School of Dentistry

Structured Event Reporting Form (SERF) guidelines

Structured Event Reporting Forms (SERF) for Safeguarding Issues and Professionalism Alerts

Guidelines for staff and students

Contents

Students within the School of Dentistry are expected to behave in a professional and responsible manner, complete the duties and requirements associated with their studies and do so in a manner that supports the wellbeing and health of the student and their peers.

Throughout the Schools programmes, students have contact with a wide range of staff, peers, patients and members of the public; all these groups, as well as our students, must be safeguarded. This represents a challenge when any difficult issues appear, and specifically communicating information in a secure, appropriate manner.

The system of reporting incidents or events is confidential and efficient, and seeks to safeguard individual students, the student body as a whole, the school and our service users and patients. As part of this system, the Structured Event Reporting Form (SERF) is intended to capture and communicate information from an incident or event, of which there are three types:

- Safeguarding and welfare
- Professionalism
- Positive incidents

The SERF is used to communicate information for all three of these types of event, and the form can be found on our website here.

The SERF has three boxes which allow the event to be categorised appropriately (Safeguarding and welfare; Professionalism alert; or positive incident).

Safeguarding and welfare issues, and professionalism alerts are identified as being level 1, 2 or 3, the level indicating the urgency with which the issue should be dealt, and to whom the information is directed.

Positive incidents are those where a student has shown exemplary conduct or behaved in a manner above and beyond what would normally be expected. There is no level attached to these.

A SERF should ALSO be completed in any situation that a clinical incident form is completed within a clinical environment involving School of Dentistry students.

Further details of the different types of event and the levels of incident are given below.

Types of event

a) General guidance on recording level of an event

Level 1 – Impact is limited to students or reporter involved in the incident. This will include positive feedback. The incident is unlikely to have any long-term impact on the student's progress. No Fitness to Practice (FtP) issues raised.

Level 2 – Impact may involve other peers, patients or staff. There may be long term ramifications related to this incident. There is no imminent or actual risk of harm to the students, peers or patients. Issues of FtP may be raised, but not clearly the need for FtP procedures to commence. The incident is unlikely to have any long-term impact on the student's progress.

Level 3 – Impact may involve other peers, patients or staff. There may be long term ramifications related to this incident. There is imminent or actual risk of harm to the students, peers or patients. Issues of FtP may be raised, and a case of FtP may be considered. The incident may have a long-term impact on the student's progress and has the potential to bring the school, the health partners and/or the profession into disrepute.

b) Safeguarding and welfare

A SERF should be completed in any situation where an unexpected, inappropriate or exceptional event occurs, or situations when such events were prevented ('near misses').

Examples of safeguarding and welfare situations include:

- Patient safety incident e.g. Sharps handled unsafely, not washing hands in clinical area, lack of clinical skill that has potential to cause harm
- Student welfare or wellbeing e. g. Student harmed on placement, student needs not met, student asked to complete tasks they do not feel trained to complete
- Academic issues that could impact patient safety or the student's wellbeing and ability to progress
- e.g. Failure to attend placements that could jeopardise progression, poor performance within clinical session, student reporting failure of educator to offer planned session
- Pastoral issues e.g. student concerned with health issues, home sick, financial concerns
- Significant activities that could bring the profession / institution into disrepute e.g. Criminal behaviour, drug or alcohol misuse, racism or discrimination
- Admissions issues – e. g. not fully disclosing relevant health information
- Disclosure of sensitive information – if possible, level 2 confidential information is disclosed at any time, staff should complete a level 2 SERF to allow the responsible officer to recognise and safeguard this information
- Plagiarism or any form of cheating (communicated through SERF, but covered by university guidelines)
- Absence – as per procedures below

c) Professionalism (alert)

Reporting of events in the category of professionalism is intended to maintain a minimum standard of conduct, and for this reason, a 'scale' of severity has been devised, linked to the professionalism element of the MSQC (medical skills and quality care) theme.

At level 1 and 2, an incident will generate a professionalism 'alert'. The alert will be given verbally to the student, with the reasons behind its issuing. Once a Professionalism alert has been issued, a SERF showing the appropriate level is completed; the student will then be invited to a meeting in line with SERF reporting guidance. Only staff who are employed by UCLAN (internal, honorary staff or accredited Clinical Educators) may issue Professionalism alerts, and these staff must have received appropriate training.

Examples of situations that would trigger a professionalism alert at levels 1 and 2 include:

Level 1:

- Untidy appearance or inappropriate attire not in line with the Dress Code
- Unpunctuality/compliance with clinical practice time keeping, e.g. failing to return from break at agreed time
- Poor personal hygiene
- Failure to show normal courtesy
- Minor breaches of infection control
- Prior unapproved but notified absence
- Inattention/lack of interest
- Un-notified absence
- Unwillingness to accept advice/criticism
- Improper decorum in the teaching environment

Level 2:

- Failure to recognise personal limitations/lack of preparedness before embarking on a clinical procedure
- Failure to arrange appropriate appointments for continuing care of patients
- Non-premeditated breaches of patient confidentiality
- Non-premeditated breaches of Health and Safety
- Significant breaches of infection control
- Failures in record keeping
- Unprofessional behaviour to colleagues, patients or staff

Since this system is intended to reflect current behaviour, and is not cumulative, all professionalism alerts at levels 1 and 2 expire after 15 weeks or at the end of the academic year. The agreed actions, recorded on the SERF outcome form, will remain in the student eportfolio.

However, if the behaviour results in a student being given three professionalism alerts at level 1 in one term, this will automatically generate a professionalism alert at level 2. Beyond this, if in an academic year a student is given more than two professionalism alerts at level 2, this will automatically result in failure of the professionalism module for that year, and they will need to retake this element as remediation. Resit of this element of the professionalism module will at a minimum consist of a personal reflective professionalism awareness essay, along with evidence of improvement in behaviour, as identified in their academic advisor reviews.

Level 3:

Two professionalism alerts at level 2 will also lead to the Head of School of Dentistry being contacted who will consider if an upgrade to Fitness to Practice procedures is needed; were this to be the case, a professionalism alert at level 3 would be issued.

Professionalism alerts rated at level 3 will usually involve higher level **disciplinary** or **Fitness to Practice** procedures.

Examples of level 3 professionalism incidents include:

- cheating, plagiarism or assault – these would be recorded as level 3 on the SERF and would lead to disciplinary procedures

- failure to disclose a relevant medical history would constitute a level 3 on the SERF, and would lead to the Fitness to Practice process

- being drunk at a placement would lead to both disciplinary and fitness to practice processes.

d) Positive feedback

A SERF recording a positive incident should be completed in any situation where an unexpected or exceptional positive event occurs. Examples include:

- Unsolicited positive feedback from patients and users regarding a student's work

- Learning or practice that was above and beyond what may be expected from a student

- Contribution in a positive way to wider school, university and community life

- Events or acts that reflect positively on the school or university to the wider public

- Demonstration of leadership and management that is above what would be expected from students at that level of training

Completing a SERF

It is key for both staff and students to appreciate that the SERF is merely an information notification system – a SERF is not held formally anywhere outside the secure SERF database. The SERF is only the vehicle by which information is securely gathered, triaged, and directed to appropriate person(s). As such, any situation when a SERF is completed and submitted will be followed up with another process – this may be academic (lodging positive feedback in portfolio), safeguarding focussed (student welfare needing pastoral or possibly health input) or professionalism (leading to disciplinary note of the professionalism alert).

a) Who can complete a SERF?

A SERF **can** be completed by anyone involved with School of Dentistry students. This includes:

- UCLan Dental staff

- Any other UCLan staff

- Staff within clinical placements – UCLan trained

- Staff within clinical placements – non-UCLan trained

- Students on School of Dentistry courses

- Public or patients

Students can complete SERFs regarding staff, learning experiences or any incidents they feel require reporting and will be encouraged to do so to support future error reporting behaviour in healthcare. This is dealt with in a separate section below.

b) Where do I find and how do I submit a SERF?

The SERF template is online at the School of Dentistry webpage:

The "submit form" sends the form to dentalserf@uclan.ac.uk If for any reason this cannot be accessed, the Designated Officer (DO) should be contacted on 01772 89(xxxx) and details completed via telephone and then uploaded by the DO to the online system. This is only to be used in extreme situations when the online form cannot be completed.

c) What information should be recorded?

- What the type of event was (safeguarding / professionalism / positive)
- Details of the event
- When and where it occurred
- Who was involved?
- What was the impact: consider for student, their peers, patients, public and staff?
- The level of the event i.e. 1, 2 or 3? See details below

System following submission of SERF

Our over-riding concern is to ensure that patient safety and student welfare are always supported. All SERFs will be triaged by a Designated Officer (DO). The DO will assess if the level assigned is appropriate for the incident, and if necessary, will up- or down-grade the level. At subsequent meetings with a student a **SERF outcome form,** which identifies actions to be undertaken, is completed and uploaded into the student's e-portfolio.

a) Positive incident

SERF sent to academic advisor (SCT) who will collate and pass to student for inclusion in their portfolio, usually at the next timetabled meeting with the student.

b) Level 1

SERF forwarded to the Academic advisor. The advisor will make contact with the student and meet within **two weeks** of receiving the SERF. At the meeting an action plan is formulated, and a SERF Outcome form completed which will upload immediately into the student's Portfolio (Appendix 3). An email is also sent to the DO to advise that the SERF has been dealt with. When a satisfactory conclusion (agreed actions completed) is reached this will be recorded in the next formally timetabled meeting between student and academic advisor. NB an interim meeting might be needed between student and academic advisor to review progress if there is more than a month to the next formally timetabled meeting. Upon a

satisfactory conclusion, an email should then be sent to the DO at dentalserf@uclan.ac.uk to note satisfactory outcome.

c) Level 2

SERF forwarded to Academic Advisor (SCT) and Head of Course. A meeting then takes place between academic advisor, Head of Course and student, within **one week** of receipt of the SERF. A SERF outcome should be formulated and logged as for a level 1 incident and an email should be sent to dentalserf@uclan.ac.uk upon satisfactory outcome.

If suspension of a student results, the internal UCLan procedures will be immediately instigated. The e-portfolio will be locked after this entry and a snapshot taken of all entries for use in further FtP **procedures.** The Compliance Team in the <i> will be informed immediately to ensure they can inform the Home Office as this may impact on Visa issues.

d) Level 3

SERF forwarded to Academic Advisor (SCT), Head of Course and Head of School. A discussion between the parties must be instigated immediately and take place within 24 hours of their receipt of the SERF; at the meeting an action plan is formulated, and a SERF Outcome form completed which is uploaded immediately into the student's Portfolio.

When FtP is initiated, the e-portfolio will be locked after this entry and a snapshot taken of all entries for use in further procedures. Suspension may occur to allow assessment of FtP issues to be made.

Actions in the event of multiple SERFs being submitted

A secure SERF summary document is held in line with the school's confidentiality policy. This gives summary data of the number and nature of SERFs for each student and is only accessible by the DO or nominated proxy.

If more than 3 level 1 incidents are raised against a student in one term, the DO will automatically inform the Head of Course and assessment made as to whether there is a chronic underlying problem. This may lead to an upgrade to level 2; this is the case whether these are professionalism alerts or safeguarding incidents. This does not lead to any automatic outcome; it merely escalates information sharing.

If more than 2 SERFs at level 2 are raised against a student in one term, the DO will automatically inform the Head of School and assessment made as to whether there is a chronic underlying problem. This may lead to an upgrade to level 3; this is the case whether these are professionalism alerts or safeguarding incidents. This does not lead to any automatic outcome; it again merely escalates information sharing.

It must be understood that this upgrading is not a punishment. The ultimate goal here is to identify if a student's wellbeing or career is not progressing as needed and provide appropriate support.

Frequently Asked Questions

When and how should SERFs be used with regard to student absence?

If a student has more than three unauthorised absences in one semester, the admin team will complete a SERF indicating level 1. If a student is absent for more than seven days, but in contact with the admin staff, a SERF indicating level 2 will be completed.

It must be highlighted again that this is not disciplinary – this is to safeguard students. The university imposes strict attendance requirements and such absence could make it mathematically impossible for a student to complete that year's studies. As such, this communication supports the Head of Phase in considering possible academic remediation and other support that may be needed for successful transition back to studies and successful progress.

Note: for students absent with no contact, please see the 'missing student' policies.

What happens if an incident is reported involving a member of staff or clinical teacher?

The information is once again triaged by the DO.

If a level 1 issue, the DO will communicate with the relevant staff member immediately to try and remedy the situation. The line manager or relevant staff member at UCLan will be informed.

If this is a level 2 issue, the DO will communicate with Head of Course immediately. Head of Course will meet with the individual and an action plan will be raised to try and remedy the situation.

Confirmation that the rating is appropriate will be documented and if so, suspension of teaching duties may be needed and, in this case, disciplinary proceedings may need to be discussed.

If this is a level 3 issue, the DO will communicate with the Head of School immediately; they will meet with the individual and an action plan will be raised to try and remedy the situation. Confirmation that the rating is appropriate will be documented and if so, this will lead to suspension whilst investigation is undertaken, and appropriate proceedings are discussed.

What happens if a SERF is submitted by a student?

If the event is regarding course process, teaching delivery or similar and reported by a student, the DO will triage and forward to the relevant member of staff. The same timescale applies as with other incidents reported through SERF; a level 1 incident should lead to an action being formulated within 2 weeks of receipt of the SERF, and a level 2 incident should lead to an action being formulated within 1 week of receipt of the SERF. The actions will be feedback to the student who raised the SERF; this will be in writing unless the student requests a face to face meeting.

How can a member of staff or student appeal the process?

As with all systems, there may be times when it is considered that the process has not led to the

correct outcome and appeal can be considered.

It is important for students to note that, in line with professional guidance from the GDC, feedback on adverse events and incidents with reflection and professional development are key parts of continuing professional development. Whilst students have the right to appeal any decision at any time, if a student is found to have poor insight into their practice through this process, this in itself may become the subject of a professionalism alert and /or fitness to practice issue. We therefore advise open and honest dialogue and specifically for students to take early advantage of the independent support available to them when considering such an appeal.

Sources of support include the Student's Union, SASS and the Student's Academic Advisor.

All appeals will be audited annually, by the Designated Officer and reported to the Dental Academic Committee, to ensure the consistency and fairness of the process

What is done to deal with anonymous SERFs that are thought to be malicious or falsified?

As the process is predicated towards easy reporting, it is conceivable that information may be received that is anonymous. Whilst this is not necessarily a problem, it is possible that the situation may be encountered in which the contents are felt to be malicious or inaccurate. As the SERF system lays out process, but not outcome, the normal discussions with staff and student will rapidly identify if this unusual circumstance has occurred and if the outcome of a SERF is that the contents were felt to be false, the SERF will be removed from the student's record.

It must be noted that filling in a SERF with inaccurate or malicious information is itself a fitness to practice or serious conduct issue and anyone found to have done so will be subject to appropriate processes.

How is the reporting process quality assured?

All submitted SERFs are presented anonymously within the relevant course management meetings. This allows patterns related to educational provision, staff or facilities to be swiftly identified and remediated.

This also allows audit of the process to occur, specifically considering if timelines are being met, confidentiality policy being followed and the appropriateness of the procedures to always be considered.

An annual report will be submitted to the Dental Academic Committee regarding the process. Additionally, the reporting process will be covered within induction training for all students, and for all UCLan staff, as well as all staff within placement sessions who are trained to complete work based assessments, and finally all examiners who take part in the School of Dentistry assessment process.

Designated Officer

Dr Vicky Buller (VBuller@uclan.ac.uk)