

Serious Incident Case Review Guidance

Document Title	Serious Incident Case Review Guidance
Policy Lead	Senior Tutors' Committee
Administrative Lead	Head of Student Support
Date of Implementation	
Approving Body/Bodies	<i>Committee Name(s) & paper/minute reference.</i>
Responsibility for Implementation	Colleges can adopt or adapt as needed. Given the wide variety of factors that might surround a serious incident, the College's management and response to each instance will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
Date of Last Review	
Date of Next Review	<i>August 2024</i>
Current Version Number	2.4

Contents

Cambridge context.....	2
Underlying review principles	2
What is a serious incident in this context and where does the University Silver Team fit in this process?	2
When should a review take place?	3
How should a serious incident case review be convened and who should convene it?.....	3
Who should information about the review be shared with?	4
In the case of attempted suicide or serious self-harm	4
Review process	5
Stage 1: Initial incident	5
Stage 2: Information gathering	5
Stage 3: Incident overview.....	5
Stage 4: Reflection of whole incident and identification of learning and action points	6
Stage 5: Reporting.....	6
Appendix 1 Serious incident background information form	7
Appendix 2 Serious incident reflective feedback form.....	10
Appendix 3 Serious incident final report: structure	11

Cambridge context

The Colleges aim to work in close partnership with the University to provide the very best pastoral and welfare support to our students and the Collegiate University is constantly seeking ways to maintain and improve our students' experience at Cambridge.

However, given that upwards of 18,000 students study at Cambridge during any given academic year, it is unfortunately inevitable there will be times where a serious incident involving a student or students will occur. Such incidents are often unexpected and can have a profound impact on the student's College community.

There are already well established processes within the University's emergency management team (the Silver Team) and at local level within Colleges for dealing with serious incidents as they arise, allowing those with responsibility to take action quickly. This protocol does not seek to impose any changes to existing arrangements or procedures already in place to allow efficient and appropriate responses to adverse events.

However, bearing in mind the significant impact a serious event involving a student can have on the College community, how the College responds will also be important. Whilst often extremely challenging, with every serious incident there is also an opportunity for those involved to reflect, consider decisions and actions that were made before, during and after the incident and, where it is deemed necessary, implement changes and improvements to processes and arrangements to influence the way the College (and if appropriate the University) responds to a similar, future serious incident or, ideally, to prevent a future recurrence of the incident. There may also be opportunities to share best practice and lessons identified with the other Colleges and the University to enable others to benefit from the experience and insights that have been gleaned following a serious incident.

This protocol therefore recommends that Colleges be encouraged after a serious incident to convene all relevant parties involved to discuss the case with the aim of determining what happened, how it happened, why it happened and whether there are learning points for the College, wider institution or other external agencies. The review might consider whether any issues occurred which contributed to an incident and/or the aftermath and whether/how these issues might be managed or avoided in the future.

Underlying review principles

The review process should not be used to identify fault or blame. Every effort should be made to support those involved and encourage a culture of honest reflection, identification of relevant learning points and of positive and tangible actions that directly reduce the risk of a recurrence. Each review should therefore:

- be conducted with due candour
- Ideally, include the student(s) involved or their family
- be completed as soon after the incident as practical
- be objective and focused on identifying positive actions
- be focused on addressing specific questions raised by those impacted by the incident
- be proportionate in its scale

What is a serious incident in this context and where does the University Silver Team fit in this process?

A serious incident in this context is an event that could have caused (a near miss) or did cause

serious or lasting harm to a student or group of students.

The University has emergency management policies and plans to ensure it can respond effectively to any incident that has the potential to:

- present a risk to students, employees, residents, visitors or members of the local community
- create an environmental hazard
- disrupt academic business continuity and integrity
- result in enforcement action or litigation against the University
- damage the reputation of the University

In short, any **major** or **widespread** incident, in most cases, would invoke the University Silver Team.

Serious incidents, which invoke the University Silver Team, would **not** fall under the remit of this proposal. Given the legal and reputational risks at stake in major incidents, those responsible for Emergency and Continuity Planning on behalf of the University would conduct post-incident reviews, liaising with the institutions involved as appropriate.

There are however serious incidents that occur, which are no less significant, but for which the impact is felt at a more **local** level, rather than institutionally and therefore are best managed locally. It is for these incidents that the protocol is intended.

It is impossible to provide a definitive list of events that might be reviewed under this process, however they may include at a College-level:

- the death of a student
- a serious incident of self-harm, where there appears to have been clear intent to attempt suicide
- other incidents of serious harm being caused to a student or groups of students through unnatural means
- serious harm caused to others by a student at the university
- a serious safeguarding issue eg, a child or young person aged under 18 reports abuse

When should a review take place?

UUK guidance recommends that once the initial incident has been resolved or the situation is stable, a wider process of information gathering should begin, using the template at Appendix 1. It is recommended that the information gathering process is commenced within 2 weeks following the incident.¹

Any report and associated documents may be disclosable to the court in the event of legal or coroners proceedings. However, conducting a review demonstrates that proactive steps have been taken to prevent future incidents.

How should a serious incident case review be convened and who should convene it?

It is recommended that the Senior Tutor of the College, as the person with ultimate responsibility for student pastoral affairs, should have discretion in deciding whether and when a case review would be appropriate in line with the above considerations.

It should be led by a senior member of staff who has not had close prior involvement with the student(s) concerned. There may be merit in appointing a neutral and experienced person, who has

¹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Reports/postvention-carrying-out-a-serious-incident-review.pdf>

not been involved in the case (the Head of House or Senior Tutor of another College) to take the Role of Lead Reviewer (Stage 4).

Who should information about the review be shared with?

Outputs from the review should protect the identity of the people involved, including students, family and friends. Colleges should produce an anonymous version of the review which can be shared with the Joint Wellbeing Committee.

In the case of attempted suicide or serious self-harm

Colleges should consult the near miss guidance, for guidance on supporting individual students and staff.

Colleges are also asked to report these incidents to the University Student Support Department using a [secure online form](#). This is to inform a fuller picture of such incidents across the collegiate university.

Wherever possible, consent should be sought from the student to share information with the University Student Support Department. This would enable a joint decision making process with the Mental Health Advice Service (MHAS) regarding any current risks and future actions regarding individual students. MHAS involvement at this stage would allow individual support planning for students and tailored responses to individual Colleges.

In cases when this is not possible, for example when the student does not consent to the sharing of information, the form enables submission of anonymised information.

All data collection will be in line with data protection legislation and confidentiality policies.

Review process

Stage 1: Initial incident

The priority must be responding to the specific incident and supporting those involved either directly or indirectly. However, the Lead Reviewer should be confirmed as soon as possible after the incident has occurred, so that they can be apprised of what appears to have happened and start the process of collecting relevant information.

Stage 2: Information gathering

Once the initial incident has been resolved or the situation is stable, a wider process of information gathering should begin, using the template at Appendix 1. This stage should normally be commenced within two weeks of the incident or as soon as possible thereafter.

The University will seek to share requested information with the College, and will seek the student's consent to do so where relevant.

In cases such as the sudden death of a student, external agencies will require some of this information within a matter of days. GDPR only applies to living individuals, so the University will be able to share information more freely in such cases.

Information may be gathered from a range of different sources including, but not limited to:

- staff who dealt with the initial incident
- College and University staff who may have been providing support to the student either recently or in the past
- academic and administrative colleagues in the relevant faculty or department
- fellow students
- immediate family and other relatives
- staff in partner organisations (e.g. NHS services)

In addition, the Lead Reviewer will seek initial reflective feedback from relevant individuals using the template at Appendix 2.

Stage 3: Incident overview

Having collated information, the Lead Reviewer will produce a chronology of events, which summarises relevant context and interactions between the student and others prior to, during and after the incident. In the case of the death of a student by suspected suicide, this should be a long form document that sets out in detail all aspects of the student's time at the university.

To produce these summaries, it may be necessary to seek information from additional people by email or interview. In the spirit of the principles underlying this procedure, any interview will be informal in nature. The Lead Reviewer will also collate reflections submitted by those asked to input into the case on any learnings that can be drawn.

Stage 4: Reflection of whole incident and identification of learning and action points

On completion of the chronology the Lead Reviewer will convene a small review group (normally of up to five people) who will review all relevant documentation and will meet to:

1. Consider whether there remain any outstanding questions or gaps in knowledge relating to the incident that should be filled through a further process of clarification or investigation.
2. Having filled any knowledge gaps, to confirm that the chronology adequately addresses, what happened, to whom, when and where.
3. Identify, through review of the reflections gathered from others and through their own experience, learnings that can be drawn from the incident.
4. What actions should be taken to put in place improvements for the future, which are aimed at minimizing the chance of a recurrence or a similar incident involving another student.
5. Ensure that the resulting action has clear owners and time scales for delivery attached to each action. It is the responsibility of the Lead Reviewer to determine the membership of the review group based on the nature of the incident. It will usually be comprised of College staff, but consideration should be given where relevant to how to receive input from others (eg university staff, other students, friends and relatives and staff in other organisations).

Stage 5: Reporting

The Lead Reviewer will be responsible for completing a Serious incident review: final report (Appendix 3) and for ensuring that an anonymised summary of outcomes is also reported to the Joint Wellbeing Committee.

Appendix 1 Serious incident background information form

Name(s) of student(s)

Date of birth

Gender

Course

Faculty or Department

Mode of study

Level of study

Year of entry

Year of study

Fee status (eg home/international)

Status (eg active/on intermission/withdrawn)

Home address

Term-time address

Disability declaration

Date, time and location(s) of the incident

Type of incident

Summary of the incident

Was the student's emergency contact or another 3rd party contacted prior to or after the incident?

If yes, then summarise these interactions.

Staff directly involved in responding to the incident

Students directly involved in responding to the incident

Name and contact details for any outside agencies involved in responding to the incident

Any other 3rd parties involved in the incidents (including contact details)

Names of any staff or students who may require ongoing welfare support as a result of the incident:

Details of any communications issued:

Details of any media and social media coverage:

For the College:

What contact did the individual/s have with your welfare and support services within the College?

What contact did the individual/s have with their Tutor?

What contact did the individual/s have with their Director of Studies?

Please produce a timeline of interactions in chronological order, noting in particular any concerns that had been raised about the student and the action taken as a consequence:

Please provide a summary of this student's attendance:

Please provide a summary of any applications for mitigating circumstances, noting whether these were successful and the mitigation applied:

Please provide a summary of this student's academic performance:

Note: The student's application form and any declarations made at registration should be collated. Where a death by suicide is suspected, review of emails and any other information relating to the student will be required.

For central University services:

What contact did the individual/s have with services/teams within the University?

- University Counselling Service
- Mental Health Advice Service
- Harassment and Violence Support Service
- Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre
- Student Wellbeing Service
- Office for Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals
- Other

Produce a timeline of interactions in chronological order, noting in particular any concerns that had been raised about the student and the action taken as a consequence.

For the student's faculty or department:

What contact did the individual/s have with departmental administrators?

What contact did the individual/s have with their postgraduate supervisor or academics in the department?

Please produce a timeline of interactions in chronological order, noting in particular any concerns that had been raised about the student and the action taken as a consequence:

Please provide a summary of this student's attendance:

Please provide a summary of any applications for mitigating circumstances, noting whether these were successful and the mitigation applied:

Please provide a summary of this student's academic performance.

Note: Where a death by suicide is suspected, a full disclosure of emails and any other information relating to the student will be required

Appendix 2 Serious incident reflective feedback form

The Lead Reviewer shall determine who will be asked to complete a reflective feedback form, but as a guiding principle they should be as inclusive as possible and by default any member of university or college staff who has provided direct support to the student, where that is deemed relevant to the incident itself, will be asked for their reflections. The Lead Reviewer will also offer the opportunity for a confidential 1:1 discussion with each individual, in lieu of or in addition to completing this form.

Please highlight any areas of good practice related to the support provided to this student during their time at university:

Please highlight any specific staff or other individuals who have positively and proactively supported student:

When considering your own interactions with this student, do you have any reflections about:

- ways in which you positively contributed to the student's time at university:
- anything you may with the benefit of hindsight have chosen to do differently:
- information that was not known to you, which may have influenced your actions/decisions had this not been the case:
- any concerns, no matter how directly related, that you had prior to the incident

Considering what you know about this student, the background to the incident and the incident are there any lessons that you believe can be learned from this case?

In order for these lessons to be learned, are there specific actions that you believe should be taken as a result of this incident in order to reduce the risk of a recurrence or of a similar incident?

Please include any further information you would wish to highlight related to this incident:

Appendix 3 Serious incident final report: structure

- student name
- student ID number
- date of review
- name of lead incident reviewer
- summary of chronology of events
- outcome of the incident (including details of any injuries)
- remaining knowledge gaps
- identify areas of good practice and positive support provided to the student by specific staff or other individuals
- lessons identified from review of this incident
- agreed actions to reduce the risk of a recurrence or of a similar incident (must have clear owner and delivery date)
- any additional communication required (eg with other teams within the college or university who may be required to take action as a result of this incident).

The College should also produce an anonymous version and share it with the Joint Wellbeing Committee (JWC). The JWC will collate an annual, anonymised report on serious incidents across the collegiate university and share it in order to help prevent future incidents.