**University of Edinburgh**

**Guidance on Communicating with Student Emergency Contacts**

1. **Introduction:**
   1. This guidance has been developed for staff working within the University of Edinburgh when they identify concerns and risks relating to a student’s wellbeing, and they need to communicate with the student’s nominated “Emergency Contacts” (as recorded on EUCLID) to make them aware of the situation and identify whether anything more can be done to locate and/ or support the student. This may be at any point in the student’s time at the University, including when they are at the point of interrupting their studies or withdrawing. If the Emergency Contact details are not populated then the default contact information should be the student’s most recent home address.
   2. This guidance does not replace the University documents entitled “Urgent Information Request Checklist” and “Disclosing Student Information”, and should be used in conjunction with both. This guidance should also be read alongside the University guidance on (a) Tier 4 Compliance and (b) Student Engagement and Attendance Monitoring, as well as with (c) the “Helping Distressed Students” guide.
   3. Wherever possible, University staff should consult with the student prior to communicating with their Emergency Contact. The student has provided this information on the understanding that it is used without prior consent only when there is evidence of an urgent risk to their immediate health or safety.
   4. If a situation where this guidance needs to be used takes place out of normal University office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), or if within the development of a situation decisions need to be taken outwith normal office hours, then the University Security Section should be contacted so that a senior manager can be alerted.
2. **Urgent situations**

2.1 It is important to note that at any point with a student situation, if the set of circumstances is assessed as being urgent, or where there is an assessed/ perceived immediate and significant risk to the student’s health and safety/ vital interests, then immediate consideration should be given to communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact on EUCLID, and consideration given also to contacting the emergency services. This may, in some situations, involve seeking advice from senior colleagues at College or Edinburgh Global, or from the Director of Student Wellbeing, about how to contact emergency services overseas if the concerns are about a University of Edinburgh student who is overseas. For details of actions required in urgent, high-risk situations, please refer to “Note on urgent situations” at section 5 below.

1. **Process for initial contact with student**

3.1 If within a student situation there are engagement/ attendance/ behaviour concerns/ risks that have been identified by a member of staff or fellow student, and the student has not responded to initial contact attempts from the School (via email and telephone) then the School/ Deanery’s Senior Tutor (ST)/ Postgraduate Director should be contacted. The ST, or appropriate senior officer, will decide on who is best placed to request (via email, letter and phone call) a formal meeting with the student and their PT/ supervisor to discuss the concerns raised.

3.2 Staff within the School/ Deanery need to take a co-ordinated approach to ensure that multiple members of staff are not contacting the student simultaneously (with the student responding to only one, leaving the remaining staff members concerned regarding the student’s situation) and similarly, consideration needs to be given as to who should take the lead on making contact- in most cases this will be the student’s PT, supervisor or SSO, but in some cases it may be a studio tutor, for example, if it is felt this is appropriate.

3.3 The nominated staff member should make pro-active attempts to engage with the student. All available and reasonable methods of communication should be used, and staff should be mindful that many students are unlikely to respond just to an email in situations where they are isolating themselves deliberately. Methods of contacting the student should include:

* E-mail
* Telephone (call/text/WhatsApp – recommend using work mobile numbers where available rather than landlines, and an initial text is helpful as University numbers are blocked by most operators)
* Writing a letter

3.4 Consideration should be given by staff members on a case by case basis to contacting fellow students of the student about whom concerns exist. Whether it is appropriate to contact specific students, and how much information to share regarding the reason behind the contact will vary on a case by case basis (see point 3.5 below). If there is good reason to think that a particular fellow student may have relevant information (for example, if they are working on a group project with the “at risk” student or if indeed they raised the initial concerns), then they should be contacted. Again, a co-ordinated approach should be taken, and only the nominated staff member should engage with fellow students where this is considered appropriate.

3.5 In each case of contact with fellow students, only the minimum information regarding the “at risk” student that is required to obtain the relevant information should be disclosed. A documented reason for contacting specific fellow students should be kept on EUCLID by the relevant staff member (see section 6 below), and beyond enquiring about their recent contact with the “at risk” student, no details of the “at risk” student or their circumstances should be disclosed to fellow students (other than in the most serious cases where disclosing such information is considered vital). In exceptional cases, it may be appropriate to contact third parties (i.e., individuals who are not members of the University community or designated Emergency Contacts) about the “at risk” student, and in such cases the same principles as set out in sections 3.4 and 3.5 will apply.

3.6 If the student has not responded to attempts to contact them after **three** calendar days, then the appropriate staff member in the School/ Deanery (e.g. Senior Tutor, Postgraduate Director, Senior SSO, Graduate School Manager) should make rapid contact with a manager at Residence Life (if the student is in University accommodation), with the University Chaplaincy and with the Director (or one of the Assistant Directors) of both the Student Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service to identify whether the service has any information which can confirm the student’s safety or can facilitate a resolution to the situation. There should also be conversations with these services as to whether there are any known risks associated with communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact which may exacerbate the situation.

3.7 The staff member should then email the student, write to them and text (using a work mobile where available)/leave a message on their telephone, clearly stating that the University will communicate with their nominated Emergency Contact if the student does not make contact with the staff member within **one** day. If there is no Emergency Contact information on the student’s EUCLID record, then staff members should use the student’s listed home address contact details for this purpose. All messages conveyed to the student should:

1. Include specific information on whom we will contact should the student not respond.
2. Provide the student with an opportunity to nominate a third party whom the University should contact, and give the University their formal, written permission for us to liaise with their third party advocate.
3. Provide a number of different options for whom the student can contact (e.g. University Security) in case there are sensitivities for the student on making contact with other members of University staff for any reason.

Template communications are provided at Appendix 2.

3.8 University staff need to be mindful that someone may subsequently contact us on the student’s behalf (this could happen for a number of reasons). Within these situations, the member of staff should refer back to the formal University guidance noted in paragraph 1.2 above, and should also seek advice from the relevant College Office in terms of how to proceed from that point.

3.9 If the student responds to contact from the School/ Deanery, then all relevant staff members should be updated and appraised of any plans to support the student. There may be a number of outcomes from this process that might trigger a discussion with SCS/ SDS and may lead to the Support for Study route. If the student fails to respond within **24** hours, then the situation should be escalated.

1. **Final Escalation** 
   1. If the student (or their advocate) has not contacted the University within a further **24 hours** then the nominated Authoriser within the School should quickly be consulted (please refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the “Authoriser” can be - within each School there should preferably be two individuals who are identified as “Authorisers”- one academic and one within professional services), and a decision reached on whether communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact is required, based on all available information and risk factors (including risk of exacerbating the situation through communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact).

4.2 If a nominated “Authoriser” within the School is not available, then a senior member of staff within the relevant College Office should be contacted. Refer to Appendix one for College office Authorising Officers.

4.3 If authorisation for making contact is given, then the Authoriser should make a decision on who is best placed within the School to communicate with the student’s Emergency Contact, based on all available information and risk factors. The purpose of this contact will be to make the student’s Emergency Contact aware of the situation and identify whether anything more can be done to locate and/ or support the student. The nominated person should then make contact, by phone and email, and also by letter if immediate contact is not possible. The Authoriser must also ensure that the Director of Student Wellbeing is made aware of the situation.

4.4 If authorisation to communicate with the Student’s Emergency Contact is not given, the reasons for this decision should be recorded on EUCLID (please refer to paragraph 6.1 below).

4.5 Further action may also include convening an urgent case conference and/ or ensuring that the Head of Academic Affairs/ Academic Administration (or their deputy) within the College is informed of the situation.

1. **Note on urgent situations:**

5.1 Within urgent situations (as referred to in paragraph 2.1 above), before communicating with the student’s Emergency Contact in an urgent situation, the member of University staff who is leading on responding to the situation in the School/ Deanery should make *rapid* contact with a manager at Residence Life (if the student is in University accommodation), with the University Chaplaincy and with the Director (or one of the Assistant Directors) of both the Student Counselling Service and the Student Disability Service to identify whether the service has any information which can confirm the student’s safety or can facilitate a resolution to the situation.

5.2 The nominated “Authoriser” within the School/ Deanery should then quickly be consulted, as outlined in paragraph 4.1 above (please refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the “Authoriser” can be), and a decision reached on whether contacting the student’s Emergency Contact is required.

5.3 If a nominated “Authoriser” within the School/ Deanery is not available, then the guidance in paragraph 4.2 above should be followed.

5.4 The guidance described in paragraphs 4.3 to 4.5 should then be followed.

1. **Recording:**

6.1 Staff should record each decision and action using the comments and notes field on EUCLID, although highly confidential details should not be included.

**Appendix 1: Authorisers**

Each School/Deanery should ensure that at least **two** senior members of staff (recommended at least grade UE08, although agreed local arrangements may mean that this is not the case) are identified as Authorisers, one academic and one professional services. Suitable Academic Authorisers can be Head or Deputy Head of School, Director of Teaching, Head of Graduate School, Senior Tutor or Postgraduate Director

Suitable Professional Services Authorisers can be Director of Professional Services, Teaching Office Managers, Director of Student Services, Director of Student Experience or Senior Student Support Officer but it is recommended that this responsibility should only be delegated to staff at grade UE08 or above.

**College Office Authorisers**

CAHSS: Dr Lisa Kendall (Head of Academic and Student Administration) or Dr Jeremy Crang (Dean of Students)

CMVM: Ms Philippa Burrell (Head of Academic Administration) or Dr Geoff Pearson (Dean of Students)

CSE: Ms Claire Vallance (Head of Academic Affairs) or Ms Heather Tracey (Deputy Head of Academic Affairs)

**Appendix 2: Template communications**

**For paragraph 3.2**

Dear “student’s name”,

I am writing to you now because we are concerned about your wellbeing. This is because (insert brief summary of reasons for concern).

Please make contact with me within 5 calendar days, either by email or on (insert telephone number) so that we can organise a convenient time for you to some in to meet with (insert names and roles/ job titles) so that we can discuss how you are and ensure you have the right support in place.

If we do not hear from you within 5 calendar days, we will need to consider getting in touch with your emergency contacts to ensure that you are safe and well.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Job Title

**For paragraph 3.5**

Dear “student’s name”,

Having made attempts to reach you by email and telephone, we are now so concerned for your well-being at this stage that I am offering an opportunity to come forward and let us know you are ok **before we contact your emergency contacts** to make them aware that we cannot reach you. We are deeply concerned about your welfare and safety.  I stress that you are not in any trouble but please get in touch to let us know you are ok.

Your Emergency Contacts on EUCLID are as follows:

Names:

Address:

Tel:   
00xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

If we get no response from you in the next 24 hours I’m afraid we have no other option but to get in touch with your emergency contacts.  If after referring to your emergency contacts you still do not contact us we will refer the matter on to the local police to investigate.

This is now an urgent matter and I impress upon you the need for you to make contact with me as soon as possible.  I am anxious to hear from you so I can establish that you are safe, and I look forward to your reply. Alternatively, please call on (insert telephone number) and ask to speak with me.

With best wishes,

Name

Job Title

**Appendix 3: Process Flowchart (see pages 7 and 8 below)**

End

No

Yes

v

Senior officer to also consider contacting fellow students

Contact Senior Tutor or PG Director. Relevant senior officer to decide who is best placed to request formal meeting with student and their Personal Tutor

Nov

Yes

Response received within 1 calendar day?

Senior officer to contact student to state the University will communicate with their nominated Emergency Contact

Yes

Concern and risks identified in student wellbeing

Contact student. Response received from student within 3 calendar days?

No

Urgent?

Senior officer to contact Residence Life (if applicable), Chaplaincy, Directors of Counselling and Disability. Consideration also given on contacting emergency services.

Senior officer to contact Residence Life (if applicable), Counselling Service, Directors of Counselling and Disability. Consideration given on contacting emergency services.

End

All staff members to be updated and appraised of plans to support student

Nominated authoriser (s) or senior member of staff to be contacted

End

v

End

Yes

Nov

v

Nominated person to contact student’s Emergency Contact. Director of Student Wellbeing to be informed

Authorisation given?