



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF  
**WELLINGTON**  
TE HERENGA WAKA

# Student Critical Incidents

Overview for

**2025**

*The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of student critical incidents the University had in 2025, as required by the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021. This data also is to identify areas of concern and opportunities for growth and development.*

## Definition

1. A student critical incident is defined as an unanticipated, major personal event with a widespread and traumatic effect on students. It is likely to have a stressful impact on the University community and will require immediate action since it may overwhelm the coping strategies of either an individual or group.
2. The incident occurs on university property or off-campus while undertaking University-related activities (e.g., off-campus field trips and teaching, cultural and sporting activities, etc.); or occurs off campus at a non-university location and impacts significantly upon a student or students (e.g., an event of a serious and/or traumatic nature).

*Note: Institutional critical incidents that may impact the University's business functions but do not have a significant impact on students (e.g., a gas leak that is successfully resolved through standard emergency response procedures) are not considered as a part of this 'student critical incident' definition.*

Situations relating to student conduct, sexual harm, mental health, or self-harm are of great concern to the University, and are not included in this definition, unless it meets the specific points above. The University has standalone policies and procedures (and specific Pastoral Care Code obligations) that relate to these types of student concerns, which form part of normal operating procedures.

## Overview of the University's approach

Most incidents at the University are handled within business-as-usual processes. In most student-related incidents, the Tauria—Student Interest and Conflict Resolution team leads the coordination in collaboration with other relevant student support services and faculty staff.

The Incident Management Team (IMT) provides tactical level coordination of response activities during incidents beyond the capability of a business unit to manage itself. This ensures an effective, coordinated response that delivers on the objectives to:

1. preserve life and avoid any further injury
2. protect assets and operations
3. minimise the impact on the local community and environment
4. facilitate business continuity
5. return to business as usual, as soon as practical.

The core structure of the IMT is based on the New Zealand Coordinated Management System (CIMS), a framework used by emergency services and government departments. This framework ensures common structures, roles, and terminology for easy interoperability between teams or agencies and sets out a best-practice methodology for managing incidents. One of the key principles of CIMS is that it is modular and scalable to any situation, so is easily adaptable to the university context and range of incidents.

Number of Student Critical Incidents in 2025: One student death<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Students who were enrolled in studies in 2025 and where the death was connected to the University.

<sup>2</sup> Demographic data is not provided to preserve the privacy of the individual and their family.



## 2025 overview

### **Improvements to postvention processes**

The most common student critical incidents the University responds to are unexpected deaths. Over the years, there have been ongoing improvements to our internal processes to coordinate the appropriate response to these tragic situations. In 2025, further work was done to improve internal documentation so there is enhanced capability across the Tauria—Student Interest and Conflict Resolution team to coordinate these responses.

### **Enhanced consistency across the organisation**

Due to the large size of the institution, many different parts of the University can be notified of student critical incidents and so consistency and streamlined coordination in our response is essential. In 2025, work was done to support more consistent internal operating and escalation guidelines between different student services, health and safety, and security teams to support a timely, well-coordinated, and collaborative response.

### **New safety and security section on university website**

In 2025, a new '[Your Safety and Security](#)' section of the website was created and now includes specific content on 'What to do in an emergency' for students. This provides up-to-date information about how to stay safe in the event of any emergency or critical incident and details about the support services that are available to students.

In addition to overarching emergency response training, we also provide team-specific emergency training tailored to individual units, including our Te Kopanga—University Accommodation team. This targeted approach ensures that each team is equipped with the specific skills and protocols necessary to respond effectively to emergencies within their scope of responsibility.

Te Kopanga—University Accommodation has also recently developed online modules for its staff in emergency and critical incident procedures to ensure their training is bespoke to the unique student accommodation context.

## Future work in this area

### **Prepared template and sample communication material**

While every critical incident is unique, there are some consistent and key messages that need to be communicated to staff and students. Having adaptable templates—such as emails, scripts, and talking points—available in advance would improve our ability to respond effectively. A goal for 2026 will be to work with relevant colleagues across the University community to further develop this content.

### **Enhancing internal capacity for critical incident response**

To ensure our overall business continuity, the University must have a range of senior staff who can step into this role. In 2026, scenario training sessions are planned with the relevant student support services and campus security to identify areas of improvement and provide opportunities for staff to develop confidence in ability to respond to time-sensitive and high-pressure situations.

