

# Student Critical Incident Management Policy

## Overview

(1) Southern Cross University is committed to providing a safe environment for students and staff. This policy describes the University's approach to Critical Incidents involving students and how the University supports students in the event of a Critical Incident.

## Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(2) The purpose of this Policy and embedded Procedures is to respond to and manage in a timely and coordinated manner Student Critical Incidents that are not considered an emergency under the [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#).

(3) This Policy aims to ensure compliance with the requirements of the:

- a. [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) - Wellbeing and Safety, Standard 2.3.5;
- b. [Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000](#) (ESOS); and
- c. [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018](#).

## Scope

(4) This Policy applies to:

- a. All students (non-award, undergraduate, postgraduate and research, domestic, and international) irrespective of their mode of participation or location; and
- b. All University staff involved in managing Student Critical Incidents.

(5) This Policy does not apply to:

- a. Emergencies or crisis situations which are managed in accordance with [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#) and associated procedures.
- b. Routine student welfare concerns and relatively minor incidents for which the University provides support and assistance through normal service operations such as Student Administration Services, counselling services and international student support.
- c. Incidents that do not involve students. Incidents involving staff are managed in accordance with the [Work Health and Safety Policy](#) and associated procedures.
- d. Transnational program partner organisations, where local critical incident management arrangements apply.

## Relationship to other University Policies

(6) A Student Critical Incident which is also a Crisis or Emergency may be managed in accordance with both this Policy and the [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#) and Procedures. Where there is a conflict between the two policies, the [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#) will apply.

(7) The [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#) applies where a Student Critical Incident occurs on University

premises, including student residences, and there is:

- a. real or immediate danger of injury or loss of human life; or
- b. a large impact on, or consequences for, operations of the University; or
- c. a significant coordinated response by emergency service organisations and high-level coordination between the University and external agencies is required.

(8) Student Critical Incidents, as described in clause (7) are immediately referred to the Vice President (Operations) who assumes responsibility for their management.

(9) Critical incidents involving staff and visitors are responded to under [Work Health and Safety Legislation](#) and related University [Work Health and Safety Policy](#) and Procedures and other Emergency Plans.

## Section 2 - Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy the following definitions apply:

(10) A Student Critical Incident means a traumatic event, or the threat of such, which causes extreme stress, fear, physical or psychological injury to Students. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- a. death, or life-threatening injury or illness;
- b. suicide, or attempted suicide;
- c. unexplained or unusual absence (for example, on fieldwork);
- d. violent behaviour, including severe verbal or psychological aggression;
- e. accident;
- f. natural disaster, or socio-political event;
- g. sexual assault;
- h. witnessing serious incidents, or distressing behaviour;
- i. mental health crisis;
- j. issues relating to drug, alcohol or substance abuse.

(11) Crisis and Emergency are defined in the University's [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#).

(12) Higher Degree Researcher means a higher degree by research student.

(13) Response Manager means the senior staff member responsible for, and empowered to, manage a Student Critical Incident.

(14) Case Manager means the person appointed by, and accountable to, the Response Manager to co-ordinate the response to a Student Critical Incident.

(15) Student means a person enrolled in a course leading to an accredited award of the University, or in units which do not lead to an accredited award of the University.

(16) Younger Student means a student under the age of 18 years.

## Section 3 - Policy Statement

(17) The University proactively manages risk and adopts a range of risk reduction activities to ensure the occurrence and intensity of Student Critical Incidents is minimised.

(18) When a Student Critical Incident occurs, it will be:

- a. Responded to, or resolved, with sensitivity and consideration of the wellbeing and safety of Students, their families, as well as staff and members of the community, if relevant;
- b. Reported to relevant University staff members, and relevant international and Australian government authorities and agencies;
- c. Managed and documented appropriately and confidentially, in accordance with the University's [Privacy Policy](#) and [Privacy Management Plan](#); and
- d. Managed in a manner to ensure that the University's reputation, domestically and internationally, is not damaged as a result of the incident.

## Section 4 - Accountability

(19) Students are primarily responsible for their own personal safety, health and wellbeing.

(20) All University staff, Students and affiliated accommodation providers are responsible for reporting a Student Critical Incident in accordance with this Policy.

(21) Younger Students: The [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018](#) (Standard 5) sets the framework for provider obligations where responsibility is accepted for accommodation, support and general welfare of international Students under 18 years of age. See [Welfare Arrangements of International Students Aged Under 18 Policy](#). If a staff member or approved homestay family becomes aware of a Student Critical Incident involving an international Student under 18 years of age, the incident must be reported in accordance with this policy, while ensuring that at all times appropriate ongoing welfare arrangements are in place.

(22) Higher Degree Researchers: University staff, such as supervisory teams and Graduate School staff are in close and regular contact with Higher Degree Researchers and may become aware of changes to a student's personal circumstances which may include a Student Critical Incident. If this occurs, the incident should be reported and managed in accordance with this Policy.

(23) Student Critical Incidents at transnational program partner organisations that are managed locally must be reported to the Chief International Officer.

## Section 5 - Key Personnel

### Response Manager

(24) Depending on the Students involved in the incident, the Response Manager will be:

- a. Vice President (Students) and Registrar: coursework students;
- b. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability): higher degree researchers, domestic and international;
- c. Chief International Officer: incidents involving international students in Australia (except higher degree researchers) or where an incident has occurred overseas).

### Case Manager

(25) The person, appointed by and reporting to the Response Manager, who co-ordinates the response to a Student Critical Incident when a Student Critical Incident Management Team is not required. Depending on the particular circumstances of the Student Critical Incident, the Case Manager will be as follows:

- a. Student Safety Support & Wellbeing Coordinator – coursework students;
- b. Manager, International Student Support Services - international students (except higher degree researchers) and incidents involving domestic students while overseas;
- c. Dean, Graduate Studies or Manager, Graduate School- higher degree researchers – domestic and international;
- d. Others, as identified on a case by case basis.

### **Student Critical Incident Management Team**

(26) The team of people assembled to manage and co-ordinate the response to a Student Critical Incident, where the severity or scale of the incident requires it. The team is appointed by and accountable to the relevant Response Manager.

### **Other Relevant Staff**

(27) Student Critical Incidents are responded to and resolved with appropriate consultation. Being mindful to protect the privacy of Students involved, and on the basis of 'need to know', advice and response may be sought from staff members and work units including, but not limited to:

- a. Office of the Vice Chancellor
- b. Vice President (Students) and Registrar
- c. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability)
- d. Dean, Graduate Studies
- e. Director, Human Resources
- f. Manager, Workplace Health and Safety
- g. Director, Business Intelligence and Quality
- h. Heads of Campus
- i. Director, Student Administration Services
- j. Chief Marketing Officer
- k. Manager, Counselling Services
- l. Executive Deans, Associate Dean (Education)s and College Deans;
- m. Manager, Insurance and Risk
- n. Privacy Contact Officer

## **Section 6 - Procedures**

(28) Each Student Critical Incident is unique. The aim of these Procedures is to provide a general framework to be followed. Staff must ensure that while compliance with the Policy is expected, the safety of those involved in the incident is paramount.

### **Part A - Reporting Student Critical Incidents**

(29) First responders to a Student Critical Incident should contact Emergency Services or University Security Services, where required. If an accident occurs on University premises, it is normal practice for University Security Services to contact Emergency Services.

(30) Student Critical Incidents may occur in a range of different situations and locations. Initial reports should be made to the Office of the Vice President (Students) and Registrar by calling the Student Safety and Wellbeing Support Line 02 6626 9643 which is available 24/7.

(31) Student Safety & Wellbeing Support may immediately refer the caller to Lifeline or other external crisis management support services.

## **Part B - Initial Assessment, Referral and Notifications**

(32) The circumstances of the situation will be assessed by the Office of the Vice President (Students) and Registrar and responsibility for the management of the Student Critical Incident assigned to:

- a. Vice President (Operations): all incidents within the scope of the [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#).
- b. Vice President (Students) and Registrar: domestic, coursework students.
- c. Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability): higher degree researchers, both domestic and international.
- d. Chief International Officer: incidents involving international students in Australia or where an incident has occurred overseas.
- e. If incidents involve international, domestic and higher degree research students, the Vice President (Students) and Registrar, Chief International Officer and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Capability) will jointly determine who assumes responsibility for managing the incident.

### **Essential Notifications**

(33) All student critical incidents must be notified to:

- a. The Office of the Vice Chancellor; and
- b. Manager, Workplace Health and Safety and an incident report lodged via Riskware immediately.

## **Part C - Case Management**

(34) Following the initial referrals and essential notifications, the Response Manager will appoint an appropriate Case Manager or establish a Student Critical Incident Team (SCI Team), with roles and responsibilities assigned accordingly. The Case Manager, or SCI Team, is responsible, with appropriate liaison and in close consultation with the relevant Response Manager, for the implementation of immediate and ongoing strategies.

### **Initial Actions**

(35) The Case Manager/SCI Team's initial actions include:

- a. Determining the impact of the incident and potential risks and identify immediate needs and appropriate supports.
- b. Obtaining student details such as ID, contact numbers, address and next of kin.
- c. Ensuring an Incident Accident Hazard Report has been submitted.
- d. Notifying the Chief Marketing Officer/Media Officer to handle any media enquiries.
- e. Notifying the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of critical incidents involving Australian Awards Students.
- f. Notifying relevant health authorities of any infectious or public health incident.

### **Follow up Actions**

(36) There is no 'one size fits all' response to Student Critical Incidents and so the particular circumstances of each incident will determine the most appropriate response and follow up actions required.

## **Liaison and Communications**

(37) Depending on the nature of the incident, and in close collaboration with relevant University staff, the Case Manager will liaise with:

- a. Police, doctors and hospital staff and government agencies, educational collaboration partners and overseas host institutions, as relevant.
- b. Affected staff and Students to ensure they are provided with appropriate information and updates. All staff-related communications are to be managed by HR Services.
- c. The Manager, Workplace Health and Safety.
- d. The Student's family or next of kin; and
- e. Chief Marketing Officer, regarding any media enquiries.

## **International Students**

(38) Incidents involving international students, or those that occur overseas, may require additional support and resources, such as:

- a. Engaging translation or interpretation services;
- b. Liaising with embassies and consulates to ensure contact with, and support for, the family in the student's home country;
- c. Supporting students in their management of overseas student health insurance issues, where appropriate; and
- d. Ensuring compliance issues, such as Confirmation of Enrolment and associated visa issues, are attended to promptly.

## **Academic Administration**

(39) Students will be supported to manage academic administration tasks, such as requests for special consideration, or withdrawal without penalty. The Case Manager will liaise with Student Administration Services, Faculties, Colleges and Graduate School, as appropriate.

(40) The Graduate School will support Higher Degree Researchers to manage all academic administration issues relating their candidature, including any leave of absence provisions, and associated financial and reporting issues.

## **Financial, Insurance and Legal Support**

(41) Students may be advised and supported to:

- a. Access emergency University financial support;
- b. Apply for tuition fee refunds;
- c. Manage insurance issues;
- d. Access legal support and services.

## **Counselling and Support Services**

(42) Counselling or other support services will be made available to students, including the after-hours Crisis Counselling Support Line and other relevant off campus support services, if relevant.

(43) Students and staff members most closely involved in the Student Critical Incident will be identified, contacted and offered appropriate support services.

(44) The wellbeing of students and staff adversely affected will continue to be monitored, with debriefing sessions

arranged, if required. Chaplains, religious leaders or others may be consulted for additional support and guidance.

(45) Staff involved in management of student critical incidents will also be offered counselling or other support services.

### **Additional Matters for Consideration in the Event of a Student Death**

(46) In the event of the death of a student, the relevant police authorities will inform the next of kin. No contact by the University should occur until official notification has occurred. In the case of an international student, the Response Manager (or nominee) will make contact with the relevant Embassy. The Case Manager may be required to assist with funeral arrangements, repatriation of the body, packing up of the student's possessions and other matters as required.

(47) Appropriate levels of support will be offered regarding memorial services or funeral arrangements, particularly where students are from interstate or overseas.

(48) The Case Manager will:

- a. Coordinate letters of condolence for signature by the Vice Chancellor.
- b. Notify Student Administration Services and the Graduate School, where relevant, so that student records are amended and other student administration (such as fee refunds) can be attended to.

### **Record Keeping and Reporting**

(49) The Case Manager will provide regular, accurate and up-to-date information on the management of the student critical incident to the relevant Response Manager.

(50) Comprehensive records of actions and responses to each Incident will be maintained and stored securely, with appropriate restricted access to confidential information. The Case Manager will provide summary information of incidents to the Student Safety and Wellbeing Coordinator who will hold and maintain a Register of Critical Incidents.

(51) The Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Quality) will notify the [Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency](#) (TEQSA) of any critical incident which constitutes a material breach of safety that impact on students.

## **Part D - Post Incident Review**

(52) At the conclusion of the Student Critical Incident, the Response Manager together with the Case Manager (or SCI Team) will review the incident to identify:

- a. The cause of the Student Critical Incident.
- b. Any action the University might take to reduce the recurrence.
- c. Ongoing support required by affected staff or students.
- d. Opportunities to improve the University's student critical incident processes, including recommendations to amend this Policy.

(53) De-identified post incident review reports will be provided to the Vice Chancellor's Group for consideration and action as required.

## **Section 7 - Related University Policies**

(54) This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- a. [Emergency and Crisis Management Policy](#)
- b. [Emergency Management Plan - Coffs Harbour](#)
- c. [Emergency Procedures - Lismore and Gold Coast](#)
- d. [Work Health Safety Policy](#)  
[Workplace Health and Safety Risk Management Procedures](#)
- e. [Welfare Arrangements of International Students Aged Under 18 Policy](#)
- f. [Privacy Policy](#)
- g. [Privacy Management Plan](#)
- h. [Fitness for Study Policy](#)
- i. [Higher Degree Research Fitness to Study Policy](#)



## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Historic
<b>Effective Date</b>	15th February 2021
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<b>Approval Authority</b>	Vice Chancellor
<b>Approval Date</b>	15th February 2021
<b>Expiry Date</b>	27th October 2022
<b>Responsible Executive</b>	Brendon Nelson Vice President (Students) and Registrar
<b>Head of Work Unit</b>	Brendon Nelson Vice President (Students) and Registrar
<b>Enquiries Contact</b>	Brendon Nelson Vice President (Students) and Registrar <hr/> Vice President (Students) and Registrar portfolio