Parental Involvement -
a guidance note

The majority of our students are aged over 18 and are legally independent adults. However, many students still have a very close relationship with their parents – they may be living at home or relying on their parents for financial support. Some involvement by some parents in the student’s engagement with the University is therefore inevitable. It is also the case that most parents will be acting in what they perceive to be the best interests of the student – and in some cases can assist the communication of key issues to the student.

However, all University staff should note that the University’s relationship is primarily and legally with the student and the University must manage all student data in accordance with the Data Protection Act – see www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/ - and there is a requirement for confidentiality in most matters pertaining to an individual. Therefore, we may not disclose information to parents unless the student has given us explicit permission to do so. As a consequence, communication with parents needs to be carefully managed to ensure:

- that there is no inappropriate disclosure of student data – marks, term address, disciplinary factors, debt, progress issues, etc;
- that the parent understands that this is a constraint of the Data Protection Act;
- that it is clear that the University does not wish to be unhelpful and, as far as is reasonable, other general information is made available to the parent.

If you are responding to written correspondence from a parent, you may wish to consider the following example letter:

Thank you for writing to inform me of your concerns about XXXXXXX. This is a matter on which I must deal with directly with XXXX (the student). This is because of the Data Protection Act. However, I will now contact XXXXX about this.

In the meantime, you may wish to note that this matter is likely to be governed by the XXXXX procedures detailed on the University website at XXXXXXX. If I can provide any further general information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you then have to deal with the student on the matter, it is recommended that you make the student aware of the correspondence with the parent. For example, if you are contacting the student in writing:

Please find attached copies of recent correspondence that I have had with your mother/father/parent(s). The constraints of the Data Protection Act mean that I cannot deal with your mother/father/parent(s) directly on this matter as it relates to you. It is however your choice whether you wish to consult with your mother/father/parent(s) further. Further to this correspondence I would like to explain XXXXXXX
Frequently Asked Questions

Should parent(s) attend my meetings with students?

In general, for routine or informal academic and advisory meetings, it would be inappropriate for a parent to attend. Parental attendance at such meetings should be discouraged. If a student wishes a parent to attend a meeting, you could reasonably expect to be asked in advance, given notice and told what the meeting will be about.

Under formal procedures, such as disciplinary/assessment irregularities, students would be given notice of a meeting – and would be advised that they can be accompanied by a friend or representative. This can be a parent.

If a parent attends a meeting then it is reasonable to expect that he/she/they take a minor support role and the main dialogue will be between the University representative and the student. This will clearly vary on a case by case basis.

Can a parent represent a student?

There is a grey area, as noted above. But a parent cannot act entirely for a student and require this University to deal directly with the parent unless the student completes a signed release. This should always be discouraged as the parent would become a third party between the student and the University.

What if my student is less than 18 years old?

Generally, consent is still required from under 18s in the same way as for adults with regard to matters of data protection and confidentiality. The following information may be relevant.

- Policy for the safeguarding of under 18s and vulnerable adults

- Policy and Procedures for Admitting Students Under 18 at
  [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/internal/admissions/admissions_process/under18apps.htm](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/internal/admissions/admissions_process/under18apps.htm)

What if I think it is important that the parent knows something?

Whatever sympathy you may have with the parent(s), without the student’s consent, you can only disclose information if there is a risk situation and the information is relevant. In a risk situation the University may disclose personal information such as term address. The definition of risk is a matter of judgement. Experienced colleagues in the School may be able to advise – or contact the Student Progress Service or the Student Wellbeing Service for advice.

What if the student tells me it is OK to speak to his/her parents?

Cases will vary, but ideally any permission to disclose should be clearly scoped and written down - and signed by the student. The permission should also be recent – do not rely on a permission given 2 years ago when there has been no recent discussion with the student on the matter.

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