Critical Incident Policy and Procedure HEPP56

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to provide guidance to staff and students enabling them to quickly and decisively respond to an actual or potential emergency or critical incident which could threaten the safety of persons or property or significantly disrupt campus operations. Where a critical incident relates to a mental health issue, please reference the *Mental Health Policy HEPP69*.

SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies to all the stakeholders of the Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) that consists of but not limited to all staff, students, and any other individual or group of people who may be affected by a critical incident, emergency and any situation requiring first aid, psychological first aid, or emergency response management. If the critical incident originates from a mental health issue with staff or students, reference the *Mental Health Policy HEPP69*.

DEFINITIONS

Critical Incident	A traumatic event, or the threat of such (within or outside Australia) which causes extreme stress, fear or injury. Critical incidents are not limited to, but could include: • missing students; • severe verbal or psychological aggression; • death, serious injury or any threat of these; • natural disaster; and • issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, drug or alcohol abuse.
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
Emergency (defined by the Emergency Management Act 2013)	An emergency due to the actual or imminent occurrence of an event which in any way endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person in Victoria or which destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property in Victoria or endangers or threatens to endanger the environment or an element of the environment in Victoria including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing— (a) an earthquake, flood, wind-storm or other natural event; and (b) a fire; and (c) an explosion; and (d) a road accident or any other accident; and (e) a plague or an epidemic or contamination; and (f) a warlike act or act of terrorism, whether directed at Victoria or a part of Victoria or at any other State or Territory of the Commonwealth; and (g) a hi-jack, siege or riot; and (h) a disruption to an essential service.
ESOS Act	Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
Psychological First Aid	A compassionate and supportive response to individuals in distress during or after a critical incident. It involves listening, comforting, and referring to professional help when needed.
First Aid	Emergency treatment administered to an injured or sick person before professional medical care is available.
SCEI-HE	Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education)

POLICY

1. SCEI-HE is committed to ensuring that:
    1.1 risk reduction measures are in place to reduce the likelihood of a critical incident;
    1.2 appropriate training and information resources are provided to staff and students;
    1.3 appropriate actions are taken in the event of a critical incident or potential critical incident and that these

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          actions maximize the safety of staff and students;

  1.4 an emergency response team manages critical incidents;

  1.5 appropriate post incident procedures are followed such as support and counselling services;

  1.6 an evaluation of the response to the critical incident is undertaken and that procedures are updated where improvements are identified. Staff and students will be encouraged to provide suggestions to assist this process.

2. SCEI-HE will ensure that critical incidents are minimised through:

  2.1 Dissemination of this policy and emergency response procedures manual to all staff and students;

  2.2 Providing information to staff and students to ensure they are aware of safety, prevention of risk and able to respond promptly to any perceived threats to health and/or safety;

  2.3 Encouraging staff to raise safety issues with the Managing Director and/or Academic Manager by emailing the details of the issue;

  2.4 Encouraging students to raise concerns about health and safety to a staff member;

  2.5 Regular emergency management training and information including emergency responses;

  2.6 Ensuring that at least 4 staff members have current training in First Aid management; and

  2.7 Staff who are undertaking travel for business related purposes should they experience a critical incident whilst interstate or overseas should contact the Course Coordinator and/or Academic Director.

  2.8 Providing training on cultural competence to ensure culturally safe responses for diverse student groups, including Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students.

  2.9 Integrating mental health awareness training to enable staff to identify and escalate mental health-related critical incidents in accordance with the Mental Health Policy HEPP59.

  2.10 Ensuring all emergency communication materials (emails, signage, safety instructions) are accessible (e.g., large font, screen reader compatibility, plain English) and inclusive.

3. In the event of an emergency, procedures outlined in the *Emergency Response Procedures Manual HEMIS10* are to be followed.

PROCEDURE

1. Critical Incident

  1.1 Where a critical incident is identified by the Course Coordinator and/or Academic Manager, SCEI-HE will activate its critical incident policy and procedure.

  1.2 The ESOS Act requires SCEI-HE to notify the DHA as soon as practical after the incident and in the case of a student's death or other incident affecting the student's attendance, the incident will need to be reported via the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS).

  1.3 All emergencies must be reported to the relevant emergency service.

  1.4 If the critical incident involves mental health issues, staff will follow a clear escalation process:

      1.4.1 identify signs of mental health crises (e.g., suicidal behavior, severe anxiety);

      1.4.2 refer to the SCEI-HE Counsellor or external services (e.g., Lifeline, 131 114); and

      1.4.3 consult the Mental Health Policy HEPP59 for ongoing management.

2. Action in the Event of a Critical Incident

  2.1 At first signs of a staff member becoming aware of a critical incident, it must be reported to the Course Coordinator and/or Academic Director as soon as practicable.

  2.2 On receipt of notification or information regarding a critical incident the Course Coordinator and/or Academic Director must:

      2.2.1 Gain a clear understanding of the known facts;

      2.2.2 If an emergency exists, contact the relevant emergency services by phoning 000 and follow the emergency response procedures manual;

      2.2.3 If translators are required contact Translating and Interpreting Service by phoning 131 450;

      2.2.4 If counselling services are required contact Life Line on 131 114;

      2.2.5 If the critical incident is at an offshore location, contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for advice on the best way to assist the student;

      2.2.6 If the critical incident involves international students, contact the student's next of kin or significant others and DHA, as soon as practicable;

      2.2.7 Relocate students and staff to a 'safe area', if necessary;

      2.2.8 Plan an immediate response;

      2.2.9 Allocate individual roles and responsibilities for managing the response;

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2.2.10   Briefing staff and delegating a staff member to deal with telephone and reception enquiries;

2.2.11   Managing any media or publicity interest.

2.2.12   Consult community leaders or support services for diverse groups (e.g., Indigenous elders, disability services) to ensure culturally appropriate responses.

2.2.13   Conduct a cultural safety check to ensure that the incident response respects diverse backgrounds (e.g., trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive).

2.3   When an international student dies or sustains serious injury, SCEI-HE may be required to assist the student's family. This may include:

2.3.1   hiring interpreters;

2.3.2   making arrangements for hospital/funeral/memorial service/repatriation;

2.3.3   obtaining a death certificate;

2.3.4   assisting with personal items and affairs including insurance issues; and

2.3.5   assisting with visa issues.

3.   Reporting a Critical Incident

3.1   A report is to be completed by the staff member involved in the incident or who received notification of the incident. The report is to be completed at the earliest opportunity and forwarded to the Course Coordinator who will take any necessary action before forwarding to the Academic Director of SCEI-HE. The report is to contain as much information as possible and indicate the people directly involved in the incident.

3.2   The following key details are to be included in the report:

3.2.1   The time of the incident;

3.2.2   The location and nature of the incident;

3.2.3   The names and roles of persons directly involved in the critical incident;

3.2.4   The action taken by SCEI-HE including any opportunities for improvement; and

3.2.5   The organisations and people contacted.

3.3   Students may report safety concerns or critical incidents directly to any staff member, the Course Coordinator, or via an anonymous online reporting portal accessible on the SCEI-HE website and Moodle.

3.4   The anonymous reporting portal must include clear instructions and be available in multiple languages and accessible formats.

4.   Following the Critical Incident

All critical incidents must be documented and reported to the Corporate Board promptly. A summary of each critical incident, including the nature of the incident, the response actions taken, and any ongoing implications for institutional operations, risk management, or student and staff safety, must be reported to the Board of Directors at the next scheduled Board meeting. In the case of incidents with significant or urgent risk implications, an interim report must be provided to the Chair of the Board within 5 business days.

A range of strategies will be in place to ensure that the appropriate support and monitoring is provided following a critical incident. These strategies include:

4.1   Identify students and staff members most closely involved with the incident and ensure they are offered support and counselling;

4.2   Debriefing of staff and students including provision of accurate information;

4.3   Identifying any other persons who may be affected by the critical incident and providing access to support services as required;

4.4   Arranging a memorial service as appropriate;

4.5   Monitoring the progress of all those affected by the critical incident especially staff and students for signs of delayed stress;

4.6   Liaison with emergency services and other services involved;

4.7   Liaison with external bodies, such as home stays, carers, or foreign embassies;

4.8   Liaison and management of media agencies; and

4.9   The Academic Director will write a report for the relevant board including recommendations to any frameworks, policies or procedures.

4.10   Ensure critical incident debriefing sessions are documented and staff/student feedback is recorded to improve future responses.

5.   Supportive Services

5.1   For all staff:

The SCEI-HE Counsellor will provide workshops and activities for all staff members regarding critical incidents. The activities and workshops will include, but are not limited to:

5.1.1   Training staff on how to respond to and recover from a critical incident situation;

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5.1.2 Training staff on the mental wellbeing repercussions of experiencing, or knowing someone who has experienced a critical incident;

5.1.3 Provide resilience training;

5.1.4 Educating all staff to recognise, understand and deal with a trauma;

5.1.5 Self-helping strategies for recovering from a critical incident; and

5.1.6 Training staff on the identification, support and response to self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

5.2 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will always ensure confidentiality and autonomy, unless the individual is in high risk of danger to themselves or to others.

5.3 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will share useful resources and tools to staff on how to recover from critical incidents. These resources will be accessible at all times, to all staff.

5.4 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will be have a referral system in place for all staff members who are in need of ongoing mental health support management.

5.5 For students:

5.5.1 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will work with students in assisting them to recover from a critical injury experience.

5.5.2 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will provide ongoing emotional support to all students on a one-on-one basis.

5.5.3 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will assist students in creating personalised action plans and strategies to help them through their trauma.

5.5.4 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will share useful mental health self-management resources and tools to students, relative to critical injury experiences. These resources will be accessible on Moodle at all times in multiple languages and accessible formats (e.g., screen-reader compatible) for all SCEI-HE students.

5.5.5 The SCEI-HE Counsellor will have a referral system in place for students who are in need of further, professional, external mental health care.

6. **Student Communication and Awareness**

6.1 Students will be informed about this policy and emergency procedures during orientation, through mandatory safety briefings, and via regular reminders (e.g., emails, posters in campus common areas).

6.2 Safety information and resources will be available on Moodle and the SCEI-HE website, in user-friendly formats and multiple languages, and written in plain English with icons where appropriate.

6.3 Workshops on safety and critical incident awareness will be offered to students at least annually, and made mandatory for new international students.

RELATED DOCUMENTS
Emergency Response Procedures Manual HEMIS10
- Mental Health Policy HEPP69
- Student Support and Wellbeing Policy HEPP41
- Risk Management Policy HEPP28

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT
Australian Standard 3745-2010 Planning for emergencies in facilities
Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 6 (Specifically 6.8)
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)
Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015
Work Health and Safety Act 2011

RESPONSIBILITIES
Course Coordinator and Academic Director: Ensuring compliance with this policy and procedure.
Staff and Students: Adhering to this policy and procedure.

DOCUMENT AND RECORD CONTROL

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