

# Death of a Colleague

People Directorate – Guidance

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## Document History and Version Control

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## Introduction

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This guidance has been developed to help support managers and employees when faced with the difficult situation of a colleague dying. Whilst it might be necessary to be flexible, the University will generally take the steps outlined in this guidance.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1. This guidance applies to all University of Greenwich workers, self-employed contractors/ consultants and agency workers. It does not form part of an employees' terms and conditions of employment and the University may change it at its discretion.
- 2.2. In the event of the death of a student, staff should refer to the University's Death of a Student Policy (see <https://docs.gre.ac.uk/rep/sas/death-of-a-studentpolicy>).

### **3. Equality, Diversity and Value Statement**

- 3.1. The University values equality, diversity and inclusion and takes active steps to provide an inclusive environment for students, staff and visitors. The potential equality impact of this guidance has been assessed.
- 3.2. As an organisation and as individuals, we value inclusivity, excellence, determination, ambition and creativity. These essential shared beliefs and principles define who we are and inspire and motivate us. The University's values underpin all its employment policies, procedures and practices.

### **4. Dealing with the death of a Colleague**

#### **Notifying Appropriate Members of Staff**

- 4.1. In the event of a death of a colleague, it is important that appropriate members of staff are notified. Whilst the way in which the University is informed of a death of a colleague and the person who is informed may vary, in all cases, it is the responsibility of the Faculty or Directorate with support from the People Directorate and Internal Communications to disseminate information.
- 4.2. The person who is notified of a death of a colleague should:
  - Record the name and Faculty/Directorate of the colleague who has died
  - Record the name the person notifying the University of death, their contact details and the nature of their relationship with the colleague who has died.
- 4.3. The person who is notified of a death of a colleague should inform the following people as soon as reasonably practicable:
  - Line Manager\*
  - Pro-Vice Chancellor/Faculty Operating Officer (where the colleague worked in a Faculty) or Director (where the colleague worked in a Directorate)\*.

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- People Operations Team/Senior People Business Partner for Faculty/Directorate

*\*Where different to the person notified of the death*

- 4.4. Where a member of staff is also a student, the Head of Student Wellbeing Assistant Director Student Services (Student Services) or the Director of Student Services should be contacted to discuss how students are informed.
- 4.5. The Pro-Vice Chancellor/Director is responsible for informing the Vice Chancellor.
- 4.6. When the University is advised or it is suspected that a colleague has died by suicided, the guidance set out in Appendix A should be followed.

#### **Offering Condolences**

- 4.7. Once the appropriate staff have been notified of the death of colleague (see 4.3), the University should contact the deceased's family/next of kin to offer condolences, confirm the date of death and ascertain the wishes of the family/next of kin regarding how relevant staff are informed about the employee's death. It will normally be appropriate for the Line Manager to communicate with the deceased's family/next of kin to ascertain their wishes.
- 4.8. The Line Manager may want to seek advice and support from their Pro-Vice Chancellor/Faculty Operating Officer/Executive Director of People before and/or after they contact the employee's

family/next of kin. Support is also available through the University [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

- 4.9. The Pro-Vice Chancellor/Faculty Operating Officer/Director will also send a letter of condolence to the family/next of kin. If required, the relevant Employee Relations and Change Manager can provide support in doing this.

**Contractual, Pay and Pension Matters**

- 4.10. The Line Manager should inform the relevant Employee Relations and Change Manager of a death of a colleague.
- 4.11. The People Operations Team will ensure all contractual, pay and pension matters are handled appropriately and will send written confirmation of final payments to the employee's family/next of kin. The People Operations Team will liaise with the Line Manager to confirm whether there is any untaken annual leave, overtime and/or additional payments which are due to be paid. The People Operations Team will also ensure that People records are updated – this will trigger the termination of the deceased colleague's access to systems and buildings. Where ongoing access to the colleague's email is required, the Line Manager should inform the People Operations Team so appropriate arrangements can be put in place with IT and Library Service (ILS).

### **Informing Colleagues**

- 4.12. The Pro-Vice Chancellor/Faculty Operating Officer/Director with advice from the People Directorate and Internal Communications should decide how best to notify colleagues, work contacts and students (where appropriate) taking into consideration the family's/next of kin's wishes or instructions. Where possible, the news should be communicated to those colleagues closest to the deceased (for example, those in the same department or team) first and where possible, should be done so in private.
- 4.13. The release of information on the death of the employee is discretionary and the University should not give out any information that is sensitive or contrary to the wishes or instructions of the family/next of kin.

### **External Communications**

- 4.14. Subject to appropriate sensitivity and agreement with family/next of kin, the University may acknowledge the contribution/role/similar of a colleague on its communications channels.

### **Time off and funeral arrangements**

- 4.15. The family's/next of kin's wishes regarding funeral arrangements should be sought and respected. If a private service is taking place, the Faculty/Directorate might consider organising appropriate tribute (e.g. flowers, donation to charity) which colleagues can contribute to. If the family/next of kin is happy for colleagues to attend, managers will need to consider how best to release staff to attend.

### **Other matters**

- 4.16. The Line Manager should ask the deceased's family/next of kin whether they wish to pack up their personal belongings or would prefer a work colleague to do so instead.

## **5. Death whilst on University Business**

- 5.1. On discovering the death of a colleague on campus, the person discovering the death should:
- Call an ambulance and the police using the emergency number "999".
  - Liaise with Security staff to ensure that security know they need to direct the ambulance and the police to the correct location.
- 5.2. Where the death occurred on campus, in a non-residential location, Security will also contact the appropriate Campus Facilities Manager who will contact the Emergency response Group lead, the Pro-Vice Chancellor/Faculty Operating Office/Director. A decision will then be made on the procedures to be followed.
- 5.3. The University has a legal duty to report workplace deaths (including where an employee is working off-site at the time) to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The Associate Director of Health & Safety Services will report a death in the workplace to the HSE where necessary.
- 5.4. The deceased's family/next of kin must not be contacted until the police have confirmed that it is appropriate to do so. The police should be notified of their point of contact which will normally be the Line Manager.

- 5.5. If the death was the result of an accident at work, the University Secretariat will liaise with the University's insurers as appropriate regarding potential claims.

## 6. Covering the deceased employee's duties

- 6.1. The University acknowledges that the immediate aftermath of the death of the colleague may be difficult for staff. However, it may be necessary for the University to act quickly to cover the deceased's duties. Line Managers should follow the normal recruitment procedures. Depending on the circumstances, the University may need to exercise flexibility with regard to the recruitment approval process – Line Managers should contact People Operations Team for Faculty/Directorate for more advice.

## 7. Additional Support

- 7.1. The death of a colleague may be difficult and distressing for staff. The University will be proactive in providing support to staff.

### Employee Assistance Programme

- 7.2. Confidential and independent counselling is available for staff and family members through the University's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The counselling service is called Confidential Care and is provided to the University through CiC.
- 7.3. The Advice Line is available 24/7, 365 days, with up to six counselling sessions available provided by trained and accredited counsellors. More information on how to access the counselling service is available on the staff portal <https://www.gre.ac.uk/hr/occupational-health-and-wellbeing>.

### Support via other External Organisations

- 7.4. Support, advice and information is also available from a range of external organisations:
- Cruse Bereavement Care - <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>.
  - NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/copingwith-bereavement/>
  - Support Line - <https://www.supportline.org.uk/problems/bereavement/>

## 8. Further Advice

- 8.1. For further advice, please contact your Employee Relations and Change Manager.

## Appendix A – Guidance where a colleague has, or it is thought to have died by Suicide

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A death by suicide can have wide reaching effects. When the University is advised or it is suspected that a colleague has died by suicided there are therefore some additional considerations that colleagues need to be aware of.

Information on who to contact in the first instance remains as at paragraph 4.3 of this guidance. Any communications concerning the death of a colleague where a colleague has, or it is thought that they have died by suicide must be formally agreed as set out below.

It may be some time before an official cause of death is registered and the University may never be advised of the outcome of any decision made by a doctor, coroner's report or inquest, therefore we need to be mindful of this when we are considering how best we communicate and advise.

Where it is established that a colleague has died by suicide the University will use the terms died by suicide and taken their own life, we will not use the term committed suicide as this implies that a crime has been committed, which is not the case.

### **Postvention**

Postvention is a response to a suicide by providing support and assistance for those affected. Effective support and assistance can also be critical in reducing the risk of further suicides from happening.

In order to ensure that a consistent and managed approach is taken a postvention team will be established and will normally be led by the Pro-Vice Chancellor/Director with support from the People Directorate. The team lead will also contact the University Secretary or their nominee to see if the Emergency Response Procedures need to be put in place.

The post intervention team lead will ensure that:

- Bereaved persons are contacted, and that support is offered
- Affected students and staff are offered support
- Opportunity to remember the deceased is provided in consultation with those that have been affected and will coordinate appropriate university forums for doing so

### **Communications**

Any communications must be formally agreed first. To do this, the Pro ViceChancellor/Director must contact the Director of Communications and Recruitment or their respective nominee. This will enable us to provide information to the different groups who may have been affected consistently, swiftly and appropriately including how to access support using established pathways and enable us to manage any external communications and enquiries.