

This Information Sheet provides guidance on how to carry out a generic risk assessment. It forms part of a series of Information Sheets that supports the Risk Assessment Policy Standard.

## **Background**

The law does not expect the University to eliminate all risks, but it does require it to protect people so far as is 'reasonably practicable' from harm.

The aim of Risk Assessments is to help make sure no one gets hurt or becomes ill as a result of the University's undertakings or activities.



## **What is a Risk Assessment?**

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in your work or workplace, could cause harm and enables you to weigh up and decide if enough is being done to prevent harm, or if more precautions are needed.

*Definitions:*

- **Hazard:** *A hazard is anything that may cause harm eg. chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, driving, undertaking social surveys [another word for Hazard could be Danger].*
- **Risk:** *Is the combination of the likelihood, great or small, of someone being harmed by the hazard and the severity of that harm should it occur.*
- **Harm:** *Injury or illness.*
- **Reasonably Practicable:** *Weighing up the cost versus the benefit ie. evaluating the risk against the trouble, time and money needed to control it.*

## **Carrying out a Risk Assessment**

The University recommends use of the Health and Safety Executive's 'Five Steps to Risk Assessment' process when assessing risk. This is a practical method, consisting of the following five steps:

- **Identify the hazards**, taking into account the harm which may occur and the risk (the likelihood) of the harm occurring.
- **Decide who might be harmed and how.**
- **Evaluate the risks** and decide on precautions.
- **Record your findings** and implement them (including communicating to all relevant persons).
- **Review your risk assessment** and update if necessary.

It is important to decide if the hazard is significant and whether enough precautions are in place to control the risk. For example, there is no point assessing the risk of getting a paper cut, a day to day risk which is usually insignificant.

In addition, do not over complicate the process as College / Directorate risks are usually well known with necessary control measures established and easy to apply.

**(Note:** Numerical/quantitative risk assessments are not normally recommended. The method creates unnecessary complexity that is not always necessary or appropriate at the University. Numerical values may be assigned for practical ease of prioritising recommended actions, but such are not generally necessary for identifying actual risk.)

## STEP 1: Identify the hazards

The first step is to identify workplace hazards that could cause harm. However, when you work somewhere everyday it may be easy to overlook them. The following should help make sure you do not miss anything.

- **Walk around** your workplace to see what could reasonably cause harm. Take someone else with you as well, as two pairs of eyes are better than one.
- **Ask people** as others may have noticed something not immediately obvious to you.
- **Look at previous Accident and Incident Records** these may highlight less obvious hazards or cases of ill health.
- **Check Manufacturer's Instructions** which may help spot hazards eg. Tippex has a hazard warning label, but if used sensibly the risk is negligible so do not mention it.
- **Think long-term health hazards** eg. high levels of noise as well as safety hazards.

## STEP 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Be clear about who might be harmed by each hazard, as it will help you work out how best to manage the risk. Do not list people by name (unless necessary), instead identify groups eg. Security staff and how they might be harmed eg. 'Security staff may suffer back injury from repeated lifting of boxes'.

Remember:

- Some workers have particular requirements eg. young workers, new and expectant mothers, health condition (for example blood clotting issue so a paper cut is a risk).
- Not all people are in the workplace all the time eg. cleaners, visitors, contractors, members of the public, students or employees of other organisations who you share the workplace with.

## STEP 3: Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Having spotted the hazards, then evaluate the risk by thinking about what controls are already in place, how the work is organised and whether what you are already doing to manage the risk is enough. You must also, always ensure your controls satisfy legal requirements, industry standards and any manufacturing guidance etc.

If you then, still feel there are shortfalls, decide how to better control the risk. Apply the principles below when thinking about additional controls, asking if there is a way to eliminate the hazard altogether:

- Try a less risky option eg. use a less hazardous chemical, outsource the activity.
- Prevent access to the hazard eg. install guarding, work permit systems.
- Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard eg. put barriers between pedestrians and traffic, set up staff work rotas.
- As a last resort, issue PPE eg. footwear, safety goggles etc.
- Provide welfare facilities eg. first aid and washing facilities to clean off contamination.
- Consider storage – good housekeeping is a basic essential in good health and safety management.

Finally, do not worry. Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For example, placing non-slip material on slippery steps is an inexpensive precaution as is making demonstrators wear coloured lab coats instead of the usual white so easy to spot in a room full of students!



#### STEP 4: Record your findings and implement them

Risk assessments do not have to be perfect but do have to be suitable and sufficient, with detail appropriate to the level of risk. It must also show:

- A proper check was made.
- All those who might be affected were consulted.
- All the significant hazards were addressed.
- The precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is low.
- Staff and their representatives were involved in the process.

Risk assessments can be recorded on the University's Risk Assessment Form or a suitable alternative. Each significant finding must be recorded, with information included under the relevant heading:

- **What are the dangers / hazards** write down the significant hazards.
- **Who might be harmed and how** identify groups of people who could be affected. Remember those that may not be in the workplace all the time eg. members of public, part time workers.
- **What are you doing already to prevent harm** list what is already in place to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring or make any harm less serious.
- **What further action is necessary** list any additional controls needed to reduce the risk 'so far as in reasonably practicable'.
- **How will you put the assessment into action** state who will carry out the action, by when and date when the action is completed.

When writing down results, keep it simple, for example 'staff tripping over rubbish' - bins provided, regular bin collections, H&S Coordinator carries out weekly housekeeping checks.

Date the Risk Assessment and communicate it to anyone who is affected by the hazards as they need to know what controls are needed to manage any risk. In addition, keep a record of the Risk Assessment for future reference with a copy, if appropriate passed to the College / Directorate H&S Coordinator or Head of College / Directorate.

**Note:** Although not a legal requirement, it is helpful if you sign the Risk Assessment to keep a record of who produced it in case your help is needed in future.

### **STEP 5: Review the Risk Assessment and update if necessary**

Review the Risk Assessment from time to time and revise if necessary. For example, a significant change in the process such as new equipment or substances which introduce new hazards, or an individual with specific needs.

**Note:** Make sure the revised Risk Assessment is re-communicated to those affected and others as necessary. As part of this process make sure all old Risk Assessments relating to the same activity are removed from use. This includes checking Notice Boards, Web Sites etc.



**No!**