

University Occupational Health and Safety Guidance Notes

UNDERTAKING A RISK ASSESSMENT

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1. PURPOSE

The University is legally obliged to make suitable and sufficient assessments of the risks to the health and safety of all those who may be affected by the University's undertakings.

2. SCOPE

This document applies to all personnel within the University who conduct, or who are responsible for managing, risk assessments.

This document is related to undertaking general risk assessments. When a general risk assessment is completed, it may identify the need for a further specific risk assessment. For these specialist topics (e.g. CoSHH, Manual Handling, the use of lasers), guidance can be found in the relevant OHS Standard for the topic on how to complete a specific risk assessment.

3. ABBREVIATIONS

CoSHH	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health
DSC	Departmental Safety Coordinator
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HoD	Head of Department
NEM	New or Expectant Mother
RCM	Risk Control Measure
RR	Risk Rating
SHaW	Safety, Health & Wellbeing

4. SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The University [OHS Standard for Hazard Identification and Risk Management](#) document defines the organisational arrangements necessary to implement the Standard effectively.

Specific roles, responsibilities and duties for risk assessment are detailed below:

4.1 Heads of Department/Services/Schools/Directors of Professional Services

The HoD/Services/Schools/Directors of Professional Services hold delegated authority for all health and safety matters that arise within their area of responsibility. They are required to:

- ensure that all work is risk assessed by a suitably competent person so that all reasonable risk control measures are put in place prior to work commencing;
- ensure the provision of adequate resources to appropriately manage any risks within their department;
- ensure that the department works with the SHaW team, DSCs and nominated departmental personnel to establish a programme of risk assessments so that workplace hazards and risks are identified, controlled and where possible, eliminated;
- Convene a Department Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee to ensure that staff are consulted on work related hazards and risks.

4.2 Departmental Safety Coordinators

The DSC is delegated by the HoD and performs a coordinating role acting as the main point of contact. The DSC will:

- advise and assist the HoD in ensuring that all work activities are risk assessed and that risk assessments are periodically reviewed, and any changes communicated;
- periodically review safety, health and wellbeing arrangements within the department, including risk assessments
- monitor the risk assessment programme, to facilitate an up-to-date risk assessment programme, and report deficiencies identified to the HoD.

4.3 Line Managers / Principal Investigators or Research Supervisors

Line Managers, Principal Investigators and Research Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all risks associated with their area of responsibility are suitably controlled.

They must:

- undertake suitable training to support their competence in risk assessment and risk management;
- ensure that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are undertaken to cover all routine and non-routine work/research activities they are responsible for managing;
- implement any recommended additional risk control measures in a timely manner;
- ensure that resources are made available to implement the requirements of the risk assessment. Where sufficient resources are not available, escalate these to senior management;
- approve risk assessments for work activities within their area of responsibility;
- ensure that all risk assessments are reviewed at appropriate intervals and revised, where necessary;
- ensure that risk assessments are carried out prior to departmental changes that could potentially introduce significant hazards and risks;
- ensure that all personnel who could be affected by the work activity are provided with the significant findings of the risk assessment, including preventive and protective control measures.

4.4 Risk Assessors

A Risk Assessor is a person(s) nominated within their area who is responsible for ensuring that risk assessments are conducted prior to the work activity commencing.

They must:

- ensure they have the appropriate level of competence relative to the nature of the work and understand the limitations of their own ability;
- carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments using methods appropriate for the hazards identified;
- develop safe systems of work, where appropriate;
- review their risk assessments and incorporate any changes to the associated work situation and/or at the specified time of review.

4.5 Departmental Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee

The Departmental Safety, Health and Wellbeing Committee is comprised of members of the department appointed by the Head of the Department. The Committee shall:

- assist the HoD in giving consideration to OHS risks in all key business decision making;
- review any risk assessment where the residual risk is in excess of 9 to determine the correct actions required, and that these issues are reported to the Faculty / Directorate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager/Adviser (or equivalent);
- ensure that where a risk assessment with a residual risk in excess of 9 is identified, that additional resources are made available to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those who may be affected by the work. The risk assessment will then be reviewed with additional resources included and risk rating re-evaluated.

5. UNDERTAKING A RISK ASSESSMENT

The aim of the risk assessment process is to make a comprehensive assessment of a particular work activity to ensure that suitable controls are put in place to prevent accidents, injuries or ill health, and to prevent damage to property. Risk assessment(s) **must** be conducted prior to work commencing. Risk Assessments must be 'suitable and sufficient' for the work activity being undertaken.

All Risk Assessments should be completed using the [eRISK](#) system. Under exceptional circumstances, a written Risk Assessment may be used (e.g. where the eRisk system cannot be accessed). Any written Risk Assessments must be stored in such a manner that they are accessible to anyone who may require to access it, and they must be reviewed in accordance with the OHS Standard on Hazard Identification and Risk Management.

5.1 What is a suitable and sufficient Risk Assessment?

A 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment must:

- identify the significant risks arising from or in connection with all parts of the work/research activity;
- include a level of detail that is proportionate to the level of risk;
- ignore insignificant risks and risks arising from routine activities associated with life in general, unless the work activity compounds or significantly alters those risks;
- be based on informed judgement or specialist advice, depending on the size, nature and complexity of the undertaking;
- consider all those who might be affected by the undertaking;
- include only what the employer could reasonably be expected to know from appropriate sources of information (e.g. relevant legislation, appropriate guidance, sector good practice, manufacturer's instructions) and competent advice;
- be appropriate to the nature of the work;
- identify the period of time for which it is likely to remain valid.

5.2 Training and competency

The responsible person for the work and those conducting the risk assessment must be competent in the risk assessment process.

5.2.1 Competence to carry out a Risk Assessment

Competency may be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Skills** - being aware of what is required of the risk assessment process and understanding what they should be looking for when completing the assessment.
- **Knowledge** - understanding the work being undertaken and the risks associated with the work.
- **Attitude** - having a suitable attitude in their approach to doing the work, and understands the benefits of doing the work safely, and the benefits that safe working practices can bring to the process and team.
- **Training** - having received the necessary training to ensure they understand the tasks being done as well as what constitutes a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.
- **Experience** - having the experience to objectively review the work, understand where those doing the work may take shortcuts, and what possible outcomes this may have as a result.

5.2.2 Training

SHaW delivers 'The Principles and Practice of Risk Assessment' both as a classroom based and online training course. This course is compulsory for all staff and post-graduate students who are either the responsible person, or are conducting the risk assessment. This training is bookable via the [online DAT](#) system.

Some hazards identified during the risk assessment process may require their own specific risk assessment. For further information on specific risk assessments see [Information Sheet - Work activities requiring a specific risk assessment](#). SHaW provides training courses on a number of these subjects, including:

- COSHH Assessor;
- Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessors;
- DSEAR Awareness;
- Gas Risk Assessment;
- Manual Handling Assessor.

5.3 Worker Participation and Using a Team Approach to Risk Assessment

A team approach to risk assessment is recommended whenever possible, especially for complex situations. Worker participation allows for the pooling of knowledge, skills, expertise and perspective. It is particularly important to involve staff who have practical experience of the particular process or work activity being considered as they will often have the best knowledge and understanding of any hazards and RCMs.

5.4 Conducting a Risk Assessment

The University's [eRISK](#) system is based on the qualitative 5-step approach to risk assessment:

- Step 1: Identify the hazards.
- Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how.
- Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions.
- Step 4: Record your findings and implement them.
- Step 5: Review your assessment and update if necessary.

5.4.1 Identify the hazards

In order to determine the hazards, present in a given work activity, the work should be broken down into a step by step list of individual tasks.

Once component tasks have been identified, the associated hazards should then be listed.

Each component task may have more than one associated hazard and a separate entry should be used for each hazard identified.

For further information on hazard identification see [Information Sheet - Hazard Prompt Checklist](#).

Where a general risk assessment identifies a hazard that is associated with a specific piece of legislation (e.g. CoSHH) then the hazard should be evaluated using the specific risk assessment method. Once the specific risk assessment has been completed, it should be cross referenced in the general risk assessment as an RCM. For further information on specific risk assessments see [Information Sheet - Work activities requiring a specific risk assessment](#)

5.4.2 Decide who may be harmed and how

For each hazard, individuals or groups of people who could potentially be harmed, and the type of injury or ill-health that could potentially occur must be identified. This can be determined by reviewing (non-exhaustive):

- the work location(s);
- access to the work area;
- who is carrying out the work;
- those who share the workplace or the immediate vicinity;
- the proximity of others who might be affected (e.g. cleaners, visitors, maintenance workers, security personnel, contractors, the public etc.);
- persons who could be at an increased risk (e.g. new or expectant mothers, disabled persons, those with pre-existing health issues, young workers etc.).

Certain groups of individuals may require further consideration in the risk assessment. For further information see Section 12.

Types of harm may include (non-exhaustive):

- immediate injury - cuts, burns or fractures;
- acute ill-health - rapid onset of allergic reaction, asthma attack;
- chronic ill-health - respiratory conditions, hearing loss, musculoskeletal disorders
- psychological effects – stress, reduced morale, depression

In cases where the type of harm is difficult to determine, it is sufficient to list harm in general terms, such as strike injury, collision injury or respiratory effects depending on the source of harm.

5.4.3 Evaluate the risks and decide on control measures

Risk control measures

RCMs should aim to either eliminate the risk or reduce the likelihood of harm occurring or the severity of any harm that may occur from that hazard. See Section 7 for information on the hierarchy of controls for controlling risks.

In order to check whether RCMs are adequate, the following should be considered:

- The level of supervision provided;
- The level of competence required compared to level achieved by individuals;
- Details of any work instructions, systems of work and/or permit-to-work procedures;
- Manufacturers' or suppliers' instructions for operation of equipment and facilities;
- Maintenance regimes for equipment and facilities;
- The potential for failure of plant and machinery components and safety devices, or for their degradation from exposure to the elements or process materials;
- The potential for a failure to induce associated failures or the disabling of RCMs;
- Details of access to, and adequacy/condition of emergency escape plans, emergency procedures, emergency escape routes (including signage), emergency equipment, emergency communication facilities and external emergency support, etc;
- Anonymised results of health surveillance;
- Details of previous incidents or unsafe acts either by the individuals performing the activity or by others (e.g. adjacent personnel).

Risk rating

The overall likelihood and severity associated with the hazard must be calculated using the scoring matrix and definitions found in Appendix 1. When scoring the likelihood and severity using this matrix the assessor should:

- consider if the RCM is suitable and reliably implemented, then how often is the harm likely to occur and what are the potential outcomes;
- consider if the RCMs were to fail, then what would be the likely injuries or ill health that would result;
- be realistic about the worst that could happen in terms of injury or ill health, being careful not to over or under-estimate the harm potential.

The risk rating can be used to determine the required level of action needed to control the residual risk.

Additional Risk Control Measures

Where a risk rating is calculated to be in excess of 9 despite existing control measures, additional RCMs must be considered to reduce the residual risk rating to a tolerable level.

A person must be nominated to implement the additional RCMs and a timescale for implementation set. Once the additional RCMs have been implemented, the nominated person should complete the action on eRisk system, allowing the author to review the risk rating and update the existing RCMs.

If the risk rating cannot be reduced to less than 9, the work must not be allowed to begin, and the risk assessment must be submitted to their Head of Department and Departmental Safety, Health and Wellbeing Committee for review. The department must also ensure that the risk is submitted for inclusion in the Departmental Safety, Health and Wellbeing Action Plan and the Departmental OHS Risk Register.

5.4.4 Record the Significant Findings

Departments must ensure that the significant findings of risk assessments are communicated to all those who may be affected by work being assessed, including those who are not directly involved in the work.

The significant findings should include details of key hazards in the risk assessment and the action required to eliminate or reduce the risk. This should be a brief overview of the main findings of the assessment, summarising the RCMs which may be included in an associated safe system of work.

5.4.5 Review the Risk Assessment

Risk assessments must be regularly reviewed so that they are up to date and valid for the work activity to which they apply, usually at a pre-determined interval (e.g. 6 months or annually etc.) set during the risk assessment process, according to the nature of the risks. All University risk assessments must be reviewed at intervals of no longer than 12 months.

A review may also be triggered by a number of factors, including:

- an occurrence of an accident or near miss;
- discovery of defects in equipment;
- a marked decrease in health surveillance results;
- a confirmed case of an occupationally induced disease.
- changes to the nature of the work, for example:
 - changes to, or modification of equipment;
 - change of location for the work;
 - changes of personnel;
 - changes of workplace or layout;
 - changes of operational sequences;
 - introduction of new work activities into the same area.

If the assessment requires significant revisions, then it is recommended that the risk assessment and any associated safe system of work is re-written to ensure that all changes are incorporated appropriately. Guidance on writing a safe system of work can be found in Appendix 2.

5.5 Approval process

Once a risk assessment has been completed, it is automatically submitted through the [eRISK](#) system to the responsible person for review. Risk assessments must only be approved by the responsible person when they are satisfied that the risk assessment is suitable and sufficient.

The review and approval of a risk assessment is a stepped review process which must be repeated until the risk assessment is deemed to be suitable and sufficient. Approving a risk assessment can only be done by someone who is competent to do so.

Responsible persons must not approve a risk assessment that they have created for work that they are carrying out themselves.

It is advised that where the person completing the risk assessment is also the person responsible for the work, they must ensure that their risk assessment is reviewed by their line manager or another member of staff with competence in the work being assessed.

6. SPECIFIC RISK ASSESSMENTS

The general risk assessment process may identify the need for a specific risk assessment, due to hazards associated with the work activity, to meet specific legal requirements. Additional training may be required for the completion of specific risk assessments.

There are a number of specific risk assessments that may need to be completed, depending on the work involved, and can include for example:

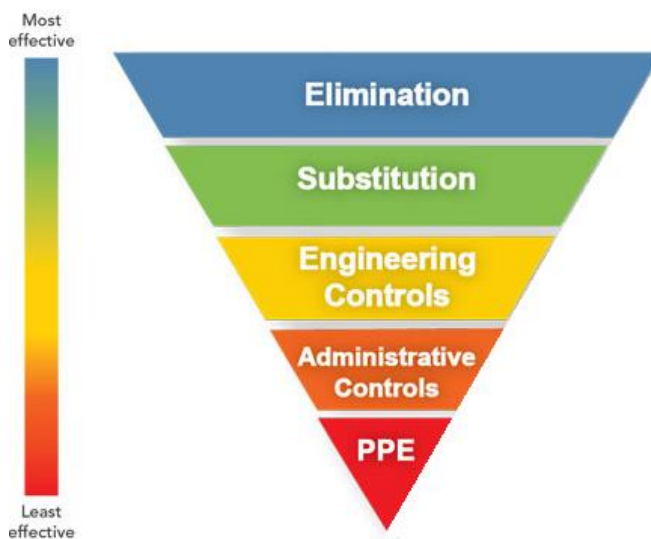
- Manual handling;
- The use of display screen equipment;
- Control of substances hazardous to health.

Further information on the requirement for specific risk assessment can be found in the [Information Sheet Work activities requiring a specific risk assessment](#).

7. HIERARCHY OF CONTROL

When deciding on RCMs, the assessor should use the hierarchy of control, starting with the first option and considering if it provides a reasonably practicable solution. If the control measure is not reasonably practicable or does not reduce the risk to an acceptable level, then the assessor should move through the options on the list. More than one control measure may be required.

The hierarchy of control from the most to least effective controls are as follows:



1. **Eliminate** – Remove the risk entirely by removing the hazardous item / material / situation.
2. **Substitution** – Replace the material, process or situation with a less hazardous version.
3. **Engineering Controls** – Use guarding or restricted / remote access to prevent the exposure.
4. **Administrative Controls** – Ensure that appropriate controls are in place (administrative / engineered).
5. **PPE** – Provide personal protective equipment to all involved in the work.

8. GENERIC RISK ASSESSMENTS

A generic risk assessment is one that has been completed for a given activity, that then may be used in multiple areas where the tasks and associated risks are broadly similar.

It is important that when using a generic risk assessment, the details are reviewed to ensure that the assessment and the RCMs listed remain appropriate for the work activity being planned.

A generic risk assessment is most appropriately used as a starting point for creating a general risk assessment for a particular activity. It provides a basis for checking whether additional detail

needs to be added and whether there are any new considerations since the initial creation of the risk assessment.

Where a generic assessment is amended it should then be classed as a general risk assessment for the activity being assessed.

9. DYNAMIC RISK ASSESSMENTS

A dynamic risk assessment may be needed when the work activity or work environment is continuously changing (i.e. a construction site) or where the work suddenly changes, presenting a previously unconsidered risk to the workers' health and safety.

A dynamic risk assessment allows the workers carrying out the tasks to identify additional hazards 'on the spot'. This may either lead to additional RCMs being implemented on site to resolve the issues or may identify that the safest option is to stop work and secure the area until further information or assistance is available.

A dynamic risk assessment may either be a mental assessment or may be carried out on site using a template form. The information that is gained from the dynamic risk assessment must be reviewed and included, where appropriate, into the original general risk assessment so that the hazard is assessed and control measures implemented in future work undertaken within the scope of the risk assessment.

10. RISK ASSESSMENTS REQUIRING ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Projects may require ethics approval in relation to teaching and research activities of the University which involve investigations on human beings. The [Code of Practice on Investigations Involving Human Beings](#) provides comprehensive information on ethics approval. Where ethics approval is required it must be gained prior to relevant materials being brought into the University and prior to work commencing. A risk assessment will need to be included as part of the submission to the University Ethics Committee as part of the application.

For further information visit <https://www.strath.ac.uk/ethics/>.

11. RISK ASSESSMENTS RELATED TO RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

When applying for a research grant, supervisors/principal investigators should conduct their risk assessment in parallel with the development of their application. This risk assessment process is pertinent to resource planning to ensure work activities/practices are conducted in compliance with legislation. The initial risk assessment should cover:

- Any potentially high-risk elements, so that appropriate controls can be identified and put in place / engineered.;
- The requirement for members of staff/post graduate students to undergo training or to request assistance from within the University or elsewhere;
- The procurement of equipment, and what the health and safety implications of the equipment use may be;
- The need for additional facilities, such as equipment, or services;
- The requirement for additional resources to ensure compliance with specific safety related legislation (e.g. permits for work with Ionising Radiation or Home Office licence for work involving animals).

Once the project/grant has been approved, the risk assessment must be reviewed to ensure that it is still applicable to the proposed work, and that all recommended control measures are implemented.

12. GROUPS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Specific groups of people may require further consideration during the risk assessment process. These are as follow:

12.1 New or Expectant Mothers

A New and Expectant Mothers Risk Assessment (NEMS) should be carried out for employees who fall into the following categories:

- Employees who are currently pregnant;
- Employees who have given birth within the previous 6 months;
- Employees who are currently breastfeeding.

“Given birth” means having delivered a living child; or after the 24th week of pregnancy, a still born child.

The responsible person must review the employees working practices and tasks to ensure that they remain at an acceptably low level of risk to both the mother and the unborn child. The responsible person must review the risk assessments regularly throughout the term of the pregnancy to ensure that the risks remain low.

When, after reviewing all relevant risk assessments, it has been determined that there is still a risk to the employees or child’s health or safety, the department must undertake a review of the employees working conditions to determine if:

- the employees working conditions or hours can be altered to remove the risk,
- the employees working conditions / hours cannot be altered, can they be given alternate work? This must be on the original terms and conditions of employment. No reduction of pay or benefits is allowed.
- there is no alternative work, then the employee is to be suspended from work until such times as the risk is removed or no longer presents a hazard. Again, this must be on the original terms and conditions of employment. No reduction of pay or benefits is allowed.

Further information on undertaking a NEMS Risk Assessment can be found at the following:

- [University Local Rule: New and Expectant Mothers](#)
- [Amendment \(June2017\) to the University Local Rule](#)
- [Occupational Health Service](#)

12.2 Disabled Persons

Under the Equality Act 2010, the University is required to ensure that anyone with a disability is afforded the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers or colleagues.

Whilst there is no obligation to notify the University of a disability, it is in the best interest of all parties that, where a person’s disability affects the way they do their work, reasonable adjustments are made to ensure the safety of the person whilst on University business.

Whilst no specific additional risk assessment needs to be carried out when a disability is declared, the responsible person must ensure that the risk assessment is reviewed to ensure that it accommodates all those involved in the works, whether they have a disability or not.

When reviewing a risk assessment to include a person with a disability, the best source of information will be the person themselves, as they will be most aware of any limitations their disability may have. Additional assistance is available for students through the University Disability Services and staff may contact Occupational Health Service and SHaW.

12.3 Young Persons

Introducing young persons (someone who is aged 16 or 17) into the work environment can provide significant benefits to both the young person as well as the University. However, due to their lack of experience of being in potentially hazardous work areas, they are unlikely to be aware of some hazards or risks that may seem obvious to an experienced worker.

Prior to a young person commencing work, all risk assessments relevant to the work the young person must be reviewed to ensure that they consider the lack of experience and training that the young person will have.

Certain hazards can have a more pronounced effect on young persons than they would have on an adult, due to the fact their bodies are still developing (e.g. ionising radiations). Where there is concern regarding the exposure of a young person to a hazardous physical, chemical or biological substance, advice must be sought from SHaW.

APPENDIX 1. RISK ASSESSMENT SCORING MATRIX

The tables below must be used when scoring a risk.

The likelihood of a hazard causing an injury or accident is determined using the following criteria:

Likelihood - The likelihood of harm from a particular hazard is determined using the following criteria		
1	May occur only in exception circumstances	V. Unlikely
2	May occur given an unlikely sequence of events or failures	Unlikely
3	Foreseeable under normal circumstances of part incidents have occurred	Possible
4	Easily foreseeable under normal circumstances	Likely
5	Inevitable under the circumstances or known past incidents	V. Likely

The severity of harm arising from a particular hazard is determined using the following criteria:

Severity – The severity of harm from a particular hazard is determined using the following criteria		
1	No injury / pain or minor injury not requiring first aid	Insignificant
2	Minor injuries requiring first aid e.g. cuts or bruises. No lasting effects	Minor
3	Up to 3-day absence, flesh wound, bruising, etc	Moderate
4	Requires over 3 days off work or a hospital visit. Reportable to the HSE	Major
5	Single or multiple fatalities, long term disability or loss of limb	Fatal

Use the product of the likelihood and severity of a hazard to determine the risk rating using the following matrix:

Severity	5	5	10	15	20	25
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	1	1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		Likelihood				

The risk rating is then used to determine the further actions required as detailed below:

Risk Rating	Risk	A Guide to Required Actions (Note: Assessors may propose more stringent actions depending on the circumstances)
17 – 25	Very High	Work may not begin. Significant work and additional RCMs required.
10 – 16	High	Work may not begin. Additional consideration needed in regards to RCMs.
4 – 9	Medium	Work may begin. Ensure the risk assessment is reviewed regularly and consider additional RCMs at time of next review.
1 - 3	Low	Work may begin. Ensure RCMs remain effective and the risk assessment is reviewed regularly.

APPENDIX 2. GUIDANCE ON WRITING A SAFE SYSTEM OF WORK

A Safe System of Work is a document that describes the arrangements associated with a particular work project or situation, such as, necessary equipment, materials, substances, personnel, layout, storage, appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision.

A Safe System of Work should also include a method statement, which is a document detailing the required steps to successfully complete the detailed work, incorporating the significant findings of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

Safe systems of work are usually put in place for complex or hazardous work activities where hazards cannot be physically eliminated and there remains a significant degree of risk to personnel and/or property.

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive but includes the essential elements that should be included. Not all the elements will be applicable on each occasion, as this will depend on the nature of the work.

- A brief description of the work and its location;
- A brief description of any standards or codes to which the work will be carried out;
- Any materials, substances, equipment and tools to be used, along with Materials Safety Data Sheets and/or COSHH assessments, relating to the use of materials, substances or generated agents, that could be hazardous to health;
- Arrangements for safe storage and transportation of materials, substances, equipment and tools etc. within a building or work area, to prevent harm to the University community;
- Precautions to be taken **before** commencing the work, e.g. minimum training requirements, authorisations required, making the work area safe, preparation of equipment, display of notices and signs, management of pedestrians etc.;
- Arrangements for maintaining a clean, tidy and safe work area and for monitoring of standards;
- Arrangements for keeping noise levels within limits imposed by current legislation;
- Arrangements for clearing up work areas following completion of work;
- Arrangements for safe removal of surplus materials, substances, equipment and tools from the area;
- Arrangements for safe return of materials, substances, equipment and tools etc. to appropriate storage areas, to prevent harm to the University community.

Plus, a **method statement**, which describes in a logical sequence exactly how a job is to be carried out in a safe manner and without risks to health. It includes all the risks identified in the applicable risk assessment and the measures needed to control those risks.

It may best be achieved by using each component task of the particular work activity, then adding a statement about the safe course of action to take, based on the corresponding existing risk control measures and/or necessary precautions recorded in the associated risk assessment.