director of Student Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that other students on the course are informed appropriately in a timely and sensitive manner. • Inform students of the support available to them, any special arrangements that have been put in place for them (e.g., 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the support available to students as appropriate • Should future need arise in terms of additional support ensure that is raised with Student Wellbeing • Ensure that affected students are highlighted within the Academic Departments engagement processes, referring students to Student Services where appropriate.
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<p>Head of Accommodation/Head of Facilities and Residential Operations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief relevant Resident Assistants • Where relevant liaise with Security Manager to secure room • Ensure administrative systems are updated so that no inappropriate contact is made • Liaise with the Family Contact or the family regarding the collection of personal belongings from the student's residence • Offer welfare support for other students affected within halls and ensure that students are aware of the support on offer 	
<p>Development and Alumni Relations Office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure systems are updated to ensure no inappropriate communication is sent to the student's address 	

7. LONGER TERM SUPPORT

People experience grief in many ways, and there are no set timescales with bereavement. Likewise, individuals who have been involved in a traumatic event will respond in different ways. Aberystwyth University recognises that this is something that may need to be part of its longer-term response to such incidents, which, in the case of a student death, would normally be post-funeral. This section details some of the approaches that can be taken to support individuals and the University community to do so. It will be important to ensure that:

- Students and staff who have been affected have access to ongoing support if needed.
- The wishes of those who have been affected are responded to appropriately and effectively.

7.1 Longer Term Support for Students

Students may need different support at different times depending on how they have been affected and support is always available to them through Student Services, their personal tutor and a variety of external support agencies ([Wellbeing Service : Student Services , Aberystwyth University](#)). This may be a student's first experience of bereavement and therefore they and their peers may have little knowledge of the grief process.

The family liaison officer will be the key point of contact for those students who have been identified as most affected by the death or incident, they can signpost the students to the Student Wellbeing team. They will be responsible for ensuring ongoing support is available to students as appropriate, including the pro-active follow-up of any students identified as being most at risk.

7.2 Longer Term Support for Staff

Staff have access to HR and Carefirst which can be accessed via the Aberystwyth University website.

7.3 Contact with next of kin

In the long term, it may be appropriate for the Family Liaison Officer or another staff member to maintain contact with the family. This could be to facilitate acknowledgement by the University of associated anniversaries or to ensure the family are involved in any memorial arrangements. This can be important to the family and those from within the University most closely affected.

Appendix i Information form (notification of the death of a student)

This form should be completed if receiving a phone call reporting the death of a student.

Please complete this form and send by email, marked urgent and confidential, to HR and Director of Student Services with the subject line URGENT ATTENTION Report of Student Death. During evenings, weekends, and University Closure periods you must contact Security who will be able to contact HR and the Director of student services to alert them that this has been sent.

Date and time of call	
Name of caller	
Caller's contact details	
Phone number	
Email address	
Student details	
Full name of student	
ID number (if known)	
Department (if known)	
Deceased date of birth (if known)	
Any other information	
Form completed by (please also include contact details)	

Useful sources of support

Cruse Bereavement Support

A free helpline on **0808 808 1677** that is open 7 days a week (see website for times) staffed by trained volunteers and an online chat with expert grief counsellors. They offer information on understanding and managing grief and how to support someone who is grieving.

Sudden

Sudden is charitable service for people who have been bereaved by a death that happened suddenly or too soon in someone's life. They have several online resources including guidance on how to support someone who is bereaved in conversation: <https://sudden.org/help-for-friends-and-communities/dos-and-donts-when-helping/>

2Wish

2Wish is a Welsh charity that offers support to those affected by sudden death in young people.

The Compassionate Friends UK

Available for support and information daily from 10.00am to 4.00pm and 7.00pm to 10.00pm. TCF is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support of and care of other bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents who have suffered the death of a child. **0845 123 2304**.

Winston's Wish is a national helpline which offers support, information, and guidance to all those caring for a child or young person who has been bereaved. **08452 030405**.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

Focuses on meeting the needs and breaking the isolation of those bereaved by the suicide of a close relative or friend. Their helpline can be reached on **0300 111 5065** between 9am and 9pm every day.