

HANDLING CALLS AND EMAILS FROM PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILIES OF STUDENTS

The University regularly receives enquiries about students from parents and other family members. Whilst we understand that families want to support students and may from time to time have concerns about their wellbeing or their academic progress, we are not able to provide personal data in response to all these enquiries.

Some of the main reasons why we should not share the personal data of students without their consent are:

- Some students are estranged from their families or have other difficult personal circumstances and might be at risk if we revealed their whereabouts or other information.
- The University occasionally receives calls from bogus or malicious callers, and we need to ensure the safety of all students.
- The University's contract is with the student (regardless of who pays their fees or their personal circumstances) and our systems are set up to deal with the students themselves rather than parents.
- In most circumstances, a member of staff disclosing personal information without the student's consent would be breaking the law (UK General Data Protection Regulation) and would be in breach of the University's Information Governance Policy and the Student Privacy Notice.

To balance student safety and legal requirements it is important to remember:

- When a call or email is received asking for information about a student, staff should not provide any personal information (including confirming that someone is a student) unless the student has consented to their personal data being discussed with the individual making the request. If you are not certain that consent has been provided do not provide any information about the student.
- When a parent calls to talk about a student we have two data subjects to consider – we should not let the student know that the parent has contacted the University unless the parent has specifically stated we may do so.
- We can discuss the University's processes and procedures in a general way e.g., we can discuss academic regulations, explain support services available, assist them to find information on the website etc.
- The University's [Notice to Parents](#) is available on the external website. It may be helpful to direct the caller to this link if they want to understand more about why the University cannot discuss a student's circumstances.

This information sheet has been developed to help University staff, both academic and professional services, to effectively manage conversations with parents, carers and other family members or friends. Each conversation will be different therefore the suggested wording on the following pages is intended to act as a guide rather than an exact script.

Links to escalation processes for student welfare and safeguarding concerns are provided in Appendix A. Staff are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these.

If you have any questions about data protection, please contact dpo@shu.ac.uk

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Possible general responses				
<p>I understand that you want to talk this through as a matter of urgency however I want to make sure that I am the right person to deal with your concern/enquiry. I don't want to waste your time if I need to direct you to another team who will be better able to help. Could you tell me your main [concern/complaint/request] so that I can make sure that I am the right person to help you?</p> <p>Until we have checked our records and established what information we can share, we can't [usually] confirm whether someone is a student. Please understand that I may talk about the University's processes for helping students in a quite a non-personal way.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>I have been talking about the University's processes in quite a non-personal way – until we check our records and established what we can share we are [usually] unable to confirm whether someone is a student / discuss an individual student</p> <p>When discussing general information try to use phrases such as 'if this person was a student', 'this is what we would normally do if a student'</p> <p>If appropriate, direct the caller to the information note for parents and family members: Notice to parents</p>				
Report of potential missing student	Welfare concern	Family wanting to make and manage a complaint on behalf of a student	Request for information about the student	Possible additional questions from the caller
<p>I'm sorry to hear that you are worried. We take this kind of report very seriously.</p> <p>If you can tell us the name of the person you are concerned about, we will try to contact them if they are a student and, as appropriate, offer any additional support that they might need.</p> <p>We will not be able to provide you with any information – this includes whether the individual is a student at the University.</p> <p>We won't be able to call you back with information unless they give their consent for us to do so. However, we can encourage them to get in touch with their family to reassure them that they are safe. This would involve us telling them that you have called. Would you be happy for us to do that?</p> <p>If we are unable to locate a student and have concerns for their wellbeing, we might call the person that they nominated as their emergency contact when they enrolled at the University and may report them as a missing person to the police.</p>	<p>I'm sorry to hear that you are concerned about your family member.</p> <p>We can't usually discuss an individual student without their consent. This extends to confirming whether they are a student here or not.</p> <p>I can take details of the concern that you want to raise and will be able to explain how we follow up on such concerns.</p> <p>When a concern is raised, we always try to contact the student and offer any additional support that they might need. It is quite possible that they are already receiving support from one of our wellbeing services or the Students' Union, but we would check to see if there is any other support the University can provide.</p> <p>When we contact a student, we would normally say that a concern has been raised and that we are following up on that concern. We may tell the student who has contacted us - would you be happy for us to disclose that you have raised a concern?</p>	<p>I'm sorry to hear that there is an issue, and you want to make a complaint.</p> <p>The University expects students to engage with us themselves to make a complaint or deal with an issue. We understand that families want to provide support, but our contract is with the student and so we would expect to deal directly with them. The exception would be if this was a reasonable adjustment for a student with a disability.</p> <p>If a student would like to make a complaint or raise an issue (e.g., with their accommodation), they should contact [appropriate contact to be provided to caller by staff member]</p> <p>If the student would like your support whilst making a complaint, they could copy you into any emails and confirm in that email it is OK for us to include you in communications relating to this situation/complaint. This will not extend to discussing other aspects of their education/welfare with you – we would require verbal or written consent to discuss other issues.</p>	<p>We can't usually discuss an individual student without their consent. This extends to confirming whether they are a student here or not.</p> <p>I can provide you with general information about our processes, but not in relation to a specific case.</p>	<p>Why can't you call me back and confirm that the student is ok?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult for us to verify the identity of a caller or enquirer and we do get bogus and malicious calls sometimes. Some students are estranged from their families and don't want us to talk to their families Some students would be at risk of harm if we confirmed that they were a student here or provided information. Students are adults, our contract is with the student, we have data protection obligations to them. <p>How does a student give consent for the University to disclose information to their family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A student can give us verbal or written consent to discuss matters with a family member. We prefer written consent wherever possible. If the student wishes to give consent, we can provide them with a form to complete– they will need to return this in person or by email from their student email account. [The consent form can be returned to the student's SSA, or as appropriate,

	<p>If they would like us to talk to you, they will need to give their consent. If possible, this should be written consent and either returned by the student in person or by email from their student account. [The consent form can be returned to the student's SSA, or as appropriate, directly to the staff member taking the call].</p> <p>Please remember that they may change their mind and withdraw consent at any time.</p> <p>Student Data Sharing Consent Form (also attached in Appendix B.)</p>	<p>Students can also contact the Students' Union for support.</p>		<p>directly to the staff member taking the call].</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We would normally limit this to a named individual and a particular type of information (e.g., a specific complaint, a financial matter, their disability, a course issue) because consent should be specific. The student can also specify a time limit to the consent e.g., until a specific situation is resolved, until the end of the year/their course. A student can withdraw consent at any time. Student Data Sharing Consent Form (also attached in Appendix B) <p>For individuals who may be trying to contact a student (or member of staff) directly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you can tell us the name of the person, we can advise them that you wish to make contact and pass on your name and contact details. We will not be able to confirm to you whether they are a student / staff member We will not be able to confirm to you that we have spoken to them and/or have passed on your details.
<p>IF CALLER REPORTING A SUSPECTED MISSING PERSON OR A WELFARE CONCERN SUGGESTS THAT THE STUDENT IS AT IMMEDIATE RISK/SUICIDAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you saying that you think they are at immediate risk of harm? Are you aware of something that has happened that makes you think they are at immediate risk of harm? We will take note of your concerns and if the person is a student we will follow up as a matter of urgency, however, if you believe that someone is a missing person or that there is an immediate risk to life, we advise that you contact the police. The University will always assist the police with their enquiries. 				
<p>Data Protection lawful basis for processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vital interests if there is an immediate risk, but this usually applies to disclosures to emergency services, OR Consent of student; OR Legitimate Interests – usually if there is a safeguarding issue that does not reach criteria for vital interests – seek advice from Information Governance Team (dpo@shu.ac.uk). 	<p>Data Protection lawful basis for processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vital interests if there is an immediate risk, but this usually applies to disclosures to emergency services, OR Consent of student; OR Legitimate Interests – usually if there is a safeguarding issue that does not reach criteria for vital interests - seek advice from Information Governance Team (dpo@shu.ac.uk). 	<p>Data Protection lawful basis for processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consent of student 	<p>Data Protection lawful basis for processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consent of student 	

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APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ESCALATING STUDENT WELFARE CONCERNS

- [Referral to Student Support or Employability Adviser](#)
- [Sheffield Hallam at Risk Pathway](#)
- [Supporting Students in Distress Guide](#)
- [Student Support Triangle](#)
- [Missing Student Process](#)
- [Procedure for responding to a student death](#)
- [Procedure for dealing with communicable diseases](#)

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APPENDIX B: STUDENT PERSONAL DATA SHARING CONSENT FORM

I,[INSERT FULL NAME]
consent to Sheffield Hallam University sharing **all personal data** relating to me which is held by the University
with
.....[INSERT NAME OF PERSON OR ORGANISATION].

OR

I,[INSERT FULL NAME]
consent to Sheffield Hallam University sharing **the following personal data** relating to me which is held by the University
[INSERT DESCRIPTION OF PERSONAL DATA, e.g. academic information, medical and health information, information about my appeal/complaint/disciplinary case, fees and debt]
.....
.....
with
.....[INSERT NAME OF PERSON OR ORGANISATION].

This data sharing may continue

<input type="checkbox"/>	for the duration of my course
<input type="checkbox"/>	until[INSERT DATE]
<input type="checkbox"/>	until[SPECIFY TIME, e.g. until my complaint is resolved]
<input type="checkbox"/>	only for[SPECIFY PURPOSE/SCENARIO/TIME LIMIT/OCCASION]

please tick ONE box

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time by contacting [SHU STAFF TO INSERT CONTACT NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS AND POSTAL ADDRESS BEFORE ISSUING TO STUDENT].

Signature.....

Date.....