



Health and Safety Annual Report 2023/24

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the University's Health, Safety (H & S) and Wellbeing performance during the 2023/24 academic year and a summary of key outputs and initiatives.

Information relating to our staff mental health and wellbeing is included within our Annual H & S report for the first time. This reflects the changes in our governance arrangements where oversight and management of associated risks now fall within our H & S management system and is led by our Director of Health and Safety.

Highlights of performance

- Staff injury rates have reduced by 40% compared to 2022/23 and are lower than injury rates reported by the wider University sector. This was a general month on month reduction. We do not believe this is from under reporting but will monitor the data to see whether the downward trend continues during 2024/25 (current data shows numbers remain similar to 23/24).
- Total RIDDOR incident rates have reduced by approximately 50% compared to 2022/23.
- We saw a similar level of total incident reporting compared to 2022/23.
- Student injury and RIDDOR incident rates remain similar compared to 2022/23.
- Our 3 most common accident types were handling, slips and trips and contact with hazardous substances (e.g. skin irritation, minor burns from splashes). Most injuries were minor and resulted from primarily lab based and operational activities.
- Following a significant increase in near miss incident reports last year, we have reviewed the type of near miss incidents being reported to better define these in line with recognised Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definitions. We found a large proportion of the issues reported did not meet criteria for a near miss incident but were issues relating to unsafe conditions or unsafe behaviours. We have updated the incident reporting system to better define these incidents and reflect the issues identified across the University. As a result, near miss incidents (i.e. a work-related incident where no injury or ill health occurs, but which has the potential to cause either), have reduced from 769 reports last year to 228 reports this year. However, a further 499 safety concerns were reported during 2023/24. This is a strong indicator of a positive H & S culture where staff are aware of their and others safety and are comfortable reporting incidents/near misses and general safety concerns. Analysis of the data will help us identify emerging themes & issues.

- We continue to seek continuous improvement and assurance that H & S risks are being managed effectively and our legal obligations are being met through programmes of audit and external verification by third party agencies and enforcement authorities such as the HSE, Environment Agency, Avon Fire and Rescue Service, Avon Police and the Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) (further information can be found in the Assurance section of this report).
- Campus Division continued to maintain accreditation of their H & S management system to the internationally recognised standard ISO45001. This provides a level of assurance that their H & S management system is working effectively in the provision of buildings and ground maintenance including all site services and residential facilities associated with the University of Bristol Campus Division.
- Our overall performance against our core landlord compliance activities (water, gas, fire life systems and electrical) was 96.37%, compared to 96.10% in 2022/23. Although this is below our target of 97%, most of the faults identified were categorized as low risk. Furthermore, any items of concern have been made safe through isolation until repair or replacement could be arranged. Notably, there was an increase of **14,301 additional tasks** compared to 2022/23.
- Our Occupational Health Service (OHS) delivered its Service Level Agreements with HR, the Faculty of Health Sciences and School of Education.
- We once again saw year on year increases in staff wishing to access our Staff Counselling and Occupational Health services. It is to the credit of these small teams that they continue to deliver the highest standards of service.
- Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) user rates have remained low, which has prompted the review and evaluation of the programme to better understand barriers to access and optimize user rates which in turn will relieve the pressure on our internal services.

Highlights of improvements/initiatives

- In September 2023, Campus Division began survey work to confirm the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within the University estate. In December 2023, RAAC was discovered in the ceiling of the dining hall at Hiatt Baker halls of residence. Third party structural engineers were immediately instructed to assess the condition. They reported it was in good condition and would need regular inspections with a three yearly inspection by structural engineers to verify the ongoing management of RAAC. Procedures for annual inspections and inspections of the roof after heavy rainfall are in place. No other RAAC was found on University premises. We manage, maintain and monitor risks present from other deleterious building materials (e.g. asbestos, woodwool slabs, High Aluminium Cement Concrete) used on the estate according to regulations and risk management principles.
- Wide scale reporting and awareness campaigns undertaken by STEM related faculties have seen significant increases in near miss/accident and safety concern reporting.

- Following the Engage, Encourage and Explain method of communicating with our students by our Residential Life teams and the development of a new fire safety video and quiz, fire safety conduct issues have been reduced by over 50% compared to 2022/23. Bringing the Fire Safety Training course for students in house has also contributed to this success.
- Guidance and support regarding work-related stress (WRS) has been expanded to include delivery of WRS risk assessment training for teams and the development of the University's organisational level WRS risk assessment which sets out the systems and processes that assists the University in managing and mitigating the risk of WRS.
- Following updates to improve user experience, we have seen an increase in numbers of staff and students travelling and using the Global Travel Approval System (GTAS). Use of the GTAS helps provide assurances that we know where our staff and students are and that any significant risks are assessed and managed.
- Following the successful roll out of Safezone across the campus, we have seen just under 4000 staff and PGR students downloading the app. This provides a real sense of reassurance and comfort that our Security services are only at the press of a button away if needed.
- The University has continued to install externally mounted defibrillators which provide public access to emergency life-saving equipment, 24-hours a day across the main campus. The units are registered with the UK National Defibrillator Network, The Circuit, to allow emergency services to direct users to the nearest unit. We have also increased the number of internal access defibrillators across the University.
- In the last 12 months the externally mounted defibrillators have been deployed 14 times leading to potentially 14 lives being saved
- In developing this report, we recognise the contribution made by Campus Division, Schools and Divisions, their safety advisors and managers and Trade Union Safety Representatives in helping manage H & S at a local level.

Assurance and Audit

We continue to seek continuous improvement and assurances that H & S related risks are being managed effectively and our legal obligations are being met. The following section summaries the activities undertaken during 2023/24 that provide assurance regarding the management of a range of H & S risks and legal obligations.

Internal Audit

These audits were undertaken as part of the Internal Audit programme with final reports and agreed actions/recommendations presented to the University's Audit and Risk Committee.

Health and Safety

The scope of this audit was as follows: - 'As aspects of health and safety management are decentralised across the University, we will review the control activities and assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that it is being managed effectively within faculties, schools and departments. We will also consider whether existing processes drive a culture of continuous improvement across the University, including whether staff members have full understanding of their roles, and whether policies are being adequately followed'.

The audit was able to provide 'reasonable' assurance (the second highest level, with the highest being 'substantial').

Fire Safety

The focus of this audit was the assurance over fire risk for non-residential buildings gained from the Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) process, managed by the Facilities Management (FM) team, within Campus Division and carried out in line with the requirements of the 2005 Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. The audit also covered buildings we lease or are a tenant and the induction process

The audit was able to provide 'reasonable' assurance.

UUK Student Accommodation

This audit was undertaken by the University's Internal Auditors. Its scope was to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of controls over the management of student accommodation in line with the Management of Student Housing Code.

It found that the University was carrying out its H & S, (including fire safety), obligations in line with related legislation and was compliant in 85 out of 86 (99%) of mandatory elements and all 12 non-mandatory elements, an improvement of 8% from the previous audit in 2019/20.

International Travel

This audit did not focus primarily on H & S aspects of international travel but the controls in place around staff business and student travel and the effectiveness of the wider processes, (which included some that related to H & S), in place to manage international travel. The audit provided Partial Assurance. Key findings included,

- Lack of clarity of overall ownership and decision-making powers for international travel.
- Separate processes and systems that make up the end-to-end travel lifecycle owned by different teams with different drivers.
- A need for a more joined up approach to managing the broad range of risks relating to travel.

Containment Level (CL) 3 labs – Management Audit

CL3 labs are designed to enable work and research into Hazard Group 3 biological agents to be undertaken safely. These are fully sealed facilities and need to be managed effectively. The audit provided Reasonable Assurance that management controls were working effectively. A working group has been established to deliver on the agreed recommendations and findings highlighted by the audit.

Controlled Drugs Audit 22/23

The audit considered whether policies conformed to relevant legislation regarding the use of such drugs by the University, (including the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act and the 2001 Misuse of Drugs Regulations). The audit provided Reasonable Assurance. Recommendations are being taken forward primarily by Health and Life Sciences.

External verification

The following provides a summary of where our management systems have been audited/inspected by third party agencies and enforcement authorities.

Fire Safety

Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS) undertook five inspections of University buildings and audits of our fire safety arrangements. Four of the inspections resulted in broadly compliant outcomes and a satisfactory standard of fire safety. These related to sleeping accommodation. The fifth inspection related to non-sleeping accommodation and noted that some improvements were required. An action plan was developed and provided to the Fire Service inspectors.

There have also been nine Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) visits from AFRS. This has seen increased activity from operational firefighters across UOB sites, co-ordinated by our Fire Safety Advisor. This process gathers significant levels of information around hazards and initial actions for operational crews when attending our buildings, along with providing familiarisation with the sites.

Radiation (Ionising)

The Environment Agency (EA) and the Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) undertook an on-site inspection of the main campus focussing on the higher security related radioactive sealed sources declared on our main campus permit. A number of low-risk improvements were identified and are being progressed ahead of a return visit by the EA in 2025.

The EA also undertook an on-site inspection of the National Composite Centre (NCC) Filton site looking at the UoB sealed and unsealed sources which are used exclusively by the School of Physics' Interface Analysis Centre group. Although, at the time of inspection radioactive material had yet to be stored on the site, the Inspector made several recommendations to be actioned prior to the arrival of materials.

Progress will be reviewed via subsequent EA inspections.

Biological Safety

A programme of inspections by the CTSA took place throughout Q2 of 2023/24 against an audit of work with specified pathogens and toxins taking place at the University. This was to ensure that suitable facilities, meeting biosecurity requirements, are in use and to familiarise a new local CTSA with our site. The CTSA also used the opportunity to engage with third-party organisations operating on University campuses to ensure that they were aware of their obligations under the Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act, Part 7 referring to specified pathogen and toxin storage and use. There were no compliance issues identified as part of these inspections.

Food Safety

There were seven inspections of UoB owned/operated food outlets carried out. All seven received the highest possible rating of five (out of five). This means that the Environmental Health Officer carrying out the inspection rated the standards of food handling, cleanliness and the management of food safety as "very good".

Other auditing activity

The following provides a summary of other auditing activities undertaken during 2023/24.

Fire Safety

Our Fire Safety Advisor (FSA) carried out nine audits across a range of residential and non-residential UoB buildings. While some improvements were identified, all conditions were considered tolerable.

Radiation

Our Radiation Protection Advisor (RPA) carried out four internal safety audits involving sealed and unsealed sources and X-ray generating equipment. All identified improvements were completed within three months of the audit.

Biological safety

Our Biological Safety Advisor (BSA) carried out an inspection and audit of the CL3 facilities at Langford. Several areas of improvement were identified. It was agreed that the facility would not be used until the improvements were made. Currently the lab is still closed awaiting a decision on whether to repair, replace or do nothing.

Food safety

Three audits of food outlets were undertaken by our food safety lead. One audit provided substantial assurance with the other two providing reasonable assurance. These audits covered different outlets audited by Environmental Health Officers

Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing

As part of our continued commitment to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our staff we held events and sessions over the year.

- Staff were once again able to access a range of financial wellbeing sessions delivered by external providers, which allowed them to access further individual appointments if needed.
- Mental Health Awareness Week where the theme of 'Movement: Moving more for our mental health' provided opportunities to work in collaboration with Sports, Exercise and Health, offering a range of sessions for all abilities.
- Time to Talk Day promoted the benefits of talking and signposting staff to our wellbeing resources and Mental Health Champions.
- We used the University Mental Health Day in March as a vehicle to further promote our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Staff Counselling Service and available staff resources.
- We ran yoga for stress and breathing sessions.
- We delivered training sessions on work-related stress risk assessments as part of Stress Awareness Month across April. We have continued to deliver these training sessions to teams across the University and is available for booking through our training platform, Develop.
- Guidance and support regarding work-related stress (WRS) has been expanded to include access to WRS risk assessment training for teams and the development of the University's organisational level WRS risk assessment which sets out the systems and processes that assists the University in managing and mitigating the risk of WRS. This risk assessment is aligned with the HSE's stress management standards and can provide staff and managers with key information relating to supporting processes and preventative measures covering demand, including workload, change, role, relationships, control and support.

We once again saw year-on-year increases in staff wishing to access our Staff Counselling and Occupational Health services. It is to the credit of these small teams that they continue to deliver the highest standard of service. However, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) user rates have remained low, which has prompted the review and evaluation of the program to better understand barriers to access and optimize user rates which in turn will relieve the pressure on our internal services.

The 2024 Staff Survey included questions relating to mental health and wellbeing. Analysis will provide us with a rich level of information that can help us focus our activities for 2024/25 and beyond.

Those staff who were ineligible for free flu vaccinations could access flu vouchers which they were able to redeem at a variety of pharmacies. Over 1300 staff took advantage of this opportunity.

To further enhance our mental health and wellbeing provision and support to staff we have started to embed governance and oversight within our established Health and Safety management arrangements which will provide improved focus and leadership. In addition, we have engaged with our Mental Health Champions to help us determine what support and services they need and how we can empower them to deliver tangible improvements to staff wellbeing on a local level.

2024/2025 and beyond

We will continue to embed our vision of *making health and safety business as usual*.

Key activities planned include,

- Seeking assurance that our overarching H & S management system remains suitable and effective.
- Analysing and responding to the findings of the self-verification assessment process (re-introduced during 2023/24).
- Review and take opportunities to improve our systems and processes for the management of asbestos across the Campus.
- Reviewing our H & S governance arrangements to ensure clarity of purpose and roles and responsibilities of our senior leadership.
- Further improving processes, communications, and guidance to support safe international travel for staff and students including our response to international incidents or crises.
- Continue to enhance safety on campus and international travel through the promotion and use of the SafeZone app.
- Continue to use the Engage, Encourage and Explain approach to improve fire safety related behaviours across our student communities
- Working with relevant stakeholders to ensure appropriate systems and support are in place to enable schools and services to effectively manage H & S risks associated with physical and mental health conditions of students.
- Reviewing and evaluating the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to better understand barriers to access and optimize user rates which in turn will relieve the pressure on our internal services.
- Further engaging with our Mental Health Champions to help us determine what support and services they need and how we can empower them to deliver tangible improvements to staff wellbeing on a local level.
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with research being undertaken across the University and the wider HE sector to enhance or improve the mental health and wellbeing of our staff.

Conclusions

We can remain proud of our H & S performance whilst continuing to seek improvement in our culture and supporting systems and processes.

2023/24 has seen our performance strengthened in many areas across the University. However, we recognise that improvement in our management systems and overall culture are still needed and will remain vigilant and responsive to the environment in which our communities work and study.

Advice and guidance is trusted and acted upon as we see 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.

Mental health and wellbeing related resources and services need to be more accessible, and we will continue to drive improvements in user experience via our shared platforms and media channels.