

**University of East Anglia
Student Support Service
Missing student procedure: guidance for staff**

1. From time to time students are reported as 'missing' and concerns are raised about their wellbeing. There may be

- unusual or unexplained absences from classes or lectures;
- reports of non-attendance from placement supervisors;
- non-response to important communications from the University;
- non- response to attempts to make contact by fellow students;
- absences from UEA or private residences noted by Senior Residents and/or flatmates;
- concerns raised by people external to the University (family, friends, landlords/landladies; see section 6 on **disclosure of information** below).

2. Students who are noted as missing may merely have failed to notify their Schools that they have a minor illness and will be absent for a few days, or have neglected to obtain permission for a period of absence. In most cases there is a simple explanation for a student's absence. However, UEA takes unexplained absences seriously in case they may result from, for example

- serious physical illness or accident;
- mental health problems, including persistent depression;
- a serious quarrel with a boy or girlfriend, friends, flatmates or family;
- victimisation or undue pressure by others, including family members;
- being the victim of a crime;
- being arrested by the police or other law-enforcement agency.

3. All unplanned or unexplained absences of more than a few days or those where the circumstances give immediate rise to concern should be **reported promptly to the Director of Student Services** and, if the concern has been raised by School staff, the Head of School or Senior Adviser. It is particularly important to act quickly in the case of students who are under 18 years of age or who are known to be particularly vulnerable due to ill health (physical or mental) or disability.

5. The Student Support Service will take immediate action in line with its Missing Student Protocol. The aims of the protocol are to

- determine the cause of the student's absence;
- locate the student as quickly as possible;
- ensure the student's safety;
- avoid raising unnecessary alarm;
- ensure that as far as possible, investigations remain confidential in order to protect the student's privacy.

As soon as SSS has been notified that a student has been reported as missing, they will immediately begin their investigation. SSS will keep relevant members of School staff fully informed of the progress of the investigation. **Please note that SSS staff will not normally visit a student's off-campus home in person unless in the opinion of the Director or other senior member of the Student Support Service, there are *prima facie* reasons for doing so.**

6. Contact with third parties and disclosure of information

Great care should be taken in respect of disclosure of information, both within the University community, and in particular, to those external to the University. This includes those who are, or claim to be, close personal friends, or family members, recruitment agents, employers, landlords or even the Police or other government employees. Whenever possible and appropriate, all such contact should be delegated to SSS in order to ensure that there are no breaches of the data protection legislation, and, even more important, that information is not inadvertently passed on to those whom student may not wish to know their circumstances or whereabouts. If staff members are in any doubt about the appropriate way to proceed in response to requests for information about students from external parties, please consult the Director of Student Services **prior to taking any action**. If SSS makes the decision to pass on responsibility for the investigation to the Police, the Service will normally inform the next of kin prior to doing so, although there may be circumstances when they decide that this is not appropriate. If a student is found to have been harmed or be seriously ill, contact with relatives is normally made by the Police or hospital staff.

7. Once a student has been located, the first inclination may be to contact those who raised the alarm, and reassure them that the student is safe and well, and/or let them know of the whereabouts of the student and their circumstances. However, the University should not act on the student's behalf, but should encourage the student to respond to concerned friends and family themselves, if they are in a position to do so. An offer can of course be made to pass on messages or letters to a student on behalf of a third party, but this offer should be made with the proviso that you will do this 'should you be in contact with the student'.

It is important to be aware that some students have good reason for wishing to keep their whereabouts or circumstances confidential. Releasing information to any third party, particularly when the identity of the contact cannot be verified, may place a student in danger.

8. If and when **the student returns to UEA**, the Adviser or another suitable member of School staff should arrange a meeting with him or her to talk over the circumstances that led to his or her absence. If the absence was caused by health or emotional difficulties, it may be appropriate at this meeting to remind the student of the practical or emotional support available to them through the Student Support Service, and/or to offer advice to the student about intercalation procedures. It may also be appropriate to remind the student of the University's Regulations concerning attendance. If there has been a protracted absence and the student is a 'non-EU national', the student should be advised to speak to a member of the International Students Advisory Team in the SSS as soon as possible as they may be in breach of their visa conditions.

If the student would prefer to speak confidentially to someone outside their School, an appointment with an advisor or counsellor in the SSS can be arranged as an alternative.

Please contact the Director of Student Services if you would like further clarification of this procedure or would like advice concerning a student.

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