



Missing Student Protocol

September 2011
Version 1.1

Noted at Council of Deans 2nd November 2011

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Reporting a Missing Student.....	4
3	Notification of Relevant people	4
4	Internal Investigation	4
5	Supporting the Family	5
6	Contacting the Gardaí	5
7	Response Team	5
8	Ongoing support	6
8.1	When the student is located.....	6
8.2	When the student is not located	6
	Appendix 1	7
	Appendix 2: Response Team Contact List.....	9

1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a clear and straightforward guide for the procedure to be adopted in the event that it is suspected that an NUI Galway student is missing. Such concerns about a student may be received by the University through a variety of channels and by any member of the University staff and student body. It is an event which requires a coordinated response by the University. The Chaplaincy coordinates the Protocol on Missing Students under the direction of the Vice-President for the Student Experience.

A student may be considered to be a "missing person" if the student's absence is significantly contrary to his/her usual pattern of behaviour and unusual circumstances surround the absence. Such circumstances may include, but not be limited to, a report or suspicion that the student may be the victim of foul play, has expressed suicidal thoughts, is drug dependent, is in a life-threatening situation, or has been with persons who may endanger the student's welfare.

The University has a duty of care to its staff and students. A situation where a student is reported missing can have a traumatic impact on the missing student's family and friends and also on the students and staff most closely involved.

Every situation will not always fit precisely into the following procedure. Often the actuality is that informal steps/approaches/communications play an important role. Therefore this protocol will not be the totality of the elements of response.

The primary objectives of the University when responding to a concern communicated about a student's whereabouts are to:

- establish contact with the student;
- ensure his/her wellbeing;
- offer appropriate support and assistance to students/staff/family involved.

There are three phases in the University's response when a student is reported as missing. These phases are based on best practice.

Internal Investigation: when there is a reasonable concern about the whereabouts of a student various enquiries are made in the University as quickly as possible.

Response Team: The response team is called together to coordinate the response of the University if the Vice-President for the Student Experience and Chaplains consider it appropriate.

On-Going Support: The provision of on-going support is made available for persons involved.

The procedure to be followed in all cases is set out below and is shown graphically in the flow chart of *Appendix 1*. Each of these phases is now outlined in more detail.

2 Reporting a Missing Student

Any member of staff or student who wishes to report the disappearance of a student should contact the Vice-President for the Student Experience who has overall responsibility to initiate an investigation and confirm whether a student is actually missing. In the event that the Vice-President for the Student Experience is unavailable, the Deans of Chaplaincy Services will be notified. It is not unusual for the family to be the first to raise the alarm.

3 Notification of Relevant people

The Vice-President for the Student Experience will contact the Chaplains who will carry out a preliminary investigation.

The Chaplains will seek confirmation from the Student Records Office that the person alleged to be missing is a registered student of the University and to ascertain relevant personal details including the student's home and term time address, mobile phone number, D.O.B., identification number and family contacts. Contact information will be kept confidential and accessible only to authorised personnel.

If the person is not a registered student then the matter should be passed to the Gardaí.

If the person is a registered student of NUI Galway, the Chaplains will inform the Vice-President for the Student Experience that a registered student is suspected to be missing and that the protocol is being implemented.

4 Internal Investigation

The Chaplains will undertake a preliminary investigation to confirm the accuracy of the report. They will discuss with the source the reasons for their concern and make any preliminary checks to establish whether there is actual cause for concern. They will attempt to contact the student by phone.

The internal investigation will involve making contact with the following staff/offices to ascertain the whereabouts of the student:

- **Student Services:** Enquiries will be made of the following individuals to establish if the student is registered with their services:
 - **Medical Director of Student Health Unit**
 - **Head of Student Counselling Service.** If the student avails of the NUI Galway Counselling Services, client-counsellor confidentiality is waived only in the case where there are grounds for believing that the student is in danger. It is important to be aware that some students may wish to keep their whereabouts or circumstances confidential.
- **Head of Security:** The Head of Security will determine when the student's ID card was last used on campus.
- **Other University Departments:** Inquiries will be made with other Student Services Departments, International Office, Sports Office, Societies Office, the Access Office and

the Mature Students Office to determine if there is any relevant information about the student (i.e., recent contact). The university may be in possession of information from the student which would indicate that the student is particularly vulnerable.¹

- Contact will also be made with course tutors and College/School administrators to determine the last date of known contact and a list of any known friends from the course. Contact will then be made with the friends.
- **Students' Union:** Contact with the Students' Union may determine if the student has had any recent involvement in their activities.
- Accompanied by a chaplain, a member of the Student Services team will visit the student's term time residence. Contact will be made with the students living in the same accommodation to find out when they last saw the student and if they were aware of any planned trips or any possible cause for concern.

5 Supporting the Family

Following preliminary investigations, and if there is cause for concern, the family/next of kin of the student will be contacted to convey that the University has concerns about the whereabouts of the student. If the person is an International Student, his/her Next of Kin will be contacted by the International Office. The University will support the family in practical ways if and when they come to Galway during the search.

6 Contacting the Gardaí

When there is a reasonable concern that a student is missing, it is best practice to notify the Gardaí as a precautionary measure and to do so at the earliest possible opportunity. Following discussions with the family, the Chaplains will contact the Gardai and seek their advice. In the event of a missing student scenario, nothing in this protocol shall be interpreted as requiring the University to defer any action or to delay contacting any individual, law enforcement authority or other entity.

7 Response Team

The Chaplaincy will decide in conjunction with the Vice-President for the Student Experience, and as appropriate, with advice from the Gardaí, whether there is a need for a formal Response Team. See *Appendix 2* for the Response Team contact list.

The President and Registrar & Deputy- President's Offices will also be informed. At this point, the role of the University is to:

- assist in Gardaí enquiries;
- provide assistance and support to the student's family and support to any students involved.
- organise informal search parties of fellow students if and when appropriate.

Members

The membership of the Response Team will include:

- Vice-President for the Student Experience (or nominee) – Chairperson of Response Team

¹ Students under the age of eighteen will automatically be considered vulnerable.

- Dean of relevant College (or nominee)
- Medical Director of Health Unit
- Head of Student Counselling (or nominee)
- Dean of Chaplaincy Services
- Press and Information Officer
- President of the Students' Union (or nominee)
- Director of the Office of International Affairs (in the case of a missing International Student)
- Head of Security (or nominee)

The above officers, and the offices for which they are responsible, will have tasks/involvements relating in the main to managing and responding to the reactions and needs of students, particularly close friends of the missing student. University records will need to be amended if the student has withdrawn. If the student has died the student death protocol will be implemented.

The membership of the Response Team may be supplemented by the Vice-President for the Student Experience as deemed appropriate in particular circumstances.

Members of the Response Team will be nominated to:

- liaise between the family and the University;
- liaise between the Gardaí and the University;
- provide support to students involved.

The Response Team will decide on further action, in the light of the information gathered.

Any enquiries from the media or from any other external persons regarding a missing student will be handled by the Press and Information Office. The switchboard will be informed to ensure all enquiries are appropriately directed.

8 Ongoing support

8.1 When the student is located

When the student is located, the Response Team is informed. The family of the student is contacted if appropriate. It is particularly important to contact the person who initially raised the concern about the student.

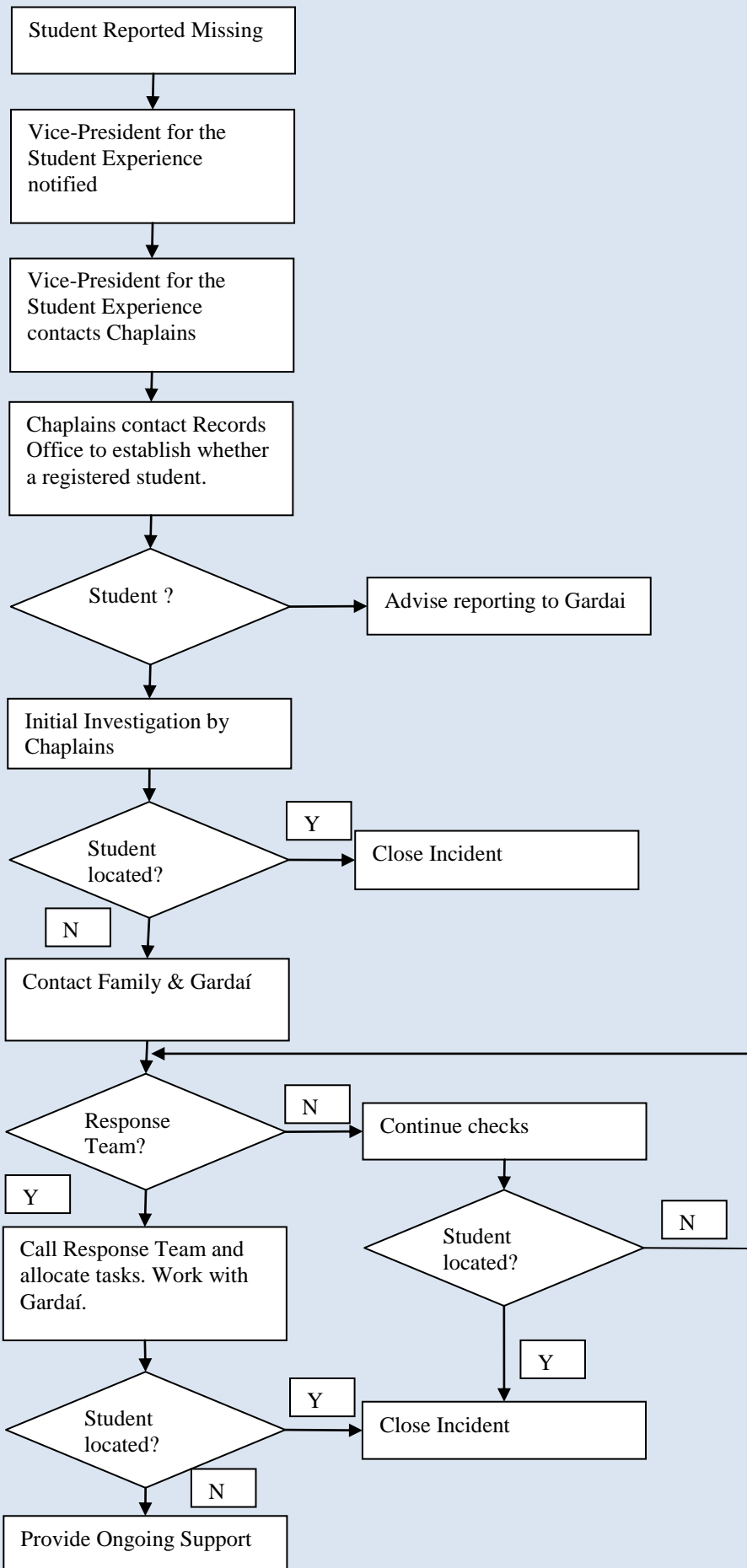
8.2 When the student is not located

If the student is not located, the Response Team will continue to meet regularly to discuss any updates and to decide on further actions. Liaison with the student's family will continue.

The Chaplaincy and Counselling Services will be made available to support the students in the University who are friends, housemates or classmates of the missing student. Chaplaincy Services will also support the immediate family of the student.

The Vice-President of the Student Experience may hold meetings to review the implementation of the protocol, and to consider any amendments which may be required. Such meetings would normally be attended by the members of the Response Team and other staff involved in the protocol.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2: Response Team Contact List