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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the University’s Health and Safety (H & S) performance during the 2019/20 academic year and a summary of key outputs and initiatives.

The latter half of the year was dominated by COVID-19 and really tested the effectiveness of our health and safety management system. It was encouraging to note that much of our system and supporting processes were used to help manage our response to the pandemic. Examples include:

- Adapting our roles and responsibilities to better provide accessible support to Academic Schools and Professional Services Divisions.
- Using key elements of our self-verification assurance assessment to provide the Chief Property Office with assurance regarding the local management of risks when certifying buildings ‘COVID-Secure’.
- Using our Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment process and associated guidance to support safe and healthy homeworking.
- Applying existing knowledge and understanding of health and safety practice to create both local and institutional guidance and support to manage the risk of transmission.
- Recognising and using existing expertise to help manage a range of public health risks and meet a complex and ever-changing set of governmental and sector guidance.

The pandemic has provided us with the opportunity to look at 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

- Our reportable injuries (those required to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)) remained similar to numbers reported in previous years; with 5 incidents reported to HSE (compared to 4 incidents in 2018/19). All reportable incidents occurred before the start of the COVID lockdown period in March.
- The University has been operating within a very different and changing environment, which has undoubtedly influenced the overall number of incidents reported this year. Staff injury rates decreased from 25 per 1,000 in 2018/19 to 17 per 1,000 staff during 2019/20, whilst student injury rates remained consistent with last year at 2 incidents per 1,000 students. We noted in both cases that over 90% of
injuries occurred before the start of the lockdown period, reflecting the reduction in onsite activities and the move to lower risk home working.

- Following the transition to homeworking we 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.
- Staff near miss reporting increased this year despite the change in work arrangements brought by COVID-19, and this continues to indicate a positive safety culture among staff.
- We observed a significant increase in fire safety related near misses (from 17 during 2018/19 to 60 reports in 2019/20). This increase was driven by improved staff recording of fire safety issues identified within student residences, through the online reporting system.
- We have benchmarked our performance against all universities and Russell Group universities. With respect to reportable incidents our rate is slightly below the Russell Group but similar to rates across all universities. We have a higher rate of near miss reporting than both groups
- All our buildings were certified as COVID-secure, in line with government and HE guidelines.
- Our Occupational Health Service (OHS) delivered its Service Level Agreements with HR, the Faculty of Health Sciences and School of Education.

Highlights of improvements

- In January 2020, the Board of Trustees approved a new Group Health and Safety Policy for the University, which now includes our wholly-owned subsidiaries and the Bristol Students' Union within its scope.
- We updated our formal organisational structure, describing how roles and responsibilities cascade through the organisation’s management and associated committee structures, to support the operational implementation of the Group Health and Safety Policy.
- We delivered a well-received session on leading H & S across the University to UEB and the wider UMT, raising awareness and understanding of their roles, responsibilities, our new vision and policy and the support available to them.
- We reviewed, processed and delivered ~500 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture to support safe and healthy home environments. All risk were evaluated and no cases of injuries or ill health were reported. To date the number of requests are now approaching 1000.
• Working in partnership, the Faculty of Engineering and Safety and Health Services established a Drone Safety Group to help the University’s Accountable Manager (Head of Health and Safety) to seek assurance that drones/UAVs are being operated by the University and third parties safely in line with national and international aviation requirements.

• In liaison with IT Services, a digitised Global Travel Approval system has been developed which improves the speed and efficiency of travel requests and creates a better user experience, while helping us understand where staff and students are located when they are travelling outside of the UK on University business.

• We developed and published a comprehensive COVID Working Guide to support the safe reopening, ramping up and return of staff and students to the Campus.

• 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

2019/20 saw the University begin 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 have:

• a better understanding of what our key stakeholder and communities are trying to achieve, their priorities, the challenges they face, tailoring advice and support to help, not hinder.

• begun to use this understanding to re-frame our messaging and communications to what is relevant to them, evidencing how good practices can be a benefit and not a burden.

• enhanced our partnership working to encourage and promote engagement with health and safety.

• an open and honest culture where good practice is shared and accidents, incidents and near misses are used as learning opportunities.

• a better understanding 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 fire safety responsibilities following the establishment of the Campus Division.
- begun to use performance information to help managers and leaders at all levels make informed decisions and identify opportunities to improve.
- enabled leaders and managers to better identify and address any gaps in the health and safety competencies of their staff.

Enable

To enable, we have begun 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 or/planning processes as vehicles for considering health and safety.
- ensure risks are managed in a more sensible and proportionate way.

2020/21 and beyond

Whilst it is hoped that some sense of normality will return in 2020/21, 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 2020/21 self-verification assessments;
- Addressing the improvements identified in the Vita Safety review undertaken in September 2020 of our arrangements in managing landlord health, safety and fire regulatory compliance for student and staff accommodation;
- Developing a range of 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;
• Developing a Drone/Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations safety management system
• Developing a range of advice and equipment/furniture to further support blended working;
• Reviewing and updating our Fire Safety Policy and associated operational arrangements to meet the external regulatory environment and manage building and behavioural risks;
• Developing an assurance/compliance register that provides accurate and timely management information relating to performance and compliance with landlord related legislation;
• Working with key stakeholders and process owners to embed H & S considerations into existing decision-making and planning processes;

COVID-19

Health and safety has been at the heart of the University’s decision making and planning during the pandemic

The University was able to utilise and adapt its health and safety management system to enable the effective management of public health risks, including:

• Adapting our roles and responsibilities to better provide accessible support to Academic Schools and Professional Services Divisions.
• Using key elements of our Self-verification assurance assessment to provide the Chief Property Office with assurance regarding the local management of risks when certifying buildings ‘COVID-secure’. A subsequent audit of this process provided the Board of Trustees with ‘reasonable’ assurance that effective controls were in place.
• Using our Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment process and associated guidance to support safe and healthy homeworking.
• Applying existing knowledge and understanding of health and safety practice to create both local and institutional guidance and support.
• Recognising and using existing expertise to help manage a range of health risks and meet a complex and ever-changing set of governmental and sector guidance.

It is testimony to our central safety advisers, legal team and Scientific Advisory Group that they were able to respond so quickly to ever-changing public health legislation and government guidance, to provide competent advice and support.
The following provides a brief summary of the key health and safety activities and support that has been developed in response to the pandemic:

- All relevant buildings certified as COVID-secure prior to reopening and general use (including compliance with all statutory requirements due to periods of vacancy).
- All teaching spaces designed to enable safe use.
- Activity-based risk assessments in place for specialised teaching and research spaces and laboratories.
- A comprehensive COVID Working Guide published for staff and students outlining all the measures that are in place and expected behaviours to enable safe use.
- Building-specific inductions developed and in place.
- A range of communications to students explaining measures in place and expected behaviours including videos, posters and Q & A sessions.
- Comprehensive guidance on PPE published.
- Cleaning strategies developed and implemented.
- Face coverings and face visors procured and distributed to all staff and students.
- ~500 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture reviewed, processed, ordered and delivered. This work continued and to date the number of requests is approaching 1000.
- Health and safety/Risk assessment workstream established as part of the Institutional Recovery Group.

Additional information relating to our response to COVID during 2020/21

- Our response to the pandemic was recognised as exemplary by Bristol City Council (BCC) and Public Health England (PHE), evidenced by a lack of community transmission following the migration of students during September/October and the lack of transmission in the workplace.
- An institutional risk assessment has been developed and agreed in partnership with BCC and PHE. This provides oversight of our arrangements, controls and interventions, taking into account spread and outbreaks. It is monitored and reviewed by the University, BCC and PHE on a regular basis providing assurance that our approach and response to the pandemic continues to be effective.
- An individual risk assessment has been developed which provides a holistic assessment of both clinical and non-clinical issues that may impact on an individual member of staff ensuring that any vulnerability is identified, assessed and supported by their line manager, HR or Occupational Health and appropriate measures are put in place to ensure they remain safe and healthy.
- The University’s Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) has grown into a trusted key advisor assisting us in developing our strategies to mitigate and manage the risk of transmission.
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.

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. However, early engagement remains a focus for improvement over the coming years as we move towards making health and safety business as usual.

The latter half of the year was dominated by COVID-19 and really tested the effectiveness of our health and safety management system. It was encouraging to see that much of our system and supporting processes were used 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.