
Procedures for Responding to a Sudden Death of a staff member or student

Policy Group

1 Purpose

To provide clear guidance to staff on the procedures to be followed in the event of a sudden death of a Victoria University of Wellington (the “University”) staff member or student, either on or off campus.

2 Organisational Scope

This procedure is University wide and applies to all staff.

Note: The response for sudden deaths within Halls of Residence is a component of the Critical Incident preparedness that each Hall undertakes. These are subject to the respective contractual arrangements in place for the management of each Hall.

3 Immediate Response Definitions

Campus Services Incident Management Team	This team coordinates the response to an emergency event. The team includes security and caretaking.
Crisis Manager	The Vice-Chancellor, or his appointee, as described in the Crisis Management Framework.
Crisis Management Team	The team responsible for managing the key risks to the University, supporting the response phase and overseeing and ensuring the responsibilities for the recovery phase.
EAP Services	The external provider who is contracted to provide expert counselling services for the University’s staff and students.
Incident Controller	Responsible for coordinating the emergency response and leading the Incident Management Team
Staff Support Team	The Staff Support Team is responsible for providing emotional support to staff and students following any traumatic incident including sudden death.

Incident Management Team	Responsible for coordinating emergency response on campus, including incidents where a sudden death occurs
Sudden Death	<p>An unexplained death.</p> <p>This may be as a result of natural causes, an accident, suicide or deliberate act by a second party.</p> <p>A sudden death on campus will be a level 4 or 5 emergency as described in the Crisis Management Framework.</p> <p>The level of emergency of an off campus death will depend upon the individual circumstances.</p>

4 Response Priorities

These priorities apply in the case of a sudden death of a staff member or student on or off campus.

4.1 Any death on campus is a matter for the Police. The Police must be contacted immediately.

4.2 The scene (including the body) must be preserved for the Police investigation. To preserve the scene, contact Campus Security as soon as possible. They will attend and secure the scene until the Police arrive.

Note: Where a death arises from a workplace accident, the Department of Labour will also investigate.

4.3 Should there be any on-going risk of harm or danger, the Campus Services Incident Management Team will provide an emergency response until the Police arrive.

4.4 The Crisis Management Team will be responsible for the recovery phase and managing the key risks to the University. They will also provide the appropriate support to the Campus Services Incident Management Team during the response phase.

4.5 The University is committed to providing the best possible support for affected staff and students. Campus Security will notify the appropriate persons within the University in the first instance to initiate the right support processes.

4.6 Should the deceased person not be a staff member or student of the University, the recovery process may be varied. However, the principle outlined in clause 4.7 still applies.

4.7 The University is committed to providing a sensitive process for facilitating a recovery from a sudden death. This may include the following:

- (a) Post incident support and de-brief with any affected persons;
- (b) Meetings with affected family members;

- (c) Management of media;
- (d) A communication plan for informing members of the University community and responding to enquiries. *Note: Police are responsible for informing next of kin.*
- (e) Logistical support for the Police, if required;
- (f) Consideration of a formal acknowledgment of the death, through funeral or another service;
- (g) Liaising with the Department of Labour where required.

5 Response and Notification

5.1 Immediate Response

- (a) Call Emergency Services – dial 111.
- (b) Call Campus Security (tel. 8888 or 463-9999). Campus Security will follow the appropriate emergency response procedure and call tree.
- (c) Once the Police are on site, they take over responsibility for managing the immediate response and the ensuing investigation phase. This may also include a Department of Labour responsibility.
- (d) Where the death is of a member of staff or a student, the Campus Services Incident Management Team will continue to coordinate the University's own response. This will include:
 - (i) Informing the Vice Chancellor (and/or Crisis Manager) where the death has occurred on campus.
 - (ii) Ensuring that Managers are notified and that the right level of support for staff is put in place. This may include asking the Staff Support Team to provide a coordinated response, including guidance and support for affected staff and students.
 - (iii) Informing the Student Interest and Dispute Resolution Adviser and the Manager Student Academic Services (Counselling) who is responsible for coordinating support for students affected by traumatic incidents. This may include providing guidance and support to staff working with affected students. If the student is a Hall resident, the Manager of Accommodation Services should be informed where.
 - (iv) Advising key staff – refer 5.2 - and facilitating the first stage of recovery.

5.2 Notification

The Crisis Manager will ensure that the following staff is advised of the death as soon as possible:

- Vice Chancellor
- Chief Operating Officer
- DVC Academic (for students)
- PVC International (for international students)
- Director Campus Services
- Director Student Academic Services (for students)
- Director Communications and Marketing

- Director Human Resources (for staff)

6 Recovery

6.1 Recovery Processes

The recovery process will be managed by the Crisis Manager who is responsible for:

- Reviewing the current status of the incident, as briefed by the Incident Controller;
- Establishing a clear leader/issue owner;
- Supporting response needs, as requested by the Incident Controller;
- Coordinating communications (includes internal and external advisories and bulletins, media releases);
- Ensuring reputation, communications and stakeholder management;
- Overseeing the transfer of responsibility for the recovery phase of the incident and ensuring the allocation of any resources, physical or human, which are required;
- Ensuring that the appropriate level of ongoing care, counselling and medical support is provided;
- Considering public and any family implications in relation to the incident;
- Addressing any legal, accountability or compliance issues in relation to the incident; and
- Enabling and contributing to a review process and determining any subsequent change in policy, procedures or physical structures.

The following is a guideline for those supporting the recovery phase.

6.2 Immediate Recovery Phase

- The Emergency Incident Controller will establish who has been immediately impacted by the death, and advise the following persons who will put in place the appropriate support processes:
 - The relevant Manager and the Deputy Director Human Resources¹ for staff deaths; and/or
 - The Student Interest and Dispute Resolution Adviser and the Manager Student Academic Services (Counselling) for student deaths.
- The nature of the support provided will depend on the circumstances of the death. It could include support staff attending meetings, lectures, halls of residences etc., for the purpose of sharing information and carrying out debriefings. Groups of affected students/friends of the deceased may also be invited to attend any debrief/support meetings run by the Student Counselling Service.
- In the immediate aftermath of any death, care should be taken to ensure that affected staff and students are identified and offered support. This may include contacting and offering support to any persons finding the deceased, or witnessing any distressing event.
- Affected staff should also be advised about the ongoing counselling support they can receive from [EAP Services](#).

¹ The Deputy Director Human Resources is responsible for facilitating Staff Support.

6.3 Meeting with parents/family members

Parents/family members may need to collect personal items from the University. In the case of an international student where this may not be possible, Wellington International may assume this responsibility. Parents/family members may also wish to meet with colleagues and friends. It is important that a plan for offering the appropriate level of support is developed. This may include providing accommodation, organising meetings and ensuring privacy when packing up a room.

6.4 Media Management and Communications

- a) Any media inquiries must be referred to the University's Communications Manager.
- b) The Communications Manager will prepare a communications plan and will liaise with the Police and/or Department of Labour as required.²
- c) This may include communications internally to staff and students, and responding to parents of other students.
- d) This will include drafting the formal letter of condolence on behalf of the university.

6.5 Funeral Service/Memorial Service

Depending on the circumstances of the death, a formal and community based acknowledgment might be considered, for example a memorial service conducted by the university's chaplains, or a ritual cleansing/blessing ceremony to be performed by the Office of the PVC Māori.

In some cases, it may be necessary to contact an appropriate person from another cultural, religious, community or specific group. If the student or staff member is not from Wellington, the funeral or tangi will probably be held elsewhere.

6.6 Anniversary

The anniversary of a death can be a particularly traumatic period for any affected students and staff. The Staff Support Team has a 'bring up' system to flag anniversary dates and provide any support, if needed.

6.7 University Administrative Procedures

In the event of a student's death, Student Records and the appropriate Faculty Administration Manager and Manager Enrolment Services should also be advised, so that the student's record can be updated and their school and faculty advised.

In the event of a death of a member of staff, Managers are responsible for ensuring that the correct notifications are completed in a timely manner to Human Resources.

6.8 Documentation

In addition to the usual information held by Student Records, which should be readily available (name, emergency contact name and contact details, degree, courses, and ID number) further details about a student may be available from Student Health and Counselling. In the case of

² Care should be taken to consider the legal aspects of any incident – refer clause 6.1.(i).

international students, Wellington International holds information on medical, travel, insurance, immigration and student's country of origin and whether an external agency needs to be informed.

7 Responding to a sudden death of staff or student not on campus

The type of response will depend upon the following:

- a) The ways in which the University may become aware of the death of a student or staff member;
- b) Whether the death was a student, or a staff member;
- c) The nature of the death; i.e. Accident, suicide, natural causes, multiple deaths, criminal action;
- d) Where the death occurred.

The first person who is advised of the death must:

- (i) ensure that the advice is verified (normally by either the Police or the next of kin);
- (ii) Where a member of staff has died, inform the staff person's Manager and the Deputy Director Human Resources.

Either one of these staff will then assess the impact on the University and consider who must be informed. This is likely to include the Manager Student Academic Services (Counselling); Employment Relations Manager; Director, Communications and Marketing; or

- (iii) Where a student has died, inform the Student Interest and Dispute Resolution Adviser and the Manager Student Academic Services (Counselling) through DVC Academic/Director Student Academic Services.

Either one of these staff will then assess the impact on the University and consider who must be informed. Where it is evident that the impact to the University meets the threshold for a level 4 or 5 emergency, the Crisis Manager will be responsible for the recovery phase. In all other cases, the appropriate manager should refer to the recovery phase outlined in clauses 6.2 through to 6.8.

Note: For guidance about the thresholds it may be necessary to discuss the matter with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

8 References

This procedure forms part of the suite of plans and procedures that are referred to in the University's [Business Continuity Management Policy](#):

9 Approval Agency

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

10 Contact Person

The following persons may be approached on a routine basis in relation to this procedure:

Associate Director, Campus Operations
Extn: 6713

Student Interest and Dispute Resolution Advisor

Extn: 5023