



GIRTON COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Welfare Checks Policy & Procedure

Approved by Council September 2024

Policy statement

At Girton College, the health, safety, and well-being of our students are our highest priorities. The College provides a network of interlocking care, safety and welfare services, including emergency responders, nurses, and pastoral care providers to promote student wellbeing and respond to any potential crises.

Welfare checking is a common safeguarding practice in the UK, which may be requested by friends, family or support agencies to ensure an individual's safety and well-being and they are a core element of Girton College's commitment to supporting students and ensuring their well-being, particularly in cases where there are concerns about a student's health.

We recognize that welfare checks may be unwelcome and can cause anxiety. They are undertaken only when there is a substantial concern for a student's safety and well-being, to ensure the student's immediate safety and to provide the necessary support in critical situations.

This policy outlines the procedures for conducting welfare checks to ensure the safety and well-being of students residing in college accommodation including Swirles Court. It applies to all students living in college-owned or operated residential facilities and students consent to its application to them where necessary as a requirement of their tenancy.¹

The college is committed to ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of its students. Welfare checks are conducted to ensure students' well-being, particularly in cases where there may be concerns about their physical or mental health.

Purpose Of Welfare Checks

Welfare checks are conducted to:

- Ensure the physical and mental well-being of students.
- Provide timely assistance in situations where a student may be in distress or facing a crisis.
- Foster a safe and supportive campus living environment.
- Ensure a safe and supportive environment for students during or after a crisis.

¹ Students are expected to reside in Cambridge during their studies and first year undergraduates are expected to reside in college accommodation to afford them ready access to the facilities, support and experiences that Girton College provides. However, there is no requirement for students to live in college accommodation after first year and students are permitted to reside in private accommodation whilst studying. The college still owes a duty of care to such students and although staff do not conduct in-person welfare checks on students living in private accommodation, staff may use alternative methods of checking a student's welfare such as phone calls or email contact.

This protocol is designed for concerns around safety and well-being, or behaviour that is out of character. It should not be utilised to respond to non-attendance at routine learning events. But it may be used when a student does not attend a scheduled examination or when College has good reason to believe there is a significant risk to a student's safety or that a student is experiencing problems that severely affect their ability to engage in their studies.

It is recognised that although welfare checks are conducted out of concern for the safety and wellbeing of students, they may be experienced as sometimes be distressing or intrusive. We are committed to minimizing any discomfort and ensuring that these checks are carried out with the utmost respect for students' privacy and dignity.

Principles of Collaboration, Communication and minimal intrusion

To balance the necessity of welfare checks with respect for students' autonomy and comfort, we work within the following principles of collaboration, communication and minimal intrusion consistent with the College's responsibilities for student safety:

- **Proactively Communicate:** We will inform students about the welfare check process during orientation and through ongoing communications, emphasising the purpose and importance of these checks.
- **Seek Consent When Possible:** Whenever feasible, we will seek consent from the student before conducting a welfare check. We will make every effort to contact the student via phone, email, or other communication methods acceptable to students prior to entering their living space.
- **Respect Privacy:** We will conduct welfare checks discreetly and respectfully, with trained personnel following established protocols to minimise disruption.
- **Provide Support:** We will ensure that students are offered appropriate resources and support services following a welfare check, including counselling, health services, and academic assistance.

Standard Welfare Check Procedure

Before initiating a standard face-to-face welfare check, Girton College will first undertake preliminary steps to assess the student's well-being through less intrusive means. These steps may include, but are not limited to:

- Attempting to contact the student via text, phone calls and emails to their student and personal email addresses;
- Reviewing key card system records to track the student's recent movements;
- Consulting with the student's DoS and academic department to verify engagement;

- Reaching out to the student's emergency contact, and
- Notifying the student of our intention to visit their residence for a welfare check.

These measures are designed to respect the student's privacy and autonomy while ensuring their safety and well-being.

Contact through these preliminary steps does not always negate the necessity for a welfare check but we endeavor to work with the student to further establish their safety which may include some alternative forms of welfare checks.

1. Initiation of Welfare Checks:

1.1. Who Can Request a Welfare Check:

- Students – Flatmates, Classmates or Friends.
- College Staff – Typically by frontline staff e.g. Porters, Nurses, Tutors, DoS, House Services.
- University Staff – Faculty/Department Staff, University Support Services staff e.g. counsellor or Disability adviser.
- The subject of the welfare checks themselves.

External professionals and/or family may not request a welfare check except in extreme emergencies. However, we may use the information provided to us by these sources to decide if there is significant need to conduct one.

1.2. Reasons for Requesting a Welfare Check:

- Uncharacteristic absence from classes or activities.
- Prolonged lack of communication or response to contact attempts.
- Concerning behaviour or appearance.
- Significant health concerns.
- Significant risk concerns including self-harm and/or suicidal ideation, intent or attempts.
- Any other reason that raises concern for the student's well-being.

1.3. Request Process:

- Contact the on-duty porters or nurse to explain the reason for the welfare check, unless there is a justified reason not to, being mindful of information that might need to remain confidential; if possible, it would be desirable also to provide the student's CrsID and address.
- Information should be forwarded to a senior member of staff (HoWW, Duty Tutor, Head Porters, Senior Tutor, Deputy Senior Tutor or Head of Student Services) to authorise the welfare check.
- Provide the student's name, residence details, and reason for the welfare check request.

2. Conducting Welfare Checks:

2.1. Responsibility:

- Welfare checks will typically be conducted by porters or nurses but may also be carried out by a tutor if appropriate.
- Where possible welfare checks should be carried out by two members of staff who are experienced in carrying out such checks and sufficiently trained. However, welfare checks may be carried out by one member of staff who has means of fast communication with other on duty staff members.

2.2. Procedure:

- Attempt to contact the student via phone, email, and other communication methods.
- Visit the student's room or apartment, knocking, announcing presence and intention to enter.
- If there is no response, use of a master key may be authorized to enter the room/apartment, following a strict protocol to respect the student's privacy.

2.3. Entry Protocol:

- If entry is required, all efforts should be made for two staff members to be present during the check in circumstances. Where it is not possible for two members of staff to attend the welfare check, the individual carrying out the welfare check must follow this guidance:

2.4. Guidance For Staff Entering Student's Rooms

- Familiarise yourself with the specific concerns prompting the welfare check.
- Review any available information about the student, including recent communications and key card activity.
- Ensure you have identification, a master key, and a means of communication (e.g. a mobile phone and/or walkie talkie).
- Notify a colleague that you are conducting a welfare check that may require entry to a student's room.
- If there is no response and concerns remain, use the master key to unlock and open the door.
- Knock again and announce your intentions before entering the room.
- Enter the room cautiously and respectfully.
- Quickly assess the immediate environment for any signs of distress or emergency.
- Call out to the student by name as you enter the space.

3. Handling Various Scenarios:

3.1. If the Student is Present and Responsive:

- If the student is found and in need of immediate assistance (medical, psychological, etc.), contact emergency services.
- Ensure the student is safe and offer to connect them with support services.

- Respect the student's privacy and dignity throughout the interaction.

3.2. If the Student is Present but Unresponsive or in Distress:

- Call emergency services immediately.
- Stay with the student until help arrives, providing reassurance and comfort.

3.3. If the Student is Not Present:

- Leave the room ensuring that you have not touched any of the student's belongings unless there is a safety concern.
- Email the student informing them that you entered the room to conduct a welfare check.

4. Post-Check Procedure:

4.1. Immediate Action:

- Record details of the welfare check, including the date, time, persons involved, observations, and any actions taken, all checks should be logged on the incident reporting system.
- All information gathered during welfare checks is confidential and will be shared only with those who need to know to provide support and ensure safety.

Urgent Welfare Check procedure

In urgent situations where a student's immediate safety and well-being are thought to be at risk, a staff member may bypass certain steps in the standard welfare check procedure. This can include proceeding without waiting for authorization from a senior member of staff or notifying the student in advance of the welfare check. These measures are taken to ensure swift action and provide timely support in critical circumstances, always with the student's best interests in mind.

Alternative Welfare Checks

As an alternative to typical welfare checks involving a staff member attending a student's room, the college offers various methods to verify a student's safety and well-being. These include phone calls, the student reporting to the porter's lodge, or virtual meetings with a member of the pastoral care team. We understand that some students may prefer not to have the college involved in their care, and in very rare cases, we may agree to a welfare check conducted through a third party, such as a support worker or family member. The list above is not exhaustive, and we are committed to working with students to make welfare checks feel safe rather than distressing. However, alternative methods will only be considered when a typical welfare check is assessed to cause more harm than good. We expect full cooperation from the student to ensure these alternative methods are a viable way to confirm their safety and well-being.

Furthermore, there will be some occasions where a typical welfare check is necessary despite the distress it may cause e.g. when staff are concerned about a suicide attempt.

Review and Feedback

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it meets the needs of students and complies with legal and institutional standards. Feedback from students and staff will be solicited to improve the welfare check process. We are committed to continuously improving our welfare check procedures by:

- **Gathering Feedback:** Regularly soliciting feedback from students and staff to understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement.
- **Reviewing Practices:** Annually reviewing and updating our policies and procedures to reflect best practices and address any concerns raised by the college community.
- **Training:** Staff involved in conducting welfare checks will receive training on recognizing signs of distress/need for intervention and proper procedures for conducting welfare checks.

Our goal is to create a safe, supportive, and respectful living environment where every student feels cared for and valued. We appreciate the cooperation and understanding of our students as we work together to maintain their well-being.

Note: This policy is subject to change based on new regulations, feedback from the college community, and evolving best practices in student welfare and safety.

Contact Information:

For questions or concerns about the welfare check policy, please contact:
headofwelfare@girton.cam.ac.uk