

Our Ref: FOI2021/056

Gillian Green
request-735833-9668d327@whatdotheyknow.com

Tuesday, 27 April 2021

Dear Gillian Green,

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Request for Information

Regarding your request for information received by the University of Westminster on 12th March 2021.

The Request

The University can confirm that it holds information relating to your request. Please see below for details of your recent 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

Information Compliance Team
University of Westminster
3rd Floor, 32-38 Wells Street
London, W1T 3UW
T: +44 (0)20 7911 5158
E: foi@westminster.ac.uk

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?

The Response

The University of Westminster does not have a formal "opt-in" scheme as defined above. Emergency contact details are a mandatory field for our students at enrolment, however, students' consent for sharing more personal information with parents or guardians may be discussed and sought on an ad-hoc basis among the disability or counselling service.

We hope this information may be of use to you.

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If you are dissatisfied with this response you may ask the University to conduct a review of its decision.

By Post: Information Compliance Team
University of Westminster
3rd floor, 32-38 Wells Street
London, W1T 3UW

By Telephone: 0207 911 5158
By Email: foi@westminster.ac.uk

Please do so in writing (including by fax, letter or email) or in some other recorded form (e.g. audio or video tape), describe the original request, explain your grounds for dissatisfaction, and include an address for correspondence.

If after contacting the University of Westminster you are not happy with the outcome, you also have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner.

Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate the case until the internal review process has been completed.

By Post: Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

By Telephone: 01625 545 700
Web: www.ico.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Information Compliance Team
foi@westminster.ac.uk