



4 September 2019

STUDENT SYSTEMS AND  
ADMINISTRATION

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The University of Edinburgh  
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Mr Michael Conway

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Dear Mr Conway

### **Student death records**

Thank you for your enquiry of 13 August 2019 seeking clarification about how the University has recorded and provided information regarding student suicides, and what this has meant for the way we have responded to freedom of information requests on this topic. I am pleased to provide the following clarification.

Our response to your freedom of information request of 14 June 2019 (asking 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 (attached)), confirmed that:

“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...”



Your enquiry of 13 August 2019 noted that in response to earlier freedom of information requests in 2010 and 2017, the University had provided figures of the number of students who were suspected to have died from suicide by each year, and asked:

*Q1. Can you explain the kind of system that was in place which enabled the University to record, at the very least, suspected suicides? How did the system work?*

And

*Q2. Why in 2010 and 2017 could that information be provided but not in 2019?*

The University of Edinburgh is concerned by any student death. Our system used to allow for recording of possible causes of death but we stopped that practice in December 2017 because this data is unreliable, incomplete and unable to support valid analysis. As the information is error-prone and was held against individual student records, we concluded that it was inappropriate to continue to record this and potentially distressing if discovered at a later date by friends or family. On making that decision, the possible causes of death already recorded in the University's student records were deleted, and as a result we were unable to extract and provide information in 2019 equivalent to that which we had provided in 2010 and 2017.

#### **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



Reporting Manager

Cc. Records Management Section, [recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk](mailto:recordsmanagement@ed.ac.uk)

Enclosures: Response and Enclosure previously supplied on 12 July 2019

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