



Death of a Student

Policy

This policy applies to:

- All students on the University of the Built Environment taught programmes
- London School of Architecture students
- Postgraduate research students

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1. Introduction

The death of any student is a sad and difficult time for the University of the Built Environment community, as well as for the family and friends of the student who has died.

The University aims to work sensitively with those who lived, learned, and worked with the deceased student to ensure everybody is supported in the way they need, and that communication is clear, appropriate, and respectful.

This policy operates alongside the University's [Death of a Student procedure \(opens new window\)](#).

Given the sensitive nature of this subject and due to suicide being referenced within this document, readers are encouraged to be mindful of their own well-being prior to reading further.

2. Scope

The University is a University that delivers the majority of its programmes online and does not have campuses, student accommodation or students learning or living on its property. The University recognises that it is unlikely to need to respond to a student death on site, or in environments more common to campus universities, such as halls of residence. The exception to this are students studying with the London School of Architecture, who although they do not have student accommodation, do have a physical campus.

However, the University strives to create and maintain a student community and remains mindful that students can be vulnerable to illness, pressure and fatal incidents, no matter how and where they study. As such the University recognises both the unique risks to student safety and wellbeing in a predominately online learning environment, as well as the common risks it shares with more traditional universities.

In line with national guidance and increasing concern about student suicide, the University is particularly mindful of the risks related to poor mental health, self-harm, and suicide that it shares with all other universities, irrespective of how they deliver their programmes.

Therefore, in setting out its Death of a Student Policy and Procedure, the University draws upon [Universities UK's guidance on how to deal with student suicides \(opens new window\)](#), and uses this practical model to inform its approach to all student deaths, irrespective of the cause, but with particular and additional considerations for death by suicide, as outlined in [section 9](#) below.

Where it is known or suspected that a student has *attempted* suicide, the University's Safeguarding team should be notified immediately.

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This policy applies whenever the University is notified that the death of a student has occurred. This policy applies to all current University students, including students based outside of the UK, and students studying with the London School of Architecture. All University staff should be aware of this policy and who to contact in the event they become aware of a student death.¹

3. Definitions

- **Suicide** - death where the underlying cause was intentional self-harm (for those aged 10 years and over), and, in those aged 14 and over, deaths where the underlying cause was an event of undetermined intent (e.g. an injury or poisoning).
- **Postvention** - the organised response from an institution following the death of a student.
- **Suicide Cluster** - three or more deaths that occur unexpectedly closely in terms of time, place, or both. In a university setting, two suicides occurring close to each other may indicate a cluster and should be taken seriously.

4. Postvention Team

Following the death of a student, the Postvention team will meet and liaise regularly to support the implementation of the Death of a Student procedure.

The core team consists of the following members (other staff should be invited as appropriate):

- Director of Student Services (chair)
- Safeguarding Manager/Head of Disability and Welfare/Director of Academic Registry
- Director of Marketing, Communications and Brand
- Head of School (for LSA students only)

Should any of the above team members be unavailable, they can be replaced by any member of the University staff nominated by the Director of Student Services or the Director of Academic Registry.

¹ The Director of Student Services is the primary contact (see [Death of Student Procedure \(opens new window\)](#) for full details).

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The chair of the postvention team will provide regular updates to the Executive Leadership Team.

Any questions or updates for the Student Death Postvention team should be directed to safeguarding@ube.ac.uk.

5. Procedure

The below chart summaries the Death of a Student procedure. The full procedure is detailed in a separate document available in the [Death of a Student procedure \(opens new window\)](#) document.



6. Information sharing

The level of information shared regarding the circumstances of a student's death will be informed by Data Protection legislation, the wishes of the family and friends of the student who has died, and by the circumstances of the student's death.

The University will be mindful that some deaths need to be investigated by the police and or a coroner and this may delay communication regarding the death to those within the organisation. Where this occurs, senior leaders will build this into their planning and will take advice from the police or other appropriate organisation as to how to proceed and what information they can share.

In some circumstances, the student who has died may have suffered with a long-term health condition. It is possible in these circumstances that the family or other external organisations (e.g., charities) will have additional wishes or guidance regarding information shared with students and staff. The University will adhere to these wishes and guidance as far as possible.

Information will be shared with the University staff based on these principles, and in line with what is agreed during the primary action planning stage of the [Death of a Student Procedure \(opens new window\)](#).

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Where the University is not in control of information about the death (for instance where it has been shared online or where other students have detailed information from other sources), staff will receive clear guidance on what information it is appropriate to share and discuss with the student population. The University will endeavour, as far as possible, to only share and discuss verified, factual information.

Where a member of staff needs support or guidance to answer student questions or is unclear about what they can share and discuss, they should contact the postvention team via safeguarding@ube.ac.uk.

7. Posthumous awards

Depending on how far a student had progressed with their studies at the University before they died, it may be possible to process a posthumous award. All decisions on posthumous awards are made by the Progression and Award Board. More information can be found in the [Academic and Programme Regulations \(opens new window\)](#).

8. Support

The University recognises that the death of a student can have a significant impact on its students and staff. It therefore aims to provide support to anyone in the university community who requires it, whether or not the deceased student was known to them.

Support will also be offered if appropriate at relevant anniversary dates (for example anniversaries of funerals, or of the date a student died).

The University is aware that different types of support may be required by different members of the University community and will be dependent on the circumstances of the death. Some may need practical emotional support; others may need ways to remember and pay tribute to the deceased student.

Support may include (but is not limited to):

- Signposting to relevant external organisations that provide bereavement support;
- Signposting to internal support services and information;
- Facilitation of group or one-to-one discussions to remember the deceased student or to grieve collectively;
- Support for staff who may need to discuss the death with students or other staff members who are bereaved and distressed (please see [Appendix A](#));
- Facilitation of access to additional therapy or counselling services;

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- Advice on the use of the University procedures to manage any impact on work or study;
- Centralised collation of tributes, messages, and/or donations in memory of the student; and
- Organisation of memorials and remembrance events.

All support is coordinated by the Postvention Team who will make the support available as soon as possible after a student death is confirmed. Students and staff can also make direct contact with the team to request or suggest additional support via safeguarding@ube.ac.uk or by calling 01184672400.

8.1 Messages for family

Staff and students may feel comforted by being able to pass on messages of condolence to the family/friends of the bereaved student. Messages should be sent to safeguarding@ube.ac.uk where they will be compiled by the Head of Disability and Welfare, following liaison with the family of the deceased student to see whether they would like to receive these messages now, at a later date, or not at all.

8.2 Funerals, wakes and memorials

Families will be asked if they would like the University to share details of funeral and wake arrangements with students and staff.

If the family would prefer to have a private funeral, the University may send a tribute, a single representative, or organise a separate memorial event to allow staff and students to remember the person who has died and honour their life. If they so choose, family members will be invited to attend any memorial events and will be asked if they would like to contribute to the event in any way.

8.3 Refunds

For more information on refunds and compensation, please refer to the University [Refund and Compensation Policy \(opens new window\)](#). Clause 8 will be of particular relevance in the circumstance that a student has died.

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9. Death by suicide

Trigger warning: The following section of this policy discusses suicide, which some readers may find distressing.

It is thought that 1 in 5 people will experience suicidal thoughts during their lifetime, and 1 in 15 people will attempt suicide (Mind, 2020).

It is known that following the death of a student by suicide, it is possible to trigger a suicide cluster. Therefore, it is appropriate to address suicide separately within this policy.

In the event that the known or suspected cause of death of a student is suicide, additional considerations will arise to ensure that students, staff, and family members are appropriately supported.

The University will use the appropriate parts of Universities UK (UUK) guidance to manage processes and communications following a suicide, and in particular will follow its postvention principles when taking about a suicide:

1. Respond with compassion and respect, being receptive to distress and sensitive to the needs of others.
2. Be guided by the wishes of the family/significant others of the deceased student.
3. Ensure timely engagement at the right levels, reaching out and connecting early.
4. Avoid communicating publicly about methods and use appropriate and sensitive language about suicide to minimise potential knowledge about suicide methods increasing suicide risk for others.
5. Avoid sensationalising or normalising suicide and remain sensitive and factual in all communications.
6. Recognise that talking about suicide responsibly does not increase the likelihood of further suicidal behaviours.
7. Adhere to information sharing protocols providing clear information while protecting the privacy and dignity of those affected and in accordance with legal requirements.
8. Be sensitive to cultural and religious perspectives that may affect responses to a student suicide.

Aim to focus on the identity, life, and memories of the individual, rather than their death by suicide.

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9.1 Notification of staff and students

In general, the University will be open about the occurrence of a death by suicide, but will also respect the needs, wishes and protected characteristics of the family of the student wherever possible.

9.1.1 Notifying staff

Relevant staff will be notified when it is known that a student has died by suicide, mention of the method of suicide will not be made. Staff will be provided with additional guidance on how to support students who wish to discuss the death and have any questions.

9.1.2 Notifying students

Relevant students will be notified when the cause of a student death is suicide. Communications may mention, in a sensitive manner, that the student has died by suicide, but will not make mention of the method of suicide.

9.2 Suicide clusters

Where the University has concerns about a possible suicide cluster, the Head of Disability and Welfare will contact the local public health suicide prevention lead and follow their instructions and guidance.

9.3 Media guidance

The University will follow [Samaritans' media guidelines for reporting suicide \(opens new window\)](#) when dealing with the media following a known or suspected student suicide. The Head of Disability and Welfare and Director of Marketing, Communications and Brand will follow up on any known media reporting that does not respect this approach.

If appropriate the deceased student's friends and family will be directed to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), to help them navigate media enquiries.

9.4 Serious incident review

Following a student death by known or suspected suicide, or in the event of a suspected attempted suicide, the University will conduct a serious incident review in line with UUK guidance.

The University acknowledges that as a predominately online learning provider, how it conducts a review and how it learns from a student suicide may differ to how that happens at a campus-based institution.

The University will always ensure that any review does not conflict with the work of coroners, inquests, or the wishes of families.

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However, the aim of a serious incident review is to learn from the student suicide or attempt wherever possible, to prevent future suicides and to ensure that the University is best equipped to provide compassionate and timely support in the case of any future student suicides. Where relevant and appropriate, families will be involved in the serious incident review.

The University follows the 'SAFER²' approach to conducting a serious incident review.

A serious incident review will be conducted by a member of the University's senior leadership team (SLT) with support from the Head of Disability and Welfare or nominated deputy. The review will be conducted with reference to the guidance and report templates within the Universities UK publication Carrying out a Serious Incident Review.

9.5 Inquests and police investigations

The University may be required to contribute to an inquest or police investigation. Any member of staff or student asked to participate in one of these should seek guidance from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (University Secretary) or Director of Student Services.

9.6 Support following suicide

The University recognises that students and staff may require additional support following a death by suicide. All staff and students will be notified of the appropriate internal and external support available at the time.

9.6.1 Staff

Staff will be offered additional support and guidance on how to support a student in distress. Some initial advice is included in [Appendix A](#).

Papyrus offer a [debriefing service \(opens new window\)](#) for professionals who have had an experience with suicide and would like to talk it through with a trained professional, and the University encourages staff to access this service as required.

9.6.2 Students

Students who are significantly affected will be offered one-to-one video calls with a member of the safeguarding team to discuss the student death.

² See page 27 of Universities UK's [Postvention guidance \(opens new window\)](#).

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They will be offered this at regular intervals, to account for the fact that their feelings about the student death are likely to change over time.

Depending on how support needs change in the weeks and months following the death, the University will discuss additional counselling or therapy services for anyone who needs significant intervention to come to terms with the death.

10. Benchmarking references

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies, procedures, and guidance documents, which set out details that relate to key aspects of the University's approach to safeguarding:

- [Death of a Student Procedure \(opens new window\)](#) ;
- [Code of Practice Safeguarding and Prevent \(opens new window\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Procedure \(opens new window\)](#)
- [Student Disciplinary Procedure \(opens new window\)](#);
- [Terms and Conditions of Contract \(opens new window\)](#);
- [Privacy Notice \(opens new window\)](#)
- [Data Protection Policy \(opens new window\)](#);
- [Refund and Compensation Policy \(opens new window\)](#);
- [Safeguarding and Welfare \(opens new window\)](#)
- [Universities UK: Suicide-Safer Universities \(opens a new window\)](#);
- [Universities UK: How to respond to a student suicide \(opens a new window\)](#);
- [Universities UK: Carrying out a serious incident review \(opens a new window\)](#).

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Appendix A: Handling difficult or emotive conversations

This document provides advice on how to handle a difficult or emotive conversation.

Key things to remember:

1. **Plan** the call/conversation beforehand if you can and have resources on hand. You may find it helpful to speak to the Safeguarding Team or your Line Manager too.
2. It is important to **consider your individual experiences** and how they may play a role in your conversations. If you ever feel uncomfortable or that it is not your place to provide the level of support needed, please tell the student and refer them to the relevant internal or external support available. By telling the student that you are not the right person with whom to have the conversation, we can provide a more effective service and protect your wellbeing as well as that of the student.
3. **Be compassionate.** You don't need to have all the answers, you just need to be there and listen.
4. **Communicate non-judgmentally.** Set aside pre-conceived judgments about the person or their situation/reactions and avoid expressing those judgements.
5. **Slow down.** This will help you to find the right words and show that you're listening.
6. **Reflect** what the person has said to confirm that you understand their situation.
7. **Give information** (not advice) about the internal support available and ways to contact external organisations that may be able to help.
8. **Refer the student** to relevant internal teams or external support agencies.
9. **Take regular breaks** throughout the day. The calmer you are the better you are at handling tough conversations.
10. **Learn and grow.** After the conversation reflect on what you said and how you could have improved. You may find it helpful to speak with a Mental Health First Aider or your Line Manager.

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To be avoided:

1. Interrupting the person and not giving them time to talk.
2. Becoming emotional yourself. This can be hard but it's crucial that you remain calm.
3. Judging the situation or person.
4. Overloading the person with information.
5. Keeping it to yourself. Whilst it's important to keep information confidential (unless it's a Safeguarding concern), you can still talk to your Line Manager or a Mental Health First Aider about the overall conversation.