

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
STUDENT DEATH PROTOCOL

In the case of a sudden, unexpected, student death, two key agencies should be informed immediately: Registry 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. Registry 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 judgement 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 Registry staff to ascertain how far the official notification network has progressed. Registry 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 Directors of Studies 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 judgement 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 Registry and Security Services about arrangements for cover.

Registry

Registry 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, Registry staff ensure that the next of kin have been informed. This is not a University duty: it is normally done by police or hospital. (The Registry holds details of next of kin from matriculation forms.) 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 Registry.

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

Third line of contact as appropriate thereafter is with Accommodation Services, EUSA, the University Secretary, Student Counselling, International Office, Health & Safety Services, Disability Office and the Library.

Other contacts are covered under internal Registry guidelines.

Support Service Responsibilities

University Health Service

The Health Service should ensure that the Registry 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 Residence Life Co-ordinator in their absence. They contact the Registry, 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/Director/Residence Life Co-ordinator 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 Residence Life Co-ordinator 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 Registry

As soon as she is informed of the death, the Director of Registry 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 Registry 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 Registry, 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 Registry. 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 Registry, 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 responsibilities for updating

This protocol should be reviewed annually in the summer vacation by the Director of Registry'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)
Chaplaincy (Chaplain)
College Offices (College Registrars)
Communications and Marketing (Director)
Estates and Buildings (Director plus Assistant Director of Support Services)
Director of Registry
Registry (Director of Registry)
Security Services (Chief Security Officer)
Students' Association (SRC Advisor)
University Health Service
University Secretary

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

Rio Watt
Director of Registry