

Office Safety and Workplace Standards Policy

Synopsis

This policy is to be used to provide information on typical office based safety risks and how they should be controlled.


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Approval

Approved by: Senior Management Team

Date: 23rd February 2023

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Revision Record

Issue	Date	Reason for Review
Draft 1	Jan 2023	New document for consultation
Draft 2	Jan 2023	Amendments made following initial consultation with representatives from Estates and Facilities
Draft 3	Feb 2023	Amendments following consultation with Health and Safety Committee
Issue 1.0	Feb 2023	As agreed by SMT (content unchanged from Draft 3).


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Introduction

It is generally believed that office environments are low risk environments and there is no need to give much attention to safety issues, however, this is not always true.

Accidents can and do happen in the office, arising from sources such as electrical equipment, slips, trips and falls and moving heavy objects such as archive boxes or equipment.

There are also legal standards which need to be met, as defined by the Health and Safety (Workplace) regulations and others, to ensure that workplaces are safe to occupy and do not pose a risk to health.

1.0 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to inform staff of the significant hazards that can arise in an office setting, controls that can minimise the risk from these hazards and to set the standards for office environments.

2.0 Scope of Policy


This procedure is intended to convey information to University of Aberdeen Staff and visitors who are undertaking work duties in an office-based work environment. This policy will apply to all university owned / occupied offices and many of the standards will also apply to all types of workplace. Please note that these office spaces may not necessarily be on the main campuses and off-site work locations are also included. This policy does not apply to teaching rooms or lecture theatres.

We shall aim to provide the same standards to PGR students who are engaging in work for the university, although this may not be possible or practicable in every situation.

3.0 Legislation

The following legislation, guidance and standards should be considered the minimum provisions:

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations
- The Health and Safety at Work Act
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations
- Electricity at Work Regulations
- HSG38 – Lighting at Work
- HSG225 – Preventing Slips and Trips at Work
- Lighting Guide (LG01) – published by the Chartered Institute of Building Service Engineers

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4.0 Responsibilities

4.1 Senior Management Team

The Senior Management Team is responsible for supporting the requirements of this policy by providing the necessary resources needed to implement the requirements of this policy. They are also required to demonstrate their commitment to this policy by leading by example.

4.2 Line Managers

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that the working environment provided to the staff they manage meets the requirements of this policy.

4.3 Estates and Facilities


Estates and Facilities are responsible for ensuring buildings are safe, ventilation is provided and maintained, fire detection / fighting equipment is provided and maintained, standard office equipment and furniture is provided and maintained in offices in University owned / occupied buildings.

4.4 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety team shall advise on the implementation of appropriate legislation and are responsible for assisting in the resolution of issues over the interpretation of this policy.

4.5 Employees

Employees are required to support the contents of this policy by adhering to the information specified in this policy. They are also responsible for raising any issues, concerns or cases of non-compliance with their line manager.

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5.0 Potentially Hazardous Locations, Equipment and Activities

5.1 Slips, Trips and Falls

The majority of accidents in an office can be attributed to slips, trips and falls. They generally result from poor housekeeping issues such as:

- Leaving files on the floor
- Trailing wires
- Worn carpets
- Damaged stair treads
- Spilled liquids
- Not using dedicated equipment for reaching items stored at height

5.2 Walkways, Corridors and Stairs


Staff should walk, never run, as running can cause an accident to you or someone else. Be particularly careful on stairs. You may need to pay special attention to floors you suspect have just been washed and may still be slippery.

If you discover any issues with walkways, corridors, stairs or other area, you should report them to Estates & Facilities via the service desk as soon as possible, via the [web form](#) or, if urgent or an emergency, by phone (3333 or 3939 out of hours). You should also warn others in the area, this may be verbally or it may be more appropriate to restrict access to the area with a cone / barrier / or similar.

If you discover any hazards such as:

- Trailing wires
- Slippery floor surfaces
- Items left in the corridors

You should tidy them up if it is safe to do so and if it is within your capabilities. If not, you should report them to Estates & Facilities via the service desk as soon as possible, via the [web form](#) or, if urgent or an emergency, by phone (3333 or 3939 out of hours). You should then report the situation as a near miss to the Health, Safety and Resilience team using the near [miss reporting form](#). This allows the team to track any issues that may be occurring across the university and tackle them before they become more serious accidents.

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5.3 Working at Height e.g. to access storage, windows etc.


Storing items at height should be considered a last resort and staff should not require frequent access to items / equipment stored at height. Frequently used items should be stored below head height. Where windows are at height and require to be opened, staff should use a long reach pole hook to open and close windows from ground level.

If you do need to access a higher area, you should make sure that you are wearing appropriate footwear and use equipment such as step stools (not ladders) which are provided for this purpose. On no occasion should you stand on chairs or other similar items.

5.4 Doors

Be particularly careful with heavy swing doors, ensure you are not following someone too closely who may not be aware of your presence and might accidentally let the door swing into you. You must also pay attention to anyone who may be following behind you before releasing a swing door. When pushing open a door, be mindful of anyone who may be standing or walking past on the other side, open doors slowly and look through the glass vision panel if the door has one.

Fire doors must never be wedged open as they form a critical role in the prevention of fire and smoke spreading throughout buildings.

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6.0 Shared Areas

6.1 Water

An adequate supply of clean drinking water must be readily accessible with suitable cups also provided (unless the supply is by a drinking fountain). Where the cups are non-disposable, washing facilities must be available nearby.

6.2 Kitchens

Worktops must be kept clear and clean at all times. If there is any damage to the fabric of the kitchen (e.g. cupboard doors) or equipment (e.g. kettle or microwave), they must be reported immediately to the Estates and Facilities service desk via the [web form](#) or, if urgent or an emergency, by phone (3333 or 3939 out of hours) and others in the area should be warned of the issue.

Care must be taken when using the kettle, urn or microwave. To prevent burns and scalds, hot food should be removed carefully, and lids should be opened from the side to allow any steam to escape. No cooking equipment (microwaves, toasters etc.) should be located anywhere but in kitchens, for fire safety / false alarm reasons.


If you spill anything on the floor or if you discover a spill, you must clean it up immediately and ensure the floor is dry. If any glass or crockery is broken it must be handled carefully, wrapped securely in several layers of paper and carefully placed in a separate bin bag, ensure the bin bag is labelled as containing sharp materials so the cleaners are aware of the need to handle the bag with extra care.

Fridges are provided throughout the university, these are for the short-term storage of food and sell-by dates should be checked frequently and the food disposed of if it expires. Food stored in fridges must be in a suitable, leak-proof container.

6.3 Welfare Facilities

All staff, students and visitors must wash their hands frequently with soap and water in order to help minimise the spread of illness and infections.

If consumables (e.g. soap, paper towels, hand sanitiser) are missing or the toilets, taps or hand driers are not working or are damaged in any way then this should be reported immediately to Estates & Facilities via the service desk via the [web form](#) or, if urgent or an emergency, by phone (3333 or 3939 out of hours).

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In order to comply with regulations, the following shall be provided:

- Suitable and sufficient number of sanitary conveniences located at readily accessible places
- Suitable washing facilities located at readily accessible places
- Suitable and sufficient facilities for workers who need to change into special clothing for work. The facilities must be readily accessible, of sufficient capacity and have seating
- Suitable facilities must be provided for eating meals (in an office environment, where food is unlikely to become contaminated, seating in the work area could be sufficient where there is a facility for preparing or obtaining a hot drink)

6.4 Rest Areas

Suitable rest facilities must be provided in a readily accessible place. They must:

- Be large enough for the number of people who need to use them at any one time
- Have sufficient seats (with backs) and tables for the number of people who need to use them at any one time
- Include seating which is suitable for the number of persons with disabilities
- Provide the facilities for pregnant women to lie down and nursing mothers to rest
- Protect employees from experiencing discomfort from smoking and vaping

6.5 Cupboards / Tambour Units

Cupboards should not be overfilled and any heavy or fragile items should be stored on lower shelves and never above head-height. Items should be neatly stored inside the cupboards and not on the top. Care should be taken to ensure that items are not placed too close the front of the shelf where they may fall out when the door is opened.

6.6 Outside Areas

As the campus consists of many buildings you may need to travel between them in the course of your work. Like corridors, outside pathways should be kept clear from obstruction. Care should be taken in wet weather when the ground may be slippery and during icy weather you should stick to the main paths which are gritted more frequently. It should be remembered that the Old Aberdeen Campus is a historical area and certain areas may not be constructed to a modern standard and the Foresterhill campus is shared with NHS Grampian. It is also important to note that we have publicly accessible campuses so you should be mindful of others, who may not be familiar with the site, driving / cycling through and incorrect speeds or against one-way systems.

You must never obstruct a final fire exit, even for a short period of time.

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7.0 Office Environment

7.1 Smoking

Under the Prohibition of Smoking in Certain Premises (Scotland) Regulations 2006, it is an offence to smoke inside university buildings, including communal working areas, individual offices, university residences, stairwells, lifts, building entrances and doorways and near open windows / vents. There are dedicated smoking areas on the Old Aberdeen Campus. The Foresterhill Campus is on an NHS site which is smoke free and no smoking is allowed in any of the premises, including all external areas.

Further information can be found in the [Smoking in the Workplace Policy](#).

7.2 Lighting

Lighting should be sufficient to enable staff to work and move around safely. People prefer to work in natural light so workstations should be positioned to take advantage of natural light where possible. Blinds must be provided to allow people to avoid glare on computer screens. Artificial and local lighting may be required where there is not enough natural light (taking into account the shorter winter days). Where artificial lighting is provided, it must be such that it does not cause reflections and glare on display screens. All light sources, whether natural or artificial, should not be allowed to become obscured (e.g. by tall storage cupboards).


Suitable and sufficient emergency lighting must be provided in any workplace where persons at work are exposed to danger in the event of the failure of artificial lighting. For example: on escape routes, emergency exits and staircases.

Any lights which are too dim, too bright or broken should be reported to Estates & Facilities via the service desk via the [web form](#) or, if urgent or an emergency, by phone (3333 or 3939 out of hours). If you are unhappy with the lighting provision at your workstation you should report it to your manager in the first instance to discuss the issue.

Please ensure that before leaving the office you turn all lights off.

7.3 Ventilation and Temperature

A minimum temperature of 16°C must be maintained during working hours. Where a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved through normal means, local heating or cooling must be provided. There must be a sufficient number of thermometers available to allow employees to accurately measure the temperature of their workplace. When used, they must be positioned thoughtfully to ensure they are not unduly influenced by drafts, heaters, sunshine etc.

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Many buildings across the campus have air conditioning and all have heating fitted. It may differ from building to building, but where you are able to, you may adjust the heating or air conditioning to suit the comfort of those in that area. Other areas may not allow local control over the heating, these areas have been set at a temperature that should be comfortable to *most* users. Please be aware that air conditioning units work better if the system is set at a constant rate and temperature and not changed frequently. Radiators and fans must not be blocked by furniture, storage or other equipment.

Older buildings may not all be fitted with the same equipment as newer buildings so may need to rely on other methods of cooling a space (e.g. opening windows). Where the need for a desk fan is identified these can be purchased through your School/Department. If a space heater is required (e.g. in the event heating systems fail and temperature drops below 16°C), these can be sourced through Estates and Facilities, please note that only oil-filled electric heaters are permitted.


7.4 Background Office Noise

You should be courteous of others in your area and mindful that some people can find lots of background noise distracting so you may need to consider taking meetings or lengthy discussions to a more suitable area (e.g. a meeting room, kitchen seating area, café). This is particularly important in open-plan shared offices.

If you feel that the background noise in your area is causing you stress or other problems you should discuss it with your line manager in the first instance.


7.5 Floor Layout

The Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations require that “every room where persons work shall have sufficient floor area, height and unoccupied space for purposes of health, safety and welfare”. The regulations require that each person should have 11 cubic meters of space within a room. The 11m³ applies to a limited maximum height (3m) even if the ceiling is higher, this means that the average minimum floor area should be 3.7m² per occupant, including circulation areas etc. or 4.6 m² if we assume a standard 2.4m height ceiling. These specifications might need to be increased to allow for visitors or other requirements.

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All offices shall meet the following criteria:

- Be thermally insulated
- Where air handling systems are present, a minimum of 300mm clearance shall be maintained
- Workstations to be arranged in such a way that avoids trailing cables
- The fire corridor must be unobstructed and no less than 1100mm wide
- Staff must not need to travel more than 18m to reach an evacuation corridor
- Staff who sit with their backs to shuttered cupboards must have a minimum of 1000mm clearance behind them and 1200mm if the cupboard doors open outwards. You must add an additional 200mm clearance if someone is to walk behind.
- Staff sitting back to back must have a minimum of 1800mm between their desks
- Cupboards higher than 1650mm must only be positioned against a perimeter wall so as not to obstruct natural light
- Location and space allocation shall be determined on need and efficient delivery of service, not status
- Any space requirement must be requested through the University Space Management Team

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8.0 Equipment

8.1 Electrical Equipment

Electrical equipment must only be used for the purpose for which it was intended and care should be taken when using, moving or storing it. Extra care should be taken to avoid damaging cables. This policy only applies to office environments which Estates and Facilities shall maintain, electrical equipment in lab areas falls under the responsibility of individual schools.

Electrical equipment, excluding new equipment, should never be used in the office without first being inspected and PAT tested by a competent person. Electrical appliances brought from home shall not be used until they have been inspected.

8.2 Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

Specific DSE arrangements can be found in the [Display Screen Equipment Policy](#).

8.3 Passenger Lifts


Do not overload the lift with either passengers or goods. All lifts are clearly marked with a maximum load and passenger numbers. If you think the lift is full you must not enter.

Never try to force lift doors open to get out of a broken down lift or help someone else out of a broken lift. If the lift breaks down when you are in it, press the emergency button which will contact the Estates & Facilities Security Office who will arrange for your rescue.

8.4 Confidential Waste

Paper shredders are not provided on site, however confidential paper waste boxes are provided across both the Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill campuses to allow for the easy and safe disposal of confidential papers. Confidential papers are collected in these boxes and are regularly collected by a shredder company which will shred all the documents on site in accordance with GDPR regulations.

Only paper is to be placed in these boxes, never put in non-paper items (e.g. batteries). Plastic from acetates or poly-pocket must not be placed in confidential waste bins, instead they should go in bags with other confidential mixed media (e.g. flash drives, CD's, X-rays, etc.) for off-site shredding.

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8.5 Office Furniture

Office furniture must be fit for purpose, suitably designed to match the work function and must meet the requirements listed below. If any office furniture is damaged or inadequate you should discuss it with your line manager in the first instance. Any office layout queries must be directed to the University Space Management Team.

Furniture must:


- Be ordered from approved suppliers
- Be ordered via the University Space Management and Furniture Team (excluding specialist ergonomic equipment which is purchased by schools / directorates)
- Be positioned in such a way as to avoid risk of injury, discomfort and personal stress
- Be sensibly arranged and must be comfortable to move around, ensuring equipment remains easy to access

Furniture must **not**:

- Be removed from offices or teaching spaces
- Be repositioned by anyone other than a trained operative
- Be taken in from out with the university

Workstation chairs should be stable and allow the operator to find a comfortable seated position. The seat height should be adjustable, as should the seat back height and tilt. Chairs provided must meet the specific needs of the individual user to enable them to carry out the requirements of their work. A footrest must be provided when the employee cannot place their feet comfortably on the floor when they are seated at their workstation

Desks / worksurfaces that are provided for members of staff who use a computer must be equivalent to 1600mm x 800mm (this area may be rectangular or an “L” shape. It may also include the top surface of a pedestal or other piece of furniture provided that is flush with the desk surface). This area may only be reduced if the workstation is only used for computer work and there is no requirement for files or paperwork or if a workstation assessment has been carried out and the change has been agreed as acceptable by a competent workstation assessor. The space under the desk / worksurface must be kept clear enough to allow for a comfortable working posture. Desks provided for postgraduate students will be a minimum of 1200mm.

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9.0 Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments shall be made to a workplace in order to not substantially disadvantage an employee with a disability when compared to a non-disabled employee. Changes can be made to physical features of a workplace and arrangements under their control.

Physical features include:

- Anything in the workplace arising from the building's design or construction
- The approaches to, exits from or access to the place of work
- Fixtures and fittings
- Furnishings, furniture, equipment or materials
- Any other physical element in the workplace

Contact your HR Business Partner for more information about reasonable adjustments or to discuss individual issues or concerns.

Reasonable adjustments must also include consideration of the need to safely evacuate in the event of an emergency. The Health and Safety team should be contacted for further information.

10.0 Fire and First Aid

First Aid is provided by trained members of staff. Lists of qualified first aiders are on display throughout university buildings. First Aid kits and defibrillators are provided at both the Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill campuses.

All staff receive fire awareness eLearning. Floor checkers and fire marshals are trained and positioned throughout buildings on both campuses who will assist in the event of a fire evacuation.


In order to reduce the risk of a fire breaking out you must:

- Avoid accumulations of material, which might easily burn e.g. paper, cardboard, and plastics
- Not obstruct the ventilation of electrical equipment
- Not overload electrical sockets by connecting too many appliances to a single socket
- Minimise the use of extension cables and not use plug adaptors

Further information can be found in the [Fire Safety Policy](#) and the [First Aid Policy](#).

11.0 Office Cleaning

Information about cleaning can be found in the Estates and Facilities Cleaning Standards Service Level Agreement [here](#).

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12.0 Manual Handling

Bending and stooping to lift a load significantly increases the risk of a back injury. Ideally, items should be lifted from no lower than knee height to no higher than shoulder height. Outside of this range lifting capacity is reduced and the risk of an injury is increased. Where items are required to be lifted above shoulder height a stand or suitable means of access should be used. Items which are pushed or pulled should be as near to waist level as possible.

Carrying distances should be minimised, especially if the task is regularly repeated. Repetitive tasks should be avoided wherever possible. Tasks which involve lifting and carrying should be designed in such a way as to allow for sufficient rest breaks to avoid fatigue. Avoid tasks that require twisting the body wherever possible.

An online manual handling training module is available through the University's Online training system but for those staff who routinely undertake manual handling as part of their role should undergo "hands on" manual handling training.

13.0 Monitoring and Review

This policy will be periodically reviewed, by the Health, Safety and Resilience Team, in conjunction with the Information Governance Committee and the Policy Review Group, to ensure it is kept up to date (in terms of both the legislation and how it works within the University as a whole).

14.0 References

Document Number	Document Name
HS-PO-014	Display Screen Equipment Policy
HS-PO-021	First Aid Policy
HS-PO-024	The Fire Safety Policy
Staffnet	The Smoking in the Workplace Policy
Staffnet	Estates and Facilities Cleaning Standards Service Level Agreement
Legislation.gov.uk	The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations
Legislation.gov.uk	The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations
Legislation.gov.uk	The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations
Legislation.gov.uk	Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations
Legislation.gov.uk	Electricity at Work Regulations
HSG38	Lighting at Work
HSG225	Preventing Slips and Trips at Work