

Our ref: F21/059

25<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Gillian Green

**Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002**

Your request for information has been considered and our response is below.

You provided the following information:

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.

You requested the following information:

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?

**AY2018-19 17,978 - 98%**

**AY2019-20 17,803 - 98%**

**AY2021-21 17,809 (as at 15/03/2021) - 98%**

- How many students subsequently rescinded their consent?

**This information is exempt under Section 17 of the Act: Information not held.**

**The University does not hold a central record of how many students rescinded their consent, therefore we are unable to answer this question.**

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

**This information is exempt under Section 17 of the Act: Information not held.**

**The University does not hold a central record of when the opt-in to contact someone has been used, therefore we are unable to answer this question.**

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

**This information is exempt under Section 17 of the Act: Information not held.**

**The University does not hold a central record of when the opt-in consent was considered but then not used, therefore we are unable to answer this question.**

If you are not satisfied with the handling of your enquiry you have a right to review under the Act as laid out in the notices below.

Yours sincerely

**Freedom of Information Office  
University of the West of Scotland**

## Notices

### **1. Right of Review**

In the event that you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request for information, you may require us to review our actions and decisions relating to your request ('Review Request').

Your Review Request must be made to us in writing or in other durable form, stating your name and address for correspondence, specifying the request for information to which your Review Request relates and the matters that have given rise to your dissatisfaction.

It must be provided to us within 40 working days (which phrase excludes Saturdays, Sundays, Christmas Day and Scottish Bank Holidays) after the expiry of the period within which we were obliged under the Act to respond to your request for information.

You may withdraw your Review Request by notice to us in writing at any time.

Assuming your Review Request is not withdrawn, we are required to conduct our review and respond to you ('Review Response') within 20 working days (which phrase excludes Saturdays, Sundays, Christmas Day and Scottish Bank Holidays) after the date on which we received your Review Request. The request for review should be addressed to:

Emma Cuckow, University Solicitor, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley Campus, Paisley, PA1 2BE Email: [Emma.Cuckow@uws.ac.uk](mailto:Emma.Cuckow@uws.ac.uk)

### **2. Right of Appeal**

In the event that you have not withdrawn your Review Request and we have failed to respond to you within the proscribed time, or you are dissatisfied with our Review Response, you may apply to the Scottish Information Commissioner for a decision as to whether we have dealt with your request in accordance with the Act ('Appeal Application').

Your Appeal Application must be made to the Scottish Information Commissioner in writing or in other durable form, stating your name and address for correspondence, specifying the request for information to which your Appeal Application relates and the matters that have given rise to your dissatisfaction.

It must be provided to the Scottish Information Commissioner within six months after the date you received our Review Response or, in the event that we did not provide you with a Review Response within the proscribed time, within six months after the expiry of that period. The address of the Scottish Information Commissioner is:

Scottish Information Commissioner, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9DS Tel 01334 464 610; Fax 01334 464 611; email: [enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info); [www.itspublicknowledge.info](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info)