

NDMRB-POL-012

Supervisor's responsibilities

1. Introduction

The term 'supervisor' is commonly used in the University to refer primarily to those individuals who deal with students or who engage in research, but for the purposes of health and safety law, many other members of staff may also have a supervisory function. An employee of the University may be considered to be a supervisor if he/she has the power and authority to give instructions and/or orders to subordinates, and be held responsible for the work and actions of other employees, or those under their day-to-day control.

Individuals holding such titles as team leader, overseer, coordinator, facilitator, principal researcher, or manager therefore may be considered 'supervisors' if these criteria apply and for the purposes of this Policy will hereafter be referred to as 'supervisors'.

2. General Responsibilities

The role of the supervisor carries with it a number of responsibilities. There is a duty to represent management in the organisational hierarchy. It is the supervisor's job to organise his/her section and staff, visualise future developments, impacts and needs, energise staff to meet targets and deadlines, and supervise their work, ensuring not only that productivity and quality standards are met, but that all arrangements established for their safety and welfare are adequately followed. To ensure that this is done, the supervisor must make certain that the staff under his/her control have the relevant training, tools, materials, and support that they need to carry out their various duties. Safety training is not separate from other job related or skills training, but integral to it.

Collaboration is important to the work of the University and the responsibilities of supervisors extend also to visiting workers, or any other group of individuals invited into departments. Similarly any supervisor who engages a contractor for maintenance, or similar, purposes will assume responsibility for them while they remain on University premises.

3. Safety responsibilities

Supervisors in day-to-day charge of staff, students, and/or visitors are expected to control all associated safety matters and have a legal duty to manage risks appropriately. This responsibility is set out as part of the University's safety management structure and is detailed in Departmental Statements of Safety Organisation.

When planning for the needs of their section, supervisors must ensure that safety matters are considered and integrated at the earliest stages. They are expected to understand and apply the appropriate safety policies of the University, and any local rules established in their departments, as well as ensuring that individuals under their supervision are aware of these requirements. Supervisors should set, by example, high standards in health and safety.

These standards must be consistently applied and appropriate action taken against those members of staff or students who fail to meet them.

In summary, supervisors must:

- (a) Be conversant with the University's safety policies and departmental local rules,
- (b) Ensure that staff, students, or visiting workers for whom they are responsible receive suitable induction training and information about emergency procedures,
- (c) Ensure the necessary risk assessments have been done and the safety provisions relating to the work discussed with those doing it,
- (d) Ensure that relevant safety documentation is readily available for reference,
- (e) Ensure that those under their supervision have received training appropriate to their needs and that safety considerations are integrated into this training,
- (f) Document the training given to individuals,
- (g) Ensure that the work environment and equipment are safe and well maintained,
- (h) Identify and correct hazardous conditions,
- (i) Investigate accidents or incidents and revise risk assessments, where necessary,
- (j) Ensure that relevant staff are registered with the Occupational Health Service, and that they attend health surveillance appointments when required,
- (k) Monitor compliance with risk assessments, enforce the control measures and censure those who fail to comply,
- (l) Ensure proper disposal of waste materials,
- (m) Ensure compliance with relevant departure requirements and the proper handover of laboratory or other workspace to relevant parties.

Further information relating to these responsibilities may be found in the following sections.

4. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a requirement of the Management of Health and Safety At Work Regulations, 1999. It is a formal, systematic process to evaluate the risks associated with work activities and a means by which appropriate measures are established and implemented to minimise the risk. Risk assessment is a valuable tool in planning and organising work and establishing procedures. Further information about risk assessment is documented in University Policy Statement S5/08.

Supervisors must ensure that 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessments are undertaken and recorded for all activities with significant risk, and that any measures decided upon in the assessment are discussed fully with those involved in the work and that all control measures are properly implemented.

Risk assessments must be reviewed regularly. The supervisor must ensure that any significant changes in the work are recorded in the assessment and determine whether existing controls are still valid or whether other measures need to be introduced to reduce the risk. Supervisors must keep abreast of any new techniques that are inherently less 'risky', or technological

advances which reduce the risk or improve control, and be aware of any emerging data on adverse health effects of the materials used or the work that is done.

Risk assessments, procedures, and/or local rules should also be reviewed in the event of an accident or near miss. The circumstances surrounding the event should be investigated and the supervisor should consider whether any revisions to the assessment or local rules are required and communicate any changes to those doing the work.

Research supervisors should be aware of and advise students of the correct safety procedures pertaining to his/her research and, if in doubt, should seek advice from their departmental safety officer, area safety officer, or the Safety Office, where necessary.

In particular, research supervisors must ensure that the appropriate classification of work has been carried out and communicated to those under their supervision, especially to define:

- (a) When work may not be undertaken without the supervisor being present,
- (b) When work may not be started without the supervisor's advice,
- (c) Any low risk activities considered acceptable out of hours,
- (d) When medium and high risk experimental work may not take place outside of working hours.

Out of hours working in research laboratories must be with the express agreement of the head of department and supervisors should report annually to the head of department that suitable safety arrangements are in place for individuals under their day-to-day control.

All supervisors must satisfy themselves that the emergency arrangements for out of hours or lone working are appropriate and that those under their supervision are fully aware of the systems in place for such work to be conducted.

5. Competence

As far as health and safety is concerned, competence is defined as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and ability at a level of expertise sufficient to perform certain work or tasks. Supervisors must ensure that individuals under their supervision are competent to work safely. They should not make any assumptions about the experience, aptitude, understanding, or competence of any new member of staff, or visitor. The safety culture, standards, and arrangements may be significantly different in other organisations and the supervisor must satisfy him/herself of the individual's competence and their understanding of the local safety arrangements, providing additional instruction and training, where needed.

6. Information, instruction and training

The provision of information, instruction, and training on health and safety is one of the basic tenets of successful risk management and a fundamental requirement of legislation. Staff, students, and visitors must be provided with all relevant information relating to the risks associated with their work and any relevant control measures. The safety information may be written (e.g. local rules, procedures, risk assessments), or communicated verbally. Importantly, the supervisor should take a proactive role in disseminating safety information and lead by example.

Information should be reinforced by suitable instruction and/or demonstration of relevant techniques, equipment use, procedures etc and the supervisor must be satisfied that the

individual under instruction understands the safety requirements and the consequences of non-compliance. Where equipment is used as a control measure, its proper use must be demonstrated and the worker advised of any routine checks to be undertaken that indicate normal function.

Supervisors who are unable to provide such instruction personally may appoint another competent team member to undertake this on their behalf. However, the supervisor must continue to monitor the conduct of the work and the progress of the individual, whether in research or other work activities and be watchful for emerging problems.

(a) Induction training

Supervisors must ensure that any student or worker under their supervision, or any visitor for whom they are responsible during their stay, receives induction training within a reasonable time of starting work. He/she must decide on a suitable induction package for the individual and ensure that this is delivered. The minimum content of an induction session is already outlined in University Policy Statement S5/10, but depending on the nature of the work undertaken the list of topics may well require significant expansion. Some departments arrange for central induction sessions to be held periodically, which may be led by a departmental or area safety officer, or perhaps some other person, but the onus is on the supervisor to ensure that the scope of any departmentally provided induction is appropriate to the needs of the individual being inducted.

(b) On the job training

The supervisor should consider and discuss with their staff or students what specific skills, techniques, methods of work, or safety training the individual might need to conduct their work or research, according to ability and previous experience.

Supervisors should be aware of any training courses offered through the Safety Office, decide which courses are mandatory and ensure their staff or students attend. Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that training needs are met and supervisors may be required to outsource some specialist training.

A summary of courses currently available through the Safety Office may be seen on the following link: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/training.shtml.

Demonstration and one to one interaction with a competent colleague is common in many work environments, and accepted practice. However, the supervisor must be confident that an appropriate standard has been reached before the trainee is allowed to work independently and signed off as being competent. He/she must also be confident in the abilities of the individual chosen to deliver such on the job training.

In the case of research visitors the duration of their visit may preclude a formal training programme and the supervisor may appoint another competent member of their team to host the visitor and provide instruction, and ongoing supervision throughout their stay.

(c) Training records

Departments must maintain appropriate training records. Departmental administrators will be provided with a list of individuals who have attended any training courses arranged by the Safety Office, along with the names of any defaulters. Supervisors must ensure that their staff, students, and any relevant visitors, have attended the courses that they were instructed to.

Supervisors should maintain records of any specialist or on the job training provided and formally sign off individuals who have attained competence in particular aspects of their work.

7. Ongoing supervision

The degree of ongoing supervision required will depend on the individual(s) being supervised. Those who have satisfactorily completed a programme of training and have shown themselves to be competent to work safely will require significantly less supervision than those who demonstrate difficulties with technique, understanding, language, or those who exhibit

recklessness or tendencies to ignore instruction, especially in relation to safety. The need for more prolonged and close supervision in high-risk activities is self-evident.

8. Absences from the department

Active supervision is dependent upon the availability of the supervisor for consultation. Although the nature of the work or research may necessarily dictate periods away from the University, supervisors are expected to make suitable deputising arrangements for such occasions. The deputising arrangements must be agreed and conveyed to all persons being supervised and the department apprised of those arrangements.

9. Health surveillance

Certain activities will require workers' registration with the Occupational Health Service so that a programme of health surveillance can be instigated. Further guidance on specific requirements may be seen in [University Policy Statement S3/13 \(Prevention of Laboratory Animal Allergy\)](#), [University Policy Statement S6/14 \(Control of Substances Hazardous to Health\)](#), OHS Memo M1/05 (Health Surveillance Procedures), [University Policy Statement S1/06 \(Control of Noise at Work Regulations\)](#), [University Policy Statement S5/09 \(Biological Health and Safety\)](#) and supervisors must make sure that relevant workers or students under their control are registered, where required and attend appointments when requested.

10. Enforcement

The procedures, protocols, or systems of work decided upon and described in risk assessments must be followed diligently. The risk assessment process is not merely a form filling exercise and it will not protect the individual, or others affected by the work, if the specified safety provisions are then flouted or ignored. Supervisors must ensure that the requirements of any risk assessment are met, and enforce this. When instruction is given, supervisors should also check that the instruction is carried through.

Where workers are observed to disregard or omit control measures they should be censured or corrected. For repeat offences or serious omissions a period of retraining should be implemented. High standards are required in safety matters, as for all University activities and a failure to enforce safety measures not only undermines the value of the risk assessment, but also reinforces the idea that safety matters are separate from other aspects of the work.

11. Maintenance of equipment

Supervisors must ensure that all the equipment under their control is properly maintained in a safe condition, and taken out of service if a fault is identified.

Where equipment is used as a control measure its continued effectiveness will be reliant on proper function and operation. Any apparent deterioration in equipment performance must be investigated and either reported or actioned, depending on its ownership. Contractors engaged to undertake equipment maintenance or repair must be supervised and provided with relevant safety information relating to their work.

12. Departure and exit procedures

All departing workers/students must make safe for reoccupation (or redevelopment) those areas where their work/research was conducted. All waste material or equipment must be properly disposed of, in accordance with the University's Policy on hazardous waste disposal and the legislation relating to waste electrical and electronic equipment. Supervisors must

ensure that the requirements of University Policy Statement [S5/11](#) and memorandum M7/07, respectively, are fully implemented.

In addition, the occupied space must be 'clean' in advance of handover. (Additional requirements for decontamination may be required in clinical or science laboratories and supervisors of these areas should refer to [University Policy Statement S5/09](#) for guidance in relation to biological agents, and University Policy Statement [S1/12](#) for guidance on radiological matters).

13. References

- University safety policy statement UPS S1/09

14. Review

This document should be reviewed by the relevant person at least every three years. Additional review may be required as the university policy is amended.