

# Health and Safety Annual Report 2020/21



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## Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the University's Health and Safety (H & S) performance during the 2020/21 academic year and a summary of key outputs and initiatives

The year continued to be dominated by COVID-19 with the health and safety of staff, students and our wider community being at the forefront of our thoughts and actions.

Both staff and students continued to adapt to changes in the way they worked and studied and to the changes in their work and study environments. Health and safety advice and guidance also needed to react and adapt to these changes, introducing greater flexibility in working practices whilst maintaining legislative standards and meeting everchanging government and public health requirements.

The principles of good Health and Safety management have continued to play a prominent role through the COVID Silver Response Group, (now COVID Operational Response Group) the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) and the joint risk assessment group with Bristol City Council's Health Protection Team and PHE (now the UK Health Security Agency).

The pandemic has provided us with the opportunity to develop more innovative ways of improving accessibility to competent and engaging Occupational H & S advice and support. This has included Occupational Health opinion and input into supporting homeworking and the individual risk assessment process, developing a range of innovative training and guidance videos and health promotion materials.

### Highlights of performance

- For the first time there were no injuries that required reporting to the HSE in 2020/21.
- Incident numbers were lower for a second year running, reflecting the ongoing impact of the pandemic on university activities.
- Injury numbers doubled during the final quarter of 2021 as we returned to more normal operations but remained substantially lower than similar pre-pandemic periods during 2018/19.

- Near miss reporting returned to pre lockdown levels suggesting there is an ongoing, positive reporting culture across the University.
- Staff injury rates were lower than rates reported for the overall University Sector and other Russell Group Universities. In contrast, University of Bristol staff near miss reporting was 3 times that of the sector. The Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) near miss data is highly variable as near miss reporting is not consistently promoted across the sector whilst Bristol has consistently encouraged near miss reporting as a key part of developing our positive safety culture.
- Following the transition to homeworking, we still have not received any related reports of accidents or injuries.
- Our 3 most common accident types remain: handling, slips and trips, and exposure to harmful substances.
- We continue to receive a high number of near miss reports (126 incidents) relating to the student residences – the majority of these are fire safety related issues such as covered detectors, propped fire doors and blocked exits. Information on actions being taken is included within the Fire Safety appendix
- Our overall performance against our core landlord compliance activities (water, gas, fire life systems and electrical) improved slightly, averaging 96.7% over the year compared to 96.2% in the previous year.
- Our Occupational Health Service (OHS) delivered its Service Level Agreements with HR, the Faculty of Health Sciences and School of Education.

## Highlights of improvements

- We reviewed, processed, and delivered over 1000 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture to support safe and healthy home environments. All risks were evaluated, and no cases of injuries or ill health were reported.
- In liaison with teams within Biomedical Sciences, we have begun to pilot the use of the SafeZone app to assist in the management of risks associated with lone working on Campus.
- We updated and published the COVID Working Guide to support the safe return of staff and students to the Campus.
- Following agreement that the Head of Health and Safety will act as the institutional lead for travel risk, Travel webpages have been developed that act as a central and signposting point for all travel information, including insurance, student placements, fieldwork, incident and crisis management, Safe zone, International Mobility, our Travel Management Company, the Travel Business Case Approval process and the University's Travel and Expenses Policy. This will enable staff and students (including both UGs and PGRs) who are required to travel or plan to travel as part of their work, research, or study, to easily access or understand what they need to do to enable safe and effective/efficient travel and to utilise the many helpful but disparate resources available to them.

- The Engineering Faculty led the development and publication of a comprehensive drone/unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations manual which sets out how the University will operate safely and meet national and international aviation requirements.
- Significant work has been undertaken through the Campus Division to address work at height risks. This followed a number of unauthorised access incidents on University property. A scaffold and alarm register have been developed, and a planned survey of roof access to mitigate risks arising from unauthorised roof access, and to manage legitimate roof access requests. This has been supplemented by the development of asset registers for balconies, safety railings and fire escapes.
- In developing this report, we recognise the contribution made by Schools and Divisions, their safety advisors and managers and Trade Union Safety Representatives in helping manage H & S at a local level.

## Making health and safety business as usual

2020/21 saw the University continue to deliver its vision of '*Making health and safety business as usual*'

Examples of actions and initiatives showing how the University is *making health and safety business as usual* are included across this annual report. The vision is based around three themes: to engage, empower and enable.

### Engage

To **engage**, we now:

- tailor advice and support to help, not hinder our key stakeholders and communities in achieving their priorities and overcoming the challenges they face.
- see an increase in the number of opportunities for partnership working with Schools and Divisions highlighting greater engagement with health and safety across the University.
- share good practice with accidents, incidents and near misses being used as learning opportunities, and
- have a better understanding of how we are performing, providing more comprehensive assurance and management information.

### Empower

To **empower**, we now have:

- better defined roles and responsibilities for all key stakeholders and duty holders, providing better information on induction and as part of ongoing support and guidance.
- Clarified a number of fire safety responsibilities following approval and publication of the University's updated Fire Safety Policy.

- improved performance information to help managers and leaders at all levels make informed decisions and identify opportunities to improve.

## Enable

To **enable**, we continue to:

- simplify our systems and processes, making them easy to understand and implement.
- make our information, guidance and learning easily accessible and engaging.
- use existing and established systems, decision making mechanisms and/or planning processes as vehicles for considering health and safety.
- ensure risks are managed in a more sensible and proportionate way.

## 2021/22 and beyond

Whilst it is hoped that some sense of normality will return in 2021/22, we anticipate that the impact of COVID-19 will continue to have a significant influence over our activities

However, we will continue to embed our vision of *making health and safety business as usual*. Key activities planned include:

- Completing and analysing the 2021/22 self-verification assessments.
- Embedding infection prevention and control within our existing H & S management system to support our ongoing response to COVID19 and other respiratory illnesses.
- Further improving processes and guidance to support safe international travel for staff and students.
- Re-designing and developing centrally held online information and instruction to enhance user experience and accessibility.
- Enhancing the management of lone working risks through the introduction and use of the SafeZone app across the Campus.
- Delivering the operational requirements of the University's updated Fire Safety Policy and responding to associated new legislation.
- Developing and implementing a clear and consistent sanctions matrix to address behavioural concerns across the Residences.
- Delivering a significant number of fire safety related training events to ensure effective coverage across the Campus.
- Developing and launching a new App to enable requests for DSE equipment at home to be submitted and processed quicker and easier.

## COVID-19

Health and safety continues to be at the heart of the University's decision making and planning during the pandemic

*It is testimony to our central and local safety advisers, legal team, Scientific Advisory Group and Campus Division colleagues that they continued to respond so quickly to ever-changing public health legislation and government guidance, to provide competent advice and support.*

The University continued to respond effectively to the pandemic, with its interventions and measures. Our approach was tested and supported by Bristol City Council Health Protection Team and PHE and the lack of evidence of any on site transmission.

The following provides a brief summary of the further key health and safety activities and support that has been developed in response to the pandemic during 2020/21:

- Development of an agreed set of risk principles that enabled the University to increase the capacity of its teaching spaces safely.
- The ventilation in all teaching spaces was assessed and available ventilation systems, whether mechanical or natural were serviced to ensure optimal performance. In addition over 100 CO2 monitors were fitted in teaching spaces to enable users to monitor air quality and take appropriate action in line with associated user guidelines.
- Activity-based risk assessments in place for specialised teaching and research spaces and laboratories.
- Regular Sit Rep/Risk Assessment meetings with Bristol City Council Health Protection Team and PHE.
- A comprehensive COVID Working Guide published for staff and PGRs outlining all the measures that are in place and expected behaviours to enable safe use on return to Campus.
- ~1000 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture reviewed, processed, ordered and delivered.
- Comprehensive guidance developed for blended working
- An events framework and associated guidance.
- A space and facility checklist to support safe use of University work and study spaces.
- Updating and integration of travel restrictions/guidance into our Global Travel Approval System.

## Conclusions

Health and safety culture has been strengthened and improved across the University this year

The year has seen further improvements in, and strengthening of, our health and safety culture across the University.

Our performance remains strong as our advice and guidance is trusted and acted upon.

We are seeing earlier and more active engagement in the assessment and management of H & S risk as part of decision-making and activity planning across the University.

The year continued to be dominated by COVID-19 testing the effectiveness of our health and safety management systems. It was encouraging to see that much of our system, supporting processes and specialist knowledge continue to be used both institutionally and locally to help manage our response to the pandemic.

Occupational H & S advice continues to grow more accessible to those who need it, when they need it. However, we will continue to drive further improvements in the user experience via our shared platforms and media channels.