

Health and Safety Annual Report 2021/22



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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the University's Health and Safety (H & S) performance during the 2021/22 academic year and a summary of key outputs and initiatives

The year saw a gradual return to normalcy following the pandemic however the health and safety of staff, students and our wider community remained 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 remained agile to adapt to these changes, introducing greater flexibility in working practices whilst maintaining legislative standards and meeting everchanging government and public health requirements.

The pandemic has enabled the principles of good Health and Safety management to become more embedded in our day-to-day operations and the challenge now is to maintain that level of effective management and awareness as we transition to a landscape where public health risks and hazards are more prominent in our thoughts and the longer term mental and physical impacts of COVID-19 are yet to be fully realised.

The pandemic has provided us with further opportunities to develop more innovative ways of improving accessibility to competent and engaging Occupational H & S advice and support and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our processes and systems.

However, the introduction of blended working has presented some challenges in maintaining appropriate coverage of fire wardens/fire marshals and first aiders across the campus (all volunteer roles) and our capacity to respond effectively to emergencies.

The pandemic and associated lockdowns have also, understandably, impacted the number of fire drills undertaken and associated liaison and coordination amongst building user groups. This has resulted in some confusion and lack of confidence in the management of evacuations. It should be noted that in all cases all staff and students have evacuated appropriately and therefore the risk to life is very low however work will be undertaken in 2022/23 to ensure capability and capacity issues are addressed. With regard to first aid, coverage remains good across areas of higher risk e.g. science and operational activities where staff are expected to be on campus.

Highlights of performance

- Overall, staff and student incident rates (per 1000fte) have increased during the year and returned to pre lockdown rates.
- Near miss reporting returned to pre lockdown levels suggesting there is an ongoing, positive reporting culture across the University.
- Following the transition from homeworking to blended working, we still have not received any related reports of accidents or injuries.
- Our 2 most common accident types remain handling and slips and trips. Most injuries are minor and result from primarily lab based and operational activities.
- We continue to receive a high number of near miss reports (167 incidents/ 48% of all near misses) relating to the fire safety issues such as covered detectors, propped fire doors and blocked exits. Information on actions being taken to resolve this is detailed in the Fire Safety section.
- Our injury rates were similar to the overall university sector and Russell group results; however, our staff reported more than double the Russell Group and three times the sector near miss incident rate.
- Our overall performance against our core landlord compliance activities (water, gas, fire life systems and electrical) improved on last year's average of 96.7%, exceeding our 97% target.
- Following a visit from a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector, looking at our response to COVID-19 we were informed of how impressed they were with the breadth and range of our measures and mitigations and raised no issues of concern.
- Our Occupational Health Service (OHS) delivered its Service Level Agreements with HR, the Faculty of Health Sciences and School of Education.

Highlights of improvements

- Campus Division successfully achieved accreditation of their H & S management system to the internationally recognised standard ISO45001. This provides assurances 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.
- We have now reviewed and processed nearly 2500 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture to support safe and healthy home environments Arranging home delivery for 100s All risks were evaluated, and no cases of injuries or ill health were reported.
- Improvements have been made to our ventilation systems to provide better thermal comfort and air quality across our teaching and learning spaces.
- Our Travel guidance and advice continues to develop and improve with our webpages acting 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.
- We have seen an increase in numbers travelling and using the Global Travel Approval process. We are committed to continuous improvement and have asked for the process to be audited as part of the 2022/23 internal audit programme.
- 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.

2021/22 saw the University continue to deliver its vision of '*Making health and safety business as usual*'

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 continue to:

- tailor advice and support to help, not hinder our key stakeholders and communities in achieving their priorities and overcoming the challenges they face.
- Identify opportunities to work in partnership with Schools and Divisions highlighting greater engagement with health and safety across the University and,
- share good practice with accidents, incidents and near misses being used as learning opportunities.
- 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.
- 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 or/and planning processes as vehicles for considering health and safety.
- To work with teams and managers across the University to ensure risks are managed in a more sensible and proportionate way.

2022/23 and beyond

As some sense of normality has returned 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:

- Re-introducing the self-verification assessment process across the University.
- Embedding infection prevention and control within existing H & S management system to support our ongoing response to COVID-19 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 safety on campus 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.
- Reviewing voluntary H & S roles (eg fire wardens/first aiders) and associated reward and recognition arrangements.
- Developing and implementing a clear and consistent sanctions matrix, alongside educational and engagement initiatives 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

Our central and local safety advisers, legal team, Scientific Advisory Group and Campus Division colleagues continued to respond 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 Public

Health Team and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the lack of evidence of any on site transmission.

The following provides a summary of the further key health and safety activities and support that has been developed in response to the pandemic during 2021/22:

- 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 Public Health Team and UKHSA.
- ~1000 requests for homeworking equipment/furniture reviewed, processed, ordered, and delivered.

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.