

Guidance Note for Staff

Data Protection and Disclosing Information about Students by Telephone

General

Personal information about students is confidential to the University and to the individual student. All staff should exercise caution when asked to provide personal information about students by telephone and ensure that information is not disclosed to unauthorised third parties.

Disclosure to Students

If you receive a telephone call from someone claiming to be a student you should not disclose personal information over the telephone unless you are absolutely sure that they are who they claim to be. A student's identity can be verified by asking them to provide their student ID number, home address and date of birth. Assuming the student accurately provides the information, brief routine or urgent queries can be answered over the telephone (if necessary offer to call the individual back once you have confirmed their details). However, if a more substantial response is required it may be advisable to send the information in writing to their University (internal) email address or a postal address held by the University. External email is not a secure method of communication and should not be used to send unencrypted personal data.

Disclosure to Parents and Guardians

The University has no obligation to disclose personal information about students to parents or guardians even if they are contributing to tuition fees. Staff may discuss University processes in general terms with parents and guardians, but the specific circumstances of a student should not be disclosed without the consent of the student. Consent should ideally be provided in writing (an email sent by the student from their University email account is acceptable), but if the matter is urgent and the student is present with their parent when they call, the student may verify their identity (as described above) and give their consent orally.

If someone asks for a student's contact details because they wish to get in touch with them, you should not provide the details or confirm whether or not the individual attends the University. Instead you should offer to take the enquirer's details in order to pass on a message to the individual on their behalf if the individual is a student at the University.

In the exceptional circumstance that a student's life or health is at risk, the requirement to get consent before disclosure may be waived and their emergency contact (provided to the University on enrolment) may be contacted. However, this must be done in accordance with the University's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and in liaison with either the Director of Student Affairs or the Head of Student Support.

Disclosure to Other External Third Parties

If you are asked to disclose a student's personal data by telephone by other third parties such as the police, you should contact the Information Compliance Manager for advice.

Disclosure to Other University Staff

Precautions should also be taken with requests to share personal information with other University staff. Information should only be shared for legitimate, work-related reasons and only the minimum amount necessary to perform the task should be disclosed. Therefore you should enquire what the information will be used for and keep a record in case the disclosure is questioned at a later date. If you are able to identify the member of staff making the enquiry (for example from their voice) you may disclose information over the telephone. However, as with any telephone disclosure, particularly if it includes sensitive personal data, care should be taken to ensure you are not inadvertently disclosing information to any unauthorised individuals who may overhear your conversation. If you are not sure of the identity of the caller you should ask them to request the information in writing via their University email account.