

Missing Student Procedure

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Documents replaced:			

Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

1. Purpose

1.1 This procedure outlines the steps the university will take when a student is reported or believed to be missing. Its purpose is to ensure a swift, co-ordinated, and sensitive response that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of the student.

2. Scope

2.1 This procedure applies to all enroled students of SOAS, University of London including undergraduate, postgraduate, part-time, international, and online learners, regardless of their mode or place of study.

2.2 It should be noted that it is very difficult to safeguard international students in their country of origin however the university will take all reasonable steps to do so. Where the student is studying abroad, we will work with the hosting institution.

3. Definition

3.1 A student may be considered missing if:

- They have not attended scheduled teaching sessions, submitted assessments, or engaged with university communications for an unexplained period, and
- Reasonable attempts to contact them have failed, and/or
- There are concerns for their welfare raised by staff, students, or friends/family members.

3.2 Immediate action should be taken if there are serious welfare or safeguarding concerns (e.g. mental health crisis, risk of harm, or recent distressing events). Action could include contacting a mental health crisis team, the next of kin or potentially dialling 999.

4. Procedure

Stage 1: Initial concern

- Any staff member (for example, an Academic Advisor) or student who believes a student may be missing should notify the Student Advice and Wellbeing Service or the Head of Department immediately.
- Record the reason for concern, last known contact, and any relevant personal, health or academic information.
- The Student Advice and Wellbeing Service will review the student's record, including attendance, communications, and engagement data.

Stage 2: Attempted contact

Within **1 working day** of a concern being raised:

- The Student Advice and Wellbeing Service will attempt to contact the student via all available means (email, phone, university messaging platforms, social media and, if appropriate, the emergency contact).
- If the student lives in student accommodation, the student accommodation team will work with the accommodation provider and their procedures to conduct a welfare check.
- If the student lives off campus, the Student Advice and Wellbeing Service may contact known housemates, landlords, or placement providers (where appropriate, lawful and in line with data protection procedures).
- Verification will be carried out to establish whether IT systems and the student's ID card have been accessed or utilised. This process will involve reviewing location data from SOAS sign-ins, along with other relevant information that may offer a forensic record.

Stage 3: Escalation

If no contact is established and concerns remain:

- The Head of Advice and Wellbeing will review the case and determine whether to escalate.

- If there is immediate concern for safety, the university will contact the Metropolitan Police (via 999).
- If the concern is serious but not urgent, the university will report the student as a missing person to the local police (via 101) providing relevant details.
- The university will notify the student's next of kin or emergency contact, unless there is reason not to (e.g. safeguarding or confidentiality issues).
- If the case is escalated, the Head of Advice & Wellbeing will notify the Director of Student Support, Wellbeing and Careers; the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Finance and Operations); the Director of Marketing, Student Recruitment and Communications and/or the Head of Communications about the case.

Stage 4: Co-ordination and record keeping

- The Student Advice and Wellbeing Service will act as the central co-ordination point for all communications.
- All actions taken must be recorded securely in chronological order with dates/times and in accordance with GDPR and university data protection policy.
- The university will co-operate with the police and other agencies during any investigation.

Stage 5: Student located

When the student is located, the Student Advice and Wellbeing Service will:

- Confirm the student's safety and wellbeing.
- Offer wellbeing/counselling support.
- Review any contributing factors to the disappearance (e.g. academic stress, mental health, housing) and agree on an appropriate support plan.
- If the student is deceased, the university will follow its *Procedure for Responding to the Death of a Student*.

5. Confidentiality and data protection

5.1 All actions must comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. Information will only be shared on a “need-to-know” basis to protect the student’s welfare or as required by law.