



12 July 2019

RECORDS MANAGEMENT SECTION

File ref: T3/30/449

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Dear Mr Conway

Freedom of information request

Thank you for your two emails of 14 June 2019 requesting information about student deaths and suicides.

The University of Edinburgh is a global university, rooted in Scotland. We are globally recognised for our research, development and innovation and we have provided world-class teaching to our students for more than 425 years. We are the largest university in Scotland and in 2017/18 our annual revenue was £984 million, of which over £279 million was research income. We have over 41,000 students and more than 15,000 staff. We are a founding member of the UK's Russell Group of leading research universities and a member of the League of European Research Universities.

Student deaths

You asked for the number of student deaths in each academic year from 2008/09 to 2018/19, broken down by gender. This information is provided in Table 1 below. The deaths of students at the University, like those of other young people in the relevant Scottish age group, are predominantly the result of sudden or underlying illness or accidents. Please also be aware that the University's student population has increased significantly between 2008 and 2019. In 2008/09 there were 26,951 students, compared to 41,294 in 2018/19. Statistics showing the [student population by academic year since 2005/06](#) are published through the University's publication scheme.

Table 1: Student deaths by gender, 2008/09 to 2018/19

Academic year	Number of deaths	
	Male	Female
2008/09	8	0
2009/10	3	2
2010/11	6	4
2011/12	4	2
2012/13	2	3

Academic year	Number of deaths	
	Male	Female
2013/14	2	3
2014/15	4	2
2015/16	4	5
2016/17	5	4
2017/18	5	5
2018/19 (part-year)	7	2

Suicide

You also asked for the number of student suicides between 2008/09 and 2018/19, for the University's rationale in choosing whether or not to record student suicides, and for the University's policy regarding actions taken after the suicide of a student.

The University of Edinburgh takes the prevention of suicide seriously. The [Student Mental Health Strategy](#) ensures that the University is recognised as a community that promotes the good mental health of its students, treats all students with respect and empathy, and that students who experience mental health difficulties at the University of Edinburgh are well supported. The *Strategy* is informed by the Scottish Government's own Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-16 with its emphasis on (a) responding to people in distress and (b) reducing the stigma of mental illness and encouraging talking about suicide. The strategy is implemented through a wide range of initiatives, policies and services. The University also provides [advice about managing crises and out of hours critical welfare support provision](#), including contact information about the student led confidential helpline, [Edinburgh Nightline](#), and works with the Edinburgh University Students' Association on awareness raising campaigns, which in 2019 will include a suicide prevention campaign.

In cases where the University is notified by a third party that a student has died, we are not always informed of the official cause of death. In cases where there is a sudden or unexpected death, the Police and the Procurator Fiscal will be involved and they do not report the outcome of their investigations to the University. This means that although in some cases the University may be told the cause of death might have been suicide, we are not able to verify the information and we do not retain records of this. Therefore we do not hold information in relation to your request for numbers of suicides.

The follow up actions taken in the event of a student death will always vary depending on the circumstances and the needs and wishes of family and friends. The University has a *Student Death Protocol*, which I have enclosed with this letter, which sets out the roles and responsibilities for various support services when notified of a student death. As outlined in the *Protocol*, the University Chaplain leads in such cases, supported by other student and staff services as needed, and her work will normally encompass friends, classmates, staff and family members. This work can be short, medium or long-term.

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Right to review

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you may ask the University to conduct a review of this decision by contacting the University's Records Management Section in writing (e.g. by letter or email) or in some other recorded form (e.g. audio or video tape). You should describe the original request, explain your grounds for dissatisfaction, and include an address for correspondence. You have 40 working days from receipt of this letter to submit a review request. The contact details for the Records Management Section are at the top of this letter. When the review process has been completed, if you are still dissatisfied, you may use the [Scottish Information Commissioner's guidance on making an appeal](#) to make an appeal to the Commissioner. If you do not have access to the Internet, please let me know and I will provide a copy of the relevant web pages.

Privacy notice for information request applicants

[The University of Edinburgh's request privacy notice](#), which describes how we use the information you have supplied about yourself and your request, is published on the University website.

Yours sincerely



Information Compliance Officer

Enc. Student Death Protocol

If you require this letter in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact the Records Management Section on 0131 651 4099 or email recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
STUDENT DEATH PROTOCOL

In the case of a sudden, unexpected, student death, two key agencies should be informed immediately: Student Administration and Chaplaincy. They will then make contacts onwards according to their procedures.

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General Principles

This document sets out the roles and responsibilities for various support services when notified of a student death. This is to ensure that information is transmitted promptly, on a need to know basis, and that all services know what support can be expected of them and of their colleagues. It assumes that any immediate contact with medical or emergency services has been taken forward as a first priority by those most closely involved.

The aim is to ensure that:

- All who need to know of a death know rapidly, but with minimal overlap in the initial cascade of information. Student Administration plays a significant role here.
- Early contact is made to express sympathy and offer help, with the flexibility and sensitivity to know when to leave with minimal contact and when to stay to help with perceived needs. The Chaplaincy plays a significant role here.
- All University departments that are informed of the death know what is expected of them and of others and where support can be found.

It must be recognised that, to some extent, individual support services operate in different ways and to differing priorities. Professional staff are expected to exercise judgment when there is an evident need for flexibility within the established framework.

Some aspects of this protocol may be applicable to other major crisis of student life which may be less easy to encapsulate in a procedural guide. Other related documents include "Helping Distressed Students: a guide for university staff" and the Meningitis Incident Group protocol.

Support Service Responsibilities

Chaplaincy

The Chaplain may be the one to receive the first advice of a student death from a variety of sources, but after each communication she liaises with Student Administration staff to ascertain how far the official notification network has progressed. Student Administration will provide the Chaplain with contact details for flatmates and family.

The Chaplain makes contact to offer pastoral support to the student's flatmates; to close friendship groups; to parents/close relatives; and to staff in the University School or Support Department. This may include onward routing of students to University Health or Counselling Services and contact with their Personal Tutors or Supervisors.

Chaplaincy support also includes checking that practical matters are being covered. The Chaplain offers support to the family in arranging funeral or memorial services. The Chaplaincy informs the University Secretary and the relevant School of the details for any services. Accommodation for family can be arranged via Accommodation Services.

Above all, the Chaplain is reliant on her professional judgment and personal sensibility in assessing what action should be taken, recognising that the rapidity inherent in funeral arrangements can outpace institutional etiquette and that there may be particular communication difficulties at a time of sudden death.

Support from the Chaplaincy is very much a team effort. The Chaplaincy Administrator and the Associate Chaplain or Honorary Chaplains may be able to provide assistance in the Chaplain's absence. The Chaplaincy Administrator will inform the Student Administration and Security Services about arrangements for cover.

Student Administration

Student Administration is responsible for the network of communications to ensure that information about a student death is passed to all relevant parts of the University.

Before any notifications of death to University members, Student Administration staff ensure that the next of kin have been informed. This is not a University duty: it is normally done by police or hospital, (Next of Kin is recorded on a student's EUCLID record and can be obtained via Student Administration Services.) In certain circumstances, there may be a limited notification only to those in the "immediate contact" section below.

Immediate contact is made with the Chaplain and the Director of Student Administration.

Second line of contact as soon as possible thereafter is with the University Health Service, Communications and Marketing, Personal Tutors/Supervisor(s) and College and School Offices.

Third line of contact (as appropriate) thereafter is with Accommodation Services, EUSA, the University Secretary, Student Counselling, International Office, Health & Safety Services, Library, HSS Visiting Student Office and Student Disability Service, Finance, Student Fees and Scholarships teams.

Other contacts are covered under internal Student Administration guidelines.

Support Service Responsibilities

University Health Service

The Health Service should ensure that the Student Administration and the Chaplain are notified immediately of any sudden (ie unexpected) death that may be reported to them.

They then consider what contact may be needed with family, flatmates and friends (either by visit or by letter/phone), being aware that the Chaplain/Associate Chaplain may have already visited. They also consider whether information should be placed in any patients' notes so that the situation is known at any future consultation.

Accommodation Services

For a student resident in University accommodation.

The member of staff first aware of the death takes the necessary action with medical and emergency services, with advice as appropriate from the immediate line manager. On-going action is co-ordinated by the Assistant Director Residence Life or the Assistant Director Property and Residential Services in their absence. They contact the Student Administration, the Chaplaincy and the University Health Service. If the death occurs outside normal working hours, the appropriate Manager/Warden attends and assesses the next stages of communication.

Further action depends on particular circumstances. Accommodation is identified to offer to any students requiring rehousing. Temporary accommodation, where available, is offered free of charge to family members. Contact Assistant Director Residence Life/Assistant Director Property and Residential Services to arrange. The need for ongoing support and advice to students and staff is discussed with the Chaplain to ensure consistent and co-ordinated referral arrangements.

For a student not resident in University accommodation.

The Assistant Director Residence Life, or the Assistant Director Property and Residential Services in their absence, is informed. Accommodation is identified to offer to any students requiring rehousing. Temporary accommodation is offered to family members. Support needs for any students rehoused are discussed with the Chaplain.

Assistance in clearing personal goods, in the event that the family does require advice or assistance, depends on individual circumstances, but is most likely to be sought from someone with a personal link, such as Warden, Accommodation Manager, Director of Studies or Supervisor.

Director of Student Administration

As soon as he is informed of the death, the Director of Student Administration checks with the Chaplain about any particular needs and whether any central co-ordination of support is needed. If central co-ordination is needed, she ensures that all concerned are clear about who is taking responsibility for the co-ordination.

Action taken depends on the circumstances. It can range from minimal (eg one phone call to be assured that all that can be done is being done) to complex (eg arranging for staff from the student's home School to meet with C&M, Counselling and Chaplaincy staff to consider what can – or cannot – be done to provide support).

She will brief the University Secretary on further details if the circumstances require it.

The institutional reaction to sudden student death in particular is a learning process. The Director of Student Administration will also liaise with the Chaplain to arrange any debriefing meetings that may be appropriate after any incidence.

Support Service Responsibilities

Communications and Marketing

Information about a sudden death may come direct to C&M. Staff there ensure that it is known to Student Administration, Chaplaincy and Security. If there is likely to be media interest, they liaise as appropriate with the Chaplain and other departments involved.

Security Services

In the case of an unexpected death, Security should contact the Chaplain and the Student Administration. Except in an emergency that contact should be made between 7 am and 10 pm.

University Secretary

When she hears of the death, the University Secretary informs the Principal.

When she receives the student's file from the Student Administration, with any necessary background information, she writes to the student's family.

When she knows the date of the funeral, she ensures that the University is represented, if that is acceptable to the family. She arranges for the University flag on Old College to be flown at half-mast and there is liaison with College Offices regarding other relevant buildings.

Police and Procurator Fiscal

In cases where there is a sudden (unexpected) death it is recognised that the Police and Procurator Fiscal will be involved. The involvement of the Police and Procurator Fiscal is expected in relation to any sudden death and does not imply suspicious or criminal factors. The sudden death is under the control of the Procurator Fiscal and arrangements such as the timing of the funeral are entirely at their discretion.

Circulation List and Responsibility for Up-dating

This protocol should be reviewed annually in the summer vacation by the Director of Student Administration's office as well as being looked at as part of any debriefing arrangements.

Copies should be sent to:

Accommodation Services (Director plus Assistant Director Residence Life and Assistant Director Property and Residential Services) *[include even if not in University accommodation for information]*

Chaplaincy (Chaplain)

[email: chaplain@ed.ac.uk; associate.chaplain@ed.ac.uk; chaplaincy@ed.ac.uk]

College Offices (College Registrars)

Communications and Marketing (Director)

International Office (Head of International Student Support)

Student Disability Service (Director)

Estates and Buildings (Director plus Assistant Director of Support Services)

Student Administration (Director of Student Administration)

Security Services (Chief Security Officer)

Students' Association (SRC Advisor)

University Health Service

University Secretary

The protocol will be web mounted by the Student Administration, but the web version will not include telephone numbers.

Director of Student Administration [Nov 2015]

