

Witness Name: Paige Smith

Statement No: WITN0050001

Dated: 22 September 2025

## THE NOTTINGHAM INQUIRY

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF PAIGE SMITH**

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I, Paige Smith, will say as follows: -

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. I worked at the University of Nottingham (the "**University**") from 2018 until January 2024. When I first joined I was involved in a Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire collaborative outreach programme about widening participation. From July 2019 until December 2022, I was an officer in the Support and Wellbeing ("**S&W**") team in the Faculty of Engineering ("**Faculty**"). In December 2022 I became the S&W manager for the Faculty.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Nottingham Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 26 June 2025.
3. From 2019 to 2022 as an officer in the S&W team my job was predominantly to meet with students who had any sort of struggle, whether academically, at home, in their accommodation, or feeling overwhelmed or down. We in the local team were often the first port of call for many Engineering students who required wellbeing support and we acted as a triage point. My role was to meet with them, and listen to their concerns. Sometimes the students just needed a chat, and we would talk about techniques to manage stress but often I would refer them to a specialist service. There is no one size fits all

approach when it came to the matters that we dealt with, they had to be treated on a case-by-case basis. We did not have a caseload within the Support and Wellbeing service: we did not keep students on our books and see them repeatedly (although if a student experienced a number of different problems they would be welcome to contact us about each one).

4. We did not tend to get involved in academic matters – there was a fairly clear distinction between the academic side and the pastoral side - and if such matters were brought to us, we signposted students to academic colleagues in the relevant Departments of the Faculty. However, where there was a crossover, for example, a student's personal situation was impacting on their academics and causing their grades to suffer, we could contact the relevant Department on their behalf (with the student's permission) and also help them with the Extenuating Circumstances process. Dealing with extenuating circumstances and students interrupting their studies was our bread and butter: I would say that is what I spent most of my time dealing with as a S&W officer. In such circumstances, we would not necessarily tell the Department exactly what was going on with the student, given the need to respect the student's privacy, and data protection considerations, we would only give them whatever information we thought necessary and appropriate.
5. For much of my time there we did not have an appointment system, and students would drop in – we were based in the Faculty. We brought in a new system in late 2022/early 2023 where students could book directly with us online. In the pandemic we were working from home but the service continued and we had virtual meetings with students.
6. At the time the S&W team engaged with Valdo from June 2020 – January 2022 there were three of us in the Faculty S&W team. Each of the five faculties at the University had a S&W manager. When I became a S&W manager, whilst the Faculty was my focus, I reported into the University's central S&W team, which (as of August 2021) sat in the Directorate of Student and Campus Life. Prior to August 2021, the S&W team were part of Student Services. The

other Faculties of the University had similar local S&W teams; we had away days and monthly meetings with the central S&W team. As a manager I still had face-to-face meetings with students but had additional responsibilities managing the team and a strategic role to provide support to students from underrepresented groups. In both roles I focused on making good connections with all staff in the engineering Faculty.

7. The frontline triage service was provided by wellbeing teams within faculties as I have described. As well as that, some central wellbeing services were provided under the umbrella of Support and Wellbeing Services: those were services which were not based in faculties. They included the Report and Support team and the Counselling service. I would refer to the Report and Support team to take the lead if a student reported harassment or I was concerned about a student's vulnerability in their accommodation. I would refer to the counselling service where a student needed more specialist counselling support: the S&W team is not a counselling service so if a student wanted or needed a repeat meeting for the same issue we would refer to the counselling service.
8. I would refer to other services as needs required. For example I would refer to the Disability Support Service if a student needed their education to be more accessible, and they would have a support plan put in place.
9. I would refer a student to the Mental Health Advisory Service ("**MHAS**") where they had a mental health condition and where I thought that a student may be a risk to themselves or others. I felt that the MHAS was largely responsive and helpful. Sometimes they were overstretched as were many services, so we would sometimes have to make a strong case for them to take on a student.
10. I am asked about policies dealing with student wellbeing, how to deal with mentally ill students, risk assessment and student safeguarding. We had a University-wide safeguarding policy. The most important things which we

needed to know in the S&W team were (i) what other services provided, so that we could signpost to the most relevant service and (ii) how to support students with academic processes such as interruption. In relation to the triaging and signposting part of the role, there were no particular policies or guidance that told us what to do. I did not ever feel that there was a lack of clarity about what we were doing because of a lack of policies. It was clear from the various documents setting out the role of University services what could be provided. In the S&W service we actively discussed whether having a policy documentation about triaging would help us, but felt that there were so many different scenarios that it would not help. For example, I am not aware of a hard and fast policy document which governed the relationship between S&W and MHAS but we deal with so many different types of cases that I am not sure that a hard-lined policy document would be helpful. I was clear in my own mind about what sort of cases should be referred to MHAS, and we had descriptions of the various services in leaflets and online so I was clear about the boundaries between the services. In relation to helping students with academic processes there were clear policies about, for example extenuating circumstances and interruption, which I was completely familiar with and used all the time. They were clear policies and I was clear about what I was meant to do.

11. I did not interact with the police or NHS mental health services as part of my role. If police were needed on campus I would expect Claire Thompson as Head of Student Wellbeing to call them, or via security. That is partly because security have a direct liaison with police, and can help them find the right location on campus. It is also a good idea to involve security because they are onsite and can get to any location on campus quickly. I did not contact NHS mental health services either – it was always the MHAS that would liaise with NHS. It was very clear to me that it was not my role to contact NHS mental health services, and there was no need to in my role, as anyone with serious mental health issues would be under the care of MHAS. It follows that there are no policies or procedures which regulated my relationship with the police or external mental health services.

12. I am asked about relevant training. Training and development was taken very seriously. There was thorough training on the job, shadowing an experienced practitioner to learn how to conduct meetings with students. I had safeguarding training on a number of occasions. I completed an externally-run mental health first aid course for children and adults, which trained us in how to keep someone safe when they were experiencing a mental health crisis until other services could attend (so it was like learning first aid for physical injuries – the aim was to provide immediate short-term help in an emergency). I completed an external training course about suicide. I completed a course about supporting students with learning difficulties. There was a good provision of in-house training that we could book onto freely, and also compulsory external training. I felt that I had sufficient training to be able to do my job well.

13. I am asked about risk assessment training. I had training in assessing the risk associated with domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, and how to complete a 'Dash Ric' checklist ('Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment Risk Indication Checklist'). I had some understanding of risks to self associated with mental health issues from the suicide-related training course and the mental health first-aid course. I was not trained in any formal mental health risk assessment. However, I don't think I needed that sort of training and did not have the professional background to be able to make those assessments. It was not part of my role to make any formal assessment of risk to self or to others by people who had mental illness: we carried out a much higher-level assessment of whether a referral needed to be made to MHAS. I did not receive any training which specifically dealt with what to do if a student posed a risk to the safety of others, but that was an extremely rare situation.

14. I am asked what actions I would or could take in my role if I had concerns about the risk a student posed to the safety of others. If an issue was escalating in front of me I could call security who were always really quick to respond and were available 24 hours, but that never happened. I can only

think of one example in the years that I worked at the University when I was concerned that a student posed a risk; it was a student who seemed to be struggling with mental health and was intimidating. I escalated the problem to the Head of Student Wellbeing Claire Thompson and also to security and all staff were sent home because the student was deemed a risk.

15. As part of my role, I was aware of the Fitness to Study process, which I believe was introduced in 2020 so was a new process at the time. I was never confident about that process; it was very rarely used so I did not have much experience with it, and did not have a good feel for when it could or should be used.

16. I know from the policy that Fitness to Study comprises of three stages. The first is very informal, involving a discussion with the student about support necessary. As part of the S&W role we constantly talked to students about support needed, be that from another service or from the academic department. I suppose that a lot of my interactions with students involved the same actions as the first stage of Fitness to Study, but I did not call it the Fitness to Study process or think of it as action under that policy. I think I was doing what level one requires but I would not say 'I am switching from a normal meeting to a Fitness to Study process'. Stage two and three of the Fitness to Study process directly involved Claire Thompson as she was the Head of Student Wellbeing. I can remember getting emails from Claire Thompson sometimes where she would ask me for information in relation to a Fitness to Study issue, and I would provide the information but she would take the lead in the process.

### **CHRONOLOGY**

17. I have been asked to set out a chronological account of my contact with Valdo Calocane, who I will refer to as Valdo throughout this statement as that is how I would have referred to him when I interacted with him.

Events in 2020

18. I never met Valdo or any member of his family.
19. The first I knew of Valdo was on 1 June 2020 when his mother sent an e-mail to the Faculty S&W team's generic e-mail address to let us know that he was in hospital [UNIN0000801]. I notified Claire Thompson (Head of Student Wellbeing) by email [UNIN0000801]. I said "*We recieved the following email into the shared inbox this morning regarding the student Valdo Calocane who has been admitted to hospital due to his declineing mental health. The email has been sent by a member of his family on Valdos behalf. Due to this, I have sent a generic reply which indicates the EC process but not confirmed that he is a student. Ben is on annual leave today so, after discussing this with Claire, we felt that it would be best to make you aware of the situation.*" I did not feel able to correspond freely with Valdo's mother, due to data protection concerns. I refer to Ben and Claire in this email – Ben was the Manager of the Faculty's S&W team and Claire was another S&W officer in the team.
20. Claire responded, forwarding the email to MHAS, and saying "*Thank you for forwarding this. I am sending this to the MH team so they can follow up. If a student has been admitted to hospital with poor mental health it should always be referred through to the MH team so they can offer support*" [UNIN0000140]. I had contacted Claire in the first instance rather than MHAS because in her role as Head of Student Wellbeing she oversaw MHAS, and I felt this was a complex situation which I wanted her to know about.
21. Valdo's mother had also separately contacted academic staff. Dr Donald Giddings also e-mailed me on 1 June 2020 to let me know that Valdo was in hospital and asked if there was any advice that I would like to send to Valdo. I responded to Dr Giddings to let him know what I had done already (notified Claire Thompson and given Valdo's mother generic information about extenuating circumstances) [UNIN0000368].
22. After this e-mail exchange, I spoke to Eleanor (Ellie) Turner of MHAS who

informed me that from a University process point of view, Valdo did not need to make an extenuating circumstances claim until the hospital had confirmed that Valdo was in a fit state to be able to complete it himself and that, up until that point, Valdo's correspondence with the University would be 'frozen'. Ellie also said that she should be the only person to communicate with Valdo's mother [UNIN0000949, UNIN0000734]. I wrote to Dr Giddings to relay this information to him (as he had previously e-mailed me about Valdo) and told him that Ellie had said that he could contact her directly if he had any queries. Dr Giddings then sent me copies of the e-mails he had sent to Valdo's mother, saying that he would forward any further e-mails from her to me and not respond directly to them unless I thought that was a good idea [UNIN0000595]. I then sent the e-mails I had exchanged with Dr Giddings to Ellie so that she had the context of the conversations that had been had [UNIN0001470]. I was informed by email that the Extenuating Circumstances process was being put on hold while Valdo was in hospital [UNIN0001161] and I let Ellie and MHAS know that [UNIN0000739].

23. I understood that MHAS was then taking the lead in relation to Valdo. Ellie Turner copied my team into an email on 2 June [UNIN0000739] making clear that the ward would contact her, and that she would follow up with the ward if there was not any liaison. I would not expect to be copied into communications between MHAS and the hospital.

24. The S&W team was kept in the loop at a high level which is what I would expect. I did not expect to stay updated about details: I did not need details about his treatment or why he was in hospital. We were informed by email on 24 July 2020 that Valdo's extenuating circumstances claim had been approved [UNIN0000840]. I understand that while I was on leave in July my colleague Ben Perrett dealt with a query from MHAS about what options were open to Valdo, and liaised between MHAS and academic staff [UNIN0000952, UNIN0000991, UNIN0001007, UNIN0000587, UNIN0001529].

25. We were updated again by MHAS when Valdo was discharged, by email

dated 4 August [UNIN0000778]. In that email Ellie wrote “*Just to quickly update you that Valdo has now been discharged back to his Nottingham address following a further admission. He has a query regarding his resit exams and will be emailing you today or tomorrow. He has declined a referral to DS despite me advising this would be helpful. He is compliant with his medication and happy to engage with the Crisis team who are visiting daily. I will call him in the first week of term and let you know if anything has changed. Please get in touch if there are any concerns*”. This is what I would expect: MHAS were still taking the lead in terms of liaison with him, and we were acting as a liaison point between MHAS and academics in the Engineering Department. Valdo did not get in touch after that.

26. On 21 August 2020, just before I was going on leave, I sent my handover notes to colleagues [UNIN0000059, UNIN0000924]. My notes in relation to Valdo said:

**“Valdo (Filed in M3 4.8.2020)**

*Ben, you we’re dealing with this case whilst I was on Annual Leave. Valdo was supposed to get in contact with the team regarding questions about his re-sits after being discharged from hospital. However, he never got in contact. I sent an outreach email on 20.08.2020 so he may reply and need information. No reply so far”*

27. I cannot locate the email I sent to Valdo on 20 August 2020 but as far as I am aware, Valdo did not respond (I don’t believe I have ever had a response from Valdo to any communication that I have sent him). I knew that MHAS was dealing with Valdo (although I did not know the details as MHAS does not tend to provide information to the local S&W team unless there is a specific reason to do so) so the outreach e-mail was really just to see if there was anything else that Valdo needed from the Faculty S&W team, because he had not got in touch. I did not push for a response, knowing he was being looked after elsewhere.

28. I can see an email from November 2020 which refers to Valdo being in contact with the Student Health and Wellbeing team [UNIN0001286]. He was actually not in touch with our team - and I understand that other emails show that it was the MHAS team which was liaising directly with academics about interruption [UNIN0000067]. I would not necessarily expect to be involved in this conversation as MHAS was taking the lead. A student would not be looked after by both MHAS and S&W at the same time. If a student was on the MHAS caseload then generally the S&W team would not have got involved unless Claire Thompson or MHAS asked us to do something specific (or the student came to see us). We did not have any ongoing role in checking up on students who were under the care of MHAS or other services.

29. I don't think I was made aware that Valdo had interrupted his studies in November 2020. I am not surprised that I did not know – information was on a need-to-know basis and I did not need to be involved in that process.

#### Events in 2021

30. I had no interactions with Valdo on him resuming studies in September/October 2021. In the S&W team we would not expect to monitor students returning from interruption. I did not know that he was detained in 2021. Again, it would not be unusual for me to not be aware that a student had been detained under mental health provisions.

#### Events in 2022

31. After 2020, I did not hear anything more regarding Valdo until 19 January 2022, when Claire Thompson (Head of Student Wellbeing) asked me by e-mail to check urgently on Valdo's engagement with his studies and if there were any concerns [UNIN0000401]. Claire did not explain why she was making this request. This is an example of the S&W service being asked to complete a task, but not having ownership of a case. I had not been alerted to any issues with Valdo. I did not know that Valdo had assaulted another

student, was seriously unwell and was being assessed to see if he should be detained under the Mental Health Act. I would not expect to have that kind of information shared with me by the MHAS unless I needed to know for some reason. I e-mailed the key academics in Valdo's Department, Dr McWilliam, Valdo's personal tutor and Emma Barney, the Senior Tutor for the Mechanical, Materials and Manufacturing (M3) Engineering Department [UNIN0000351]. On 20 January 2022, the personal tutor, Stewart McWilliam, replied to me providing a detailed account of his recent interactions with Valdo [UNIN0001605]. He copied in several other academics and explained he had asked Antonino La Rocca (module convenor for Internal Combustion Engines) to check if Valdo had submitted his exam and coursework. Antonino replied the same day that Valdo had not submitted his coursework worth 30%, failed his progress test in December (worth 30%) and he had submitted his exam that day but it was over 8 minutes late [UNIN0000385].

32. I forwarded this information to Claire on 20 January 2022 by e-mail and asked her whether there was a cause for concern that she would like the Faculty S&W team to investigate [UNIN0000456, UNIN0001641]. Claire responded the same day to let me know that there were some concerns outside of the course, but did not explain what these were. She did not ask me to undertake any further investigations [UNIN0000600].

33. As I thought Valdo may be struggling with his studies, I sent him a standard outreach email on the same day, 20 January 2022. I explained that I had been made aware that he was struggling with his studies and suggesting that he might benefit from speaking to a member of the Faculty S&W team. I asked Valdo to respond to me by 24 January 2022 and outlined that if he did not do so, I would have to seek advice from colleagues as to how to proceed and next steps could include a member of staff paying a visit to his home [UNIN0000804]. As far as I am aware, I did not receive a response to this e-mail – I didn't take any further action as we became aware shortly after this that Valdo had been admitted to hospital.

34. On 31 January 2022, Ellie Turner e-mailed me to let me know that Valdo had been admitted to hospital and asked me to inform relevant staff of this. Ellie did not tell me why Valdo had been hospitalised or provide any further context and I did not request this as it was not my place and the information would have been confidential. I contacted key academic colleagues – Dr Barney, Dr Rouse, Dr La Rocca and Dr McWilliam – as instructed [UNIN0001745]. Those whom I informed acknowledged the news, but did not ask me any questions or for assistance [UNIN0001375, UNIN0001034, UNIN0000384].
35. After this, I had no further contact with or about Valdo – neither I nor any other members of the Faculty S&W team were asked to help with Valdo’s reintegration back into studies after his time in hospital. If Valdo had come or been signposted back to us, we would have referred him to Disability Services for a support plan and I assumed that MHAS or the relevant academics had considered that.
36. I was not aware of any other occasions on which Valdo was detained at or admitted to hospital because of mental illness during the time he was a student at the University. I was not aware of any interactions Valdo had with the police or university security services during the time he was a student. I was not aware of any complaints made to the University about the behaviour of Valdo. As far as I am aware, Valdo was not asked by the University to undertake a Fitness to Study assessment at any time during his studies.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

37. I am asked whether I think I should have been told more about Valdo’s behaviour while at the University, his mental illness and/or his interactions with the police. I don’t know the full extent of the information held by other services so this is hard to answer. It would not have helped me to know more as I was not dealing with his case.
38. I am asked whether I consider there are additional actions that I or the University could have taken in respect of Valdo. In the context of my role I

don't think there was anything else I could have done, it was taken out of my hands as it was being dealt with by the MHAS. I don't identify anything that the University should have done but I don't know everything about what MHAS did to enable me to answer this question. I don't have a broad enough knowledge to pass judgment. I don't have any recommendations to suggest.

39. I am asked about what improvements I think could be made to the University or to the higher education sector generally in how they deal with acutely mentally ill students and/or students who pose a risk to the safety of others. In broad terms, Support and Wellbeing services are heavily relied on, and I think are underfunded. I think it would help to have greater clarity about what information should be shared between teams in Universities, and for what purpose, although I don't think it was an issue for me in this case. In particular, I have thought about whether we in the S&W team should have known about students who had been violent and may pose a risk to us. I really did not feel vulnerable at the time; there were always people around and security was on site. I felt well supported and knew that Claire and MHAS were there. However, looking back I think that it would have been useful to be told if someone had been violent before, as then I would consider going into the meeting with another member of staff or keeping the door open.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the content of this statement to be true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: **GRO-B** \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: 22/09/2025

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<b>No.</b>	<b>Inquiry URN</b>	<b>Document Description</b>
1.	UNIN0000801	Email from SS Welfare Engineering (UON) to Claire Thompson (UON), re: FW: Valdo's illness
2.	UNIN0000140	Email from Claire Thompson (UON) to SS Welfare Engineering (UON) and MH Support (UON), re: Valdo's illness
3.	UNIN0000368	Email from SS-WelfareEngineering [University of Nottingham] to Donald Giddings [University of Nottingham] Re: Valdo Mendes Calocane
4.	UNIN0000949	Email from SS Welfare Engineering to Eleanor Turner, re: RE: Valdo's illness
5.	UNIN0000734	Letter from Celeste Calocane to Sir/Madam, re: Valdo Mendes Calocane
6.	UNIN0000595	Email from Donald Giddings to SS WelfareEngineering, re: Valdo Mendes Calocane
7.	UNIN0001470	Email from Eleanor Turner to SS Welfare Engineering re: Re: Valdo Mendes Calocane
8.	UNIN0001161	Email from Kishen Rengaraj to Donald Giddings, Emma Barney, Alastair Campbell Ritchie and others, re: RE: Valdo - Caution because of GDPR
9.	UNIN0000739	Email from Eleanor Turner (UON) to SS Welfare Engineering (UON), Kishen Rengaraj (UON) and Donald Giddings (UON), re: Valdo - caution because of GDPR
10.	UNIN0000840	Email from SS-EC-UPE to Valdo Mendes Calocane to Benjamin Rothwell, Stephen Pickering and ZAssess, re: EC outcome – Valdo Mendes Calocane
11.	UNIN0000952	Email from Emma Barney to SS Welfare Engineering, Kishen Rengaraj, Jon Mckechnie and others, re: RE: Student query – C 14308023

12.	UNIN0000991	Email from Jon Mckechnie [UNIN] to Emma Barney, SS-Welfare- Engineering [UNIN], Kishen Rengaraj [UNIN] and others, re: RE: Student query – VC 14308023
13.	UNIN0001007	Email from Emma Barney [UoN] to Ben Perrett [UoN], re: FW: Student query – VC 14308023
14.	UNIN0000587	Email from Ben Perrett to Emma Barney, re: Student Query - VC 14908023
15.	UNIN0001529	Email from Emma Barney to Ben Perrett, re: Re: Student Query – VC 14308023
16.	UNIN0000778	Email from Eleanor Turner (UON) to SS Welfare Engineering (UON), re: Student V.C 10351712
17.	UNIN0000059	Email from Paige Smith [UNIN] to Ben Perrett [UNIN] and Claire Newbury [UNIN], re: Handover notes
18.	UNIN0000924	Notes by Paige Smith re: Handover Notes
19.	UNIN0001286	Email from Stewart McWilliam [UoN] to Emma Barney [UoN], re: ValdoMendes Calocane
20.	UNIN0000067	Email from Valdo Mendes Calocane to Emma Barney and Eleanor Turner re: Voluntary Interruption of Study
21.	UNIN0000401	Email from Claire Thompson (UoN) to SSSup-Engineering (UoN) Re: student progress check
22.	UNIN0000351	Email from SS-SupEngineering to Stewart McWilliam and Emma Barney Re: Student progress check
23.	UNIN0001605	Email from Stewart McWilliam to SS-SupEngineering, Emma Barney, James Rouse and others, re: Re: Student progress check
24.	UNIN0000385	Email from Antonino La Rocca [University of Nottingham] to Stewart McWilliam [University of Nottingham], SS-SupEngineering [University of Nottingham], Emma Barney [University of Nottingham] and others Re: Student progress check

25.	UNIN0000456	Email from SS Sup Engineering to Claire Thompson [UNIN], re: Student progress check
26.	UNIN0001641	Email from SS-SupEngineering to Claire Thompson and Eleanor Turner, re: RE: Student progress check
27.	UNIN0000600	Email from Claire Thompson to SS-SupEngineering and Eleanor Turner, re: RE: Student Progress Check
28.	UNIN0000804	Email from SS Sup Engineering to Valdo Mendes Calocane, re: Valdo Calocane Support and Wellbeing Contact Required
29.	UNIN0001745	Email from SS-Sup-Engineering (UON) to Emma Barney (UON), James Rouse (UON), Antonio La Rocca (UON) and another, re: FW: Student V.C ID 14308023
30.	UNIN0001375	Email from Emma Barney (UON) to SS Sup Engineering (UON), James Rouse (UON), Antonino La Rocca (UON) and others, re: Student V.C 1D14308023
31.	UNIN0001034	Email from Antonino La Rocca to SS-SupEngineering, Emma Barney, James Rouse and others, re: RE: Student V.C ID14308023
32.	UNIN0000384	Email from James Rouse [University of Nottingham] to SS-Sup-Engineering [University of Nottingham], Emma Barney [University of Nottingham], Antonino La Rocca [University of Nottingham] and others Re: Student V.C D14308023