1. Purpose

1.1 This policy will outline the institutional framework for managing unexpected, traumatic, or high-impact events, referred to as critical incidents, that may significantly affect the wellbeing of individuals or disrupt the operations of Central Australian Institute of Technology Higher Education (CAIT Hi-Ed). A critical incident may occur on or off campus and may involve students, staff, or visitors.

1.2 Unlike the general management of health, safety, and wellbeing—which focuses on prevention, support services, and day-to-day risk mitigation—this policy specifically addresses critical incidents that require an immediate and coordinated institutional response. These may involve any unexpected, high-impact events that significantly affect individuals or the broader CAIT Hi-Ed community including events such as business cessation.

1.3 The primary objective will be to ensure that CAIT Hi-Ed has the capacity to respond effectively, support affected individuals, and restore normal operations as quickly and safely as possible. This policy will also enable the institution to comply with regulatory requirements concerning critical incident reporting and management.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy will apply to all individuals affiliated with CAIT Hi-Ed, including domestic and international students, academic and professional staff, and contractors. The policy will also apply to activities undertaken off-site as part of CAIT Hi-Ed operations, including field trips, placements.

2.2 The policy covers the identification, reporting, management, and review of critical incidents that occur within CAIT Hi-Ed's Australian operations or that directly affect its students or staff while engaged in authorised CAIT Hi-Ed activities, such as placements or study-related travel. Incidents occurring outside of Australia will only be included if they involve CAIT Hi-Ed personnel in an official capacity and require institutional response or support.

2.3 This policy also applies to institutional business cessation or closure, whether temporary or permanent, including situations where operations are suspended due to financial, legal, or regulatory reasons. Such events will be managed as critical incidents requiring coordinated communication, support for affected students and staff, and compliance with regulatory obligations.

3. Policy

3.1 CAIT Hi-Ed will be committed to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for its community. This Critical Incident Policy will be specifically concerned with managing serious and unpredictable events that fall outside the scope of regular health and safety procedures. These events will often require emergency services involvement and may pose reputational, legal, or psychological risks. This includes preparations and response mechanisms for serious disruptions such as institutional closure or business cessation, ensuring continuity of care and communication for students and staff.

3.2 While the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy will focus on proactive risk management and promoting ongoing wellness, this policy will respond reactively—activating specialised teams and protocols once an incident has occurred. CAIT Hi-Ed will maintain a separate Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) to ensure the institution is prepared for such events.

3.3 The institution will differentiate these events from minor or routine disruptions (e.g. illness, grievances, academic concerns) and ensure that critical incidents are escalated quickly and managed by trained personnel. This separation will support a focused and trauma-informed approach to response, communication, and recovery.

3.4 All critical incident responses will be underpinned by compassion, cultural awareness, timeliness, and legal compliance. The institution will also ensure that international student support obligations are met in all relevant cases.

4. Principles

4.1 CAIT Hi-Ed will place the highest priority on safeguarding the physical and psychological wellbeing of its students, staff, and stakeholders during and following a critical incident. Appropriate emotional, academic, and practical support will be facilitated to minimise disruption to educational progress and operational continuity.

4.2 The institution will ensure that all critical incidents are addressed without delay. Where appropriate, a designated Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) will be activated to manage the institutional response in accordance with established procedures and emergency protocols.

4.3 Clear delineation of responsibilities will underpin the management of critical incidents. Senior executives, academic and professional staff, student support personnel, and external emergency or health services will each play defined roles to ensure a coordinated and effective institutional response.

4.4 Communication during a critical incident will be undertaken with clarity, professionalism, and sensitivity. While timely dissemination of accurate information will be essential, all communication will adhere to relevant privacy legislation and institutional confidentiality requirements.

4.5 The institution will give particular consideration to the specific needs of students in the event of a critical incident. This will include the provision of culturally responsive counselling services, academic flexibility, and appropriate liaison with families, carers, consulates, or embassies as required.

4.6 CAIT Hi-Ed will operate in full compliance with applicable regulatory frameworks, including the Higher Education Standards Framework, the National Code 2018, and relevant Commonwealth and State legislation. This includes compliance with obligations during business cessation, such as student teach-out arrangements, record transfer, and formal notifications to TEQSA and other authorities.

4.7 All critical incidents will be comprehensively documented. Records will be maintained securely and in accordance with institutional recordkeeping policies and relevant legislation. Incidents that meet regulatory thresholds will be reported to TEQSA or other authorities as required.

5. Procedure for Managing Critical Incidents

5.1 Identification and Immediate Response

5.1.1 Any staff member, student, or witness who becomes aware of a potential or actual critical incident — including situations that may lead to business cessation or regulatory shutdown — must immediately notify the most senior staff member available at the location of the incident.

5.1.2 Where there is a risk to life, personal safety, or property, emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance) will be contacted without delay by dialling 000.

5.1.3 The responding staff member will initiate basic containment actions where safe to do so, such as evacuating the area, assisting injured persons, or securing the scene pending the arrival of emergency services.

5.1.4 The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or their delegate will be informed at the earliest opportunity and will assess whether the incident meets the threshold for activation of the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).

5.1.5 CAIT Hi-Ed will conduct regular emergency drills, including fire evacuations and lockdown procedures, as part of its proactive risk management and incident preparedness strategy. Participation in drills will be mandatory for staff and strongly encouraged for students.

5.2 Activation of Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)

5.2.1 The CEO (or delegate) will convene the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) if the incident is deemed to require a coordinated institutional response.

5.2.2 The CIRT will be composed of nominated personnel, including senior leadership, student support services, academic staff representatives, communications officers, and any other relevant functional area.

5.2.3 The CIRT will meet (virtually or in-person, as appropriate) to evaluate the situation, assign roles, and coordinate actions. Delegated authority and contact lists will be kept current to facilitate rapid mobilisation.

5.2.4 Ensuring the immediate safety and welfare of students, staff, and visitors will remain the highest priority throughout the response phase.

5.3 Assessment and Containment

5.3.1 The CIRT will conduct a preliminary assessment of the incident to determine:

- The severity and scope of the event;
- The number and identities of those affected;
- Any ongoing risks to health, safety, or institutional operations.

5.3.2 The team will implement appropriate containment measures to stabilise the situation. This may include:

- Isolating affected areas;
- Suspending certain activities or classes;
- Initiating lockdown or evacuation procedures;
- Managing the presence of media or unauthorised parties.

5.3.3 Where required, next of kin or emergency contacts will be notified with discretion and professionalism, consistent with privacy and duty of care obligations.

5.4 Communication Management

5.4.1 The CEO will appoint an authorised spokesperson responsible for all external communications, including media enquiries and government liaison.

5.4.2 Internal communication will be managed centrally by the CIRT to ensure the accuracy and consistency of messaging to students, staff, and relevant stakeholders.

5.4.3 For international students, particular care will be taken to liaise with family members, guardians, or consular representatives in accordance with privacy laws and student consent.

5.4.4 All communications will be handled with cultural sensitivity, legal compliance, and awareness of the emotional impact of the incident.

5.4.5 In the event of institutional closure or cessation of business, communication will prioritise student and staff clarity, outlining steps for course completion, refunds, records management, and external support.

5.5 Provision of Support Services

5.5.1 CAIT Hi-Ed will ensure that students and staff affected by a critical incident are provided with timely and appropriate access to psychological, academic, and pastoral support services. In the case of business cessation, transition assistance such as credit transfer, counselling, and referral to alternate providers will be made available to affected students.

5.5.2 Affected students may be granted academic flexibility (e.g. assessment extensions, deferrals, or leave of absence) in line with the institution's academic policies.

5.5.3 Counselling and trauma support services will be made available on-site or via referral to specialist providers.

5.5.4 Staff involved in or affected by the incident will be offered access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services or other designated support pathways.

5.6 Post-Incident Follow-up

5.6.1 A formal debrief will be conducted within a reasonable timeframe involving the CIRT and key stakeholders. The purpose will be to:

- Review the adequacy of the initial response;
- Identify immediate support needs that remain unaddressed;
- Provide an opportunity for staff and students to share concerns or feedback.

5.6.2 Ongoing support and case management will be arranged for those affected, where long-term recovery or academic re-engagement is needed.

5.6.3 Lessons learned from the incident will inform updates to training programs, policy documentation, and risk assessments.

5.7 Documentation and Continuous Improvement

5.7.1 A Critical Incident Report will be completed by the CIRT and submitted to the CEO for approval. This report will include:

- A chronology of events;
- Names and roles of responders;
- Summary of actions taken;
- Post-incident recommendations.

In the case of business cessation, the report must also detail the closure rationale, affected cohorts, continuity measures, and evidence of regulatory compliance (e.g., teach-out or record transition plans).

5.7.2 All records will be retained in accordance with CAIT Hi-Ed's Information System Management Policy and privacy legislation.

5.7.3 The CEO will ensure that the incident is reviewed within 14 business days, and that any required notifications (e.g. to TEQSA, ESOS agencies, or insurance providers) are completed.

5.7.4 Institutional procedures and the Critical Incident Management Plan will be updated where required, and additional training delivered where gaps are identified.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- Will have overarching responsibility for the implementation and governance of the Critical Incident Policy and Procedure.
- Will assess initial reports of a critical incident and determine the activation of the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).
- Will act as or appoint the institutional spokesperson for external communication, including liaison with media and government bodies.

- Will ensure that notifiable incidents are reported to TEQSA, the ESOS agency, or other regulatory bodies as required.
- Will oversee the post-incident review and ensure that outcomes inform continuous improvement.

6.2 Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) Chairperson *(may be the CEO or a delegated senior executive)*

- Will lead and coordinate the CIRT during the incident.
- Will ensure that the incident is assessed, contained, and managed in accordance with institutional protocols.
- Will ensure timely communication with all stakeholders and coordinate the deployment of support services.
- Will convene the post-incident debrief and lead the preparation of the Critical Incident Report.

6.3 CIRT Members:

6.3.1 Academic Dean

- Will coordinate academic responses, such as class rescheduling, extensions, and academic adjustments for affected students.
- Will liaise with teaching staff to minimise disruption to learning and assessment.

6.3.2 Manager, Student Services

- Will coordinate pastoral care and student support services during and after the incident.
- Will liaise with counselling providers, both internal and external.
- Will ensure international student-specific needs are met, including communication with families and embassies, if appropriate.

6.3.3 Facilities or WHS Manager

- Will manage physical site safety and liaise with emergency services.
- Will ensure evacuation, lockdown, or containment procedures are executed safely.
- Will conduct risk assessments following the incident and report on hazards or safety failures.

6.3.4 Communications Officer / Marketing Manager

- Will prepare and distribute all internal communications to students and staff.
- Will work with the CEO or spokesperson to manage media responses and protect institutional reputation.
- Will ensure that all messaging is accurate, timely, and culturally appropriate.

6.3.5 IT Manager (if relevant to incident)

- Will respond to incidents involving cybersecurity, data breaches, or system outages.
- Will provide technical support during the incident response and support recovery of systems and data.

6.4 Academic and Professional Staff

- Will report any suspected or confirmed critical incidents immediately.
- Will provide support to students affected by the incident and comply with instructions from the CIRT or emergency authorities.

- Will participate in emergency drills and receive training related to their role in critical incident response.

6.5 Students

- Will be expected to follow all emergency procedures (e.g. evacuation, lockdown) as directed.

- Will report any critical incidents they witness or are involved in, as soon as possible, to a staff member.

- Will be offered appropriate support but also have a responsibility to cooperate with institutional and emergency processes.

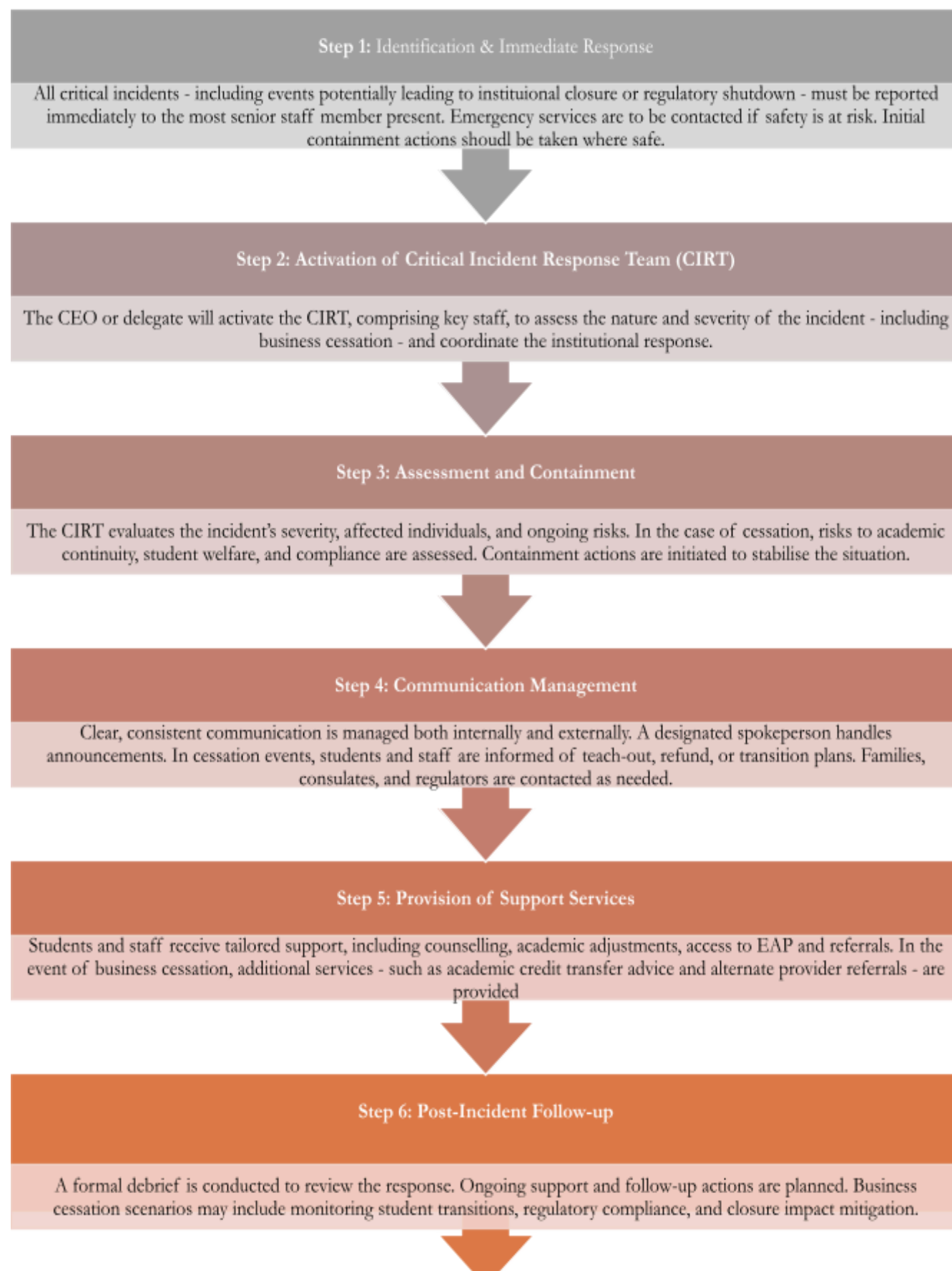### 6.6 External Providers / Contractors

- Will be required to comply with CAIT Hi-Ed's emergency and critical incident procedures while on campus or engaged in institutional activities.

- Will coordinate with internal teams during emergency responses when applicable.

7. Authority and Compliance

File Number	HEP82
Status	Current
Approval Authority	Governance Board.
Legislative Compliance	- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth) - Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 - National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code 2018) - Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth) - Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) - Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (Cth) - Emergency Management Act 2013 - Coroners Act 2008 - Health Records Act 2001 (VIC)
Supporting Documents	- CAIT Hi-Ed Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) - CAIT Hi-Ed Critical Incident Report Template - CAIT Hi-Ed Emergency Drill Schedule and Log - CAIT Hi-Ed Post-Incident Debrief Template - CAIT Hi-Ed Communication Plan Template - CAIT Hi-Ed Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) Terms of Reference - CAIT Hi-Ed Risk Assessment Template (Incident-Specific) - CAIT Hi-Ed Counselling Referral Form - CAIT Hi-Ed Notifiable Incident Register - CAIT Hi-Ed Student and Staff Emergency Procedures Guide (Quick Reference) - CAIT Hi-Ed Student Notification Template
Related Documents	- CAIT Hi-Ed Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedure - CAIT Hi-Ed Risk Management Framework / Policy and Procedure

	• CAIT Hi-Ed Student Support and Services Policy and Procedure • CAIT Hi-Ed Course Rules, Progression and Completion Policy and Procedure • CAIT Hi-Ed Student Grievance and Complaints Policy and Procedure • CAIT Hi-Ed Privacy Policy and Procedure • CAIT Hi-Ed Business Continuity Plan
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021	• Standard 2.3; ss 1 – 2 • Standard 6.2; ss 1 – 3 • Standard 7.1; ss 3 & 5 • Standard 7.2; ss 2 - 3 • Standard 7.3; ss 1 – 2
Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS Act) and National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018	• Standard 6; ss 1 – 6 • Standard 8; ss 16 • Standard 10; ss 1 - 2
Responsible Officer	Academic Dean.
Responsible Executive	CEO.
Enquiries Contact	Academic Dean.
Effective Date	
Expiry Date	Not applicable
Next Review	3 Years from the effective date

8.   Appendix 1: Managing Critical Incident Flow Chart

Step 1: Identification & Immediate Response

All critical incidents - including events potentially leading to instituional closure or regulatory shutdown - must be reported immediately to the most senior staff member present. Emergency services are to be contacted if safety is at risk. Initial containment actions shoudl be taken where safe.

Step 2: Activation of Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)

The CEO or delegate will activate the CIRT, comprising key staff, to assess the nature and severity of the incident - including business cessation - and coordinate the institutional response.

Step 3: Assessment and Containment

The CIRT evaluates the incident's severity, affected individuals, and ongoing risks. In the case of cessation, risks to academic continuity, student welfare, and compliance are assessed. Containment actions are initiated to stabilise the situation.

Step 4: Communication Management

Clear, consistent communication is managed both internally and externally. A designated spokeperson handles announcements. In cessation events, students and staff are informed of teach-out, refund, or transition plans. Families, consulates, and regulators are contacted as needed.

Step 5: Provision of Support Services

Students and staff receive tailored support, including counselling, academic adjustments, access to EAP and referrals. In the event of business cessation, additional services - such as academic credit transfer advice and alternate provider referrals - are provided

Step 6: Post-Incident Follow-up

A formal debrief is conducted to review the response. Ongoing support and follow-up actions are planned. Business cessation scenarios may include monitoring student transitions, regulatory compliance, and closure impact mitigation.

9. Review Schedule

This policy will be reviewed by the Governance Board every three years.

Version History			
Version No	Approved by	Approval Date	Revision Notes
1.0	Governance Board	9/5/2025	