

FOI: Statistics of number of parents / nominated persons contacted by university regarding student mental wellbeing

Received: 16th March 2021 from Gillian Green

Details of FOI and our response:

Dear Brasenose College, Oxford,

Following a spate of sudden student deaths in 2018, an 'opt-in scheme' was pioneered by the University of Bristol as part of a set of measures aimed at preventing suicide. In 2019, a coroner wrote to the Department for Education and Minister for Suicide Prevention suggesting that these measures might be shared throughout the sector. I am now seeking to establish the extent to which 'opt-in' has been subsequently adopted and/or utilised.

The 'opt-in' or 'consent at registration' scheme implemented by Bristol University comprises an additional personal information sharing agreement that supplements when information might be shared. It gains consent at annual registration for the university to contact a 'safe and nominated' parent, guardian or friend in situations that are not emergencies, but where staff have serious concerns that something bad might happen to an enrolled student, and/or where their health, wellbeing or welfare could be affected. Essentially it involves lowering the bar at which parents or nominated others could be contacted by a designated professional at the university, from 'vital interests' to 'serious or significant concerns'. It could for example apply in cases of trauma or distress associated with suspension / expulsion / non-attendance / mental health issues etc.

To qualify as 'opt-in' a scheme must be optional and additional to the regular emergency contact protocol. The latter is compulsory and typically restricted to serious incidents and/or emergency situations, that may present an imminent threat to a student's vital interests. Further particulars can be found at:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/contacting-people/parent/>

<https://thetab.com/uk/2018/09/20/these-are-the-unis-with-policies-to-tell-parents-if-students-are-suicidal-81552>

<https://thetab.com/uk/bristol/2019/10/31/93-of-new-bristol-students-opt-in-to-mental-health-scheme-37916>

This important scheme has been implemented at a number of universities, and perhaps at your institution as well. If so, please provide me with the following information as absolute numbers and percentages.

For each academic period (2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21) and year-of-study (e.g. 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year) sub-division:

- How many students opted-in at registration?
- How many students subsequently rescinded their consent?

The Bursar's Office

- How many times was the opt-in consent used to contact somebody?
- How many times was use of the opt-in consent considered, but with you deliberately choosing not to contact a parent or nominated individual?

Our Response:

We do not operate such a scheme as the College environment gives the student more detailed welfare options than might be present at other universities. We take details of next of kin (as would be the norm) and use them only under specific circumstances as the students are, usually, legal adults. As a result, the answers to the specific questions are “not applicable”

Philip Parker
Bursar – Brasenose College
18.5.2021