



**Safety, Security, & Wellbeing  
for Students and Staff**  
Solving the Top Five  
Challenges for Universities



**SafeZone**

# Introduction

As universities face historic security and wellbeing challenges, clear lessons can be learned from those responding most effectively.

“Staff and student wellbeing and safety is of the utmost importance”

Brian MacCraith,  
President of Dublin City  
University, Ireland

There is a growing expectation today that universities will prioritize safety, security, and wellbeing – for all their people, wherever they are.

Security and facilities directors are under increasing pressure to ensure that all their facilities, on campus and off, are safe and welcoming.

And they are now expected to deliver on duty-of-care even more widely, extending protection to members of their communities working remotely, and internationally.

This is a major new challenge of security department heads. With their resources under pressure, they are expected to support their institutions in the global competition for student and staff recruitment and retention.

But if it's a challenge, it's also an unprecedented new opportunity – to deploy technology in an entirely new way, to deliver new value, and to elevate security as a board-level, strategic contributor. This is already happening.

This eBook was informed by the extensive global travels of the CriticalArc team over the past year: around the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Working with scores of universities, and meeting hundreds of professionals – University Executives teams, Chiefs of Police, Directors of Safety, Directors of Student Services and Directors of Wellbeing Services – CriticalArc collaborates more closely with university senior executive teams, than perhaps anyone else in our sector. Based on that unique experience, we are pleased to share CriticalArc's 'Solving the Top Five Challenges for Universities'.

## Challenge #1: Responding To the Mental Health and Wellbeing Crisis

**The number one duty-of-care issue facing universities and their security/policing teams is student and staff mental health.**

The biggest challenge for institutions is how they can respond to the demand for mental wellbeing support. Through the pandemic and beyond we have seen that need increasing. In England, for example, one in four 17 to 19-year-olds had a probable mental disorder in 2022 according to an NHS Digital report – that was up from one in six in 2021. In the U.S. a recent study found that one in three 18- to 25-year-olds had experienced a mental illness, while 3.8 million reported serious thoughts of suicide.

While most universities acknowledge the importance of this issue, and the risks of failing to provide adequate support, their strategies in response vary widely. At many universities, despite the best intentions, support remains patchy. The majority still rely on – and point to – the range of help services available via their webpages.

Universities can no longer afford to solely rely on this form of support to meet their duty-of-care.

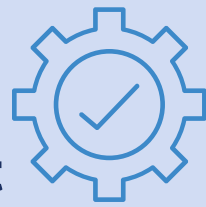
It is widely understood that any individual not thinking or acting rationally cannot be expected to go online and navigate their way to help. One university surveyed, for example, had a website presenting 27 different options, depending on who needed support, the time, the exact nature of the problem etc. being presented with so many choices is a clear a barrier to somebody seeking help.

Another very common weakness is that mental health services are often limited to working hours or extended working hours. This leaves gaps in coverage at precisely the times when people are most likely to be in crisis. In these cases, it usually falls to security teams, out of hours, to provide help. But the officers often have limited resources and training, and the institutions do not properly acknowledge the vital role that they are being asked to fulfill.

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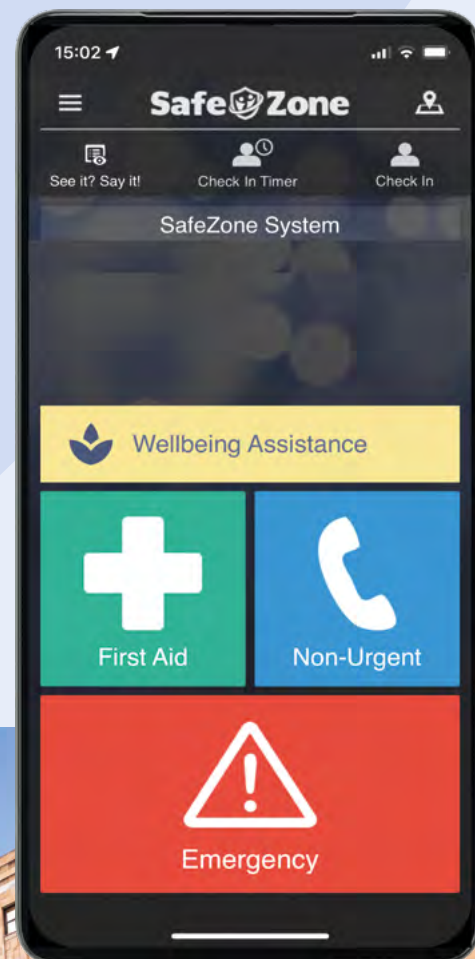
# Solutions: Solving The Challenge of Mental Health Support



Working with universities to develop a better response, CriticalArc has recently added a unique capability to the SafeZone App: the new 'Wellbeing Assistance' feature.

Imagine having a single button that can be configured to know who you are, where you are, the time of day, and exactly what services are available at that location. Imagine giving every individual a single,

straightforward access point for all the support they might need. Take that a step further, with support customized to the level of need: for example, if an individual is experiencing difficulties for the first time, they will be presented with a different set of options to someone already identified as needing additional services. All of this is possible today via SafeZone.



Universities can now give easy access to mental health support, matched to the individual's level of need



## Challenge #2: Ensuring Personal Safety, Maintaining Trust

**Nobody should be put off going to university because they are worried about safety. However, such concerns are now the reality for most students and their families. Today there is greater awareness of the risks of sexual harassment, sexual assault, exploitation, drink spiking/tampering, and other forms of abuse. Personal safety is consistently ranked as one of the three top considerations for those choosing a study destination.**

Some Universities have taken a strong position in response to these concerns, others have been slower to act, believing 'this is a safe campus, we don't need to worry'. To avoid

complacency, we need to understand the difference between *being safe* and *feeling safe*.

To appreciate the importance of university security, policing, and wellbeing services, we need to see the world through the eyes of a young person, particularly a young woman or someone from a community such as LGBTQ+, living away from home for the first time, and walking home alone at night.

We need to feel the risks as deeply. And we need to recognize the importance of continually earning the trust of our communities. Remember, it only takes one serious incident, and one inadequate response, to erode that trust.

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### Challenge #3: Dealing With Financial Stress, And Making the Most of Limited Budgets

**In many economies the threat of recession is looming. At the same time universities are still recovering from the years of adverse, COVID-related impacts to their costs and revenues.**

Human resources, which are by far the largest departmental cost, are limited. In some cases, it is becoming harder to recruit good people. At the same time, staff are having to deal with increased demand – for mental health and personal safety support – which is adding further pressure to already stretched capabilities.

To overcome these challenges, many institutions are actively looking for new efficiencies, and ‘force multiplier’ technologies that will let them do more with less and improve 24/7 operations.

University department heads, including security leaders, are thinking beyond current capacities and are challenging their teams to develop the capabilities that will enable them to take on new challenges and responsibilities.

**“We are providing improved 24/7 protection across our campuses while making significant capital cost savings”**

Dominic Marafioti, Campus Facilities Manager, University of South Australia

## Solutions: Making Budgets Work Harder, While Building Safer and More Welcoming Campuses



Working with universities, CriticalArc has developed the SafeZone [unified platform](#) to enable security and campus policing teams to:

- Visualize the exact location and availability of all their assets, deployed across a large, dispersed area in real-time
- Differentiate between full-time vs. contract security resources
- Distinguish between RAs, first aid, fire wardens, student volunteers, campus security, and others available in the field
- Coordinate all assets through a unified interface or ‘single pane of glass’ instead of doing so through a series of radio calls and acknowledgments
- Direct resources with command & control technology during emergency incidents and see staff respond in real-time to commands and adjust as circumstances change
- [Cut their response time](#) to incidents for better outcomes

- Send targeted communications to specific groups or to those in a particular geographic area, impacted by an incident
- Analyze and improve the deployment of their most precious and costly resources (their staff) to maximize their impact
- Create greater transparency to increase the level of accountability and value delivered to students and staff

Looking beyond their own departments, security and safety leaders are also looking to expand the value they can provide to their university or college.

By moving-up from a strictly tactical security role to a strategic position where they contributing value to multiple departments, they are positioning themselves as essential members of the executive team – department heads who understands the big picture and deliver in pressure-packed situations with limited resources – a rare quality.



## Challenge #4: Protecting Lone Workers

**When responsibility for lone worker safety is left with individual department heads – managers who may be great at their jobs, but who are not risk or security specialists – standards of protection are usually compromised. It's only human that line managers will focus most of their attention, and their resources, on what they see as their core responsibilities.**

In higher education for example, if you are busy managing your faculty or delivering a particular service to campus users, that's what you will worry about most. And even if lone

worker wellbeing is somewhere on your list of responsibilities, it won't necessarily be at the top.

The result of this fragmented responsibility is usually an inconsistent approach, with some lone workers protected better than others, some not protected at all, and the organization as a whole failing to live up to its duty-of-care. Common scenarios in this patchwork of protection include sites where old-fashioned visitor books are left out on reception desks, with pens stuck to lengths of string (books which most people sign on their way in, but then forget to sign on their way out); and traditional lone worker offerings that are burdened with punitive fee structures that discourage use.

## Solutions: Ensuring Protection for Everyone Working Alone



The only approach that guarantees full lone worker protection is to have a unified solution, that's centrally managed, monitored, and paid for, and that works in all environments regardless of phone signal, site geography, and building layout. In the universities sector, such is the complexity of the lone worker challenge; this is the only way to manage the risk.

Think about the huge variety of activities taking place every day, on-campus and off: individuals working alone with dangerous chemicals and volatile experiments; working with heavy equipment in engineering; engaged in one-to-one tutorials or counseling sessions; [individuals with disabilities or particular vulnerabilities](#); those working in the community, working from home (Hybrid working), visiting or inspecting rental accommodation; [traveling to satellite facilities or internationally](#); or working in isolation – and of course, there are many

places where you can be out of sight and out of earshot even on the busiest of campuses.

We need to strip out complexity too, by making it easy to access via smart devices (mobile, wearable, tablet, or desktop) to ensure WCAG compliance, by providing multi-language support options, and by allowing staff and student reminders to be prompted on users' laptops or desktops at a given time. When a checked-in user enters a higher risk environment, an automated pop-up notification on their device can give them specific safety advice or risk updates. With indoor positioning we can deliver these services to sub-3-meter accuracy in any room, on any floor, in any building. Added together, these features allow universities to meet their duty-of-care obligations to lone workers much more fully and affordably than ever before. And [without ever having to compromise](#) over who benefits from protection.



“ SafeZone gives us all the capability we need to optimize incident preparedness – something every university needs in today's fast-changing higher education environment.”

Head of Security, University of Kent

## Challenge #5: Preparedness For Major Incidents

**The list of potential major incidents has been growing longer for university security planners: COVID; the war in Ukraine and international instability; continued active shooter threats (including marauding knife or gun attacks); extreme weather events; extremism and terrorism; cyber-attacks and the increase in ransom-ware attacks; these have all contributed to institutions looking more closely at their levels of preparedness and asking how they would respond, real time, to an incident both on and off campus.**

The prospect of tighter legislation in the UK (the anticipated 'Protect Duty') is also contributing to greater executive focus. Funding is being set aside by institutions to ensure that they can meet the requirements of expected legislation and keep their communities safe.

Improvement is needed. Still too many organizations have disjointed approaches to

managing incidents, with different stakeholders expected to deliver key roles but only supported in this responsibility by aging technology and limited resources.

Organizations need to move beyond disjointed approaches to managing incidents, with different stakeholders expected to deliver key roles but only supported in this responsibility by aging technology and limited resources.

And ensuring successful outcomes to major incidents requires effective preparation in advance, with regular drills for a range of scenarios, followed by meaningful performance reviews. For example, using event recording and heatmapping tools allows the second-by-second responses and movements of individual team members to be analyzed and understood. And for individual officers it builds confidence with the knowledge that all their actions and movements will be supported from the control room, as part of a well-coordinated team response.

# Solutions: The Keys to Resilience and Response



It's critical for universities to be able to communicate in real time with their communities, with multiple channels including SMS, e-mail, push notifications and desktop notifications. And incident teams need to be able to communicate with two-way messaging between specific groups or individuals, including sharing documents, images and videos for better situational awareness and management. And they need the ability to send targeted communications to those impacted, based on their specific location – whether on campus or traveling – their group membership, or other distinguishable attributes. In addition, universities also need to provide their students and staff with instructions on what to do and how. It's important to remember that people don't think or act rationally during a crisis. They need to be helped, to get the best outcomes.

For those leading incident responses, it is essential to be able to visualize real time their

primary responders (security and/or police), and to be able dispatch and co-ordinate those team members, whether they are coordinating operations from a central control room, or in the field.

Being able to mobilize secondary responders, first aiders, fire wardens, emergency team members (Gold, Silver, and Bronze teams) so that you have effective communications, visualization and co-ordination is key to maximizing the resources available.

And after an incident, it's important to have access to operational insights and data, so that you can demonstrate that actions undertaken were correct and that any lessons learned can be extracted for continuous improvements.

Encourage your community to be part of a safety culture where they are empowered to report concerns using a see it say it tip reporting feature. Safety is everyone's responsibility!

# Transforming Protection: Why Universities Are Embracing Collaborative Security

Today, as universities embrace the technology and strategies described in this eBook, we are seeing an exciting new trend develop: collaborative partnerships between neighboring institutions, of a kind that we have not seen before.

Few organizations have the capacity, by themselves, to fully meet the scale of the challenge they are facing, or manage the demands on their resources. But working together, security teams at partnering organizations are extending the duty-of-care protection each provides to the other's people.

In one sense this is a major policy innovation, but it also reflects a long-standing tradition of allowing students shared access to resources such as libraries, study areas, arts and sports facilities.

SafeZone Alliance™ is enabling safety and security teams from participating organizations to work together to extend the footprint of 24/7

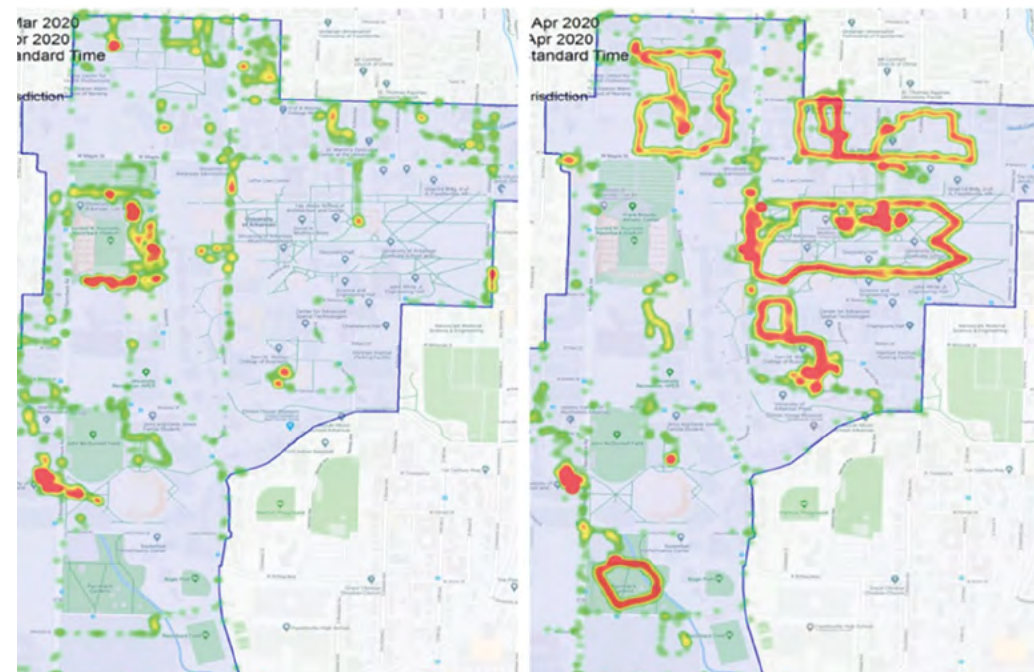
support beyond their boundaries to enhance the safety and wellbeing of their people

Participating organizations are providing Safety Everywhere™ for their people, letting them get help in the same way, using the same tools, whether they are at their home institution, or visiting a neighboring one.

We now understand how much modernized safety and security services can support student recruitment, and staff and student retention. And we are seeing how the experience of university communities can be transformed.

With an incredible 50% of U.K. universities now using SafeZone, and a growing number in the U.S. doing the same, there is a compelling offering to prospective students, their parents, and staff: choose an institution that demonstrates a clear intent to deliver an enhanced duty-of-care.

## Before and after patrol patterns



Heatmapping tools are transforming security and policing team coordination, allowing detailed post-incident reviews and targeted training, and underpinning more effective patrolling day to day

“ Student and staff wellbeing is always the top priority for our universities and we are pleased to put in place a pioneering cross-city initiative that furthers this shared aim.”

Dr Sam Grogan, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Experience at University of Salford on behalf of the universities with the Manchester SafeZone Alliance group

# Take the next step

Start your transformation journey today, get in touch to learn more about how SafeZone can support your institution.

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SafeZone is transforming security and safety, ensuring that universities thrive in a competitive global environment where the wellbeing and safety of students and staff matters more than ever

