MISSING STUDENTS PROCEDURES

Introduction

This document sets out the procedure for implementing the University's Missing Persons Policy to establish the whereabouts and safety of a missing student.

Definitions

Missing student - a student who is potentially missing when their whereabouts are unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded as unusual in relation to their normal behaviour patterns, plans and routines and/or their absence gives rise to concern and as a consequence an individual or individuals express(es) their concern.

It is important to recognise the distinction between a potentially missing student and a non-engaged student. It is possible for a student not to be seen but to be regularly engaging with their studies, for example by logging-in to the VLE, using the library facilities and submitting work.

A potential missing student is therefore someone who has shown:
- No engagement with their studies at all; and
- There has been no communication at all from the student; and
- They have not been seen or heard from

These procedures should be followed where a student who is usually engaged with their studies has stopped engaging and all efforts to contact them have failed.

Confidentiality

There is potential to cause distress when investigating suspected missing persons. Therefore cases require careful handling and clear coordination.

In order to avoid unnecessary distress or alarm, and to protect the confidentiality rights of the missing person, it is important that no member of staff contacts the missing person's family or other external person or agency, except on the advice of the Head of Student Support Services, Safeguarding Manager or Director of Student Experience, Wellbeing and Inclusion..

Procedures

Stage 1 – Initial Enquiries & Escalation

Concern about a missing student may be raised by:

- a member of staff;
- another student;
- a member of the missing person's family; or
- from someone outside of the University

Where concerns are raised by a person other than a member of staff, the recipient should ensure that they do not disclose any details but should ask for the information listed below.

- Name of missing person
- Name and contact details for person reporting, together with their relationship with the missing person
- Reasons for concern – obtain full details from the person who has raised the concern

The person reporting the concern should be thanked for making contact and asked to inform the staff member if contact is subsequently made by the missing person.

Any such concern should be raised immediately with the student's Programme and Student Lead or, in their absence, the Campus Dean or Head of Programme.

Programme and Student Leads should at this stage contact the student's nominated Student Journey Advisor (SJA) to check that the student is still registered on the course, obtain their engagement records, ascertain the student's last date of attendance and establish whether the SJA has logged any interventions with the student. The PSL should also contact the student's Academic Coach to establish whether the student has been in contact with them.

Where concern is raised from someone outside of the University, information should not be disclosed on confidentiality grounds however staff can contact students to advise them that a concern has been raised, e.g. we are able to prompt a student that their parent has been in touch without releasing any details to the parent and will encourage the student to make contact.

If there are no wellbeing concerns for the student, the Programme and Student Lead should follow the Attendance Monitoring Procedures up to and including sending of the PL2a email (see Annex 3 of the Attendance Monitoring Procedures for the text).

If there is still concern after taking these steps or there are wellbeing concerns, the Programme and Student Lead should attempt to contact the student by all of the following methods:
- email (to both personal and University account) by sending the PL2a email (see Annex 3 of the Attendance Monitoring Procedures for the text).

- Phone – to the student's registered mobile number in Unit-e
- Text message or WhatsApp

If a response to PL2a email has not been received within 48 hours* and the concern for a student's wellbeing remains, the Programme and Student Lead should (escalate the matter to the Head of Student Support Services and Campus Dean under Stage 2 of these procedures

Note; Students sponsored by the University on a Tier 4 or Student Route visa are expected to fully comply with the Attendance Policy for Visa-sponsored Students. Where a student's attendance falls below 90% for unauthorised reasons and/or they have ten or more consecutive unexplained absences, the University is required to report the student to the Home Office. The Visa Compliance Team within SICA should also be notified if a Tier 4 / Student Route Visa student is considered to be a **Missing person** as defined above.

Stage 2 –Investigation, Risk Profile, Report & Escalation

Concerns raised via Stage 2 of these procedures will be managed by the Head of Student Support Services or their nominee.

Investigation

After escalation, the Head of Student Support Services or their nominee will investigate the following:

- Last known contact with missing person including date, time, contact type and any supporting key information
- Normal patterns of contact
- Last login to the University's IT systems
- Attendance records including any reasons known relating to previous absences where appropriate
- Assessment records including any reasons for recent concessions where appropriate
- Visa status
- Age
- Previous access to student support or wellbeing services, last date of contact, relevant background information, e.g. disability status, and confirmation of any future appointments booked
- Last activity by missing person on social media (where possible)
- Whether emergency contact/next of kin details are available

The following may be contacted discreetly and without disclosing the reason for making the request for contact information about the missing person, to see if they can provide any useful information:

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- Students' Union, particularly if the missing person is a member of any clubs or societies or they are a student representative;
- Where the missing student has previously accessed student support or wellbeing services, their GP or other external practitioner where this information is held by the relevant service

All contacts made and information gathered should be documented.

A search for the missing student on social media can also be conducted to see if any recent activity could account for their whereabouts.

Information about a missing person can only be shared outside of the University where there are serious concerns for the wellbeing of the missing person, or the wellbeing of others, and there is a potential risk to life involved.
In order to avoid unnecessary distress to the missing person's family, in most circumstances they need not be contacted until any investigation has been completed and as much clarity as possible about the absence has been obtained. However it is important to maintain a degree of flexibility dependant on the circumstances.

Risk profile

When conducting the investigation and information gathering tasks it is important to establish the following about the missing person:

- do they suffer from any form of physical or mental health condition that makes them considered a high risk?
- do they require essential medication or treatment?
- is their absence a significant change in their established pattern of behaviour, which cannot be explained, and gives reason that some harm may befall them or suspicion of abduction?
- are they usually resident abroad and have gone missing in the UK?
- are they usually resident in the UK and have gone missing abroad?
- are there any drug/alcohol related difficulties?
- have they stated an intent to harm themselves/others?
- have they recently been involved in racial/violent incidents(s)?
- have they been a victim of crime, especially harassment, bullying or violence?

- have they previously expressed extremist views and may be at risk of radicalisation?
- do they partake in any hazardous sports or activities?
- have they had any recent injuries, especially head injuries?
- are there adverse weather, travel or security alert conditions?
- do they have a previous history of having been missing?
- are there known to be family/relationship difficulties?
- are there known to be academic difficulties?
- are there known to be financial problems?
- how long is it since the missing person was last seen by any member of the University community?

The Head of Student Support Services will use the risk profile to identify an appropriate course of action which may involve some, all, or none of the following:

1. Do nothing for the time being – this option should only be pursued after full investigation and consultation with the Safeguarding Officer and Campus Dean; and/or

2. Unless there is a clear reason as to why not, contact the student's next of kin; and/or

3. Contact the police if there are serious concerns for the wellbeing of the student or others.

4. Recommend to the Campus Dean that the student's registration with the University be brought to an end as a result of their continued non-engagement with the course.

Report

Once the investigation and information gathering tasks are complete the Head of Student Support Services should report all findings and his/her action recommendation to the Campus Dean who should be kept updated at all times. The Director of Student Immigration Compliance and Advice should also be informed if the student is visa-sponsored.

If the Head of Student Support Services feels there are continued grounds for concern, they may attempt further contact with the missing person using all means of communication available. A letter/email should be sent advising the student of the level of concern and requesting urgent contact. The student should be advised that, if we do not hear from them within 48 hours*, the University will need to make contact with their next of kin and/or the police.

Note: where contact has already been attempted by the Programme and Student Lead in accordance with the Attendance Monitoring Procedures, the Head of Student Support Services will consider whether to make immediate contact with next of kin and/or the police dependent on the level of risk identified. In these cases, the student will already have received notification from the Programme and Student Lead that this action may be taken.

Escalation

If the missing person does not make contact within 48 hours*, the Head of Student Support Services may attempt to make contact with the next of kin where known. If this does not result in the wellbeing of the student being satisfactorily confirmed and there are ongoing concerns for the missing person's wellbeing, they should be reported to the police immediately.

The Head of Student Support Services should ensure that they have sufficient information before contacting the police. This includes (but is not limited to) the following information about the missing person:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Current address
- Contact numbers
- Next of kin contact details
- Home address (where applicable)
- Reason the student is believed to be missing
- Contact details for the person who made the report
- Details of when the student was last seen (including date, time, location, who they were last with)
- Physical description
- Any vulnerabilities
- Any relevant history

Where contact is made, the member of staff should attempt to find out the whereabouts of the student and ascertain whether any support is needed. The student should be asked to contact the person who has reported their concerns or, if they have provided their written consent, for the University to update the person on their behalf.

*Timescales within these protocols are indicative but action may be taken sooner depending on the level of risk identified.

Analysis

Following a missing person incident, the Head of Student Support Services will complete a report to highlight lessons learned and inform the development of this document and procedures and the University's Missing Persons Policy.

Version history:

Version	Amended by	Revision summary	Date
V1.0	Head of Student Support Services	Initial Draft	16/03/2017
V1.1	Director of Operational Services	Minor amendments	13/04/2017
V1.2	Legal	Amendments	7/5/2017
V1.3	Head of Student Support Services	Incorporate feedback from Campus Deans	15/09/2017
V1.4	Head of Student Support Services	Incorporate feedback from Head of IVO	27/11/2017
V1.5	Registry Officer	Change to coding convention	24/03/20
V1.6	Head of Student Information and Administration - Quality	Updates to department name	20/08/20
V1.6	Quality Assurance Team Leader	Extension to term of approval of 1 year	10/2022
V1.7	Head of Student Support Services	General Amendments	24/01/2023

APPENDIX
Missing Student Action Sheet

Student's full name (and preferred name, if different)		SRN	
Course		Year	
Date of Birth/Age		Disability/SpLD? If yes, give details	
Visa status (non-EEA)			
Address (term time) (inc telephone contact details)			
Address (home) (inc telephone contact details)			
Where and when last seen and by whom			
When last seen, were they with anyone? If so, name and contact details			
Is their absence typical or unusual (give details)?			

Have they missed any assessments/submitted concessions within the last 2 weeks (give details)?	
When last seen, what was their state of mind and is there any reason to consider them vulnerable?	
Name and contact details of person who reported the missing student	
Action taken	
Person completing form	

Signature: Date: