



Absent and missing students Policy & Procedure

Purpose

The university accepts its responsibility to have due regard to the need to ensure the health, safety and welfare of students. It aims to provide a safe, secure and supportive environment in which students can study and sometimes reside. This support includes taking necessary actions, where appropriate, to address any cause for concern regarding the absence of individuals.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define how the University ascertains whether a student is missing or absent and if so, what action should be taken.
- Set out administrative responsibilities in the event of an absent or missing student;
- Ensure that the response to such an event is appropriate, timely and effective;
- Ensure that the University communicates effectively with the family and all public authorities involved in the incident
- Ensure that the University acts in a supportive way to all involved.

Definitions

The University will use the most recent definition(s) of 'absent person' and 'missing person' as proposed by the Association of Chief Police Officers of the United Kingdom (March 2015) to update their Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and following the Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons (2013). This is to ensure that decisions around 'absent' and 'missing' are soundly based around risk and the rationale for those decisions are suitably documented. The definitions below have been adopted for the purpose of this policy:

Absent – “A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk.”

Missing - “Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.”

Scope

This policy and procedure will apply only to students enrolled and studying on University of East London premises. Collaborative partners will require their own local policies and procedures.

This policy does not address the University's response to emergencies which is dealt with under the Incident Management procedures.

Roles and Responsibilities

Student responsibilities

All students should be aware that they are expected to comply with University attendance requirements outlined in the Engagement and Attendance Policy. Students whose attendance falls below 75% will be followed up routinely as outlined in the Engagement and Attendance policy.

Staff attendance monitoring responsibilities

Personal Tutors, Module Leaders and Residence staff should play an active role in monitoring the attendance and wellbeing of students allocated to their care, and should report any concerns to their line-manager and Student Support without delay. Student attendance is monitored by the Student Retention Team in Student Support and staff should liaise with the team as necessary.

Policy

The University is committed to responding to the reports of an absent or missing student in a dutiful and respectful manner. The University will be guided by the following principles when responding to such incidents:

- a. The University will act in a timely and sensitive manner to the report of an absent or missing student. It will analyse any attendance records and contact with schools, and relevant student support teams, to gather information about previous engagement and academic progression. Where appropriate, other sources of information will also be sought.
- b. Student Support will take the lead on establishing the level of risk posed to ensure that decisions around 'missing' and 'absent' are soundly based around risk.
- c. The University will seek to collaborate and cooperate with external agencies to facilitate any investigations or administrative activities related to the reporting of a missing or absent student, and seek to establish a decision on a reasonable response with them.
- d. Care will be extended to those closely involved with the student, including the family or next of kin, friends and staff members that may have raised the enquiry, as appropriate.

- e. The University will act discretely when dealing with information relating to the student and the incident and will abide by the limitations of the Data Protection Act at all times. Any public statements made for or on behalf of the University will only be released after they have been checked for accuracy and approved by the Communications Office. Any staff involved in responding to the incident will use discretion at all times.

1. Procedure for reporting and responding to a report of an absent or missing student

1.1 Initial report and investigation

Concerns about an absent or missing student may be raised in the following ways

- A student speaking to a member of the University's staff
- a member of staff reporting their concern to another member of staff, particularly to those staff members who have a designated responsibility for student support
- the student's family expressing their concern
- someone outside the University reporting their concern to a member of the University community.

The member of staff who is concerned or has received a reported concern should immediately report this at the local level within the student's academic department and the University hall of residence. The reporting member of staff should also report their concern to the Student Retention team in Student Support who will take over the initial investigation by looking at the engagement activity of the student and attempting to make contact with them. This may include emailing and telephoning the student, as well as contacting the student's friends, housemates, fellow students, reviewing social media activity etc. The Student Retention Team may liaise with colleagues as appropriate to obtain additional information that may help them with the initial investigation. At this stage, this should not include contacting parents, emergency contacts or other third parties external to the University. All investigations should be carried out discretely and without causing undue alarm.

There may be times when a family member contacts the University because they are concerned they have not heard from their relative. In most cases all that is required is for the student to be contacted and told of their relative's concern with the suggestion that they make contact with them. You should not disclose any information about the student to the relative on confidentiality grounds. However if the student cannot be contacted an initial investigation as above should be carried out and, depending on the outcome, escalation to the Director of Students Services outlined in 1.2 may be appropriate.

1.2 Escalation to Director of Student Services (or nominee)

If these initial enquiries fail to locate the student or concerns remain, the Student Retention team will escalate to the Director of Student Services (or nominee) who will coordinate the University's response to the situation. The Director of Student

Services (or nominee) will liaise with the Head of Security and make further attempts to locate the student and assess the possible level of risk involved. This may include:

- searching the student's University hall of residence room, for clues to their whereabouts e.g. Room check / enquiries with neighbours, Campus searches / CCTV, Incident reports
- examining student records to see if the student is already known to any University support services
- asking the School, Students' Union, Security, IT Services and the Library for any additional evidence of the student's whereabouts
- establishing last known contacts and whether the student evidenced any unusual patterns of behaviour

If the Director of Student Services (or nominee) considers there to be grounds for concern about the student's wellbeing s/he will use the student's emergency contact number to contact family/friends.

1.3 Report the student as a missing person

If, as a result of these enquiries, the location and wellbeing of the student cannot be confirmed, the Director of Student Services (or nominee) will then report the student as missing to the Police and other external agencies as necessary (e.g. Home Office, relevant Embassy, Consulate or High Commission), and become the main University point of contact for the Police.

The Director of Student Services will inform the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, the relevant Dean of School, Director of Legal and Governance, Director of Communications and the Academic Registrar to ensure any subsequent incoming enquiries can be dealt with appropriately.

1.4 Support the found student

Once the student has been located and their safety and general wellbeing ensured the Director of Student Services will update the members of staff listed in 1.3. The academic department will remind the student of the expectation that they will be in attendance as outlined in the Engagement and Attendance Policy. Support to help address any underlying difficulties will also be offered through signposting to relevant support services.

If a student is located deceased the Policy and Procedure for Response to Student Death will apply.