Guidance on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

Purpose of Guidance

On some occasions, it is appropriate to contact a student's Trusted Contact if you have exhausted attempts to contact the student, or in an emergency where there is an urgent risk to the student's immediate health or safety. You must make sure that you have considered whether the situation warrants this, and have sought the appropriate authority to make contact from a designated 'Authoriser', as listed in the guidance below.

Scope

All Students, Staff in student-facing roles such as Student Support Teams, Student Advisers, Wellbeing Advisers, Personal Tutors, Supervisors, Senior Tutors, Heads of Student Services in Schools, Directors of Professional Services, Heads of Schools/Deaneries and Student Experience Services staff.

Contact Officer	Rebecca Shade	Senior Policy & Project Adviser-Students	Rebecca.Shade@ed.ac.uk

Document control

Dates	Approved: 06.10.21	Starts: 01.11.19	Equality impact assessment: Completed 2019	Amendments: 16.06.20 10.09.20 30.11.22	Next Review: August 2023

Approving authority	University Executive
Consultation undertaken	Task Group, Edinburgh University Students' Association
Section responsible for guidance maintenance & review	Wellbeing Services, Student Experience
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Annual registration, University Data Protection Guidance, Support for Study Policy
UK Quality Code	N/A
Guidance superseded by this guidance	N/A
Keywords	Trusted contacts, student wellbeing, emergency situations

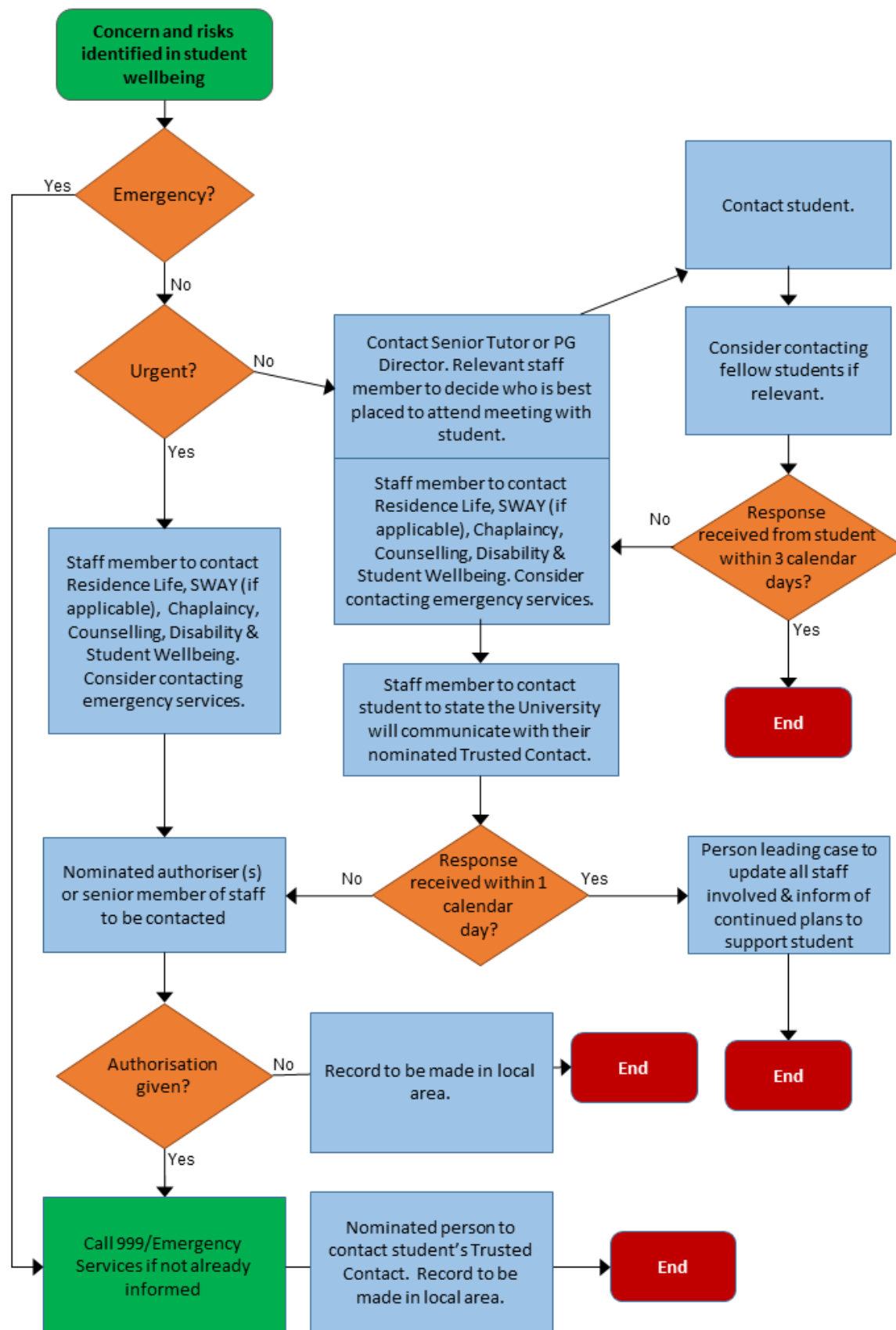# Guidance on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

University of Edinburgh
Guidance for Staff on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

1 Key points about this guidance

a) This guidance relates to all students studying at the University, including those studying online programmes, and has been approved by the University's Legal Services.

b) On some occasions, it is appropriate to contact a student's 'Trusted Contact' if all attempts have been exhausted to contact the student, or in an emergency where there is an urgent risk to the student's health or safety (see paragraph 4.1 below for examples of emergency situations).

c) The member of staff must make sure that they have considered whether the situation warrants this (see paragraph 3.3), and have sought the appropriate authority to make contact from a designated 'Authoriser', as listed in the guidance. Staff invoking this procedure will be student facing staff in the University e.g. student advisers, student support teams, personal or senior tutors, PhD supervisors, staff in Residence Life, staff in Student Counselling, Disability & Learning Support or Student Wellbeing advisers.

d) Wherever possible, staff should consult with the student prior to communicating with their Trusted Contact. The student has provided their Trusted Contact information on the understanding that it is used without prior consent only when there is evidence of an urgent risk to their immediate health or safety.

e) In emergency situations, if the student's safety or location cannot be confirmed, in addition to attempting to contact the Trusted Contact, the University should immediately pass on the student's details to Emergency Services via 999 (if the student is in the UK), or other services appropriate to the location of the student (if the student is abroad- see paragraph 5.8).

f) In non-emergency but critical situations, proactive attempts must be made to engage with the student using all available and reasonable methods of communication, prior to contacting a Trusted Contact (see paragraph 6.4). Setting clear deadlines for the student to respond is essential in this situation. Suggested timescales and template email communications are provided within the guidance to assist with this.

g) Many of our students will be studying/ working/ living overseas. In terms of how best to respond to situations, it is important to differentiate between (i) those students who are studying with us from overseas or are studying online programmes; and (ii) those students who are on exchange, study/work abroad or overseas fieldwork/research, who may be known to the University's [Study and Work Away Service](#) (see paragraph 6.5).

h) The flow chart on page 3 sets out the proposed process, and this is described in more detail within this guidance.

i) In the unfortunate event of a student death, please refer to the University's [Student Death Protocol.](#)

j) Working through these situations can be emotionally challenging. The University has a range of [health and wellbeing support](#) available for staff.

2. Process Flowchart

```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Concern and risks       │
│ identified in student   │
│ wellbeing               │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
Yes ◄──── ◇ Emergency? ◇
             │ No
             ▼
No ◄──── ◇ Urgent? ◇ ────► Contact Senior Tutor or PG Director. Relevant staff member to decide who is best placed to attend meeting with student.
             │ Yes                                    │
             ▼                                        ▼
Staff member to contact          Staff member to contact Residence Life, SWAY (if applicable), Chaplaincy, Counselling, Disability & Student Wellbeing. Consider contacting emergency services.
Residence Life, SWAY (if                                    │
applicable), Chaplaincy,                                    ▼
Counselling, Disability &        Staff member to contact student to state the University will communicate with their nominated Trusted Contact.
Student Wellbeing.                                          │
Consider contacting                                        ▼
emergency services.          ◇ Response received within 1 calendar day? ◇
             │                      No ◄──┘        └──► Yes
             ▼
Nominated authoriser(s)          Person leading case to update all staff involved & inform of continued plans to support student
or senior member of staff
to be contacted
             │
             ▼
◇ Authorisation given? ◇ ──No──► Record to be made in local area. ──► End
             │ Yes
             ▼
Call 999/Emergency Services if not already informed ──► Nominated person to contact student's Trusted Contact. Record to be made in local area. ──► End
```

Contact student.
             │
             ▼
Consider contacting fellow students if relevant.
             │
             ▼
◇ Response received from student within 3 calendar days? ◇
   No ◄──┘   └──► Yes ──► End

Guidance on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

3. <u>Introduction</u>

3.1 All students are asked to record annually the details of their next of kin or other Trusted Contacts on the University's student record system, EUCLID when they enrol.

3.2 There are times when the University may need to contact a student's Trusted Contact without the student's consent. Deciding to do this may be relatively straightforward (for example in the case of a medical emergency) or it may be a relatively complex decision, for example where students or staff have raised concerns about a student's wellbeing and the whereabouts of that student are not known.
Staff invoking this procedure will be student facing staff in the University e.g. student advisers, student support teams, personal or senior tutors, PGR supervisors, wellbeing advisers, staff in Residence Life, staff in Student Experience Services.

3.3 This guidance has been developed to help staff in such situations, i.e. when they identify concerns and risks relating to a student's wellbeing, and they are considering whether to communicate with the student's nominated Trusted Contact to make them aware of the situation and secure their help with locating and/or supporting the student.

3.4 These situations can be complex and as such it would be impossible for this guidance to cover comprehensively every situation. If you are in doubt as to whether to make contact with a student's Trusted Contact, please contact the Duty Assistant Director at the [Student Counselling Service](#) (or their nominated deputy) via Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk

3.5 This guidance may be used at any point in the student's time at the University, including when they are at the point of interrupting their studies, while on interruption or withdrawing.

3.6 This guidance should be read within the context of the University's GDPR guidance. The Data Protection guidance that covers disclosure of data to family members can be found [here.](#)

3.7 Wherever possible, University staff should consult with the student prior to communicating with their Trusted Contact. The student has provided this information on the understanding that it is used without prior consent only when there is evidence of an urgent risk to their immediate health or safety. [Student Guidance: Contacting your Trusted contact | The University of Edinburgh](#)

3.8 There may be situations when a third party (including the student's nominated Trusted Contact) makes contact with the University with concerns about a student's health and safety. Within these situations, the nominated 'Authoriser' within the relevant School/Deanery or Student Wellbeing Service should be contacted so that decisions can be made rapidly about (a) the urgency of the situation; (b) information sharing; and (c) what action is required in order to ensure the student is safe.

3.9 If a situation where this guidance needs to be used occurs out of normal University office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), then the University Security Section should be contacted (0131 650 2257) so that they enact the [Critical Student Welfare Procedure](#).

4 Emergency situations

4.1 If there is an emergency, for example if any student (including students studying online) is taken to hospital due to serious and immediate concerns regarding their health, staff can contact the student's Trusted Contact to let them know about the situation. If the concerns relate to a University of Edinburgh student who is overseas as part of their programme, staff should contact colleagues at Go Abroad, Study & Work Away (see 5.3 for contact details) to find out more information about the situation. SWAY can support through contacting the HEI/ overseas placement provider where the student is studying/ working. If the concerns relate to a University of Edinburgh PGR student who is studying away for the purpose of their research (i.e. on Leave of Absence), staff should contact the student's supervisor and/or School/Deanery PG Director who will have more information on the student's circumstances.

4.2 The nominated "Authorisers" within the School/Deanery/Service should immediately be consulted (refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the "Authoriser" can be), and a decision reached on who should contact the student's Trusted Contact.

5 Urgent situations

5.1 In exceptional circumstances it may be in a student's best interests for the University to use the Trusted Contact in urgent situations where there is a significant concern about a student's health or safety. Examples of such situations include but are not limited to:
- When a student cannot be located/is believed to be a 'missing person' and there are concerns for their safety and wellbeing
- A student is displaying symptoms of serious physical or mental illness or there are concerns about behaviour which might indicate serious physical or mental illness
- When a student has been involved in an accident or is a victim of crime

5.2 The member of University staff who is leading on responding to the situation should make *immediate* contact with the services listed below **in working hours** to identify whether there is any information to confirm the student's safety or if they can facilitate a resolution to the situation **marking as urgent**. If the situation occurs out of office hours, then the guidance at paragraph 3.9 above should be followed. If the student's School has not been alerted to the concerns regarding the student's health and safety, then the member of staff leading on responding to the situation should contact the School student adviser or support team immediately so that the student's last point of contact with the School/ Deanery can be identified.

5.3 See next page for table

Guidance on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

Role/Service	Contact details	When to contact
Manager at Residence Life	Rit-core@mlist.is.ed.ac.uk	If student lives in University accommodation
Wellbeing Adviser or Lead Wellbeing Adviser (if not actioning themselves)	Student.Wellbeing@ed.ac.uk	Always
University Chaplaincy	Chaplaincy@ed.ac.uk	Always
Student Counselling Service	Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk	Always
Disability & Learning Support Service	Disabiity@ed.ac.uk	Always
CAHSS Visiting Student Office (if relevant)	cahssvisitingstudents@ed.ac.uk	Based on EUCLID information
The Study & Work Away Service (if relevant)	sway@ed.ac.uk	Based on EUCLID information
Principle Supervisor & relevant Postgraduate Director for PGR Students including those working away from Edinburgh	Differs depending on home School/Deanery	Based on EUCLID information

5.4 The member of University staff should speak with these services to confirm whether there are any known risks associated with communicating with the student's Trusted Contact which may exacerbate the situation.

5.5 The nominated "Authoriser" within the School/Deanery/Service should then quickly be consulted (refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the "Authoriser" can be), and a decision reached on whether contacting the student's Trusted Contact is appropriate, and if so who should do this.

5.6 The purpose of this contact will be to make the student's Trusted Contact aware of the situation and identify whether anything more can be done to locate and/ or support the student/ make the student safe. A record of each time this procedure is used should be made, such as on 'Students with Enhanced Support or Students of Concern lists' in local areas.

5.7 If nominated "Authorisers" within the School/Service are not available, then a senior member of staff within the relevant College Office or area can be contacted.

5.8 If the student's safety cannot be confirmed, in addition to attempting to contact the Trusted Contact, the nominated Authoriser should pass on the student's details to Emergency Services via 999 (for students in the UK). If the situation occurs out of office hours, then the guidance at paragraph 3.9 above should be followed.

5.9 For students living abroad, if the student's safety cannot be confirmed, during office hours the member of staff managing the situation should contact SWAY (where appropriate- see paragraph 4.1 above), other services appropriate to the location of the student can be identified and contacted (this may involve contacting e.g. an embassy/ consulate; an Edinburgh Global Regional Director; emergency services overseas). For PGR students working away from Edinburgh the member of staff managing the situation should contact the principle supervisor and relevant Postgraduate Director. Again, if the situation takes place out of office hours, then the guidance at paragraph 3.8 above should be followed.

5.10 If authorisation to communicate with the Student's Trusted Contact is not given, the reasons for this decision should be recorded on EUCLID or on an alternative local case management system (see 5.6 above), by the staff member leading the situation ensuring that records are kept in an appropriately secure manner in line with University retention requirements (refer to 6.14 below).

6   Ongoing concerns for a student's wellbeing

6.1 It may also be necessary to contact a student's Trusted Contact even in situations which are not emergencies or urgent as described above. Examples of this would include situations where there are emerging concerns (e.g. about engagement/ attendance/ behaviour/ deterioration in mental health and wellbeing, Support for Study process) that have been identified by a member of staff or fellow student, or where the student has not responded to multiple contact attempts from the School and has become disengaged.

6.2 In any such case the School/Deanery's Senior Tutor, Postgraduate Director, Head of Student Services/Support or equivalent role should be contacted. The Senior Tutor, or appropriate equivalent staff member will decide on who is best placed to request (via email and phone call) a formal meeting with the student and their PT/supervisor/Student Adviser/Wellbeing Adviser to discuss the concerns raised.

6.3 In most cases this will be the student's Personal Tutor, supervisor or Student Support team/Student Adviser, or Wellbeing Adviser but in some cases it may be a studio tutor, for example, if it is felt this is appropriate. What is also important at this stage is that staff within the School/ Deanery/Service take a co-ordinated approach to ensure that multiple members of staff are not contacting the student simultaneously (with the student responding to only one, leaving the remaining staff members concerned regarding the student's situation).

6.4 The nominated staff member (see 6.2 above) should make pro-active attempts to engage with the student. All available and reasonable methods of communication should be used, and staff should be mindful that many students are unlikely to respond just to an email in situations where they are isolating themselves deliberately. Methods of contacting the student should include:
- E-mail (see Template Communication at Appendix 2)
- Telephone (NB: staff should not normally use their own personal mobile phones)
- Text/Whatsapp
- Teams call or chat where applicable

6.5 If the student is studying or working abroad as part of their programme at the University, then the Study and Work Away Service should be contacted. For PGR students working away from Edinburgh, contact with the principle supervisor and relevant PG Director is essential to ensure the students wellbeing is monitored appropriately. This is so that they can assist by identifying a point of contact at the student's host Higher Education Institution/placement provider or organisation whom the nominated member of staff should then contact immediately and ask to identify where and how the student is.

6.6 The nominated staff member should also consider whether it is appropriate to contact fellow students of the student. Whether it is appropriate to contact specific students, and how much information to share regarding the reason behind the contact will vary on a case by case basis (see point 6.7 below). If there is good reason to think that a particular fellow student may have relevant information (for example, if they are working on a group project with the student about

whose health and safety there are concerns, they are likely to know where the student is - or if indeed they raised the initial concerns), then they should be contacted.

6.7 In each case of contact with fellow students, only the minimum information regarding the "at risk" student that is required to obtain the relevant information should be disclosed. For example, if the University wanted to know if a student had attended a club event, they should ask the other student(s) about the at-risk student's attendance but would not go on to say they were concerned because of the student's mental health condition (which would be disclosing sensitive medical evidence). The minimum information will change on a case by case basis, depending on the particular facts. A documented reason for contacting specific fellow students should be kept on the EUCLID record (or the local recording system, see point 5.6 above) of the "at risk" student by the relevant staff member (see section 6.14 below). Beyond enquiring about their recent contact with the "at risk" student, no details of the "at risk" student or their circumstances should be disclosed to fellow students.

6.8 If the student has **not** responded to attempts to contact them after **72 hours**, then the staff member should follow the guidance at Section 5.2 above. They should then email the student (see Appendix 2), write to them (hard copy letter- NB: this may not be appropriate for students living overseas) and leave a voice and text message on their telephone, clearly stating that the University will communicate with their nominated Trusted Contact if the student does not make contact with the staff member within a further **24 hours or on the next working day.** All messages conveyed to the student should:

- Include specific information on whom we will contact should the student not respond
- Provide the student with an opportunity to nominate a third party whom the University should contact, and give the University their formal, written permission for us to liaise with their third party advocate
- Provide a number of different options for whom the student can contact (e.g. University Security) in case there are sensitivities for the student on making contact with other members of University staff for any reason

Please note that the Student Wellbeing Service may ask for a decreased response time from the student according to their risk status.

Template communications are provided at Appendix 2.

6.9 University staff need to be mindful that someone may subsequently contact them on the student's behalf (this could happen for a number of reasons). Within these situations, the member of staff should refer back to the formal University Data Protection Guidance noted in paragraph 3.6 above, and should also seek advice from appropriate managers in terms of how to proceed from that point. This may include requesting from the student confirmation from their University e-mail account that they are happy for the nominated representative to communicate on their behalf.

6.10 If the student responds to contact from the School/ Deanery/Service, then all relevant staff members should be updated by the coordinating staff member and appraised of any plans to support the student. There may be a number of outcomes from this process that might trigger a discussion with relevant support services such as Wellbeing Adviser, Counselling or Disability & Learning Support, and may lead to further consideration under the University's Support for Study Policy.

6.11 If the student does **not** respond within **24 hours**, then the situation should be escalated and the nominated Authoriser within the School should quickly be consulted (please refer to Appendix 1 for information on who the "Authoriser" can be) and a decision reached on whether communicating with the student's Trusted Contact is required, based on all available information

and risk factors (including risk of exacerbating the situation through communicating with the student's Trusted Contact).

6.12 If nominated "Authorisers" within the School are not available, then a senior member of staff within the relevant College Office or Service can be contacted.

6.13 The guidance at section 5.3 above should then be followed and a decision reached on whether contacting the student's Trusted Contact is appropriate, and if so who should do this.

6.14 Staff must record each decision and action confidentially using the comments and notes field on EUCLID, following the University's GDPR guidance. Where EUCLID is not available, staff should record the relevant information on an alternative local case management system (ensuring that records are kept in an appropriately secure manner in line with University retention requirements). Schools should record each time this has been invoked during an academic year, and keep safely on local systems.

Appendix 1:   Authorisers
Each School/Deanery/College and student facing Service need to ensure that at least **two** senior members of staff are identified as Authorisers, one academic and one professional services.

Suitable Academic Authorisers can be Head or Deputy Head of School, Director of Teaching, Director of Graduate School, Senior Tutor or Postgraduate Director.

Suitable Professional Services Authorisers can be Directors of Professional Services, Teaching Office Managers, Director of Student Services, Head of Student Experience, Senior Student Support Officer/Adviser. In the Student Wellbeing Service, this is Head or Assistant Head of Service. This list is not exhaustive and depends on local arrangements.

It is recommended that this responsibility should only be delegated to staff at grade UE08 or above. **Staff delivering student support and the PGR student office within each School/ Deanery/Service need to keep a list of Authorisers and ensure that people within the School/ Deanery/Service know who they should approach for authorisation**.

Appendix 2:   Template Communications
For paragraph 6.4
Dear "student's name",

I hope you are ok? I am writing to you because we are concerned about your wellbeing. This is because (*insert brief summary of reasons for concern*).

Please make contact with me as soon as you can and no later than within 3 days, either by email or on (insert work telephone number) so that we can organise a convenient time for you to meet with (insert names and roles/ job titles) so that we can discuss how you are and ensure you have the right support in place.

If we do not hear from you within 3 days, we will need to consider getting in touch with your Trusted contacts to ensure that you are safe and well (insert specific information on who the Trusted contacts are). You can nominate a third party whom the University should contact if that is easier- you will need to give the University your formal, written permission by email to enable us to liaise with your third party advocate.

(Only insert if required: "If there are sensitivities for you in making contact with members of University staff for any reason, you can contact the University of Edinburgh Security Section on +44 131 650 2257).

Yours sincerely,

Name
Job Title

For paragraph 6.8

Guidance on When to Contact Student Trusted Contacts

Dear "student's name",

Having made attempts to reach you by email and telephone, we are now so concerned for your well-being at this stage that I am asking you again to come forward and let us know you are ok **before we contact your Trusted contact (insert specific information on who the Trusted contact is). We will also need to contact** emergency services in the area where you live (e.g. police and ambulance) to make them aware that we cannot reach you and to ask them to ensure that you are safe. We are deeply concerned about your welfare and safety. You are not in any trouble but please get in touch to let us know you are ok.

Your Trusted Contacts on EUCLID are as follows:

Names:
Address:
Tel:
00xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

If we get no response from you in the next 24 hours we will contact your Trusted contact. If after referring to your Trusted contacts you still do not contact us we will refer the matter on to the local police to investigate (Only insert if required: "or if you are living abroad we will need to contact the relevant embassy or consulate").

You can nominate a third party whom the University should contact if that is easier- you will need to give the University your formal, written permission to enable us to liaise with your third party advocate.

This is now an urgent matter and I impress upon you the need for us to know that you are safe, and I look forward to your reply. Alternatively, please call on (insert work telephone number) and ask to speak with me.

(Only insert if required: "If there are sensitivities for you in making contact with members of University staff for any reason, you can contact the University of Edinburgh Security Section on 0131 650 2257).

With best wishes,

Name
Job Title

Reviewed December 2022