Risk assessment guidance

University of BRISTOL
Safety and Health Services

Contents

1. Introduction

This document provides guidance on carrying out risk assessments at the University.

The University undertakes a diverse range of activities involving varying levels of risk. The guidance is designed to enable and support these activities, whilst helping Schools and Services carry them out in a safe manner.

Information is based on the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) guidance: Managing risks and risk assessment at work.

2. Risk assessment: the main principles

2.1 What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is a logical way of looking at work activities and identifying sensible precautions (control measures) to control the risks created by these activities.

There is no set way to carry out or record a risk assessment, although a suggested approach is outlined in 2.2 below. The University has a standard risk assessment template and subject-specific templates for:

- work-related stress
- workstations and DSE
- first aid
- travel

as well as a range of risk assessment templates for specific use cases relating to:

- chemical safety
- biological safety
- radiation safety

Search “risk assessment” in the document directory or visit the relevant page on the Safety and Health Services website.

Locally developed risk assessment processes and templates may also be available. More information can be found from your local School/Service Safety Adviser (SSA) and the Local Rules document where you work.

2.2 Hazard versus risk

Hazards have the potential to cause harm, such as trailing cables, chemicals, or electricity.

Risk is the likelihood (high or low) that someone could be harmed by a hazard. For example, the risk of tripping over a trailing cable on the floor of a busy office might be high.

2.3 Is a risk assessment needed?

If work activities present a foreseeable risk of injury or ill health, a risk assessment should be carried out.

In a relatively low risk environment, such as an office, a single risk assessment covering all the activities undertaken together with DSE risk assessments may be all that is required.

In other workplaces with higher risk activities, a more extensive risk assessment and separate subject-specific risk assessments may be appropriate.

The Local Rules document for the school or service and the SSA will have further information on the arrangements for carrying out risk assessments locally.

An effective risk assessment:

- Enables the work to be carried out safely whilst supporting learning and innovation.
- Focusses on significant risks (you are only expected to cover reasonably foreseeable risks, not trivial ones).
- Covers all groups of people who might be harmed (staff, public, students, visitors, contractors, etc).
- Identifies sensible and appropriate control measures which reduce the risk to an appropriate low level.
- Has been produced in consultation with those carrying out the work and their representatives.
- Records any actions required, with the highest risks being prioritised.
- Is not about generating large amounts of paperwork.
- Does not aim to completely remove all risks, which is neither realistic nor desirable.

2.4 Managing risk dynamically

In some circumstances, there may be a need to dynamically assess risks as an activity is carried out. This can be particularly useful where the activities carried out are inherently variable or unpredictable.

This approach should not replace the risk assessment carried out before an activity takes place but is in addition to the risk assessment.

If it is likely an activity will need to be dynamically assessed as the work is carried out, this should be covered in the standard risk assessment and details provided in the controls and comments sections.

Definition

IOSH: USHA guide defines **dynamic risk assessment** as:	**'… a continuous process of identifying hazards and evaluating risks as they come up, taking appropriate actions to eliminate or reduce the risk.'**

Some examples where risks may need to be managed dynamically include:

- Security Services – dealing with unpredictable incidents
- Fieldwork in changeable locations – this could be political, environmental, etc
- Post-mortem activities – where it is not possible to for see all potential hazards until the work has started

Individuals using this approach must be competent to do so, for example by having adequate training, experience and knowledge of the activity being undertaken. This will ensure any actions taken are appropriate. These might include:

- Stopping the activity, for example if you or others feel unsafe, or the risks are too great to yourself and others.
- Requesting help or assistance, for example from a colleague or manager or obtaining specialist advice.
- Using a different method, if safe to do so.
- Changing equipment, if safe to do so.

Actions after using dynamic risk assessment:

- Consider if the current risk assessment needs reviewing and amend if appropriate.
- Depending on the level of risk, it may be appropriate to record actions taken whist the activity was being dynamically assessed. This could be in the form of a report or other record.
- Use the action plan section of the risk assessment template to record any further actions required after.
- Report accidents or near misses afterwards to enable learning from the incident.

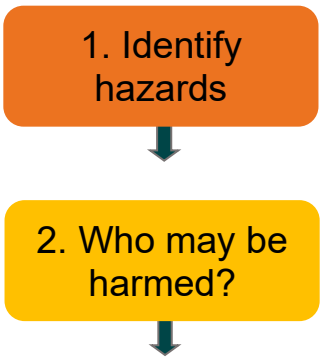
2.5 Risk assessment process overview

Consult your School or Service's local rules document and speak to your local SSA. They will be able to give you useful information on how risk assessments are carried out locally, what assessments are already in place, and if there are any specific templates to be used or processes to be followed.

Consider the School or Service's main risk areas and what areas require a risk assessment. For example, fieldwork, display screen equipment (DSE) or manual handling.

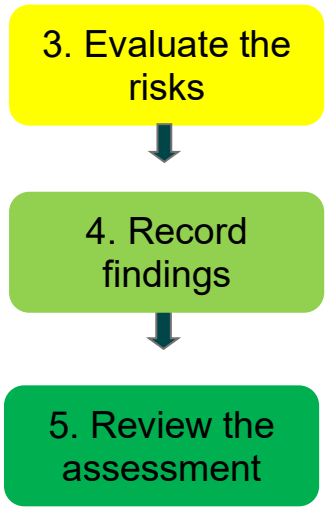
This information should be available from your School/Service's most recent self-verification assurance assessment. These key areas of risk should be prioritised an assessed before others.

The risk assessment process can be broken down into the following steps:



Identify significant hazards associated with the activity. What could cause harm? Walk round your workplace, talk to staff, look at accident data and consider non-routine activities like maintenance, etc.

Consider who might be harmed and how. Include staff, visitors, students, the public and contractors. Also think about individuals such as new or expectant mothers, young people, or disabled people.



Decide how likely it is that harm will occur.

Record the significant findings including the hazards, who might be harmed and how and the control measures required. Findings may also be recorded in the form of an operating procedure or local rules, where appropriate.

The review frequency should be based on the level of risk and any changes to work activities. Consider how effectively controls are implemented, concerns raised, changes to work activities and accidents/near misses.

2.6 Control measures

Control measures (recorded in step 4 above) are any measures in place to reduce the risk of harm. The types of controls are listed below, and most risk assessments will have a combination of these.

1) **Elimination**: Can the hazard be eliminated? For example, avoiding the need for working at height.
2) **Substitution**: Can you choose another option? For example, substituting a less harmful chemical.
3) **Engineering controls**: Can you prevent access to the hazard? For example, physical barriers to machinery or local exhaust ventilation.
4) **Administrative controls**: Can you organise your work to reduce exposure to the hazard? For example, safe working procedures, signage, or controlling time spent exposed to a hazard.
5) **Personal protective equipment**: Issuing protective equipment should be a last resort after the points above have all been considered.

Sometimes referred to as the hierarchy of control, these measures should be considered in list order with preference given to controls higher up the list, as these are generally more effective.

Hazards presenting the highest risks should be focused on first and have the most robust control measures in place.

Certain subject-specific legislation also requires specific control measure to be in place for some risks, such as noise at work.

2.7 Responsibilities

As outlined in the University's Group Health and Safety Policy, Heads of Schools or Services are responsible for ensuring systems are in place so the risk assessment process is effectively managed.

This includes ensuring those responsible for carrying out risk assessment are competent to do so (see 2.10). The School or Service's local rules document should contain details of how risk assessments are managed locally.

The person responsible for carrying out the risk assessment must:

- ensure the significant findings from the risk assessment are recorded for example the hazards, how people could be harmed, and the control measures required.
- cooperate and coordinate with other parties involved or affected by the work activities being risk assessed. Other parties may need to be involved in the assessment process or be aware of the risk assessments / working procedures.

2.8 Other guidance and sharing good practice

The University may have similar activities being carried out in more than one School or Service. Sharing information on approaches to risk assessment can be very helpful in these circumstances.

You can ask SSAs within Schools and Services to provide information on their approach to risk assessments, or an adviser within Safety and Health Services may be able to facilitate this.

Viewing generic examples of risk assessment produced by other organisations, trade or professional bodies may also be useful. It is essential that any example assessment used is amended to accurately reflect the hazards, risks and work activities being carried by the School or Service.

Safety and Health Services also has example risk assessments available to use in relation to subject-specific guidance. Search "risk assessment" within the document directory to locate these, and always check the associated guidance.

2.9 What happens next?

Carrying out a risk assessment is just the beginning. The aim of a risk assessment is to prevent harm. To ensure this continues to happen, the following should be considered:

- The risk assessment can inform safe systems of work or operating procedures. This prevents risk assessments being filed away and not being working documents.

- **Implementation of controls**: Checks on implementation of controls should be part of the workplace's health and safety management system
- **Ensuring staff are competent to carry out their work:** Providing information on how to work safely is a key part of this. It is not necessary to make staff read the risk assessment for the activities they carry out. In many cases more user-friendly documents are developed, which include safety and other key information.
- **Safe working procedures:** These are sometimes called method statements or safe systems of work. They may also be part of a document such as Local Rules or more general standard operating procedures.
- **Review of risk assessments:** The frequency of reviews should be based on the level of risk and if there have been any changes to the activities being assessed. It is generally recommended that risk assessments are reviewed annually.

2.10 Competence

Those tasked with carrying out risk assessment must be competent to do so.

Competence is more than simply attending training: it is a combination of training, skills, experience, and knowledge in both carrying out a risk assessment and the subject being assessed.

3. References and other useful information

- Safety and Health Services website
- HSE risk assessment advice