

Why Safeguarding Training Matters for All Staff - and Sometimes Students - in Universities

Universities are complex, vibrant communities. They are places of learning, independence and growth - but they are also environments where individuals may be at risk, vulnerable, or experiencing harm, often away from traditional support networks for the first time.

Safeguarding within higher education is therefore not a niche or specialist concern. It is a shared responsibility, and one that requires awareness, confidence and consistency across the institution.

Safeguarding is not just about children.

While universities are primarily adult environments, safeguarding responsibilities extend far beyond under-18s.

Universities routinely support:

- students under 18 (particularly in first year, widening access and international cohorts)
- care-experienced students
- students with disabilities or additional support needs
- students experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence or exploitation
- students affected by mental ill-health, substance misuse or coercive control
- students who are parents, carers, or involved in family court processes

Safeguarding in higher education sits at the intersection of child protection, adult support and protection, Prevent, wellbeing, equality, and duty of care. It cannot be safely held by one team alone.

Why *all* staff need safeguarding awareness.

Most safeguarding concerns in universities do not come through formal reports.

They emerge in **everyday interactions**.

A disclosure may be made:

- to a lecturer after class
- to an administrator responding to an email
- to accommodation staff
- to a librarian, placement supervisor or research lead

If staff do not feel confident in:

- recognising concerns
- responding proportionately
- understanding their role and limits
- knowing when and how to escalate

...then opportunities to safeguard are easily missed.



Safeguarding training for all staff ensures:

- concerns are recognised early
- responses are calm, consistent and trauma-informed
- staff do not over-promise, investigate, or inadvertently cause harm
- escalation routes are used appropriately
- the organisation can evidence a whole-institution approach

This protects **students, staff**, and the **institution itself**.

The case for role-specific training.

While baseline safeguarding awareness should be universal, **depth of training should reflect role and responsibility**.

For example:

- Designated Officers and Safeguarding Teams require detailed knowledge of thresholds, legislation and decision-making
- Academic staff benefit from understanding disclosures, boundaries and referral pathways
- Professional services staff need clarity on documentation, data sharing and escalation
- Senior leaders need assurance, governance oversight and inspection readiness

A layered approach ensures safeguarding is **embedded, not diluted**.

Where students fit into the picture

Safeguarding training for students is sometimes overlooked — or avoided altogether — yet it can be powerful when done well.

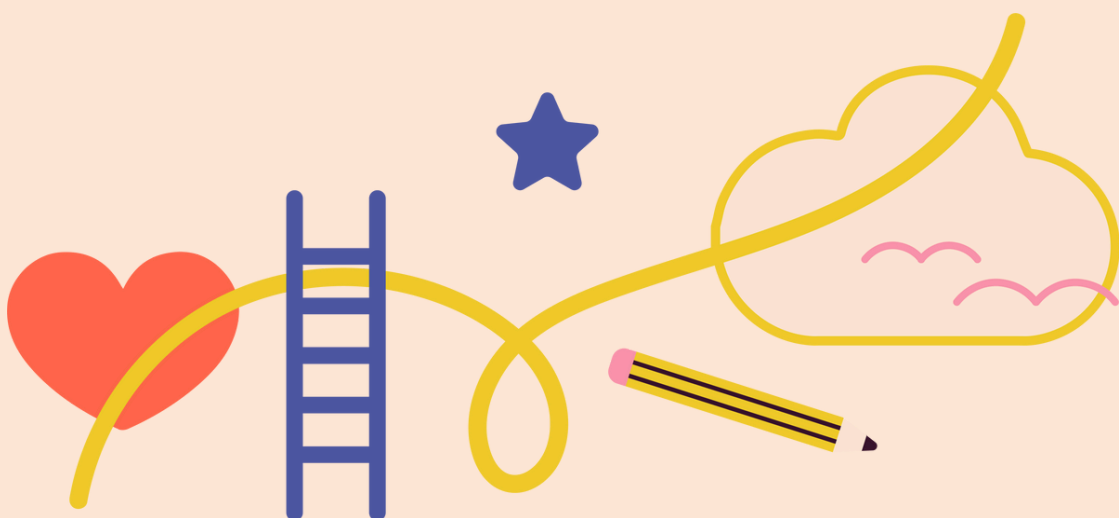
Appropriate, proportionate safeguarding awareness for students can:

- clarify what safeguarding is (and what it isn't)
- reduce fear around reporting
- encourage peer support without placing responsibility on students
- help students recognise when to seek help — for themselves or others
- reinforce boundaries and consent

This is particularly relevant for:

- student leaders and representatives
- placement students
- postgraduate researchers
- students working with children or vulnerable adults
- those living in shared or residential accommodation

Done sensitively, this supports a **safer campus culture** without creating anxiety or burden.



Why a trauma-informed approach matters

Universities are increasingly aware that **how** safeguarding is delivered matters as much as **what** is delivered.

Trauma-informed safeguarding training:

- recognises the impact of past trauma on behaviour and disclosure
- avoids blame, judgement and over-reaction
- supports staff to respond with empathy and clarity
- aligns safeguarding with wellbeing, inclusion and dignity

This is particularly important in environments where:

- staff themselves may be impacted by vicarious trauma
- students may disengage if responses feel procedural or punitive

Safeguarding as assurance, not just compliance

From an institutional perspective, effective safeguarding training supports:

- regulatory compliance
- inspection and audit readiness
- defensible decision-making
- reputational protection
- staff confidence and wellbeing

But at its heart, safeguarding is about **people** — ensuring that when someone raises a concern, **the response is safe, informed and consistent.**

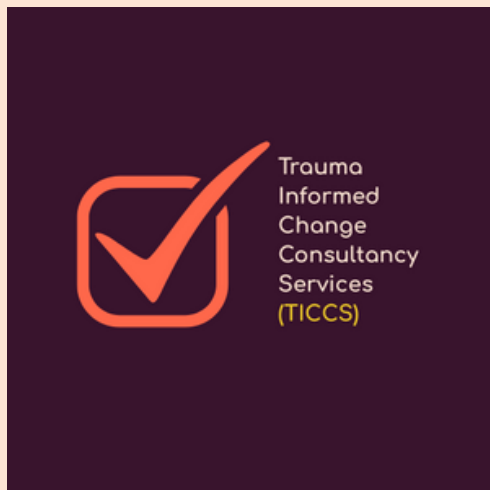
A whole-university responsibility

Safeguarding in higher education works best when it is:

- visible
- understood
- proportionate
- embedded across the institution

Training all staff — and appropriately engaging students — is not about creating specialists everywhere.

It is about ensuring **everyone knows their role**, and no one is left holding risk alone.



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