

# Student Contact Opt-in Procedure

## 1 Contact Officers

Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor

Director of Student Life

## 2 Scope

This procedure applies to all students who undertake registration with the University, and is relevant to all (academic and professional services) staff interacting with students.

## 3 Purpose

This procedure outlines how student emergency contact details are collected and updated, the circumstances under which the University will use emergency contact details, how that decision is made, and who will be authorised to make contact. The purpose is to provide clarity to students, staff and emergency contacts, and to ensure that appropriately informed and timely action is taken in emergency circumstances.

## 4 Context

The wellbeing of students is our primary concern at all times. Our Strategic Plan sets out the University's "...*deep commitment to inclusion for those experiencing mental health problems*", and also outlines our "...*leading role in partnership with the National Union of Students and others to make universities and cities 'suicide safer'*." The higher education sector has seen unprecedented increases in the incidence and reporting of mental ill-health over recent years, and the University remains committed to being at the forefront of improvements to student wellbeing support.

In line with emerging best practice<sup>1</sup>, and the prioritisation of student mental health by the government<sup>2</sup>, this Procedure outlines our intention to offer every student the opportunity to give permission for a named and trusted adult to be contacted, in the event of the University having serious concerns for their physical or mental health, wellbeing or safety. Where permission is given, this will allow us to make an informed choice to initiate that contact, in exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to gain the student's written consent at the time of the incident(s) or concern(s).

This is in addition to our legal right to use the contact information without prior consent where it is in the student's vital ('life or death') interest to do so.

Students will be able to update the contact information, or withdraw from the opt-in aspect of the contact procedure, at any time via their SOLE page.

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<sup>1</sup>e.g. [Link to Bristol University procedure](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Link to OfS on student mental health](#)

## 5 Procedure

### Providing and updating emergency contact details

#### Mandatory

- 1.1 Students are required to provide details of an emergency contact during the registration process at the beginning of each academic year. This information is held on SITs, the student record system, and is covered by the University's Privacy Notice. It is a mandatory requirement for students to provide an emergency contact.
- 1.2 Students are asked to provide a mobile number, where possible, as well as a landline number, to ensure that contact can be made quickly. They are advised to tell the emergency contact that their details have been provided to the University, and ensure that they have permission to nominate the contact.
- 1.3 Students can update the emergency contact details, via their SOLE page, at any time, and they are advised to keep the details up to date, as in an emergency situation it may not be possible to check with the student first.
- 1.4 The University can legally use this emergency contact information, without prior consent, in very serious situations where it is in students' vital interests to do so. This normally implies a life or death situation, or one where the student is physically incapable of giving consent (for example if they are unconscious).
- 1.5 Most students choose to nominate a parent, guardian, partner or spouse as their emergency contact, but they may nominate any responsible adult, as this does not relate to their legal 'Next of Kin' (see 2.3).

#### Optional

- 1.6 Under the 'Opt-in' Procedure, students are also given the option to give advance consent for the University to be able to use these emergency contact details in situations which are not life or death, but where there are serious concerns about the student's physical or mental health or wellbeing (see 2.5).

### Circumstances when the University may call the emergency contact

- 2.1 Emergency contacts are not routinely given information about academic progress or any other aspect of the student's life at University. Those nominated will only normally be contacted when there is a significant concern about the student's physical or mental health, wellbeing or safety.

## **Legitimate use**

- 2.2 The University can use emergency contact information, without prior consent, where it is in the student's 'vital interests' to do so. This will usually involve a life or death situation, where there are clear concerns for the life of the student. This may include, for example:
- When the University is made aware of an emergency admission to hospital, or collection of the student by emergency services in what appears to be a potentially life-threatening or critical condition
  - When, in the opinion of the University, it is not possible to reasonably keep a student safe, such as when they might be considered to be a threat to their own life, or when the University is managing an emergency exclusion
- 2.3 In the event of a suspected or confirmed death of a student, the University will pass the emergency contact details to the Police or other emergency services to support them in their role of contacting the next of kin. It is not the role of the University to first inform Next of Kin of a death, and it should be noted that the emergency contact chosen by the student may not be their legal Next of Kin (see 1.5).

## **Optional**

- 2.4 In other circumstances, the University must have consent from the student to use the emergency contact. The University will always seek to gain informed consent from students at the appropriate time, but there may be exceptional occasions where it is in a student's best interests for the University to use the emergency contact in situations which are not necessarily life-threatening, but where there is significant concern about a student's physical or mental health, wellbeing or safety.
- 2.5 Examples of circumstances when a decision might be made to get in touch with the emergency contact on this basis include, but are not limited to:
- Serious physical or mental illness, or concerns about behaviour which might mean that someone is seriously unwell
  - When a student is seemingly missing (such as when they have missed key events without explanation, and we are unable to contact them; when there has been a prolonged lack of contact, despite efforts to get in touch with them; or when the University has received a credible report that the student is missing, and there is genuine concern for their safety or wellbeing).
- 2.6 In addition to attempting to contact the emergency contact, where appropriate the University may also pass the contact details to the emergency services, for example to the ambulance crew or by telephoning the Emergency Department at the hospital, where the information will help them to support and/or treat the student.

## Deciding to use the emergency contact details

- 3.1 The emergency contact details are for use in exceptional circumstances, as set out above. In such circumstances, the decision to use the emergency contact details during working hours will normally be made by the Director or Assistant Director of Student Life; or the Assistant Director of Estates and Facilities for Security and Operations; alternatively, where appropriate the decision can be referred to the Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor or Deputy Provost. Out of hours, staff should contact Security (X5000), who will escalate the concern through their Duty Manager, and onto the Incident Management Protocol if necessary.
- 3.2 Colleagues should refer any concerns through an appropriate channel, for example by discussing with their line manager in the first instance; by contacting firstpoint ([firstpoint4staff@worc.ac.uk](mailto:firstpoint4staff@worc.ac.uk) or X2659); or by contacting a professional colleague from Student Support and Wellbeing ([studentlife@worc.ac.uk](mailto:studentlife@worc.ac.uk)) or Counselling and Mental Health ([cmh@worc.ac.uk](mailto:cmh@worc.ac.uk)) for advice.

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