

RULES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE RESPONSE TO STAFF AND STUDENT DEATHS

Approved by the University Management Committee on: 23 July 2026.

1 Introduction

The rules and guidelines for the response to staff and student deaths are provided by the University Management Committee (UMC) to guide the university's official response and engagement in the event of the passing of a staff member or student. The rules and guidelines must be applied with the necessary sensitivity and ethic of care, further ensuring that the dignity and privacy of the deceased and their family is protected.

2 Interpretation

2.1 Policies, rules and procedures

These rules and guidelines must be applied in a manner that is consistent with the –

- i. Protection of Personal Information Act, 4 of 2013;
- ii. Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 and regulations made in terms of the act;
- iii. Statute of the North-West University;
- iv. General academic rules of the North-West University;
- v. Communication Policy;
- vi. Personal Information Privacy Policy;
- vii. Employee Wellness Policy;
- viii. Emergency and incident reporting procedure of the NWU;
- ix. Events management rules and procedures;
- x. Fees Payable and Financial Rules of the University; and
- xi. Relevant employment contracts and insurance policies and obligations;

2.2 Definitions

The following definitions are relevant to the interpretation of these rules and guidelines:

Term	Definition
CCD	Refers to a Campus Chief Director.
DSL	Refers to a Director for Student Life.
DVC	Refers to a Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
DVC SLTPC	Refers to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Student Life, Transformation, and People & Culture.
Official university business	Refers to activities, programmes and engagements that form part of the approved university programme as it relates to teaching-learning and research, student life, community engagement, sport, etc. Official university business can take place on or off university premises, at local, national or international level.
SHE	Refers to the department of Safety, Health and Environment.
Staff	Refers to an employee of the university employed on either a permanent or temporary basis as contemplated in the Statute of the University.
Student	Refers to a person registered for a programme leading to a qualification as contemplated in the Statute of the university.
UMC	Refers to the University Management Committee.

3 Bereavement notice

3.1 Notice on the death of a student or staff member can be received from various sources including via line managers, colleagues, students or family member, but must be reported as follows once received by a university stakeholder (including an employee or student death):

Information received	First-level notification	Next-level notification	University notification
Death of a staff member	Upon receipt of the notice by the university, the relevant line manager must be informed and verify the death of the staff member.	Upon verifying the death of a staff member, the line manager informs the relevant secondary line manager and UMC member, with the UMC member in turn informing the Vice-Chancellor and relevant campus DVC of the campus where the staff member was employed.	The line manager in consultation with the university spokesperson and family of the deceased must determine whether a bereavement notice must be issued to the university community.
Death of a student	Upon receipt of the notice by the university, the relevant director student life must be informed and verify the death of the student.	Upon verifying the death, the director must inform the relevant CCD and campus DVC, who in turn notifies the Vice-Chancellor.	The DSL in consultation with the university spokesperson and family of the deceased must determine whether a bereavement notice must be issued to the university community.

3.2 The publication of the bereavement notice indicated in paragraph 3.1 is regarded as the university's official notice and condolence message to the family and friends of the deceased.

3.3 Faculties, departments and student structures may issue similar condolences, provided that the university has released an official bereavement notice.

3.4 The bereavement notice and condolences must be issued in a manner that is culturally sensitive and maintains the dignity and privacy of the deceased and their family or friends.

4 Designated officials

4.1 The following role players are identified as the designated officials in the event of the passing of a staff member or student:

Category	Designated official
Death of a staff member	Depending on the situation, the relevant line manager or P&C Client Services Practitioner is the designated official who acts as the responsible contact person between the university and the family. Informed by the situation, the practitioner and relevant line manager work in collaboration to engage the family, with the objective of ensuring an effective and efficient exchange of information and ethic of care.
Death of a student	The relevant DSL is the designated official who acts as the responsible contact person between the university and the family of the deceased. In the absence of the DSL, the CCD acts as the designated official.

4.2 The designated officials are responsible for executing the various roles and responsibilities outlined in these rules and guidelines, ensuring the effective and efficient exchange of information and support.

5 Administrative processes and records

5.1 Staff

In the event of the passing of a staff member, the designated official identified in paragraph 4.1 is responsible for the following functions, as guided by relevant legislation contractual obligations:

- The line manager of the deceased must inform the relevant People and Culture client services practitioner with regards to the death of the employee to start the appropriate administrative processes relating to Group-life insurance, pension- and leave payouts, etc.
- The client services practitioner must assist the family with regards with the processing of insurance and all other payouts that the deceased staff member may have with the university.
- The line manager must determine the list of university assets issued to the staff member and coordinating the return thereof to the university.
- Where required, Employee Wellness and similar support services may be activated to render psycho-social support services to follow staff.
- Requesting Campus Protection Services to deactivate the deceased's university access card and revoke any access rights to premises or facilities of the university.

5.2 Students

In the event of the passing of student, the designated official identified in paragraph 4.1 is responsible for:

- i. Coordinating the submission of relevant documentation by the family to the university, including the death certificate of the deceased.
- ii. Liaising with the department of Student Finances and Financial Related Systems to commence with the finalisation and close out of the student account, as informed by the relevant financial guidelines and rules.
- iii. Liaising with the department of Student Academic Lifecycle Administration to deactivate the student's student record and updating the any statuses associated with the student.
- iv. Informing the relevant faculty of the passing of the student to commence with the relevant faculty administrative processes relating to the student's academic performance, and consideration on the posthumous awarding of qualifications (as guided by the General Academic Rules of the university).
- v. Where relevant, engaging with affected student groups including university residence or day house communities, student leadership structures or societies, and updating the co-curricular record of the student, including the pro-rata issuing of privileges receivable owed to the deceased (if applicable).
- vi. Where required, requesting Student Counselling and Development and similar support services to render psycho-social support services deemed relevant.
- vii. Liaising with Library and Information Services and similar support departments to coordinate the return of university assets and resources which may have been issued to the student on a temporary basis.
- viii. Requesting Campus Protection Services to deactivate the deceased student card and revoke any access rights to premises or facilities of the university.

6 Instances of the death of a staff member or student

6.1 Instances occurring on university premises

6.1.1 In the event of the death of a staff member or student on university premises (referred to as the "incident scene"), the relevant CCD assumes the role of operational coordinator on behalf of the university with the objective of ensuring the effective and efficient coordination of relevant university services.

6.1.2 For the duration of the incident scene, the CCD functions as the primary liaising point between the university-, legislative- and government departments.

6.1.3 The CCD must ensure the following:

- i. Deployment of campus protection services to the scene, including emergency services and SHE representatives.
- ii. Activation of the South African Police Services, external emergency services, and where relevant the Department of Employment and Labour (DoEL), ensuring that the necessary support, access and information is provided to the SAPS and DoEL to conduct the relevant investigations and work.
- iii. Effective dissemination of information to the various stakeholders identified in paragraphs 3 and 4 above.
- iv. Access management, deescalation and containment of the incident scene.
- v. Establishment of contact with the family of the deceased, informing them of their death.
- vi. Activation of psycho-social support services and trauma counselling to staff and students who are immediately impacted by the incident scene.
- vii. The deployment and coordination of other services and responses as deemed necessary for the management of the incident scene.

6.1.4 After the incident scene has been cleared and the relevant authorities have departed, the procedures contemplated in paragraph 5 continue with the designated officials identified in paragraph 4.

6.2 Instances occurring on premises not owned or controlled by the university during the execution of official university business

6.2.1 In the event of the death of a staff member or student occurring on premises not owned or controlled by the university whilst the staff member or student is engaged in university business, the following provisions will guide the university's response:

- i. Informed by the geographical location and context of the instance, the university must determine which support could reasonably be provided to the affected staff, students, and family members.
- ii. The relevant local authorities remain the main point of contact in managing the scene and incident.
- iii. Steps taken by the university to support affected staff, students and family members must be comparable to the provisions of these rules and may not place an unjustifiable burden on the university.

7 Funerals, memorial services and condolences

7.1 Attendance of funerals

7.1.1 The attendance of funerals by staff and students is considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to the following guidelines:

- i. The attendance of staff and students to a funeral must be agreed to by the family of the deceased.
- ii. Preference must be given to staff and students who are based on the same campus and well acquainted with the deceased, including colleagues, fellow classmates, fellow residents in university residence, etc.
- iii. Guided by the wishes of the family of the deceased, the following limitations are set for the number of staff and student attendees in relation to the distance of the funeral from campus:

Distance from Campus	Number of attendees	Provisioning of meal packs
0-150km	40 to 65 attendees	Only water
150-300km	30 attendees	Meals packs
300-500km	20 attendees	Meals packs
More than 500km	12 attendees	Meals packs + accommodation

- iv. International travel relating to the attendance of funerals is not permitted.
- v. The transport of staff and students must be done in line with the applicable university rules relating to expenditure and travel.
- vi. Where reasonably possible, staff and students must travel to funerals using shuttle- or bus services.

7.2 Hosting of memorials

7.2.1 The university may resolve to host a memorial service, per campus, in memory of staff and students who passed away during the course of the year.

7.2.2 Smaller memorial services may be hosted by departments, faculties or student life, with the aim of providing opportunity to students and staff who were well acquainted with the deceased to bid farewell.

7.2.3 Memorial services must be conducted in a manner that protects the dignity of the deceased and their family and must ensure a respectful and caring tone.

7.2.4 A programme for memorial services must be developed and approved by the designated officials indicated in paragraph 4.

7.2.5 The immediate family of the deceased must be invited to attend the memorial service, with reasonable support provided by the university in terms of transport and accommodation, limited to a maximum of 6 family members.

7.2.6 Due consideration must be given towards the religion, beliefs and culture of the deceased when planning the memorial service and eulogies delivered during the service.

7.3 Condolences

7.3.1 The university may extend their condolences to the family of the deceased via the designated officials identified in paragraph 4.

7.3.2 The condolences may include messages, flowers or similar items, which do not exceed R1 000.00 in value.

8 Memorial artefacts

8.1 The honorary naming of buildings or facilities of the university must be managed in accordance with the relevant policy.

8.2 The installation of memorial artefacts like plaques, images, display items, etc., must be approved by the designated official identified in paragraph 4, done in consultation with the relevant CCD and campus DVC.

8.3 The expenses relating to the production and installation of memorial artefacts considered above may be funded by the university but may not exceed R3 000.00.

8.4 The memorial artefacts may not cause damage to university facilities or assets or reasonably encroach on the usage of university facilities by other staff and students and may not be larger than 30x30cm.

8.5 Memorial artifacts may be removed after a period of 5 years, following consultation and approval between the relevant DSL, CCD and campus DVC.

9 Social-welfare support

- 9.1 The designated officials indicated in paragraph 4 may resolve to provide limited and reasonable social-welfare support to the immediate family of the deceased, which may include covering minor expenses relating to the funeral preparations or food items.
 - 9.2 The value of the social-welfare support issued must be agreed upon between the designated official, relevant CCD and campus DVC, and may not exceed R5 000.00.
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