

## Procedure in the event of a student death

### Introduction

1. Birkbeck, University of London (the College) operates as a collegiate community and the death of a student can have a large impact on students and the staff who work with them. The College will not seek to replicate the support offered by statutory services but will endeavour to provide help and guidance in an organised and effective manner.
2. When students enrol, they are required to list an emergency contact and this contact will be directed to let us know about a student death, by emailing: [bereavement@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:bereavement@bbk.ac.uk).
3. Where the next of kin is referenced in this guidance, we are referring to the friends/family of the deceased, who are listed as the emergency contact for the student; this may not necessarily be the official next of kin.

### Purpose of the procedure

4. From time to time, the College is faced with the sad event of a student death. The purpose of this procedure is to:
  - a. Co-ordinate an appropriate response from the College
  - b. Avoid confusion, by creating clear lines of responsibility
  - c. Create a clear way of reporting when a student has died
  - d. Mitigate institutional risk, by ensuring legalities are observed and the interests of the College are protected in cases where negligence might be alleged
  - e. Act with common sense in mind.

### Notification of a student death- off-campus

5. If a member of staff is informed of the death of a student off-campus, the following senior personnel should be contacted immediately by emailing: [bereavement@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:bereavement@bbk.ac.uk). This email address is monitored by the following staff:
  - Head of Student Services (coordinating the response)
  - Deputy Head of Student Services (coordinating the response)
  - Student Records (who will amend the student's record- this team will not have contact with the emergency contact/next of kin)
  - BSIS (who will close the student's record- this team will not have contact with the emergency contact/next of kin)

6. In these rare events, staff will be expected to undertake additional duties that are related to their regular role, for example, to meet the family. The coordination role undertaken by staff from Student Services will not replace the role of staff from other professional services, faculties and schools, which is vitally important in such circumstances. It may be appropriate that the coordinator acts wholly behind the scenes and supports the staff who are liaising directly with the family of the deceased, for example, rather than taking on that liaison work themselves.

### **Notification of a student death- on-campus**

7. If the body of a student is discovered on campus, DO NOT touch or move anything. Inform the College Security on extension 555 and ask them to call the police.

### **Who must in turn be informed, through rapid dissemination, by the Head or Deputy Head of Student Services:**

- Executive Dean
- Director of Operations
- Head of School
- Counselling Service Manager
- Academic Registrar

### **Who may be informed, depending on the circumstances:**

- International Liaison Officer
- Health and Safety Officer
- Director of Estates
- Head of Communications
- Administrative/academic staff within the school
- Library Manager

## **Responsibilities**

### **First Tier Responsibilities-**

8. The following senior professional services staff will act together as a team, the role of which is to ensure the following:
  - a. that appropriate people both in the College and externally are informed of the death
  - b. that the legalities surrounding the event are being followed
  - c. that appropriate people are consulted and involved with the further actions that the College may wish or need to make.

9. Head of Student Services (or nominee), immediately:
  - a. confirm the veracity of information (and that the next of kin have been informed, when the next of kin are not providing the information. Note that the Police are responsible for informing the next of kin, not the College)
  - b. notify relevant College officers of a student death, as above
  - c. to act as the overall co-ordinator of actions arising, liaising with the school
  - d. liaison with next of kin, although communications may be delegated to more appropriate staff (e.g. personal tutors)
  - e. liaise with the school over support being offered to staff and students, including in the breaking of the news
  - f. identify if the student was registered with the service and communicate any relevant information to the police/coroner
  - g. liaise with a hospital, if necessary
  - h. Explain how next of kin can notify relevant external agencies- Student Finance England
  
10. Head of Student Services (or nominee), continuing:
  - a. liaise with Police, Coroner's Office, legal representatives, as appropriate
  - b. co-ordinate offers of support to affected students/staff
  - c. maintain contact with the school etc. to disseminate information on funeral arrangements and/or memorial events
  - d. organise review meeting at the conclusion of the process, to consider potential improvements to response
  - e. take any action required by law, as the result of a possible death by reason of infectious disease, to collaborate if appropriate with the NHS/local authority
  
11. Director of Facilities and Estates Services, immediately:
  - a. take steps as outlined in the additional notes on discovery of a death on College premises
  - b. arrange alternative accommodation if required, for those directly influenced by the event.
  
12. Director of Facilities & Estates Services, continuing:
  - liaise with College Health & Safety Officer if appropriate.
  
13. Executive Dean for the student's school (after liaising with Head of Student Services), immediately:

- a. inform academic staff and school admin/technical staff (guidance will be provided by Student Services)
  - b. write a letter of condolence to the relevant contact/next of kin.
14. Executive Dean for the student's school (after liaising with Head of Student Services), continuing:
- a. to arrange an appropriate College tribute at the funeral of the deceased (taking advice from those in contact with the family and/or Chaplain and with particular attention to cultural sensitivities)
  - b. arrange posthumous awarding, where appropriate

### **Second Tier Responsibilities-**

15. The following staff will act to ensure the following:
- a. that administrative procedure is dealt with appropriately, so as not to cause additional distress to relatives/friends of the deceased
  - b. that follow-up enquiries are channelled to the appropriate person
  - c. to put in place support for those affected from the news of the death
  - d. that all concerned have confidence that the College is acting in a responsible, compassionate and sensitive manner.
16. BSIS Help- [bsishelp@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:bsishelp@bbk.ac.uk)
17. Counselling Service Manager, immediately:
- identify if the student was known to the Counselling service
18. Counselling Service Manager, continuing:
- support the school in staff/student bereavement, if requested
19. Head of School/personal tutors, immediately:
- a. assist with informing staff and students connected with the deceased
  - b. provide updates on last interactions with the student as requested by the Head of Student Services
  - c. help identify students who were close to the deceased and most vulnerable in the immediate aftermath
20. Head of School/personal tutors, continuing:
- a. facilitate appropriate representation by staff and students at a funeral and/or memorial service/event, where appropriate

- b. ensure the continuation of academic work but being sensitive to possible distress of some students
  - c. raise awareness of the College's support services
  - d. contribute to the College's discussions on funeral arrangements, memorials and contacts with the family/partner
21. Head of communications, immediately:
- a. agree immediate statement if enquiries come in, defining facts and limiting what is said to whom
  - b. ensure direct all enquiries to the Communications team in External Relations
22. Head of communications, continuing:
- a. handle, or delegate the handling, of all media enquiries
  - b. where practicable, if necessary, to assist with shielding the relatives from the media
23. Students' Union (SU) Manager, immediately:
- a. inform the sabbatical officers
  - b. identify if the student was involved in any SU groups or activities
  - c. pass any relevant information on to the Head of Student Services
  - d. ensure SU run social media doesn't discuss the incident until announcements have been made
24. Student Union Manager, continuing:
- a. contribute to the College's discussion on funeral arrangements/memorials where appropriate
  - b. ensure SU registrations and memberships are cancelled
25. Finance Office, immediately:
- a. ensure there are no immediate letters to be sent to the student
  - b. provide any recent communication to the Head of Student Services if requested
  - c. prevent any debtor suspension letters/emails being issued
26. Finance Office, continuing:
- a. consider banking implications, i.e. withholding direct debit request
  - b. stop any payments to the student and amend records accordingly
27. International Student Administration (where appropriate), immediately:

- liaise with embassy/consulate and family of deceased, about practical arrangements.
28. International Student Administration (where appropriate), continuing:
- agree responsibilities.

## **What happens next?**

### **Communication**

29. It is of vital importance that only known facts are communicated in the first instance. If relevant people are identified as being required to know about the incident, additional to the above list, then they may be added to the contact list: however care must be taken to minimise distribution of initial information and to only those that need to be aware for specific reasons. It is important that rumours and guesswork do not spread.
30. The notification from Student Services will contain the following basic information:
- a. name of deceased
  - b. student ID number
  - c. programme and year of study
  - d. basic facts about the death, as appropriate
  - e. a hyperlink to a copy of this protocol for reference
  - f. name and contact details of the Head of Student Services who will act as the coordinator and the person all enquiries should be directed to
  - g. a request that no-one should contact the next of kin without consulting with the Head of Student Services
  - h. advice about how to notify students of what has happened
  - i. a request that all press enquiries should be referred to the Head of Communications.

### **Informing Next of Kin**

31. Where the College is made aware of the death of a student and this is not by the next of kin, it is the responsibility of the Police to inform the next of kin. This is normally done by a visit to their home. On no account should College staff or students make any attempt to contact next of kin, until confirmation has been received that the Police have informed the next of kin. The Head of Student Services should ascertain what information the Police will pass on and to whom. This will be useful in subsequent contact with the next of kin and could be relevant to other agencies.

32. It will be appropriate for the Head of School/Head of Student Services or any other senior member of staff who has had close involvement with the student, to contact the next of kin soon after it is confirmed that they have been informed by the Police, to offer sympathy and support. This will be agreed between the school and Head of Student Services.
33. The Head of Student Services or appointee will ascertain whether the next of kin has been informed or knows of the death, before any public communications proceed.

### **Informing students**

34. Informing fellow students of their colleague's death needs to be done sensitively and quickly. This can be done either by email (suggested wording will be supplied by Student Services), by calling a special meeting, or at the end of a lecture or seminar. The Counselling Service can be present when the news is broken, or they can advise on how to conduct this type of meeting. All facts, as far as they are accurately known, should be made known, as should the availability of ongoing support and a person to contact for further information. Another meeting may need to be called once the results of any postmortem are known.

### **Funeral**

35. The responsibility for the funeral rests with the family and their wishes take priority. Some families prefer a small private ceremony, especially in the event of tragic or suspicious circumstances and thus it may not be possible for staff or students to attend. Alternatively, the family may be glad if representative staff and students attend, with, where possible, the assistance of the College. Sometimes it may also be advisable for a member of staff who did not know the deceased, to accompany affected students to the funeral in order to offer support, while at other times someone who did know them, is appreciated. It is also possible to hold a parallel event in College, at the same time as the funeral, for those who cannot travel or attend the funeral itself, or indeed at a later date.

### **Possessions**

36. If a student has hired a locker or lived in halls of residence, belongings may need to be collected. Collection of the possessions of the deceased, including their work, will be a distressing time, particularly for the next of kin. The situation will need to be handled sensitively and with respect to the wishes of those directly involved. The Head of Student Services or their appointee will co-ordinate the handing over of a student's possessions to the next of kin. The family may also wish to have copies of

the student's work. Where possible, this will be arranged by the Head of Student Services and the school.

### **Continuing**

37. Staff and students may continue to be affected by the death of a student for some time after the death. This may come to light in a number of ways such as with exam or coursework grades. Consideration needs to be given to the impact that a student's death may have and the College should endeavour to do what it reasonably can, to take this into account.

### **Emergency contacts/where a death occurs outside of regular College hours**

38. Where a member of staff is contacted about a student death out of hours, ordinarily the details of the student and the person reporting the death, should be referred to the Head of Student Services and this will be followed up during business hours, unless the nature of the death raises a more urgent response such as:
- a. the death occurs on College premises
  - b. the nature of the death suggests that there might be a wider risk to other members of the College community or the public (such as a death by an infectious disease)
  - c. the nature of the death is likely to generate media interest.
39. Where the death does require a more urgent response, the details should be reported to the Malet Street reception, or by dialling 555. The staff on reception should report the death immediately to the Estates and Facilities Manager on duty, who should assess the situation and contact managers from Student Services and/or the communications teams, as appropriate.

### **Review**

40. In the weeks following a student death, a review meeting may be called to bring together all staff who were close to the incident, to assess if there is any learning that the College can take from the incident. The meeting is not to apportion any blame but to identify opportunities to improve the support given to students. Key findings will be circulated to the key members of staff listed in this document and where necessary, the procedure will be reviewed and amended.

### **Quick advice**

41. Bereavement, sometimes also referred to as grief, is a term used to describe the sense of loss felt when someone close to us or who we care about dies. It can be difficult and stressful and nearly everybody goes through it at some point in their lives.



42. This sense of loss may contain a range of emotions, such as sadness, anger, guilt, frustration and anxiety. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including our age and personality, our cultural background and religious beliefs, our previous experiences of bereavement, our circumstances and how we cope with loss.
43. The College is committed to providing support, advice and guidance to students who are experiencing bereavement and loss. It may be that students would like to make a start, by speaking to someone at the College or perhaps feel they would like to join an online support group, call a helpline or begin some bereavement counselling. However, it may be that students would like some help in working out where to start. Experiencing bereavement is often confusing and disorientating and students may experience a mixture of emotions that can be overwhelming and may not in reality, have a good sense of where to begin. The following College support services are available:
- the College Student Counselling Service can provide listening and compassionate support to students and signpost to mental health support, services and charities outside the College and to online resources
  - the Chaplaincy

### Helplines

44. There are various national helplines which will be able to give free and quick advice and support:
- the charity Sudden has produced covid-19 specific bereavement advice which can be accessed as follows: [Support for suddenly bereaved people and those who care for them](#)
  - [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)- 0808 808 1677. Cruse also have [information about grieving in isolation](#).
  - Students in distress and who need support can ring the Samaritans for free at any time of the day or night. Freephone (UK and Republic of Ireland): 116 123 (24 hours) or [email Samaritans](#).
  - [Hope Again](#)- free helpline: 0808 808 1677 (Mon-Fri 09:30-17:00). Hope Again is Cruse Bereavement Care's website for young people with information, vlogs, podcasts, videos and sharing personal stories.
  - [Survivors of Bereavement By Suicide](#)- free helpline 0300 111 5065 (9am to 9pm every day).

- [Sands](#)- free helpline 0808 164 3332 (9.30am to 5.30pm Mon-Fri and 9.30am to 9.30pm Tues and Thurs evenings) for anyone affected by stillbirth or neonatal death.

### Accessing online support

- The NHS provides [links to online apps available in your community](#).
- NHS Choices 'Grief after bereavement or loss' has [information about how to cope and mental health and wellbeing](#).
- [What's Your Grief?](#) offers an online supportive community, resources about grieving in isolation and discussion about grief.
- [The Good Grief Trust](#) offers support and resources by others who have been bereaved.
- [The LOSS Foundation](#) is for people who have been bereaved due to cancer and the site has a short video describing the stages of grief, 'Phases of Grief'.

### Apps

- [Child Bereavement UK](#) offer an app for 11-25-year-olds who have been bereaved of someone important to them. It can also be used by friends, teachers, parents and professionals, who would like to know how to support bereaved young people.
- [Calm](#) offer an app to help you manage your mood in the grief process, with meditation.

### 'Off-line' reading about bereavement and loss

#### Bibliotherapy:

- [Facing Grief: Bereavement and the Young Adult](#), Susan Wallbank
- [How To Go On Living When Someone you Love Dies](#), Therese A. Rando
- [A Special Scar: The Experiences of People Bereaved by Suicide](#), Alison Wertheimer
- [No Time to Say Goodbye. Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One](#), Carla Fine.

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