

(Author)

Academic Council Student Experience Committee

(Title of Item)

Procedure for Responding to Reports of Missing Students

Submitted to Academic Council 15-01-16

Action requested Approve

Background rationale

The development of this Procedure has arisen from a number of possible cases of a missing student.

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.

A previous version of this document was reviewed by Academic Board in May 2015, but queries raised at that time led to a significant reconsideration of the document over summer 2015, following which a new version was prepared and approved by the Academic Council Student Experience Committee (ACSEC) 18-11-15.

Resource implications

None

Brief description / summary of the item

The report of a student as “missing” or “potentially missing” can be a situation of real concern for the next of kin/family involved and indeed for the whole university community. University College Cork is committed to managing these situations in a sensitive and effective manner, and to do so in a timely fashion that reflects the urgency of the circumstances involved.

A draft of the Procedure was approved by Academic Board (02-12-15) subject to minor amendments (addition of UCC contact details). The final draft is now before Academic Council for approval.

University College Cork Procedure for responding to reports of Missing Students

Introduction:

The report of a student as “missing” or “potentially missing” can be a situation of real concern for the next of kin/family involved and indeed for the whole university community. University College Cork (the “**University**”) is committed to managing these situations in a sensitive and effective manner, and to do so in a timely fashion that reflects the urgency of the circumstances involved.

Purpose

The purpose of this Procedure for responding to reports of Missing Students (the “**Procedure**”) is to provide a clear and straightforward guide for the procedures to be adopted in the event that it is suspected that a student registered in the University 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.

Any official declaration that a person is a “missing person” in Ireland may only be made by members of An Garda Síochána (the “**Gardaí**”).

This Procedure may be invoked by the Head of Student Experience or nominee where:

- a) A student is not yet declared a Missing Person by the Gardaí but the absence of the student is causing concern that the welfare of the student is thought to be at risk (a situation hereinafter referred to as “**Potentially Missing**”);
- b) The student has been declared a Missing Person’s case by the Gardaí (a situation referred to as “**Formally Declared Missing**” below).

Principles

Confidentiality and Data Protection

While the sharing of private and confidential information may be necessary in the case of a missing student, recipients of such sensitive material should remain mindful of maintaining confidentiality. It is also important to be aware that some students may wish to keep their whereabouts or circumstances confidential. Accurate and factual notes regarding this process will be maintained in a confidential manner by the Head of Student Experience or his/her nominee, in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 as amended or updated from time to time (the “**DPA**”).

Duty of Care

The University has a duty of care to its staff and students. In a situation where a student is reported missing to the University, information gathered must be accurate and careful consideration must be given as to how this is conveyed to students and staff.

Communications

Any enquiries from the media or from any other external persons regarding a Potentially Missing Person or Formally Declared Missing Person will be handled by the Office of Marketing and Communications in liaison with the Head of Student Experience. The switchboard will be informed to ensure all enquiries are re-directed.

The Marketing & Communications Office will work closely with the Head of Student Experience, Head of College and Students Union to monitor communications on social media. The Head of Student Experience will consult with the Head of College or nominee to agree the means, content and student grouping(s) to whom any communication will be sent from the University. Such Communication may be sent from the Head of College, Head of School/Department/Unit or Head of Student Experience as appropriate. The President of the Students' Union may consult the Head of Student Experience to discuss communications by the Students' Union to the general student body or the wider UCC community. The feelings of next of kin and family should be considered in all communications relating to any Missing Student incident.

In the event that a student or staff member becomes aware of a potential missing student **out of hours**, he/she will make contact with General Services: 021-4903111.

PHASE 1 – Student Potentially Missing

Student Experience Office

Concerns about a potentially missing student may be raised by a student, member of staff or member of the wider community. These concerns should be communicated to the Head of Student Experience in the first instance.

Academic Department

The Head of Student Experience or nominee will inform the Head of College, who will then contact the Head of School/Department/ Unit to make him/her aware of the reported concern, if this is not already the case. The Head of School/Department/ Unit will determine, if possible:

- When the student last attended lectures, tutorials, labs;
- If assignments etc. have been handed in;
- If there are any known academic issues;

The Head of School/Department Unit or nominee will seek to contact the student using contact numbers or addresses on file

The Head of School/Department/ Unit will report back to the Head of Student Experience if contact with the student has or has not been established. If the School/Department/Unit is unable to establish contact with the student, the Head of Student Experience will convene a Missing Student Group (“MSG”).

In liaison with the Head of School/Department/ Unit, the Head of Student Experience will attempt to collate a list of known friends from the course and make contact with them if deemed appropriate.

Missing Student Group

The Head of Student Experience will convene a MSG, which may include the General Services Officer, President of SU, Head of Student Health & Wellbeing, Chaplaincy, Director of Marketing & Communications and the Head of School/Department/Unit. A representative from the International Office may also be included if there is concern for an Irish student missing overseas or if it is an international student missing in Ireland. The MSG will decide on any additional internal enquiries which need to be made. The Head of Student Experience will liaise with the UCC Community Garda. All decisions on actions to be taken external to the University will be made and documented by the Head of Student Experience.

Accommodation

If the student is resident in Campus Accommodation, the MSG will request Campus Accommodation to:

- Attempt to contact the student by phone and/or leave a note under the apartment door
- Check if the student is in their accommodation
- 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 etc.

If the student is resident off-campus in rented accommodation, then the Head of Student Experience or his/her nominee will attempt to contact the student by phone and contact any other students living at the same address and the owner of the property to find out when they last saw the student and if they were aware of any planned trips, partners, issues etc.

Offices of Academic Affairs

The MSG may request the Offices of Academic Affairs to check the status of the student on the Student Records system (registration status, course details, contact details, photo). These details may be requested in confidence from any of the following:

Student Records & Examinations Office, 021-4902405

Academic Systems Administration, 021-4902172

Admissions Office, 021-4903571

Academic Secretariat, 021-4902269

Graduate Studies Office, 021-4903076

Other University Departments

Contact will be made with other University Departments (e.g. Library, Finance, Records) who may have had recent relevant contact with the student.

Student Services

The MSG will check with Student Societies Office and Sports Office to determine if there are any club or society activities which the student may be involved with. The MSG will also check with other Student Services Departments (Student Counselling, Student Health, Chaplaincy, SU Welfare Officer, Peer Support, Disability Support Service, Mature Student Office, UCC PLUS⁺), if appropriate, to determine if there is any relevant information about the student, e.g., recent contact, information about physical or mental health or disability.

Assessing Risk/Contacting Family and/or the Gardaí

If after the above investigation, a student's whereabouts are still not known, the MSG will use the information gained to carry out a risk assessment in connection with the student's disappearance which takes into account relevant factors such as the student's normal behaviours, age etc.

The Head of Student Experience, in conjunction with the MSG, will use this risk assessment to identify an appropriate course of action. Where contact with next of kin/family members and/or the Gardaí is deemed necessary and appropriate by the MSG, this should take into account the DPA and the right to privacy of the individual student with the need to inform next of kin/family and/or Gardaí of a potentially serious situation, and should only be carried out after consulting the University Data Protection Officer or

his/her nominee.

PHASE 2 – Student Formally Declared Missing

It is envisaged that, in the vast majority of cases, a Potentially Missing Student will be contacted and located arising from the actions taken during Phase 1.

If a student is declared a Formally Declared Missing, at this point, the role of the University is to assist in Garda enquiries, to offer assistance and practical support as appropriate, and to manage the situation and communications internally within the University.

MSG

A Missing Student Group (MSG), with membership as described above, will be convened, or continued from Phase 1 as appropriate, and meetings of the MSG will be convened by the Head of Student Experience. A member of the MSG, nominated by the Head of Student Experience, will act as the University's liaison for Gardaí and the family as appropriate. It may be necessary to make arrangements for the Gardaí to access the student's apartment or to interview friends and housemates. The University will seek to offer appropriate support to any affected 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 Gardaí. The Head of Student Experience will notify relevant University personnel, including where appropriate the President, Registrar and Head of College.

International Office

Many UCC students spend some time outside Ireland as part of their programme of studies. Students also occasionally travel as individuals or as part of a group on activities or events that are not part of their programme but have been arranged by the University, or University Clubs, Societies or Students' Union. The majority of UCC students travelling outside Ireland do so as a leisure activity unrelated and unconnected to the University. The responsibility for co-ordinating and responding to a UCC student reported missing whilst outside the Republic lies with the local police and/or Irish Embassy.

The Head of Student Experience will consider convening a MSG group to agree the appropriate response to a student reported missing whilst outside Ireland. The Head of Student Experience or delegate (who may be from the International Office) shall be the UCC point of contact to liaise with the reported missing

students' next of kin, Gardaí, local police and/or Irish Embassy (as appropriate). The Head of Student Experience or nominee shall also be the point of contact for any partner institutions or placement organisations, in the event that the student is reported missing whilst on placement in a workplace or educational institute outside Ireland.

Support Services

The University will seek to ensure that its Chaplaincy and Counselling Services are available to support the students in the University who are friends, housemates or classmates of the Formally Declared Missing Student.

The Students' Union Welfare Officer, Student Counselling and the Peer Support Coordinator may consider providing a waiting and support space in the Student Common Room for concerned students and friends.

Staff who may be impacted will be made aware of the University's Employee Assistance Programme. The Chaplaincy may also provide a support to the immediate family of the student.

PHASE 3 – Conclusion and Review

When the student is located:

When the student (Potentially Missing Person or Formally Declared Missing Person) is located, the Head of Student Experience will contact all personnel who were involved during Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 to inform them of the outcome, including the person who initially raised the concern about the student. The University will continue to make support available to students and staff who may be impacted by the event.

When the student is not located:

If the student is not located (Potentially Missing Person or Formally Declared Missing Person), the MSG will meet, to discuss the matter as it deems appropriate. The University will continue to make support available to students and staff who may be impacted by the event.

Review:

The Head of Student Experience will arrange for a review meeting to be held to discuss 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 within 2 weeks of the conclusion of Phase 2. The purpose of these meetings is to review the implementation of this Procedure, and to consider any amendments which may be required. Such meetings would normally be attended by the members of the MSG and other staff who were involved in the relevant cases.

The procedure to be followed in all cases is set out below and is shown graphically in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Report of a concern about the whereabouts of a student to be communicated to the Head of Student Experience – by staff/student/personal external to University Concerns out of hours can be reported to General Services on 021-4903111

The official declaration of a student as a “missing person” may only be made by members of the Gardaí.

This protocol may be invoked where:

- a) A student is not yet declared a Missing Person by the Gardaí but the absence of the student is causing concern such that the welfare of the student is thought to be at risk (Potentially Missing)
- b) The student has been declared a Missing Person’s case by the Gardaí (Formally Declared Missing)

Phase 1 – Potentially Declared Missing

- Head of SE to contact Head of School/Department/Unit to make him/her aware of reported concern
- If Academic Unit unable to establish contact with student the MSG is convened by Head of SE
- The MSG will decide on any internal enquiries which need to be made
- Contact with the student’s family and/or the Gardaí should only be made by Head of Student Experience or nominee following risk assessment by MSG and consultation with Data Protection Officer

Phase 2 – Formal Declared Missing

- 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 as appropriate, and to support other students.
- The Head of SE or nominee will act as the liaison between the Gardaí and the University and will keep relevant University personnel updated as necessary including the President, Registrar and Head of College

Phase 3 – Conclusion and Review

- When the student is located the Head of SE will inform all involved during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the outcome. Support will be offered to students and staff who may be impacted by the event
- If is not located, (Potentially Missing or Formally Declared Missing) the MSG will meet to discuss the matter as it deems appropriate. Liaison with the student’s family will continue with ongoing support to students and staff
- Review – the Head of SE will arrange for a review meeting of all cases to review the implementation of the protocol and to consider any amendments which may be required

Reports of Concerns about a UCC Student Reported Missing whilst outside of the Republic of Ireland

- The responsibility for co-ordinating and responding to a UCC student reported missing whilst outside the Republic lies with the local police and/or Irish Embassy
- The Head of Student Experience will consider convening a MSG Group to agree the appropriate response to a student reported missing whilst outside Ireland
- The Head of Student Experience or nominee shall be the UCC point of contact to liaise with the reported missing students’ next of kin and/or the UCC point of contact to liaise with the civil/police authorities involved/partner institutions or placement organisations