

## Death of a Current Student Procedure

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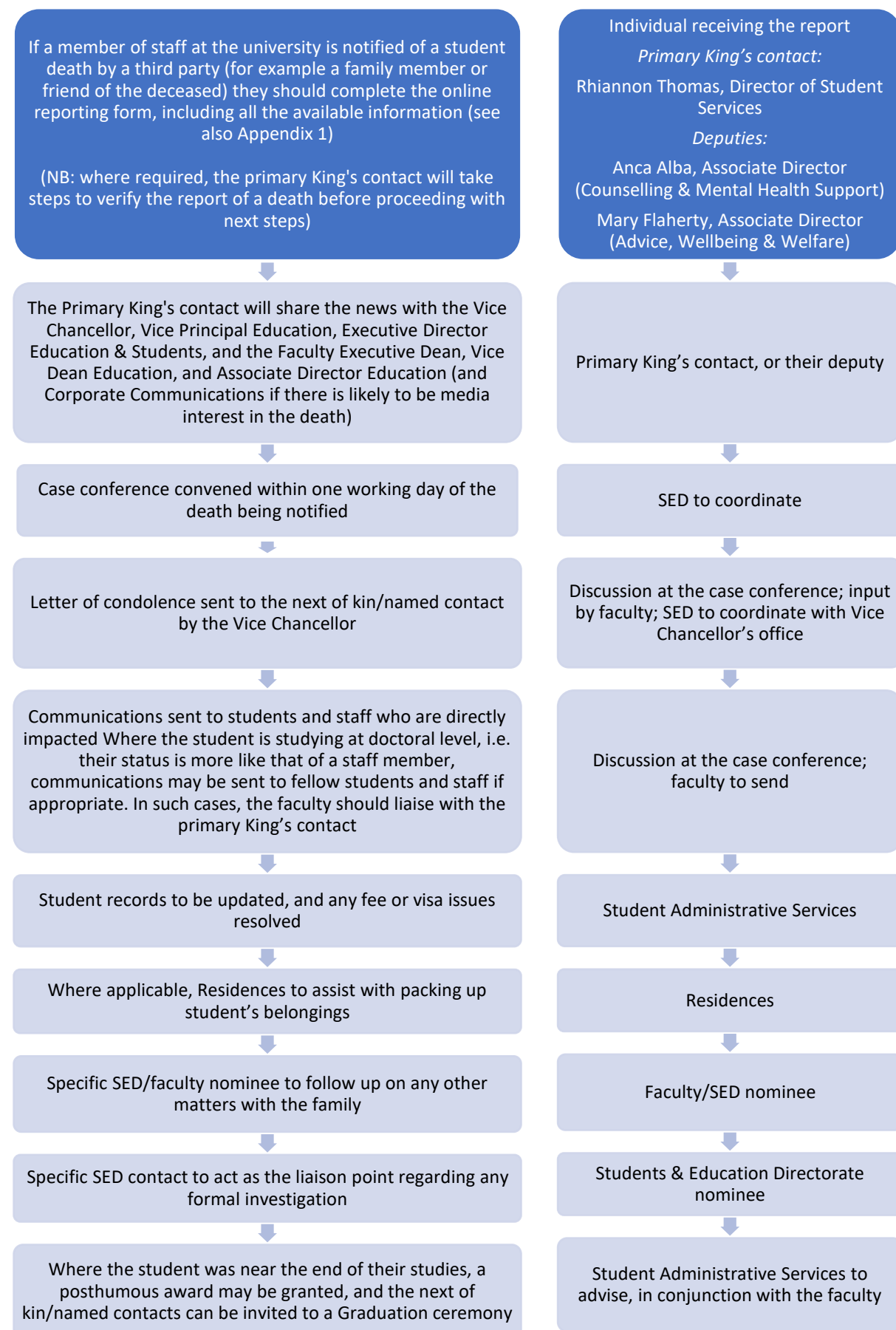
#### 1. Purpose & Scope

- 1.1 This procedure is intended to support the [policy on the death of a current student](#).
- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to:
  - coordinate a sensitive and appropriate level of response from the university, taking into consideration the needs of all those involved and affected
  - set out clear lines of responsibility
  - ensure that the responsibilities (including legal responsibilities) of the university are observed

#### 2. Summary of procedure - notification of student death by a third party

See flowchart overleaf.

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### 3. Case Conference

- 3.1 A case conference will be arranged within one working day of the incident being reported to Student Services.
- 3.2 One set of minutes will be produced, and shared with the case conference group. Any documents produced at the case conference (including any other notes taken by others attending) would potentially be disclosable in an investigation, so it is helpful to maintain a single record.
- 3.3 Those attending will include:
- Director, Student Support & Wellbeing Services (chair)
  - Head of Welfare (secretary)
  - Faculty representative(s) – Associate Director Education and academic representative (e.g. Vice Dean Education, personal tutor, programme lead, Associate Dean for Doctoral Studies (if postgraduate research))

Representatives from the following areas:

*For the whole meeting*

- Counselling & Mental Health Support
- Disability Support & Inclusion, where the student was known to that team
- Chaplaincy
- Corporate communications

*For relevant parts of the meeting*

- Student Administrative Services
- Visa Compliance (if international student)

*If relevant*

- KCLSU (if the student was significantly involved in KCLSU; information will first be sought via email)
  - Centre for the Doctoral Studies (if the student was at postgraduate research level)
  - Residences (if student lives in university residences)
  - Others deemed necessary by the Chair as appropriate
- 3.4 The case conference will inform those attending of the known facts of the case, and any actions to date. This might include social media activity, discussions within the department and faculty, and any other relevant information.
- 3.5 Should the circumstances of the death be distressing, the relevant parts of the meeting will be limited to essential participants only, to safeguard staff wellbeing. Those attending will also each be offered support following the meeting.
- 3.6 A key liaison will be identified for next of kin/trusted contact of the deceased student. That Primary King's contact point will be named in the letter of condolence sent by the Vice Chancellor's office.
- 3.7 Student Support & Wellbeing Services will provide templates – for review and personalisation – for the letter of condolence, and emails to staff and students likely to be impacted by the

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student's death. The faculty or department concerned will then tailor these as appropriate. Student Services will liaise with the Vice Chancellor's office about the formal letter; email communications will be sent by the faculty/department.

- 3.8 The case conference will determine how and when to communicate the student's death to the inner circle within King's who are likely to be most directly affected, to include:
  - a. Key Faculty/Department staff – Head of Department, Vice Dean Education, Associate Director Education, Personal Tutor, key academic staff involved in teaching the student, or in supervising the postgraduate research student
  - b. Students on same course/year
  - c. Where relevant, those with whom the student shared accommodation (whether in Residences or Private rentals)
  - d. Any student clubs / societies of which the student was a member. KCLSU to advise and provide support
- 3.9 Those at the case conference will discuss support for affected students and staff (see 3.7 and 3.8 above), including – where relevant – those whose details were recorded at the scene of the incident
- 3.10 Student Administrative Services will ensure that the student's record is updated as required, and contact other services across the university to ensure that no further communications are sent to the student's email or postal addresses.
- 3.11 Student Administrative Services will advise on the student's fee status. If any form of refund it agreed then the money will need to be returned to the account from which it was paid.
- 3.12 Where appropriate, Visa Compliance will liaise with UK Visa and Immigration.
- 3.13 If the student was close to the end of their studies, a posthumous award may be available. In such cases, the faculty should liaise directly with Student Administrative Services.
- 3.14 In the unusual event that a wider message from the President & Vice Chancellor is required, Corporate Communications will advise on protocols
- 3.15 Corporate communications will monitor any social media response, and liaise with Student Services as required
- 3.16 The case conference will also discuss funeral attendance, if King's staff have been invited; whether a memorial service at King's is appropriate (in such cases, the faculty should liaise with the Chaplaincy); and the option of making available an online memorial book (this is normally agreed between the faculty and the family).
- 3.17 If the death has occurred on King's premises, and/or in cases of suspected suicide, a representative from the university may be invited to an inquest. The Coroners' Courts would normally liaise with the [primary King's contact \(or deputy\)](#) regarding representation, and any information required from King's.
- 3.18 If the death has occurred as part of a student's programme of academic studies away from King's campuses, for example, on a placement, period of study at another academic institution or field trip, the case conference will consider any actions appropriate in regard to practical

arrangements for repatriation and/or involvement with third party investigations. (Please also refer to the [Incident Away From Campus guidance](#).)

See [Appendix 4](#) for full details of case conference and record keeping.

#### **4. Communication**

4.1 In all cases, care should be taken to ensure that the cause of death, particularly if suicide is suspected, is never presumed or stated until confirmed by the coroner. This process takes some time and will be managed by the family (see 7.11 for university involvement). Any requests for disclosures of information should be flagged to Joy Whyte, or her deputy, given the highly sensitive nature of such information.

4.2 The language “committed suicide” dates back to the time when suicide was a crime. King’s practice is to talk about ‘death by suicide’ in general terms, and ‘suspected suicide’ in any individual case.

*See [Appendix 6](#) for additional protocol for cases of suspected suicide, particularly around language used.*

4.3 All King’s communication should be managed through and with the Corporate Communications team.

4.4 The use of social media means that information may get into the public domain before family members have been properly informed of a student death. This can be extremely upsetting and damaging, regardless of well-meaning intentions. Social media will be managed as per the usual protocol through the Corporate Communications team.

4.5 All media enquiries should be directed to [comms@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:comms@kcl.ac.uk)

#### **5. Support**

5.1 It is a mistake to expect people to move too quickly; these things take time. Shock, grief, or anger and a range of strong emotions are normal responses to a death, especially if it is unexpected. Students showing these responses will not necessarily require counselling but they will need support, understanding and the opportunity to process the loss with peers and members of the university community, or family and friends.

5.2 The template email to students likely to be impacted by the death of one of their peers sets out sources of support both within and beyond King’s.

5.3 In some cases, students in out-of-university or rented accommodation may have to bear much of the responsibility for the practicalities that occur when a housemate has died. In such cases, it’s important to be aware of and responsive to the emotional impact of the death on the student’s friends and housemates. Students may have very little experience of loss, or the loss may be reminding them of another bereavement they have experienced, and it is therefore helpful to support them while they are grieving and to show a willingness to talk. The template email to students who have been impacted by a death sets out sources of support, and personal tutors may also wish to take particular care to signpost such students to that support.

- 5.4 Staff members connected to the student should also be supported, as will those who have responsibility for coordinating the university's response. Staff members can access the [Employee Assistance Programme](#), and the template email to staff likely to be impacted by the death of a student sets out the sources of support available.

## **6 Posthumous awards and graduation**

- 6.1 As noted at 3.13, if the student was close to the end of their studies, a posthumous award may be available. In such cases, the faculty should liaise directly with Student Administrative Services.
- 6.2 In the case of the death of a student who has completed sufficient credits to receive an award from King's, but who has died prior to their graduation ceremony taking place, King's can offer the following:
- For the student's degree award to be announced posthumously at the appropriate graduation ceremony
  - Should the family wish to attend the ceremony;
    - Free tickets for up to 10 family members or friends
    - A private, catered, backstage area for family members to utilise throughout the event as and when needed
    - A private photography session, with photographs provided free of charge
    - A free digital recording of the ceremony
    - Flowers for the family/friends, which could be given as part of the on-stage presentation

In these circumstances the family would usually be asked if they would like to engage in the ceremonies by the primary King's contact who is liaising with them regarding the death of the student – this tends to be a programme lead, Student Experience Manager or sometimes the Vice Chancellor's Office. The Graduation team should be contacted by the Faculty/ Vice Chancellor's Office to take forward the relevant arrangements.

## **7. Death of a former student**

Where King's is notified of the death of a former student, the faculty or department concerned may wish to write to the next of kin, and/or to express condolences in other ways, including attending a funeral or memorial service.

## **Appendix 1 – Notification of the death of a student – form and response guidance**

### *Reporting death of a student*

This online form is to be completed if receiving a call, email or another report of the death of a student:  
[Notification of the death of a current student](#)

Please complete all sections of this form and submit online.

During King's Closure periods, the Switchboard (0207 836 5454) will be able to make contact with the SED senior staff member on call, to alert them that such a form has been sent.

If the student was based in Residences, please also inform the on-call Residences duty manager (0775227286).

### **Guidance for responding to the report of a student death**

Please use the following guidance/script on receiving the news of the death of a King's student.

"Firstly, can I say that the thoughts of the university are with you and your family and friends at this tragic time."

*[pause and listen]*

"Before I go, please can I check if you feel able to provide me with some information about [name (if known) the deceased]. This will only take a few minutes."

*[Complete the following reporting death of a student form with the caller]*

*[At the end]*

"Thank you once again for calling us at what must be a very sad time for you, one of my colleagues will be in touch in the very near future."

***Appendix 2 – Summary of procedure – death on campus***

<b>Discovery of a body</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call 999 and inform campus security</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share next of kin/named contact information with emergency services (accessed via Student Records)</li><li>• Record any witness contact details for welfare follow up</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Inform SED lead</a></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thereafter, see the procedure at section 2 (above)</li></ul>

See [Appendix 3](#) for process to follow for death of student in residences

**1. Immediate response**

- 1.1 If anyone discovers an unresponsive person on KCL premises, they should first call the emergency services (phone 999) to request an ambulance. They should then notify security.
- 1.2 To report an emergency at any time, please use these emergency numbers:
  - Institute of Psychiatry, call 020 7848 0001
  - Guy's, Strand, Waterloo campuses, call 020 7848 2222
  - NHS Trust buildings, call 020 7188 3333
  - Denmark Hill West, call 020 7848 5555
- 1.3 Security will ensure the area is kept clear for the emergency services to attend. Depending on the decisions of the emergency services, the body may be removed relatively quickly on confirmation of death, however, if further investigation is required the emergency services will remain on site for a number of hours before the body is removed. It is important that throughout this period, and until the emergency services (generally involving the police) take charge, that nothing is moved or touched other than what is necessary to secure the scene of the incident.
- 1.4 The first person on the scene should contact the primary King's contact (or deputy – [see section 2 of the main procedure](#)), who will then liaise with Corporate Communications and Student Services Associate Directors, who will ensure that their relevant processes are put into action.
- 1.5 If the incident occurs in a building and other people are in the location, they should be moved as a group to another location, where a record of their names, student ID numbers and contact information<sup>1</sup> should be compiled by the primary King's contact for follow-up with welfare support, as co-ordinated at the case conference. Details should be securely stored as part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Only collect information 'necessary for the performance of a (student/staff) contract', so that suitable welfare support can be offered.

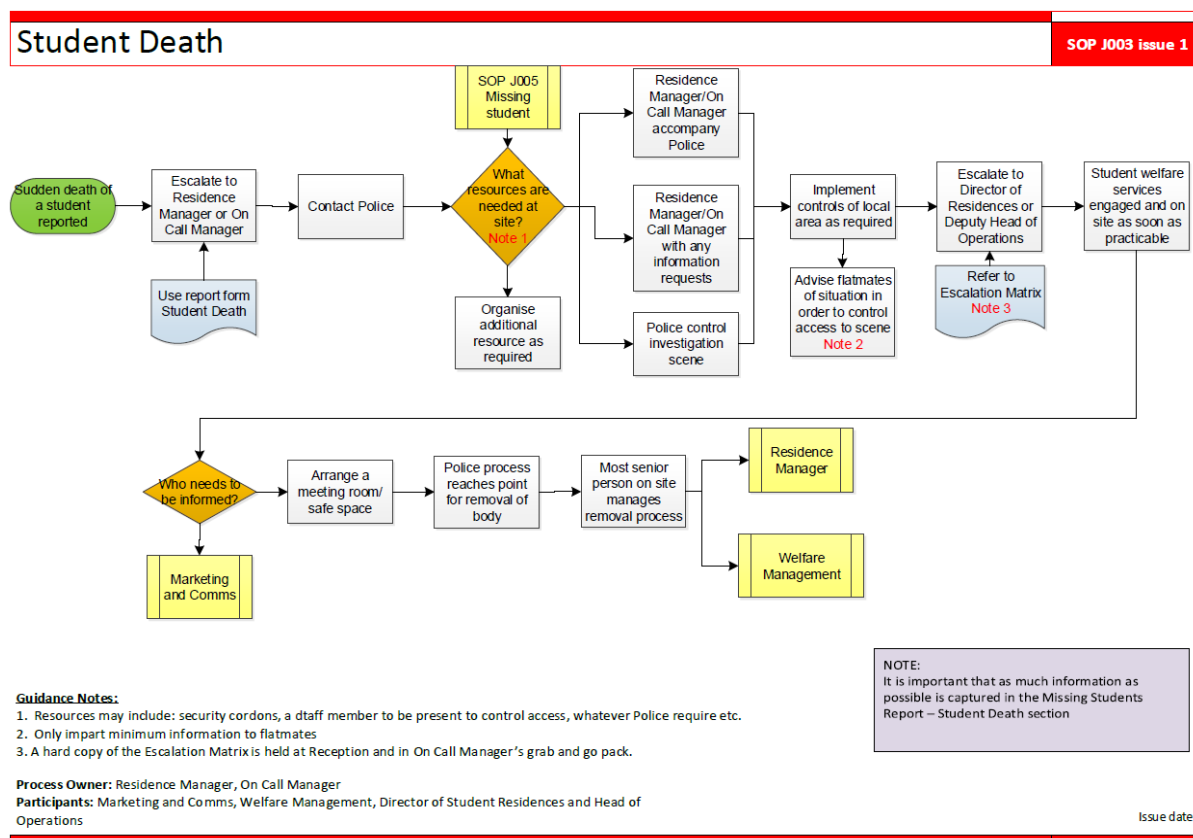
case file (see [appendix 4](#)). Once this information has been collected the witnesses will normally be free to leave, subject to confirmation by the emergency services.

- 1.6 If the police are present, they will take their own records and statements as required, and the primary King's contact should take the contact details of the police officer(s). We should not attempt to take our own statements as the police may accuse us of interfering with an investigation. The primary King's contact should maintain contact with the police and/or coroner to understand how matters are progressing and to ensure suitable retention of records.
- 1.7 The area should be secured to prevent anyone accessing it. The scene of any death should be treated as a scene of crime until the police advise it is to be treated otherwise. If the death is suspicious, it may be necessary to close off a wider area (the police would advise about this). These actions will support the police in their immediate enquiries. Security staff are familiar with these arrangements and will be able to support those on the scene in managing these arrangements.

## **2 Contacting the next-of-kin/trusted contact**

- 2.1 The appropriate next of kin/trusted contact's information may need to be made available to the police from Student Records. It is not necessary for a request to be made to Information Compliance in these circumstances (Schedule III(3) of the Data Protection Act allows the release of personal data about an individual in an emergency, e.g. for medical, accident or next-of-kin/trusted contact situations etc, in order to protect the vital interests of that individual or another individual), and any member of staff with Student Records access can provide this information. We would ideally want the Police to make such a request in writing. If it is such an urgent situation that this cannot be done, then the information can be released on a verbal request, but the staff member concerned should record the details of the Officer requesting the information, the date, and the circumstances, and also record what data was released.
- 2.2 The Police Liaison (see [Appendix 7](#) Table of Responsibilities) will check that the police (or hospital authorities) are informing the next of kin/named contact and will ascertain which persons have been informed. No attempt to contact the next of kin/named contact should be made by any member of King's until they have been informed of the death by the appropriate authorities.
- 2.3 In the event that the deceased's next of kin/trusted contact makes contact with the university before they have been informed of the death, their name and query should be taken down, with a reassurance that it will be looked into by the university, but we cannot share any information about a student with a third party without their consent.

**Appendix 3 – Process following death of student in residences<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> Any reports made directly to the Switchboard should be referred to the Residences Manager (see [Appendix 7](#) below)

#### Appendix 4 – Case Conference Record for Death of a Current Student

*This record, and related files, will be stored securely in a shared folder with ownership limited to Student Services staff. The notes of the meeting will also be shared with those attending, to enable appropriate follow up action.*

Case number (e.g. 2020-001)	
Date of case conference	
Name of deceased student	
Student Number	
Date of death	
Cause of death	
Faculty of deceased student	
Level & year of study at time of death (e.g. UG year 1)	
Home or international student?	
Case conference attendees	<b>Attending:</b>  <b>Apologies</b>
Overview of initial activity and facts know	
Confirmed next of kin/named contact liaison (name & job title)	
<b>AGREED ACTIONS</b> (Detail the action, who owns the action, the date the action has been completed and any reference e.g. to a file or other pertinent information)	
Agreed actions for letter of condolence	<b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b>

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<p>Agreed action for communication to King's students &amp; colleagues directly affected <i>(e.g. contacting course mates, faculty/department staff)</i></p>	<p><b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b></p>
<p>Agreed action for communication with person who notified university if not next of kin/named contact</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b></p>
<p>Agreed actions for Student Administrative Services <i>(e.g. updating Student Records, informing other services to update records etc)</i></p>	<p><b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b></p>
<p>Agreed actions for Visa Compliance (if applicable)</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b></p>
<p>Agreed actions for KCLSU (if applicable)</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> <b>Owner:</b> <b>Date completed:</b></p>
<p>Agreed actions related to fees <i>(e.g. if a refund of fees is required)</i></p>	<p><b>Action:</b></p> <p>Fees paid...refund possible? Yes/No (if yes, how much and name of person approving refund:</p> <p>Fees owed? Yes/No</p> <p>If yes, debt to be written off?</p> <p>If yes, how much and name of person approving write off:</p> <p>Date completed:</p>
<p>Is communication to wider university community needed? (YES / NO)</p> <p><i>If yes, please provide details of sender &amp; date</i></p>	<p><b>Yes: Details of Sender and date:</b></p> <p><b>No:</b></p>

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Memorial & funeral plans  <i>(e.g.) details of memorial at King's for student, attendance at funeral, posthumous award granted)</i>	<b>Yes: Details of coordinator for these</b>  <b>No:</b>
Posthumous award and offer of graduation ceremony	

#### **Appendix 5 – *Next-of-Kin/trusted contact liaison***

As part of the case conference an individual member of the university will be appointed as the next of kin/named contact liaison for the purposes of continuity; to reduce the number of separate contacts they have within King's and to avoid unnecessary distress and the need to repeat the same information a number of different times to different people.

The person responsible for next-of-kin/trusted contact liaison may wish to discuss with them:

- Whether university representation at the funeral would be welcome and who can/should attend.
- Whether a university Chaplain may be able to offer support and guidance regarding funeral arrangements.
- How any personal belongings of the student held within the university should be dealt with.
- Where the student's postal mail should be directed.
- Whether the family wishes to visit the university and, if so, whether they need help finding accommodation and who they would like to meet
- Whether a memorial service for the student should be held and how this should be arranged
- Whether the family of a student eligible for an award 'in memoriam' if they were close to completing a qualification would welcome such an action.
- Informing the family of any reimbursement of fees, and relaying to the family the logistics of this.
- It is often felt appropriate to organise a memorial on campus and to facilitate methods of condolences to the wide community. Options often opening a book of condolence for students and staff to sign, memorial page to put up on Faculty web pages.
- Depending on student progress it may be appropriate to grant a posthumous award – the decision on this should be led by the family.

If the student is from overseas, arrangements may also need to be made for repatriation.

One of the university Chaplains may be well placed to advise on any cultural or religious observances relevant to the student and their next of kin/named contact which should be respected or taken into consideration.

It is important to note that any contact with the next-of-kin/trusted contact should be based on the facts as they are released and not speculation. It is especially important to respect the privacy of the family or other named contact.

### **Appendix 6 – Protocol for cases of suspected suicide**

As previously outlined, there are important legal reasons and other sensitivities that mean that it is important not to speculate on the cause of death which may be particularly relevant in cases of suspected suicide. However, there are also other issues that mean additional action should be taken if it is suspected that a student has died by suicide.

In particular, support services should be aware of additional resources available via the Samaritans Step by Step service which provides [information and support to HEIs after a suspected death by suicide](#).

If a death is confirmed as a suicide, the terms and phrases used when communicating it to others are important. The Samaritans make the following recommendations regarding the language used:

*Inappropriate or careless use of language can perpetuate stigma or sensationalise a death, while careful use can help minimise distress to bereaved family members and friends.*

*Avoid labelling a death as someone having ‘committed suicide’. The word ‘commit’ in the context of suicide is factually incorrect because it is no longer illegal.*

*With this in mind, Samaritans recommends:*

<i>Phrases to use:</i>	<i>Phrases to avoid:</i>
<i>A suicide Take one’s own life Person at risk of suicide Die by/death by suicide Suicide attempt A completed suicide Suspected suicide</i>	<i>Commit suicide Cry for help A ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ Suicide victim Suicide ‘epidemic’, ‘craze’ or ‘hot spot’ Suicide-prone Suicide ‘tourist’</i>

When communicating with the university community, it is important to convey the message that people may have a range of reactions to suicide, including guilt, anger and sadness amongst others; that this is normal and, with support, they will cope. Asking for help can be a positive step towards moving on.

As the UUK report on Suicide-Safer Universities makes clear, universities should have a robust ‘postvention’ plan in cases of suspected suicide in order to provide any additional support that might be needed and to avoid ‘contagion’.

### **Suggested Dos and Don’ts for communications**

DO:

- As soon as the next of kin/named contact have been informed, if at all possible, first let close contacts know in person and ensure that a follow up is scheduled to check that they are ok (see case conference summary for further information).

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- As soon as possible after that, inform the wider cohort with basic factual information about what has happened. A decision on the appropriate cohort will be taken on a case-by-case basis but is likely to be the year group within subject.
- Establish clear lines of responsibility and communication within the university.
- Involve the student body via KCLSU in your plans and communication, explaining what you are doing (or not doing) and why, so that they can work to support your lead.

### DON'T:

- Minimise the impact by appearing to hide any information away. This is only likely to arouse anger and speculation.
- Describe a death as 'suicide' or give the cause of death until this has been confirmed by the Coroner even if this is suspected.
- Give excessive detail about the time and method of death or give information in a way that others may identify with the person who died.
- Disclose the contents of any communications left by the deceased.
- Leave the communication of the news, or the follow-up support, to the student body.

## Appendix 7 – Responsibilities

Role	Contact	Deputy	Responsibility
First point of contact (24/7)	King's Switchboard: 020 7836 5454  Or Residences Manager (if the death occurs in Residences)		Escalation within Education and Students  See Appendix below re Residences
First point of escalation (E&S)	Rhiannon Thomas, Director of Student Support & Wellbeing Services	Anca Alba, Associate Director (Counselling & Mental Health Support)	Liaise with Student Services, Comms & faculty, convene case conference
Police Liaison	Fiona Elliot, Associate Director of Facilities (Cleaning and Security Services) – initial response  Rhiannon Thomas, Director of Student Support & Wellbeing Services– ongoing liaison with the police/coroner	John Conaghan, Head of Security  Anca Alba Associate Director (Counselling & Mental Health Support)	Primary point of contact for police, point of contact for coroner etc.
Student Services	Anca Alba, Associate Director (Counselling & Mental Health Support)	<a href="#">Mary Flaherty</a> , Associate Director (Advice, Wellbeing & Welfare)	Participation in case conference
Corporate communications	Louise Owen	Izzy Coombes	Social and other media. Attend case conference
Associate Directors Education	Use <a href="mailto:adeducation@kcl.ac.uk">adeducation@kcl.ac.uk</a> mailing list (expand the list to identify the relevant individual contact)	Use <a href="mailto:SEM-Forum@kcl.ac.uk">SEM-Forum@kcl.ac.uk</a> mailing list (expand the list to identify the relevant individual contact)	Attend case conference, liaison with relevant faculty & department staff

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Security – see campus details in <a href="#">Appendix 2</a>	Fiona Elliot, Associate Director of Facilities (Cleaning and Security Services)  Campus Security Manager would attend scene of the incident within working hours	John Conaghan, Head of Security	Attend scene of incident (where applicable); Police liaison; Secure the incident location; Create incident report; Provide relevant CCTV footage if required
Chaplaincy	Dr Ellen Clark-King, Dean	Tim Ditchfield, Chaplaincy	Support for staff and students
Student Administrative Services	Kirstin Jackson, Associate Director (Student Administrative Services)		Amend Student Records to ensure that no further correspondence to the deceased student takes place. Email Library, Careers and Alumni to ensure they mark their lists accordingly. Assess current tuition liability. Liaise with Credit Control if cancellation or refund required. Assess eligibility for any award based of accrued credit.
Residences	Charles Gallagher, Director of Kings Community Business Services	Phil Cox, Associate Director – Student Residences	See <a href="#">Appendix 3</a>
KCLSU	Julia Pointon-Haas, Head of Advice and Support	Tony Logan, Director of Services	Provide information in advance of case conference, and attend if appropriate
Visa Compliance	Kirstin Jackson, Associate Director (Student Administrative Services)		Update Tier 4 status, repatriation