



Guidance for Students, Parents and Staff

Consent to share information

General principles

This guidance is intended to offer assistance to Staffordshire Regional Access Centre staff in working with the parents, spouses, relatives or guardians of applicants, students, and former students. (The words 'parent' and 'student' are used generically to cover these categories).

Students who are over eighteen are adults and have the same legal rights as any other adult regarding confidentiality. In particular, they are protected by the Data Protection legislation. Personal data about a student (which could include the status of their application, confirmation that they are studying here, where they live and how their studies are progressing) should not be disclosed to anyone else without the express consent of the student.

Parents have no legal right to information about a student, although they would of course be contacted as next of kin in the event of an emergency or real concern about the welfare of their son or daughter (e.g. if they are at risk of harm).

In relation to applicants, in the UCAS application scheme, applicants are specifically asked whether they wish a parent or representative to be authorised to discuss their application with UCAS, and if so, to nominate who can act on their behalf. This authorisation is not, and cannot be portable to the institutions to which the individual may have applied.

Staffordshire Regional Access Centre understands that parents can be anxious about support arrangements in Higher Education. Staffordshire Regional Access Centre is aware of the importance and value of the informal network of support offered to students by family and friends and understand that there may be concerns about how this can be maintained at the University; in Higher Education, students are encouraged and expected to be independent learners and to take responsibility for both their studies and their support arrangements.

It is appropriate, and often very helpful, to outline the general process and relevant context for the parent, without disclosing specifically the situation of the individual student. This could include an explanation of application processes, or information about how a student should raise a complaint or general matter of concern. This may enable the parent to guide the student towards more effective resolution of any problems or personal difficulties.

Giving consent

Staffordshire Regional Access Centre is unable to comment on individual circumstances without the written consent of the student concerned, as legislation requires us to maintain confidentiality. A student can expressly give consent to share information with a third party. The individual student will be asked to generate a "Consent to Share" document, stating who they would like Staffordshire Regional Access Centre to communicate with and what they are keen to share/ disclose.

It is advisable that the Consent to Share should be in writing and should specify the particular issues that the student is willing to share/ disclose e.g. a copy of the Needs Assessment Report or the status of the assessment report. A suggested format for the wording is detailed in Appendix 1.

Staffordshire Regional Access Centre would accept instruction directly from a student from an email address given at the point of application or their university email address

A parent will be informed that their son or daughter will need to provide written consent, indicating that they are happy for a specified issue to be discussed with their parent, before any communication takes place.

The written authorisation should be submitted to Staffordshire Regional Access Centre and saved in the student's file. It will not be shared with other staff across the University. It will also not be portable across the institution.

The **only exception** to the requirement for written consent may be:

- If a parent initially calls to book a Needs Assessment on behalf of the student. It will be assumed that the student has given permission and Staffordshire Regional Access Centre will communicate with the parent regarding :
Making an appointment, requesting the documents needed in preparation for the appointment and the need for Consent to Share for future communication to take place.

If a parent contacts Staffordshire Regional Access Centre by telephone, email or in person, without the student's consent, staff will politely decline to discuss the student's affairs with them without the student's consent.

Even with consent, it is not deemed to be appropriate to have a conversation with a parent and to agree that the content of that conversation will not be disclosed to the student, unless this is justified with a reason related to the student's physical or mental wellbeing.

Attendance at meetings

It is recommended that parents are not encouraged to attend a Needs Assessments or other formal or informal meetings.

The Needs Assessment considers the individual needs of each student and considers what difficulties the student may experience when accessing their course. Support recommendations are then made. With this in mind it is essential that a disabled student is able to freely, and truthfully, discuss their difficulties in relation to accessing their course. The presence of a parent could, in some circumstances, inhibit a student's ability to answer questions truthfully for fear of disappointing or upsetting their parent. In this regard it is often a better outcome for the student if they attend the assessment on their own. However, having said that, some students may of course struggle to remember or explain the difficulties they have or could feel too anxious to attend on their own. In such a situation, the student may be encouraged to prepare well for the assessment with the support of a parent. In exceptional circumstances and with the student's express written consent, the student may request that the parent attend. However, it should be noted that the assessor will direct all questions to the student as the assessment is with them and not the parent.

If a parent proves to be assertive or aggressive during the Needs Assessment, they will politely be asked to leave.

In practice

If a parent calls to make a Needs Assessment appointment for the student, the Centre will accept that the student has given permission for this and will communicate with the parent regarding the sending of evidence, the completion of a pre-assessment questionnaire the sending of a copy of the funding letter in preparation for the Needs Assessment and the need for consent for further communication.

It will be made clear to the parent that all correspondence will take place directly with the student and that no further information will be disclosed regarding the student, with the parent, unless a Consent to Share document is provided by the student.

If the student completes Consent to Share document, Staffordshire Regional Access Centre can disclose information, provided that the specific issue is detailed in the Consent to Share and the person/s with whom any information is to be shared are detailed.

Communications with a student, including email correspondence, written correspondence etc. will not generally include the parent, unless the student has given us specific consent (for example, to share a copy of the Needs Assessment Report).

Instruction will **not be** taken from a Parent re:

- Confirmation that the student has read the draft Needs Assessment Report and does not wish for any changes to be made.
- Authorisation for the distribution of the Needs Assessment Report
- Subsequent queries following the Needs Assessment.

For any information that is disclosed by a Parent, Staffordshire Regional Access Centre will not agree to keep that information from the student. Any responses with the parent will be copied to the student as a matter of course.

Revoking Consent to Share

Consent to share will generally be valid for the length of the course that the student is on, when the student completes the Consent to Share document.

A student can, at any time revoke the Consent to Share. The consent will be withdrawn from the date that the written cancellation is received by Staffordshire Regional Access Centre. The parent will not be informed by the Centre.



Appendix 1

Consent to Share Form

I consent to my Parent/Guardian/Spouse/Partner

[name]: _____

contacting the Staffordshire Regional Access Centre on my behalf about the following issue:

- Disability and evidence of disability
- Needs Assessment /status of assessment etc
- Other (be specific).....

Signature:

Date:
