

## Protocol to be Followed in the Event of the Death of a Student

### 1. Introduction

In a community as large as Imperial, it is a sad fact that students sometimes die, and as a public organisation with a very high reputation, representing a home community of more than 20,000 people and a wider community of alumni and friends numbering hundreds of thousands all over the world, such an incident can have profound repercussions.

It is crucially important therefore that anyone involved in a student death – whether as a directly affected member of staff, or someone who simply comes across a relevant piece of information – behaves as sensitively and appropriately as possible.

This document sets out how to handle such a situation, in order that the incident can be handled in the best possible way by the university, and takes as its starting point the following principles of approach:

- *Respect and dignity for the memory of the student should always be observed through all actions undertaken relating to the death;*
- *The utmost discretion should be used when receiving and passing on any information about the incident, with rumour and speculation avoided as much as possible;*
- *The wishes of the student's family and/or their formal representative should be considered wherever possible;*
- *All relevant authorities – for example the police and the coroner's office – must be fully supported and cooperated with where necessary.*

### 2. Factors to Be Considered

The exact circumstances of a student death can vary widely in each case:

- The death may be sudden and unexpected and happen in a very public place, such as an accident on or near campus or in a hall of residence;
- There may be more than one death involved, for example a serious car accident involving multiple occupants;
- The death may be largely expected, and may have already involved some preparation, for example if a student with a pre-existing severe illness dies while in care;
- The death may be the result of a completed suicide. In such circumstances, a suicide will only be formally confirmed as such by a coroner, but it is sometimes the case that the family or representatives will characterise the death as suicide and will expect the university to proceed on that basis.

- The death may involve suspected criminal activity, and therefore involve the police and other authorities, and severely constrain what information can be disseminated;
- Not all deaths will require an inquest, while in other cases the exact cause may be in dispute, and may not be resolved even after an inquest;
- The death may happen abroad, in which case relevant embassies and the Foreign Office are very likely to need to be involved;
- The death may have been recorded in some way on security or social media devices, either deliberately or accidentally;
- There may be particular cultural or religious factors involved in the death, and in the way that the family wishes the death to be dealt with.

Any media enquiries must be immediately re-directed to [News and Media](#) team in Communications.

### **3. Communication to Staff and Students**

As noted in the previous section, there are several different factors that need to be considered when informing members of the university community about the death of a student. Unless the death is already in the public domain and widely known about, Imperial will not issue university- wide notifications but will focus on informing those who can be identified as being directly affected. Imperial will work proactively to avoid catastrophising any significant event and will be mindful of the [advice provided by the Samaritans](#) in relation to media reporting and related communications. Further detail about where the responsibilities lie for notifications and other communications are set out in the following sections.

## **4. Action Taken on Notification of a Student Death or Suspected Student Death**

### **4.1 *Receipt of Notification***

Any member of staff who receives notification that a student has died must contact the Chief Student Services Officer (CSSO) immediately, copying in the Academic Registrar<sup>1</sup>. The CSSO is responsible for ensuring that the actions ascribed to key contacts are carried out and for maintaining a record of the steps taken across the university to facilitate reporting and reviews.

### **4.2 *Establishment of Circumstances***

The CSSO will first establish, as far as possible:

- Cause of death and other relevant information relating to the circumstances
- Contact details for next of kin and whether the individual is aware of the circumstances
- Whether any other students are already aware or may be directly involved / affected

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<sup>1</sup> In the event of the absence or non-availability of the Chief Student Services Officer, the Director of Student Support will undertake the duties assigned to that postholder.

- Whether there is involvement of the emergency services and/or Campus Safety & Security

If the veracity or detail of a report is difficult to establish, the CSSO will use their judgement and discretion in involving other members of the university community or in communicating information about the circumstances. There may be circumstances where the emergency services have taken command of the situation and thus Imperial must respond to information provided or action advised by the relevant service. In this scenario, it is expected that the medical staff or police will inform the immediate family of a death of a student and therefore it is not the role for Imperial or any of its staff.

### **4.3      *Actions and Responsibilities***

The sequence of action and responsibilities may be adjusted according to the nature of the circumstances reported. The areas identified below will be notified once the immediate actions are in process and there is absolute certainty about the situation.

#### **4.3.1    *The Chief Student Services Officer***

The Chief Student Services Officer will act as the family liaison (if an alternative and appropriate contact has not already been established at the point of notification to the university). Where the notification is received from someone other than the next of kin, as declared by a student and held on their central record, the university liaison should establish the relationship between the reporting individual and the listed next of kin. It will then be important to use careful judgement over which contact will be most appropriate for ongoing communication, given the circumstances that apply.

The CSSO will be responsible for informing certain members of Imperial's community about the situation and for determining which areas of the university need to act. They will do so in consultation with members of the University Management Board, who will be kept informed of the situation as information is known or released by the authorities.

The CSSO will liaise with departments, services and senior management (as appropriate) to approve any financial or other practical support to be offered to family members who may need to travel to London to manage the student's affairs. The CSSO will also contact the Insurance Manager in case repatriation is required or a personal accident claim might be raised.

The CSSO will coordinate activity with hall warden staff as appropriate to provide support to any students affected by the death, either because it occurred in a hall of residence or because the university is aware that students in halls have been affected, and to liaise with the student's family to arrange for collection of possessions if required.

If required, the CSSO will coordinate with Legal Services, Communications and the Faculty Senior Tutor as to whether there should be an Imperial representative at an inquest, and who should undertake this duty.

If the student was attending Imperial as part of an exchange programme or, for any reason, they held registration with another university, the CSSO will ensure that arrangements are in place to liaise with the other organisation(s) concerned. If a student was on a placement, the CSSO will liaise with the Assistant Registrar (Placements) to inform the provider. If an Imperial student was overseas on

an exchange, the CSSO will liaise with the Faculty Senior Tutor to inform the department's exchange co-ordinator.

Where it is deemed necessary, the CSSO may hold a case conference approximately 24 hours after the notification was first received or at any other time as appropriate. Others with responsibilities listed below may be asked to join the meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to ensure that the university's response is fully co-ordinated, that support for students and staff has been put in place and that any other ongoing issues are being managed appropriately.

#### *4.3.2 The Head of Department, Departmental Operations Manager, Senior Tutor (UG/PGT/PGR) and Faculty Senior Tutor*

The Head of Department, Departmental Operations Manager or Senior Tutor will, in conjunction with the Faculty Senior Tutor:

- (a) identify whether and how to inform other students within the department, balancing the need to communicate quickly with the need for sensitivity about the most appropriate channel to use. In-person information (such as announcements in a lecture or a class) will always be the preferred method but this is not always going to be possible or practical;
- (b) issue a letter of condolence on behalf of the department and provide information on the student to the President's Office;
- (c) ensure that the student's name is removed from any local distribution or other lists;
- (d) ensure that there is no online content relating to the student which may cause distress to the family, to other students or to staff;
- (e) inform the student's Personal Tutor / Supervisor, Departmental Senior Tutor and other relevant members of staff;
- (f) considering family wishes, whether to create an online condolence site, in liaison with Communications;
- (g) discuss with the Chief Student Services Officer formal Imperial attendance at the funeral or other memorial event.

#### *4.3.3 Communications and Public Affairs*

The Vice-President Communications and Strategic Engagement and their team will:

- (a) aid in drafting condolence messages;
- (b) provide technical assistance with setting up blogs and websites and offering advice on social media communications if required;
- (c) work with Imperial College Union to assist in coordinating their communications with the university's;
- (d) coordinate and cascade the sequence of communications where appropriate, including preparing public statements to be issued if the situation demands such action;
- (e) monitor social media and other media for any coverage of the situation and advise on any response, if appropriate.

#### *4.3.4 The President's Office*

The President's Office will liaise with the department, Communications and the Chief Student Services Office in order to issue a letter of condolence to the student's next of kin / family on behalf of Imperial.

#### *4.3.5 Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service*

The Director of Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service and their team will:

- (a) offer appropriate support to any students affected by the death;
- (b) assist the department or other relevant individuals / services with advice on breaking the news to students and staff;
- (c) liaise with the Chaplain regarding collaborative working to provide student support;
- (d) wherever possible, be present where in-person announcements are made to students by the department;
- (e) offer advice about departmental based support

#### *4.3.6 Chaplaincy*

The Chaplaincy will:

- (a) be available to any student or member of staff who has been affected by the death and would value support from the Chaplaincy;
- (b) liaise with the student's department, being mindful of the wishes of the family, over holding a memorial event on campus;
- (c) liaise with the department to be available to support families and to make hospital or other visits as appropriate;
- (d) be available for in-person announcements to students and staff if required;
- (e) liaise with Director of the Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service regarding collaborative working to provide student support.

#### *4.3.7 Imperial College Union*

The Imperial College Union Managing Director and/or President will, as appropriate:

- (a) inform the Officer Trustees;
- (b) inform relevant Club or Society leadership if the student was an active member;
- (c) determine whether it is appropriate to inform Club or Society members and co-ordinate any communications with the university communications team;
- (d) ensure that the Union media does not discuss any reports until their veracity has been established and those students and staff most directly affected have been informed;
- (e) write a letter of condolence;
- (f) contribute to discussions with the department and the Chaplain about holding a memorial;
- (g) assist the university in reminding students affected about the support services available and how to access them.

#### *4.3.8 Registry*

The Academic Registrar and their staff will:

- (a) liaise with the student's department to establish whether the student would be eligible for an academic award and determine the most appropriate route by which to inform the family;
- (b) in cases when a student is eligible for an award, liaise with the Graduation Team to ensure that the family is invited to attend and collect the award should they wish;
- (c) issue an announcement of death to the university community as follows:
  - Advancement and those running the Graduation Ceremonies;
  - Alumni Relations;
  - Campus Safety & Security;
  - Campus Services;
  - Careers;
  - Chief Legal Officer and Deputy University Secretary;
  - Disability Advisory Service;
  - Faculty Senior Tutor
  - Imperial College Health Centre;
  - Information and Communication Technologies;
  - Library;
  - Marketing, Outreach, Recruitment & Admissions (MORA), in case the student has an application with Imperial, is an Outreach participant, a student ambassador or appears in any marketing collateral;
  - Occupational Health;
  - Registrar and University Secretary;
  - Student Finance and Credit Control;
  - Student Hub;
  - Any department in which the student has active teaching according to the central student record;
- (d) ensure that the student record is closed;
- (e) notify any relevant external agencies such as the Student Loans Company, the UK Visas and Immigration Service, scholarship bodies etc.

#### *4.3.9 Legal & Regulatory Affairs team*

The Chief Legal Officer and their team will:

where necessary, liaise with the Coroner's Office, and will co-ordinate with the DSS, Registry, the Department concerned and the Communications team to

- (a) prepare any evidence required for an inquest;
- (b) assist any member of staff who should attend and give evidence at the inquest. The Legal & Regulatory Affairs team may seek assistance from external counsel with expertise in the handling of inquest matters where appropriate.

#### *4.3.10 International Relations Office*

- (a) in instances where the death has taken place during a summer vacation research programme abroad support the DSS and the Department in contacting (where necessary) any relevant third-party organisations

#### *4.3.11 Campus Safety & Security*

Campus Safety & Security will:

- (a) assist the Chief Student Services Officer with liaison with emergency services and the police authorities;
- (b) ensure that any immediate risks are identified and addressed, where appropriate.

#### *4.3.12 Other Areas of Imperial*

Those offices that have been informed of the death of a student, as listed in 3.3.8(a) above should ensure that the student is removed from local distribution lists and that no further correspondence is sent to the deceased. They should also amend any local records systems.

### **5. Follow-up Actions**

In the weeks following the initial report, a case conference may be called to bring together all staff directly involved in the response to identify any learning points and to advise on any amendments that should be made to this protocol. The case conference will never be used to address individual performance concerns or to apportion blame where shortfalls in the university's or Union's responses have been identified.

This protocol is to be reviewed annually if such review has not been prompted via a case conference.

### **6. Former Students**

This protocol can also apply to former students, where appropriate. In this case the Alumni Office would liaise with the Chief Student Services Officer, the department and the President's Office about a letter of condolence.

### **7. Applicants**

This protocol can also apply to applicants, where appropriate, with the following exceptions: the Director of Admissions and Data would liaise with the Chief Student Services Officer, the Admissions Tutor of the relevant Department, the Faculty Senior Tutor and the President's Office about a letter of condolence, and would circulate information about the student's death. They would also inform UCAS and any other relevant external agency as appropriate.

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