# Student Death Policy

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**Section / Dept:** Student Support Services  
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**Policy history:** Created by Student Support Services in consultation with University colleagues

## Version History

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## Approval History

**Equality Analysis**

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## Committee Sign Off

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1 Introduction

This Policy should be read alongside the Student Death – Procedures document.

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 It is rare that the University is faced with the death of a student; however, it is essential that formal procedures are in place which observe the following principles:

(i) an appropriate level of response from the University, with help as appropriate from relevant external agencies;

(ii) a sensitive and compassionate approach which recognises the distress for the person finding the body, the next of kin, and the distress or potential for distress for staff and students close to the deceased student;

(iii) clear lines of responsibility to support a set of coherent and valuable contributions in response to the death made by University staff and students;

(iv) the observation of legalities to protect the interests of the University in cases where negligence might be alleged;

(v) an appropriate duty of care towards all staff and students.

Scope

1.2.1 The policy provides a high level overview of the responsibilities and actions required by a range of stakeholders to respond to student deaths. It therefore focuses on a broad range of responses undertaken at the central and faculty level.

This Policy applies to all student deaths that occur outside a controlled environment such as a hospital.

1.3 Equality Analysis

1.3.1 Pending

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 Phases

Phase 1
Initial period of response during which the Silver Command is established and frequent meetings occur to direct a co-ordinated University response.

Phase 2
Period of response following Phase 1 when responsibility is transferred to the VP AA during which departmental teams offer immediate aftercare to help those affected under the direction of an Incident Response Manager (IRM), a Family Contact Officer (FCO) and a Students Contact Officer (SCO).

Phase 3
Period of longer term response and support, following Phase 2, usually after the funeral incorporating feedback and review.
Roles

**Incident Response Manager (IRM)** - The operational manager leading the overall coordination of the operational response to a student death. Normally, the IRM will be (i) the Head of Student Support Services or (ii) Deputy Registrar & Director SSA.

**Family Contact Officer (FCO)** - The individual appointed to act as the sole liaison point from the University with the family following a sudden death. Normally, the FCO will be (i) the Chaplain (or University representative of the relevant faith) (ii) the Director of Wellbeing, (iii) the Head of Student Support Services or (iv) the VP AA.

**Student Contact Officer (SCO)** - The appointed staff member who acts as co-ordinator and identified ‘go to’ person for closely affected students. Normally, the SCO will be the SSA Manager in the relevant faculty.

### Legislative context

1.5.1 The following legislation is, or may be, relevant to student deaths:

- Public Law Duties – general duty to act reasonably, fairly and lawfully in relation to students
- Law of Tort - Duty of Care
- Consumer Legislation
- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
- Occupiers Liability / Defective Premises Act
- Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty)

### Health & Safety Implications

1.6.1 **Section 3 Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974**: “It shall be the duty of every employer to conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their health & safety.”

Duties owed to: Staff, Students, Contractors/Suppliers, Visitors, Neighbours

### Policy

2.1 **Principles**

2.1.1 To ensure:

(i) that appropriate people in the University, and external to the University, are informed of the event of a death of a student and are involved in making an appropriate response

(ii) those charged with the management and response to a death act in a responsible, reasonable, compassionate and sensitive manner

The aim in all cases is:

(iii) to create time, space and appropriate support for those affected to begin to adjust to and recover from the news of the event

(iv) to ensure that confidence in the University’s response is maintained and that all necessary actions are completed
2.2 Procedures

2.2.1 Phase 1

Phase 1 is the period immediately after identification of a body

or

immediately after a student or a member of staff has been informed of a student death.

Phase 1 is one of three phases governing the University’s response to the death of a
student. Procedures to be followed in Phase 1 are noted in full in this Policy document.
Actions in Phases 2 and 3 are noted in the Student Death - Procedures document under the
lists prescribing actions to specific staff.

Action on discovery of the death of a student

(i) Any student or member of staff who discovers a body should:

• not touch or move the body or any object connected with the scene
• immediately notify the Security Office. Security will then immediately
  notify the Head of Security (or nominee)
• take note of any witnesses (any other persons present at the time of
  discovering the body) and forward this information to Security

(ii) Any student or member of staff who is notified of a student death should
immediately notify the Security Office. Security will then immediately notify
the Head of Security (or nominee).

(iii) The Head of Security (or nominee) will immediately notify all of the individuals
listed below:

• Chair of Silver Command
• VP & Registrar
• Director of Marketing and Communications
• Director of Wellbeing (counselling, mental and physical health)
• Head of Student Support Services (wardening/mentoring/international, money & housing advice teams)

(iv) The Head of Security will ensure that if there are witnesses who the Police will
wish to interview, they are taken to a private area removed from the
immediate scene as soon as possible and provided with appropriate support.
(e.g. crisis counselling provision)

(v) The VP AA will immediately appoint an Incident Response Manager.

(vi) Immediately on appointment, the Incident Response Manager will inform:

• The Vice Chancellor’s Office
• University Secretary and Legal Counsel
• Dean of the relevant Faculty
- Faculty SSA Manager
- The President of the Students’ Union
- Senior Warden / Court Warden (as appropriate)
- Head of the Accommodation Office
- Director of Business Support
- University Chaplain [coordinating chaplain]

(vii) The Head of Student Support Services (who may be the IRM) will then inform all colleagues in student support facing roles.

(v) Silver Command will be established and will coordinate initial responses and communications.

(vi) The Chair of Silver Command will ensure a record is taken of actions agreed by Silver Command.

(vii) The Head of Security will ensure that steps are taken to secure and preserve any evidence at the scene, including any CCTV footage.

(viii) The Head of Security will open an incident log and ensure that all actions and policy decisions taken by Security are recorded.

Background information

(viii) Death, unless it occurs within a controlled environment such as a hospital, must always be notified to the Police. The Police will normally arrange for the removal of the body and any necessary post-mortem.

(ix) The Police (or Hospital) will also normally arrange that the next of kin are informed. In the event of a death taking place abroad, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will normally have this responsibility. The VP AA (or designate) must check with the Police whether this has been done and which person(s) have been informed. The University may need to assist the Police by making next of kin information available on request from its student records system (SITS https://sits.surrey.ac.uk/). The Head of Security is the University contact for the Police. In the unlikely event that the Police do not undertake to inform the next of kin, responsibility falls to the VP & Registrar (or designate).

(x) An apparent or alleged suicide is not a suicide until confirmed by the Coroner. It is important that people acting in an official capacity within the University know this and do not pre-empt the Coroner’s verdict.

(xi) Where there is an attempted suicide, or death occurs in relation to a terrorist incident, a referral to the Local Authority Prevent Coordinator will be considered by the VP AA, or his nominee.

2.2.2 Phase 2
The Phase 2 response is the period when responsibility for responding to the incident is transferred from the Chair of Silver Command to the VP AA and operational designated University teams are directed to follow up agreed actions.

The actions to be taken and the responsibilities of staff during Phase 2 are listed in the Student Death - Supporting Procedures document, see 3.4.1.
2.2.3 **Phase 3**
Phase 3 is the longer term response from the University to those affected by a student death which follows Phase 2 and usually the funeral of the deceased.

The actions to be taken and the responsibilities of staff during Phase 3 are listed in the Student Death - Supporting Procedures document, see 3.4.1.

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### 3 Governance Requirements

#### 3.1 Responsibility

3.1.1 Overall responsibility for University’s response to a student death rests with the chair of Silver Command during Phase 1 and the VP AA in Phases 2 and 3.

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#### 3.2 Implementation / Communication Plan

3.2.1 This policy together with the associated procedures sets out overarching responsibilities, definitions and principles of the University’s approach to handling student deaths.

Implementation will be publicised via the Leaders’ Alert, SurreyNet and directly to colleagues in relevant support offices.

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#### 3.3 Exceptions to this Policy

3.3.1 Providing a safe environment and response to known risks in order to reasonably protect students from harm is underpinned by significant legislation. Therefore exceptions to the principles outlined in this policy are not expected.

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#### 3.4 Supporting documentation

3.4.1 Student Death – Supporting Procedures
Student Death – Process Chart
[www.surrey.ac.uk/currentstudents/ask/regulations/](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/currentstudents/ask/regulations/)