



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Gillian Green
request-735113-727f7020@whatdotheyknow.com

22 March 2021

**Freedom of Information,
Queen Margaret University,
EH21 6UU**

Email: foi@qmu.ac.uk

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

REF: FOI 21-57

Dear Gillian

In response to your request for information received by the University on Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 13:00, please find the University's response on the following pages.

Best wishes,

Queen Margaret University FOI

Your right to seek a review of how your information request was managed

If you are not satisfied with the University's response and/or our reasoning, you have the right to request a review of our decision. The time lines in which this right is available are set out in section 20(5)(a) and (b) FOISA. In broad terms the right to seek a review must be exercised within 40 working days of receiving this response.

Any request for review should be put in writing or some other permanent form and sent to the University, for example by email to foi@qmu.ac.uk.

A request for a Review should:

- a) state your name and address;
- b) describe the nature of your original request; and
- c) explain the reasons why you are dissatisfied with our response.

If you remain dissatisfied with how your request for information has been dealt with following Review, you also have the right to apply to the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) for a decision. In the event of an appeal to the SIC, the Commissioner will generally only be able to investigate the matters raised in the request for review. Details on how to appeal to the Scottish Information Commissioner is available on their website: www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal

REQUEST

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?
- 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?

RESPONSE

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:

1. How many students opted-in at registration?

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Opted in	N/A	3553	5484
Opted out	N/A	70	146
Did not indicate	N/A	1657	-

The question was added to the annual matriculation process part way through the 2019/20 academic year. There were instances where students had matriculated prior to being asked the question so no data was collected. However, students were given the opportunity to opt-in or opt-out as part of a separate task that could be completed at any time.

For 2020/21, the question was present in the annual matriculation process from the start of the academic year and all matriculated students responded to the question. The opportunity to opt-in or opt-out is still present as an additional task that students can use to change their status at any time.

Please note that the above figures exclude all overseas collaborative provision. The University does not hold the information requested by year group and does not hold relative percentages (although this can be worked out from the figures provided above). Notice is given that Section 17 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 applies.

2. How many students subsequently rescinded their consent?

The University does not hold the information you have asked for, and notice is given that Section 17 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 applies. By way of explanation, the University records its students' current preference only, and is unable to report on historical changes.

3. How many times was the opt-in consent used to contact somebody?

Once.

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

Zero.