

 NUI MAYNOOTH Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad	<i>Current Revision:</i> 01
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University Protocol on Missing Students

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a clear and straightforward guide for the procedures to be adopted in the event that it is suspected that a student may be missing. Such concerns about a student may be received by the University through a variety of channels and by any member of the University staff and student body, and it is an event which requires a coordinated response by the University. Therefore it is important that these procedures are widely disseminated so that all staff and students are clear who should be contacted if anyone has concerns regarding the whereabouts of a student.

2. Principles

Confidentiality

It is important to be aware that some students may wish to keep their whereabouts or circumstances confidential.

Duty of Care

The University has a duty of care to its staff and students. In a situation where a student is reported missing this can have a traumatic impact on the family, friends, students and staff most closely involved. Therefore, information must be accurate and careful consideration must be given as to how this is conveyed to students and staff. The primary objectives of the University when responding to a concern about a student's whereabouts are:

- to establish contact with the student;
- to ensure his/her wellbeing;
- to offer appropriate support and assistance, and
- to ensure, insofar as is possible, that investigations remain confidential in order to protect his/her privacy.

Some students may already have disclosed information to the University which makes them particularly vulnerable, and students aged under 18 will automatically be considered vulnerable.

Sensitivity

The possible disappearance of a student may be dramatic, which may excite comment and, possibly, media interest. All staff and students should behave in a highly sensitive and professional manner, and should not get involved in any form of speculation or unauthorised comment.

3. Procedure

The procedure to be followed in all cases is set out below and is shown graphically in Appendix 1. There are three phases - Initial Internal Investigation, Formal Missing Person, and Conclusion and Review.

PHASE 1 – Initial Internal Investigation

Reports of concerns about a student

A report of a concern about the whereabouts of a student may be received by any member of staff from another member of staff, a student or a person external to the University. Such a report should be communicated to the Head of Security, who will inform the other members of the Central Committee. [Director of Student Services and Health & Safety Officer], and an internal investigation will be initiated. The following actions will be taken, as appropriate:

Central Committee:

The co-ordination of the response to the report of a concern about the whereabouts of a student is the responsibility of the Director of Student Services. The Director will chair the Central Committee, which will consist of the Head of Security and the Health & Safety Officer. The Central Committee will liaise with the Offices listed below and will gather all data from these Offices. The Central Committee will decide on any additional internal enquiries which need to be made. All decisions on actions to be taken external to the University will be made by the Central Committee.

Academic Department:

Contact the course Tutor and Department Administrator to determine, if possible:

- When the student last attended lectures, tutorials, labs;
- If assignments have been handed in;
- If there any known academic issues;
- If there are known friends from the course – a list should be prepared. Contact should be made with each of them to find out when they last saw the student and if they were aware of any planned trips, etc.

Residence Office:

If the student is resident on-campus, then

- Attempt to contact the student by phone (this will normally be the student's own mobile phone number, as listed by the student in University records).
- Check student's room and apartment;
- Speak to all students living in the same apartment to find out when they last saw the student and if they were aware of any planned trips, partners, issues.

If the student is resident off-campus in rented accommodation, then

- Attempt to contact the student by phone (this will normally be the student's own mobile phone number, as listed by the student in University records).
- Contact any other students living at the same address to find out when they last saw the student and if they were aware of any planned trips, partners, issues.

Academic Advisory Office:

- Check the status of the student on the Student Records system (registration status, course details, contact details, photo);
- Contact other University Departments (e.g. Library, Finance, Records) who may have had recent relevant contact with the student.

Student Services Office:

- Check with Student Activities Office and Sports Office to determine if there are any club or society activities which the student may be involved with;
- Check with other Student Services Departments (Counselling, Medical Centre, Chaplaincy) SU Welfare Office and Access Office, if appropriate, to determine if there is any relevant information about the student (recent contact, information about physical or mental health or disability);

Head of Security:

- Determine when the student's ID card was last used on campus;
- Visit the off-campus address, if the student is resident off-campus in rented accommodation (or nominate an officer of the University to do so);

Contacting Family:

- No contact should be made with the student's family or home, except by a member of the Central Committee or their nominee;
- When the home of the student is contacted for the first time, it is the policy of the University to be up-front about the circumstances, i.e. the University has concerns about the whereabouts of the student and the family may be able to assist in contacting other friends/contacts. This may result in stress and alarm in the short-term, but it is not considered appropriate to make contact with the family in the guise of leaving a message for the student.

PHASE 2 – Formal Missing Person

In the vast majority of cases a student is contacted and located arising from the actions taken during Phase 1. If this does not occur, then the Central Committee will decide on further action, in the light of the information gathered. At this point, the role of the University is to assist in Garda enquiries, to offer assistance and practical support to the student's family and to support other students. Possible actions will include:

Central Committee:

- The student's Next of Kin (as recorded in the Student Records system) is contacted to update them on the University's investigations;
- If the Next of Kin do not know of the student's whereabouts, and are unable to locate them via known friends or contacts, then it may be recommended to the family that the Gardai be informed, depending on the individual circumstances. This is normally done by a family member. The Head of Security, or other member of the Central Committee, will be available to assist the family through this process, and will act as the liaison between the family and the University;
- The Head of Security, or other member of the Central Committee, will also act as the liaison between the Gardai and the University and will provide all relevant information which has already been gathered. It may be necessary to make arrangements for the Gardai to access the student's apartment or to interview friends and housemates. Appropriate support will be offered to such students at this time;
- Contact with local hospitals to ascertain if the student has been taken ill or been involved in an accident will normally be done by the Gardai;
- The Director of Student Services will notify relevant University personnel – the Registrar, Head of Academic Department, Communications Office, Chaplaincy Service, Counselling Service,

International Office:

- If the student is an International Student, the student's Next of Kin (as recorded in the Student Records system) is contacted by the International Office to let them know of the University concerns;
- In such cases, the Gardai may be contacted directly by the Head of Security;
- The International Office will act as the liaison between the family and the University. It may be necessary to contact the embassy/consulate of the student, and to make other arrangements as required.

Chaplaincy and Counselling Services:

- The Chaplaincy and Counselling Services will be made available to support the students in the University who are friends, housemates or classmates of the missing student;
- The Chaplaincy Service may also provide a support to the immediate family of the student.

Communications Office:

- Any enquiries from the media or from any other external persons regarding a missing student will be handled by the Communications Office. The switchboard will be informed to ensure all enquiries are re-directed. The Director of Corporate Services will also be informed.

Registrar:

- Should the case become a formal "Missing Person" case being investigated by the Gardai, the Registrar may write a letter of support to the family;
- The President and Deputy President will also be informed.

PHASE 3 – Conclusion and Review

When the student is located:

When the student is located, the Director of Student Services will contact all University staff who were involved during Phase 1 and Phase 2 to inform them of the outcome. It is particularly important to contact the person who initially raised the concern about the student.

When the student is not located:

If the student is not located, the Central Committee will continue to meet regularly to discuss any updates and to decide on further actions. Liaison with the student's family will continue.

Review:

The Director of Student Services will arrange for a review meeting to be held each semester to discuss all cases where the actions taken in Phase 1 resulted in the student being located. In all cases where Phase 2 is entered, an individual review meeting will be arranged by the Director of Student Services within 2 weeks of the conclusion of Phase 2. The purpose of these meetings is to review the implementation of this protocol, and to consider any amendments which may be required. Such meetings would normally be attended by the members of the Central Committee and other staff who were involved in the relevant cases.

APPENDIX 1

