

## National review of suspected suicides by Higher Education students

### Frequently Asked Questions

In this FAQ document, we use the word *'report'* to refer to the output prepared by a Higher Education Provider following a suspected suicide death or an incident of non-fatal self-harm. The word *'review'* is used when referring to our NCISH national evaluation of reports submitted to us. You may find it helpful to read our FAQs alongside our [information sheet](#). These FAQs will be updated regularly.

➤ **Is the national review UK-wide?**

No, this review is of serious incident (SI) reports conducted by Higher Education Providers (HEPs) registered in England only. International students and home students from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, will be included where the institute they attended is in England. We anticipate that our recommendations will be applicable across the UK.

➤ **Which serious incidents are to be included in the review?**

Reports into suspected deaths by suicide and incidents of non-fatal self-harm that occurred during the 2023/2024 academic year (between 1 August 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024).

➤ **How do you define "incidents of non-fatal self-harm"?**

The main aim of this review is improving suicide prevention, and we are primarily asking HEPs to send us their SI reports into suspected student suicides. If you believe a serious incident occurred that could have led to a fatality, either due to the potentially fatal nature of the method used or an interruption that specifically prevented suicide (i.e., being talked down from a dangerous location), then please submit the report to us. However, as this is not the main purpose of this review, the threshold should be high.

➤ **Would you review an SI report for an incident which occurred outside the 2023/2024 academic year?**

We may widen the timeframe to include incidents which occurred from January 2023 onwards, depending on the number of SI reports we receive relating to the 2023/24 academic year.

If you would like to submit a SI report for an incident that occurred outside the 2023/2024 timeframe (up to the beginning of January 2023) then please do so, but we may need to apply a different methodological approach to our analysis of these cases depending on the volume received.

➤ **Where an incident occurred in the 2023/2024 academic term with no investigation conducted, should an investigation and report be completed retrospectively?**

No, there is no expectation to retrospectively conduct a SI investigation if one was not conducted at the time of the incident.

➤ **What information should we send to NCISH as part of the national review?**

Please send us the redacted final SI report that you prepared as part of the SI investigation. We are not asking for sight of any information that was compiled as part of your investigation. However, if you feel there is

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additional contextual information that is relevant to our review, then please include it with your submission.

As with the SI report, please ensure that any additional contextual information has also been redacted or anonymised before it is sent to us.

We also appreciate that you may follow different guidance and frameworks to the [Universities UK/Papyrus postvention guidance](#) and template, so please submit your SI report in whatever form it takes.

➤ **How much of the serious incident report should be redacted?**

We would expect names of students and staff members to be redacted, although we would find it helpful if job titles/roles could be retained. We would also suggest any other sensitive redaction, as you believe to be pertinent.

➤ **Is there existing guidance for the HE sector on how to complete a serious incident review?**

Yes, please see the [Universities UK/Papyrus postvention guidance](#) on carrying out a serious incident review.

➤ **How soon after a serious incident should the report be completed?**

We recommend the SI report be completed within 3 months of notification of the incident. This should not be a barrier to involving families in the SI investigation. We acknowledge it may be difficult to engage families in the first few months after the incident, but they should be offered the opportunity to contribute should they wish to.

➤ **Who would be considered sufficiently independent to lead a serious incident review?**

The [Universities UK/Papyrus postvention guidance](#) recommends a SI review be led by a senior member of staff, who has had no prior involvement with the student(s) involved.

➤ **Should we send you the serious incident report if we are not certain the cause of death was suicide?**

Yes. The focus of this review is “suspected” suicide deaths, unconfirmed by coroner inquest or investigation. It is likely the coroner’s inquest would not have taken place at the time of your investigation and we understand the cause of death might not be known. When you submit a SI report you can let us know if the cause of death is currently unknown if you wish. If it is then later confirmed that suicide was not the cause of death, you may want to notify us, and we will account for this in our analysis.

We are also aware there may be sensitives within the family about the cause of death when suicide is suspected, but not confirmed by coroner inquest. If suicide is suspected and a serious incident report has been completed, please submit the final report once it is ready.

➤ **Are recent alumni or students with an interruption to their studies included in the national review?**

Yes, we would include recent alumni/graduates, within 6 months of finishing their studies. We would also include reports relating to students who may have taken sabbatical leave or an interruption of study due to personal difficulties or circumstances.

- **Would you include a student studying at a partner institution in either a national or international setting in the national review?**

Yes, we would include students in these circumstances in our national review.

- **Will you accept SI reports prepared without family involvement?**

We are acutely aware of the sensitivities of involving families in a serious incident investigation when there is an assumption (rather than a confirmation) of suicide. We would accept reports prepared without family involvement; however, we suggest family members should be offered the opportunity to contribute. Whether the family was contacted is one of the items we will be assessing for in our review.

- **How will concerns about sharing third party information (or individuals potentially being identified due to the small number of reported incidents) be addressed?**

We are requesting you only send us anonymous (redacted) SI reports. However, we are aware that due to the small number of cases any one organisation is likely to submit there may sufficient information to identify individuals. Therefore, we are requesting reports be sent to us at [ncish@nhs.net](mailto:ncish@nhs.net) which is an email address encrypted to NHS standards. A member of the NCISH research team will then transfer the SI report via an encrypted USB to our secure NCISH server, which is not connected to the internet or any other network and can only be accessed from the NCISH office on the University of Manchester campus. Access to submitted SI reports will be restricted to authorised researchers only. The NCISH research team have a long history of handling sensitive, personal data and are bound by the confidentiality agreements in accordance with University policies and have undertaken relevant information security, data protection and good clinical practice training.

- **How would information shared with NCISH be treated in response to a Freedom of Information request?**

Freedom of Information requests would be considered on a case-by-case basis, including involvement from University of Manchester Information Governance colleagues and the Department for Education. We would refer any requests for individual level data to the data owners (i.e., the submitting HEP). As we plan to publish aggregate data, it would not be appropriate to respond to any requests for aggregate analysis outside of the publishing timeframe.

- **How will the review be conducted and what outputs will be created?**

We will collect information on factors such as pre-existing mental ill-health, the content and availability of mental health promotion within HEPs, the role of academic and non-academic factors, and access to means of suicide from submitted SI reports. We will independently read the submitted SI reports and extract relevant issues and common themes based on:

- The [Universities UK/Papyrus postvention guidance](#) for carrying out a serious incident investigation;
- The [NCISH 10 standards](#) for investigating serious incidents in the NHS, modified for the HE sector;
- Any other areas of focus agreed with our specifically convened expert advisory group.

We are focused on identifying how learning can develop, including how to follow up on incidents which occur. The purpose of this review is collective learning and working together towards improvement. It is not about blame or criticism. We want to see the system as it currently is and so we do not expect it to be working perfectly.

The findings of the review will be published as a report – with any details of cases anonymised. We will provide individual feedback in a summary report to each submitting HEP, consisting of quality evaluation of the SI reports, comments on student support, and recommendations based on HEP report findings, good practice, and possible areas for improvement.

➤ **Will you triangulate SI report findings with other sources of information (e.g., coroners, the NHS)?**

We will look at Prevention of Future Death (PFD) reports concerning students from HM Coroners in England for the period 2015 to 2024, as a contextual source of information but we will not undertake a formal comparison and we will not be triangulating them (or other sources of information) with submitted SI reports. If you are aware of another (e.g., NHS) serious incident review, even if it does not form part of your investigation, then you can let us know for context.

➤ **When should we start submitting serious incident reports to NCISH?**

You can now submit SI reports to NCISH via our secure email address [ncish@nhs.net](mailto:ncish@nhs.net). We obtained ethical approval to conduct the study from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 (ref: 2024-18940-33665).

➤ **Do you require a formal nil return?**

Yes, it would be helpful if you could tell us if you have no cases of suspected suicide or non-fatal self-harm to report for the 2023/2024 academic year.

➤ **Is there a deadline for submitting serious incident reports to NCISH?**

We would be grateful if serious incident reports could be submitted to us by the end of October 2024.