Registry Health and Safety Audit

The Registry houses the majority of the central administrative functions of the University and as such is home to multiple Professional Service Departments. Each Department is responsible for managing Health and Safety for its own staff and the activities they undertake, including staff members who are based in units located elsewhere on campus. However, there is an additional, overlapping tier of Health and Safety management based on the physical building.

In this, the first visit to the Registry under the recently restarted Health and Safety audit programme, the decision was made to focus on those staff and functions that are based within the building. During the audit we interviewed a total of 16 staff from the Academic Division and Human Resources. Staff from Finance, Research Services, Corporate Communications and the Development Office, were not spoken to and they may well be subject to a separate audit in the future.

Policy
The Registry has its own Health and Safety Policy and this was recognised by the majority of staff. Not all staff knew where to find a copy of the local policy, but most reported that they were sent a copy annually or received it at their induction. A minority were also aware of the University Health and Safety policy, particularly those in roles who supervise staff who travel on University business.

Organisation
The organisation of Health and Safety management within the Registry is complicated, not only because of the multiple occupancy of the building, but also because of the very diverse work activities undertaken by staff based there, particularly so by the business units contained within the Academic Division. However, that is countered by the strong line management structure present in both of the Professional Service Departments visited. Thus, for the most part staff all recognised that Health and Safety responsibilities lay up the line management chain and that any Health and Safety issues encountered could be escalated up this chain if necessary. In addition, various business units have designated Health and Safety people, frequently those individuals that sit on the Registry Health and Safety Committee, to whom staff can go to for help and support. These individuals were very well recognised amongst relevant staff. Heads of the distinct business units were generally seen proactive with respect to Health and Safety.

Some, but not all, staff knew who the Safety Coordinator for the Registry Building was. Equally some, but not all, staff were aware that there was a Registry Health and Safety Committee and the confidence of those that did know that they could ask for issues to be raised at that meeting did vary. That said all staff spoken to were clear that there were forums within their units for raising and discussing Health and Safety issues if the need arose and that any concerns would be taken seriously.

Planning
Staff within those Department’s visited participate in a wide variety of work activities and this is reflected in the work-related hazards and risks that they identified. Many are related to the general office environment, for example computer use, manual handling and storage issues. Others are more business unit specific involving, for example, visits by prospective students and schools to campus, international travel, etc.
In all cases risks are well controlled. All staff have undertaken the new online DSE training and workstation self-assessment and where needed additional assistance is available from local DSE assessors. Manual handling is a common work activity and only some staff have received the relevant training. Consideration should be made as to whether more staff should receive this training and, although we saw no direct evidence of this, whether some of the heavier tasks require a formal manual handling risk assessment. Storage is a very well-recognised issue, as is manager’s insistence that homes are found for items and clutter is not allowed to accumulate.

With respect to the more specific, and indeed greater, hazards identified, the relevant business units have very comprehensive risk assessments and procedures to cover them. These are produces either by the participating staff or their managers and are regularly reviewed. Staff are informed of their findings through email and face to face briefings. Their adequacy is discussed in post event briefings. The one area where tighter controls are needed is the health and safety of students on overseas placements, an area that is complicated by the joint responsibility of the originating Academic Schools in this regard. However, this had been recognised prior to the audit visit and work is well underway to improve procedures and advice in this area.

Monitoring
The Registry is an office building, with no technical areas that need inspection. Offices are inspected for clutter, tripping hazards, etc. Within Human Resources this is formalised and takes place on an annual basis. Within the Academic Division it is more ad hoc, although despite this it appears effective as staff were well aware of the need to maintain clear passageways and that failure to do so was an issue picked up on by managers. Any action identified via inspections is dealt with immediately by relevant staff or, if appropriate, via Estates. All staff are aware of a route by which they could report building defects.

Understanding of accident and near miss reporting was variable, with some staff aware of the University’s electronic reporting system and others just aware that there was likely a process by which accidents could be reported. Although this likely reflects the fact that few staff have had first-hand experience of accident reporting and that there are few incidents to report, this is an area where staff awareness could be improved.

Levels of supervision and overview for activities such as campus visits and travel are well defined and followed. General inspection during the audit visits showed that PAT testing of electrical equipment was comprehensive and up to date, there were no trip hazards and both escape and general exit routes are kept clear.

Review
Key information on Health and Safety, for example incidents and accidents is reported up the line management chain, coming to rest at whichever level the issue is ultimately dealt with. This reflects the trust that Heads of the Professional Service Departments have in their staff to deal with issues and to recognise where escalation in terms of both information and action is required. This appears to be very effective, but may mean that some information that should flow to senior managers is not doing so.
Training
All staff receive a local induction when they start in their role and this includes aspects of Health and Safety, including receipt of the Registry Health and Safety policy. Normally this is provided by the individual appointed as the local Health and Safety rep. More detailed information regarding risk assessments, policies and procedures are provided by the new starters’ line manager.

All staff were well aware of the emergency arrangements in case of fire, generally recognising primary and secondary emergency exit routes and all knowing where the assembly point for the building was located.

Many staff have undertaken the health and safety training that is now compulsory for new staff. Those that hadn’t were most frequently staff that had worked at the University for a length of time and started prior to this requirement for training being introduced.

Summary
Overall Health and Safety is very well managed within the parts of the Registry that were visited. The individual Professional Service Departments and the distinct units within those Departments have a clear understanding of the hazards and risks that is associated with their work activities and either have appropriate policies, procedures and controls in place to deal with them or are actively developing these. Risk assessments are completed and are reviewed in a timely manner. Managers do, and are seen to, take Health and Safety seriously. As such we have no substantive recommendations. One is for Department and individual business units to consider whether any additional staff need to undertake Manual Handling training. Another is for reps who sit on the Registry Health and Safety Committee to advertise forthcoming meetings, if indeed they do not already do so, such that the staff they represent have a better opportunity to raise issues to be taken to the meeting.

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