University of Essex

**POLICY ON CONTACT WITH THIRD PARTIES IN RELATION TO STUDENTS REGISTERED AT THE UNIVERSITY**

1. **Overview**
   1. This policy sets out the University's position regarding contact with third parties in connection with students registered at the University[[1]](#footnote-1), such as parents, guardians, partners and sponsors of students[[2]](#footnote-2).
   2. The policy sets a framework for staff who may come into contact with relevant third parties, students, and the third parties themselves. All staff are required to adhere to the principles of the policy when handling contact with third parties about students. The policy should be read in conjunction with relevant guidance notes[[3]](#footnote-3).
2. **Types of contact**
   1. A third party makes contact with staff at the University in relation to students for a variety of reasons. The third party may wish to:
3. request information about a student;
4. make a complaint on behalf of a student;
5. provide information about the student; or
6. act as an advocate for the student.
7. **Handling contact with third parties**
   1. The University's position in relation to contact with third parties is built around a number of key principles, which are designed to ensure a fair, consistent and lawful approach to dealing with activity in this area.
   2. The University aims to treat its students as autonomous adults.
   3. The University aims to empower its students, many of whom are living away from home for the first time, and wishes to create a student experience which encourages the development of independent living skills as well as academic achievement.
   4. The University has a legal relationship solely with the student. Generally, the University will only liaise directly with the student and not via a third party, including parents, guardians and other interested individuals, groups or organisations.
   5. When a third party makes contact with the University in relation to a student, the University's primary concern is the welfare and interests of the student. While the University recognises that most third party contact is motivated by a genuine desire to protect the interests of the student, it is mindful that in rare instances this may not be the case.
   6. In certain circumstances, the University accepts that a student may nominate a specific individual or organisation with which it can liaise directly in relation to that student. Such liaison is only permitted where it is considered to be in the best interests of the student and the University, where written consent is given, and where all parties are content with the terms of the liaison.
   7. The University has a duty of care to protect its staff and students and manage its resources effectively. To this end, it reserves the right to refuse to liaise with a third party, particularly if it is felt that contact may impact negatively on staff time or resources, or where the third party is behaving in an aggressive or threatening way.
   8. Where a student gives consent to allow the University to share information about them with a third party, the University may choose not to share information where it consider that it would not be appropriate to do so. If this is the case the decision, and the reasons for it, will be communicated to the student.
   9. The University is committed to compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the data protection principles. This policy is formulated in conjunction with the University's own data protection policy and other relevant University policies relating to confidentiality of personal information.
   10. The University will release information about a student where there is a legal obligation, a contractual requirement to do so, as set out in the University’ Privacy Notice for Students[[4]](#footnote-4).
   11. Information provided by a third party about a student is generally recorded on the relevant student file, to which the student has a right to access under the Data Protection Act 2018. The University does not accept requests for information about a student to be retained confidentially in a way that prevents the student from knowing about it.
   12. The University will contact a relevant third party or release information to a third party where it is necessary to protect the student's vital interests. Such disclosures or contact are only made in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. In an emergency situation involving medical treatment or hospitalisation of a student, the student's emergency contact details are likely to be passed to the relevant external authorities dealing with the situation. In certain circumstances, the University may communicate directly with the nominated emergency contact.

1. **Rare or exceptional circumstances**
   1. The University accepts that rare or exceptional circumstances may require the waiving of the general principle that it will only liaise directly with the student. Such circumstances are defined as where a student is perceived to be a serious risk to themselves or others; where a student is under 18 or an adult at risk and it is judged to be in the student's best interests, or other relevant circumstances agreed following discussion with relevant senior staff[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Policy information**

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1. It is important to note that the policy only covers contact relating to currently registered students. As such, contact relating to an applicant wishing to study at the University or by a prospective employer after a student has graduated is not covered by the policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the purposes of the policy, these potential contacts will be referred to as "third parties" [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/working-with-information-and-data/third-party-sharing [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/my-essex/privacy-notice-students> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Such contact and liaison would be made in conjunction with the provisions of related policies, including the University's Fitness to study policy and procedure <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/students/health-and-wellbeing/documents/fitness-to-study.pdf> or the Policy on Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk <https://www.essex.ac.uk/information/safeguarding/safeguarding-policy-and-guidance> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)