

Missing Person Guidance and Flowchart (for missing students)

1. Introduction

This Guidance is intended as a model of good practice across the collegiate University to inform current practice. 'Missing Person' is here defined as a student who has disappeared and where there are concerns for their welfare.

Students may, on occasion, be absent from their studies or academic community. In most cases this will be for short periods, and for a specific reason. This guidance is for cases where students go missing for more extended periods, or where there are specific concerns for a student's safety or wellbeing. It is intended for use by both Departments and Colleges.

This procedure is not for use in an emergency. If you have concerns that a student is at imminent risk of serious harm, you should contact the emergency services.¹ There are additional considerations for students who are under-18, and these cases should be raised to the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services (director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk).

2. Expectations

Colleges are often best placed to respond to missing students. This Guidance may also be useful for Departments or Faculties where a graduate student has no college or has little contact with their college. Colleges and Departments will need to work closely together to ensure that all routes to contacting a missing student are explored before referring to the Police.

3. Key considerations

3.1 Sources of information

We may learn that a student is missing from a range of parties: tutors, supervisors, Departmental administrators; College staff; family and friends; or external agencies such as the Police or NHS. Sometimes a student misses a planned meeting, class or examination and then does not respond to attempts to follow up.

3.2 Patterns of attendance

Courses of study have different patterns of attendance, and it may be normal for students to have little contact with their supervisor for days/weeks at a time. It is important to think about the specific context of the student's course in order to determine whether their attendance patterns have changed, and to assess if this is out of character.

3.3 Risk factors

In some cases there are particular risk factors which mean it would be appropriate to escalate concerns about a student sooner. These may include but are not limited to:

- Known physical or mental health needs (these must be specific)
- Student on overseas fieldwork (see [separate guidance](#))
- Concerns raised externally by family
- More than one party reporting concerns
- Students on a Tier 4 visa who have missed 'contact points'

¹ E.g. if a student leaves a suicide note, or if they are heard threatening to harm themselves, or if they are missing without vital medication.

High risk, such as those related to significant harm to self or others, should indicate a more rapid escalation through the process stages. It may be appropriate to seek a view on risk from the College GP or the College nurse.

3.4 Reasonable period

One of the most challenging aspects of responding to a missing person is understanding how long to wait. The Police do not have a minimum waiting period for reporting a missing person, but will prioritise their response according to the level of risk. If you have received information that a student is at imminent risk of harm (from themselves or others), then you should contact the emergency services immediately.

Otherwise, where the concerns are general e.g. 'I haven't heard from X for a while' or 'X has missed some appointments this week':

- Is it term-time or the vacation, and what are the student's obligations in either case? Students often go on holiday or do not check e-mails in the vacation (and at weekends).
- Does the student have multiple tutors/supervisors, and have they told one (but not all) about plans to be absent?
- Does the Department operate an annual leave booking system?
- If a student has missed an appointment, have you followed up with them?
- For a UG in term-time studying within the College environment, 48 hours of no response is a reasonable starting point (if this is out of character).
- For PGTs in term-time similarly, 48 hours of no response is reasonable.
- For PGRs, patterns of study and attendance will vary widely across subjects. In a busy lab environment a student's uncharacteristic absence for 24 hours may be sufficient to raise concerns. Where students work in libraries, at home, or other study spaces it will be harder to measure absence.

Where a student lives in their college, or attends it regularly, it may be possible to establish when a person was last present using card or fob records. Sometimes students will avoid their Department or academic obligations but may still be 'seen' in the dining hall or other social spaces.

Where there are risk factors (see 3.3) you may need to use a shorter timeframe or escalate your concerns sooner.

3.5 Contact with family

Concerns for a student's wellbeing may be raised by family members. In such cases the [Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare](#) should be followed when communicating with family members.

4. Process

Reasonable steps should be taken at each stage to contact the missing student. It may be appropriate to begin this process at Stage 2 if there are known risk factors.

Stage 1 – Raising Concerns

If a student misses scheduled meetings, teaching or examinations, you can follow up with them to establish whether there are any problems or welfare concerns. If you expect to see the student daily and they are absent without explanation, this may be sufficient for you to raise concerns. If you generally see the student less frequently, you will need to consider whether their absence is unexpected or out of character. Colleges should consider checking in with the College nurse or the Porters.

If the concern is more general e.g. no replies to communications for some time, and this is out of character, try to contact them using the Personal Email Address and Phone Numbers on eVision.

If there is still no response, you should contact the Department (if you are the College) or *vice versa*.

It is very important to establish contact with either the College or Department at an early stage, as the other party may have vital information about the student's whereabouts or wellbeing.

If after following these steps and a reasonable period (see 3.4) has elapsed with no response from the student under Stage 1, move to Stage 2.

If concerns are raised by friends and family that a student is missing, or there are specific concerns about safety and welfare, it will probably be appropriate to move straight to Stage 2.

Stage 2 - Initial investigation

This stage is appropriate as an escalation after Stage 1, after an unexpected student absence of more than 48 hours, or where specific concerns are raised about the safety and welfare of the student. At Stage 2 further action should be undertaken by the College Welfare Team or Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with each other.

This may include:

- Speak to known friends (in College or Dept) or members of research group to establish most recent contact.
- Urgent follow up with the student (by telephone ideally) leaving the message that there are concerns about their safety and welfare, asking the student to get in touch within a specific time frame.
- It is sometimes appropriate to warn the student that you are considering contacting their Emergency Contact or the Police due to a lack of response.
- Speaking to the College nurse to understand if there are additional risk factors
- The College might be able to check recent use of facilities e.g. library or dining hall.
- If the student is living in College accommodation, the College Welfare Team might be able to visit their room.
- Attempts to contact the student should be made at regular intervals and using the various methods available, except for the Emergency Contact.

If no contact has been made with the student after another 48 hours, then move to Stage 3. If the risk is considered higher, then an escalation to Stage 3 should be taken sooner.

Whilst in contact with friends or colleagues you may learn new information which suggests an increased level of risk. Make sure this information is specific and attributable (i.e. not rumours or assumptions) as you may need to pass it to the Police.

Stage 3 – Case Conference/Police

Escalate your concerns to the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS) (director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk, 280444) together with an information trail detailing last known contact points with the College and Department, details of attempts to contact, and any other relevant information, to include:

1. Details on the last contact we had with the student
2. Is the absence out of character?
3. Any known and specific health conditions (known to either College or Dept)
4. Relevant academic information e.g. missed examinations, or recent poor performance

5. Any concerns for the student's state of mind: messages on social media, concerning conversations with friends
6. Any known and specific links to specialist services e.g. NHS Adult Mental Health Team, or Social Services
7. A recent photograph of the student

the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services (or a deputy) will convene a case conference to assess risk and agree a plan of action. The group can include relevant parties from the College, Department, Welfare, Security Services, and the College GP or nurse if appropriate.

The case conference group will agree next steps including whether to use the Emergency contact information on eVision, and which external agencies to involve (Police, NHS or Social Services).² Normally the student's Emergency Contact would be notified if we intend to report a student as formally missing to the Police.

If the case conference agrees to notify the Police, they may ask for [specific personal information](#).

Return to study

When a missing student is found, the College Welfare Team or Director of Graduate Studies should ensure that the student is aware that their absence triggered serious concerns, and signpost them to relevant support services.

Document Control Information

Policy / Procedure title:	Missing Person Guidance (for missing students)
Date approved:	3 Nov 2020
Approving body:	Student Wellbeing Sub-Committee
Version:	1.0 (3 Nov 2020)
Supersedes:	
Previous review dates:	
Next Review Date:	2022-23
Related regulations:	N/A
Equality relevance outcome:	N/A
Related policies:	Mental Health policy
Related procedures:	
Related guidance / codes of practice:	Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare
Policy owner:	Director of Student Welfare & Support Services

Any suggestions for amendments to these Guidelines should be submitted to the policy owner.

² A staff member in the college or department should have access to the Emergency Contact on eVision (UG and PG).

Missing Persons Flowchart (Students)



Imminent risk of harm - **contact 999** immediately.

If student is **under 18** – escalate to Safeguarding Lead in College and/or contact Director of Student Welfare and Support Services immediately (director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk, (2)80444).

Stage 1

Raise concerns with College Welfare Lead and/or DGS who should:

- Attempt to contact student by alternative email or personal telephone number (on eVision).
- Make contact with the Department (if you are the College) or *vice versa*.
- Consider level of risk.

After a reasonable period has elapsed without response (and situation is low risk) move to Stage 2



Stage 2

College Welfare Lead and/or DGS:

- Contact student by personal telephone number requesting response.
- Speak to known friends in college, department, and research group.
- Check use of facilities in college or department, e.g. card/fob records.
- College could check student room if living in.

After 48 hours without response, move to stage 3



Stage 3

Escalate concerns to the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS) (director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk, (2)80444). Provide an information trail detailing last known contact points details of attempts to contact, and any other information:

1. Details on the last contact with the student
2. Is the absence out of character?
3. Any known and specific health conditions (known to either College or Dept)
4. Relevant academic information e.g. missed examinations, or recent poor performance
5. Any concerns for the student's state of mind: messages on social media, concerning conversations with friends
6. Any known and specific links to specialist services e.g. NHS Adult Mental Health Team, or Social Services
7. A recent photograph of the student

Contact made

Once contact has been established, the College Welfare Lead and/or DGS should invite the student to a return to study meeting to outline concerns and signpost to relevant services.