



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

STUDENT CRITICAL INCIDENTS

OVERVIEW FOR 2024

Te Herenga Waka—
Victoria University of Wellington

May 2025





The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of student critical incidents the University had in 2024, 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. This report is made publicly available to support transparency and openness regarding the University's complaints procedures. 2024 is the second year of such a report being published, moving forward these reports will support a broader understanding of potential trends and opportunities for change.

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).
3. Institutional critical incidents that may impact the university's business functions but do not have a significant impact on students (eg. a gas leak or bomb threat that are successfully resolved through standard emergency response procedures) are not considered as a part of this 'student critical incident' definition.

It is important to note that situations relating to student conduct, sexual harm, mental health or self-harm are of great concern to the university, but 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 and are part of normal operating procedures.

OVERVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY'S APPROACH TO MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Most incidents at the University are handled within business-as-usual processes. In most student related incidents, the Student Interest and Conflict Resolution Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington

(SICR) team lead the coordination in collaboration with other relevant student support services.

However, when an incident impacts on multiple business units or causes significant disruption to our community, coordination and leadership is needed across the responding groups. 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 which delivers on the objectives to:

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

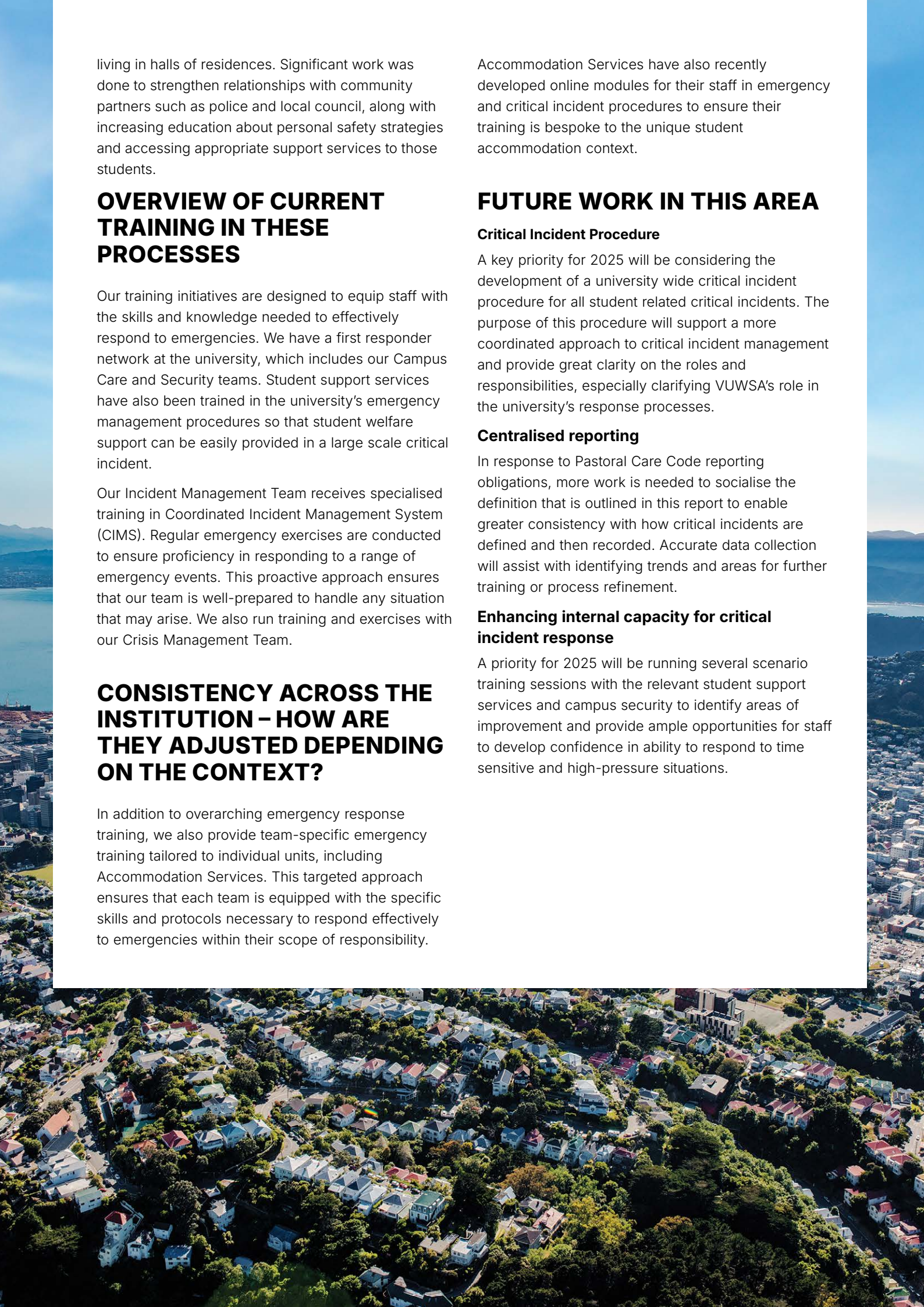
The core structure of the IMT is based on the New Zealand Coordinated Management System (CIMS), a framework used by emergency services and government departments. This framework ensures common structures, roles and terminology for easy inter-operability between teams or agencies and sets out a best-practice 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 2024

In 2024, the university thankfully had no student critical incident as per the definition above.

Whilst there were not any specific incidents of such a serious nature, there were still a range of situations that had an impact on student wellbeing. For example, the instability of the geopolitical climate in 2024 had a tangible impact on our students, especially international students. The university developed specific communication material and resources for students impacted by international political instability and provided personalized outreach to students on a case-by-case basis.

In New Zealand, the ongoing cost of living crisis and economic climate has also had a noticeable effect on socioeconomic indicators such as homelessness and criminal activity in Wellington. This resulted in an increase in reports of safety concerns in the central city, often having a greater impact on students



living in halls of residences. Significant work was done to strengthen relationships with community partners such as police and local council, along with increasing education about personal safety strategies and accessing appropriate support services to those students.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT TRAINING IN THESE PROCESSES

Our training initiatives are designed to equip staff with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively respond to emergencies. We have a first responder network at the university, which includes our Campus Care and Security teams. Student support services have also been trained in the university's emergency management procedures so that student welfare support can be easily provided in a large scale critical incident.

Our Incident Management Team receives specialised training in Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS). Regular emergency exercises are conducted to ensure proficiency in responding to a range of emergency events. This proactive approach ensures that our team is well-prepared to handle any situation that may arise. We also run training and exercises with our Crisis Management Team.

CONSISTENCY ACROSS THE INSTITUTION – HOW ARE THEY ADJUSTED DEPENDING ON THE CONTEXT?

In addition to overarching emergency response training, we also provide team-specific emergency training tailored to individual units, including Accommodation Services. 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.

Accommodation Services have also recently developed online modules for their staff in emergency and critical incident procedures to ensure their training is bespoke to the unique student accommodation context.

FUTURE WORK IN THIS AREA

Critical Incident Procedure

A key priority for 2025 will be considering the development of a university wide critical incident procedure for all student related critical incidents. The purpose of this procedure will support a more coordinated approach to critical incident management and provide great clarity on the roles and responsibilities, especially clarifying VUWSA's role in the university's response processes.

Centralised reporting

In response to Pastoral Care Code reporting obligations, more work is needed to socialise the definition that is outlined in this report to enable greater consistency with how critical incidents are defined and then recorded. Accurate data collection will assist with identifying trends and areas for further training or process refinement.

Enhancing internal capacity for critical incident response

A priority for 2025 will be running several scenario training sessions with the relevant student support services and campus security to identify areas of improvement and provide ample opportunities for staff to develop confidence in ability to respond to time sensitive and high-pressure situations.

