

Workplace Health and Safety Committee

Unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2025

Meeting Attendance

Members present:

Ex Officio Members:

The Chief Financial and Operating Officer (**Chair**): Nigel Alcock
The Director of Health and Safety: Dev Agarwal
The Director of Estates and Campus Development: Roger Ward
The Director of Accommodation, Campus and Commercial Services:
Lisa Woods

Faculty Representatives

Professor Andy Dougill (Dean, Sciences)
Professor Karen Rowlingson (Dean, Social Sciences)
Ros Roberts (DFO, Arts and Humanities)

Trade Union Representatives:

Dr Christopher Crispin-Bailey (UCU)
Chris Fielding (UNISON)

Other Members

Student Wellbeing representative: Tom Banham (Academic Registrar)

In attendance:

Dr Philip Evans (**Secretary**)
John Bell (WHSO)
Carolyn Jackson (WHSO)
Paul Mullins (WHSO)

Apologies for absence:

HR Representative: Suzy Shelton
Dean of Faculty of Arts & Humanities: Professor Duncan Petrie
YSU representative: Geoff Ward
Student Wellbeing representative: Martin Crosby
UNITE representative: Michael Walker

Declarations of Interest

24-25/27 Members were invited to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting. None were declared.

Committee Constituency (*verbal report*)

24-25/28 The Secretary **reported** that:

1. this was the first meeting of the Committee with its new smaller constituency, as approved by the University Executive Board (UEB) in December 2024 and implemented with immediate effect;
2. given her new Director-level responsibility in this area, the Director of Library, Learning, Archives and Wellbeing would be approached to assume the membership position for a Student Wellbeing representative (in place of Martin Crosby/Interim Deputy Director of Student Life & Wellbeing and Tom Banham/Academic Registrar).

Minutes of Last Meeting (*WHSC.24-25/24*)

24-25/29 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2024 were **approved**.

Action Schedule (*WHSC.24-25/25*)

24-25/30 The Committee **noted** its action-tracking schedule and the Chair **observed** that where possible action-owners should confirm more specific deadlines and descriptors for their actions.

Annual Schedule 2024-25 (WHSC.24-25/26)

- 24-25/31 The Committee **noted** its draft annual schedule of business for 2024-25 and the Director of Health and Safety **reported** that he would update it for 2025-26 in accordance with the new governance structure approved by UEB (M24-25/45 below refers) **[ACTION: Director of Health and Safety]**.

SECTION A

Director's Overview Report (WHSC.24-25/27)

- 24-25/32 The Committee **considered** a general update from the Director of Health and Safety covering a wide range of H&S matters.
- 24-25/33 The Director **reported** that:
1. the new H&S governance structure represented a re-set of the approach to H&S across the University which would now be implemented in a phased manner ahead of the next academic year;
 2. as the WHSO was operating with reduced resources following the recent round of Voluntary Severance, feedback would be appreciated on any perceived gaps in coverage in order to inform its risk-based priority approach;
 3. work was ongoing to enhance the WHSO web presence and provide more regular H&S communications to the University community;
 4. colleagues in HR (where the WHSO was now located) had been collaborating with the University Occupational Health (OH) Adviser in respect of work-related stress, which was covered in more detail in the full Q1 report (M24-25/37[4] below refers);
 5. the University-wide H&S regulatory compliance audit programme referenced in the paper would initially be focused on statutory compliance in DTEF (including fire safety).
- 24-25/34 The Committee **observed** that:
1. **[**MATERIAL REDACTED**]**
 2. the ongoing work in respect of staff wellbeing was to be welcomed as this was currently a major item of discussion at Faculty H&S Committees;
 3. the current IT/online system for recording and reporting H&S incidents was out-of-date and needed to be replaced with a more effective cloud-based system; the Director of Health and Safety was therefore encouraged to continue developing a proposal that could be considered in the first instance by the Integrated Infrastructure Board **[ACTION: Director of Health and Safety]**.

Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing: Q1 Report (WHSC.24-25/28)

- 24-25/35 The Committee **considered** the Q1 report (October 2024-January 2025) on Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing.
- 24-25/36 The H&S Business Partner (Carolyn Jackson) **reported** that:
1. **[**MATERIAL REDACTED**]**;
 2. **[**MATERIAL REDACTED**]**;
 3. an issue around false gas alarm activations in Chemistry had been addressed following identification of the cause of the problem arising from a contractor handover;
 4. some reported incidents combined with safety walk-arounds by WHSO had raised some concerns about the prevalence of out-of-hours and lone working on campus; additional guidance on this would therefore be published **[ACTION: WHSO]**;
 5. **[**MATERIAL REDACTED**]**;
 6. **[**MATERIAL REDACTED**]**;
 7. the responsibility of the H&S Business Partners as first point-of-contact for individual Departments and Faculties was set out in the report (noting that the reference to DTEF was in fact a reference to all PS directorates);
 8. a new monthly H&S round-up and Safety Alerts on specific topics were now routinely published in the Staff Digest;
 9. the workplace hazard identification project was ongoing with the DSAs leading on the completion by Departments of a hazard checklist pro-form as the first phase;
 10. the report provided details of the current OH caseload and waiting times as well as the current status of the employee assistance programme provided by *Health Assured*.

- 24-25/37 The Committee **observed** that:

1. the 8-week lead-time for travel risk assessment should remain an advisory recommendation as it was not always possible to know all relevant details so far in advance of an overseas trip; it was also possible for the safety situation to change quickly and at very short notice in some destinations;
2. work should continue to support Heads of Departments in driving up training completion rates among their staff including consideration of how this might be integrated into other University processes (e.g. PDRs, promotion etc) and more widely mandated (e.g. for new staff as part of induction); it was hoped that moving the H&S training programme onto the University's Learning Management System (LMS) would make it easier to access/promote as well as auto-generating reminders and enhanced completion data allowing management follow-up with individuals as necessary; it was suggested that such management follow-up could also be supported by TU representatives with a focus on the collegial aspect of workplace safety; given the importance of the University demonstrably fulfilling its legal duties as an employer in this area, it was **decided** that the Chair and Director of Health and Safety should review the situation and bring recommendations back to the next meeting with the overarching aim of achieving 95% completion rates for mandatory training [**ACTION: Chair/Director of Health and Safety**];
3. as the nature and prevalence of lone working had changed considerably since the post-COVID introduction of hybrid working (e.g. far lower occupancy rates in many buildings), it was **decided** that the Directors of Health & Safety and Estates should collaborate to bring a report to the next meeting which assessed the level of risk and proposed possible policy solutions [**ACTION: Directors of Health & Safety and Estates**];
4. as regards the ongoing work in HR/OH to develop an appropriate suite of KPIs for staff wellbeing, it was decided that a separate substantive report on this matter should be submitted to the next meeting [**ACTION: HR representative/OH Adviser**].

Faculty Health and Safety Committees (WHSC.24-25/29)

24-25/38 The Committee **considered** IDA logs from meetings of the Faculty H&S Committees.

24-25/39 It was **reported** that:

1. mandatory training and fire safety were regular items of discussions at Faculty meetings; the need to replace the H&S accident-reporting software before its licence expired (M24-25/34[3] above also refers) was also a repeated matter of discussion;
2. specific issues relating to building/renovation works were also discussed at Faculty meetings (e.g. recent work on the roof of Alcuin College);
3. the WHSO was working to develop a simple template for escalation reports from the Faculty and DTEF H&S Committees to replace the current IDA logs which were difficult to interpret [**ACTION: WHSO**]; the new template would include an assessment of the degree of risk of each of the individual matters reported/escalated;
4. the previously reported fire safety issue in a specific academic office in King's Manor had been resolved.

Fire Drills (WHSC.24-25/30)

24-25/40 The Committee **considered** a report and recommendation from the Fire & Infrastructure Safety Business Partner (Paul Mullins) regarding the University's fire drill process

24-25/41 The Business Partner **reported** that:

1. the recommendation was for the Zone Managers to continue scheduling fire drills in collaboration with the Fire Safety Team and the Departments concerned until September 2025;
2. in the context of discussion about online fire safety training, the fire drills needed to be viewed as the practical application of that theoretical training;
3. although they covered the relevant statutory requirements and standards, the current Fire Safety Policy and Management Procedures needed to be updated to reflect more recent University organisational and staffing developments; there was also a lack of consistency across Departments in the implementation of the Policy/Procedures;
4. once the standard process had been reviewed and implemented, it would be possible to consider possible variations to the standard drill procedure in high-risk areas so that the exercise functioned as more effective training and awareness raising;
5. the starting point for the review would be to work with DTEF to confirm the 'cause and effect' charts for each building and to identify the different units occupying them.

24-25/42 The Committee **observed** that:

1. timing was key to ensuring that fire drills occurred at times of maximum occupancy; the number of Departments (academic and PS) currently re-locating across the campus was a factor here and also the fact that many building were multi-use, some with resident students;
2. effective fire drills required a collaborative team approach which would also reinforce the collegial and community aspects of fire safety more generally; the Campus Safety team also needed to be involved and aware of the procedures;
3. with space-sharing common across the sector, it was important to note that separate units with different risk ratings might occupy the same building (as was the case in some Biology buildings at York);
4. in the new context of hybrid working, it would be advisable to introduce eligibility criteria for colleagues volunteering to be trained as Fire Wardens/Sweepers to ensure that their working/attendance patterns were consistent with fulfilment of the role;
5. given the importance of this matter to staff safety and the need to demonstrate responsiveness to the impact of new hybrid working arrangements, it was decided that the Fire & Infrastructure Safety Business Partner should continue to provide progress reports to each meeting against the timeline in his paper **[ACTION: Fire & Infrastructure Safety Business Partner]**.

SECTION B

Reporting of Accidents/Incidents (*verbal report*)

- 24-25/43 The Committee **received for information** a verbal report and demonstration from the H&S Business Partner (Paul Bell) of the new WHSO guidance webpages for the reporting and investigating of accidents and incidents.
- 24-25/44 The Committee **observed** that:
1. colleagues might need support to navigate through the reporting framework with as little free text required as possible (e.g. through the provision of mandatory questions for completion); the new webpages also needed to be compatible with mobile phones to facilitate swift on-site reporting;
 2. as the investigation aspect would be undertaken by DSAs, they would be fully trained in the required process;
 3. if accidents/incidents were 'work-related' they should be reported even if they did not occur on University premises (e.g. at a research fieldwork site);
 4. there was an onus on individuals to recognise accident reporting as a personal responsibility as members of staff (a point which should be emphasised in Faculties and through the DSAs).

SECTION C

Health & Safety Governance Framework (*WHSC.24-25/31*)

- 24-25/45 The Committee **noted** the revised H&S Governance Framework as approved by UEB in December 2024.

WHSO Workplan (*WHSC.24-25/32*)

- 24-25/46 The Committee **noted** the current Workplace H&S Office work-plan including the current status of each significant project or deliverable.

Date Of Next Meeting

- 24-25/47 It was **reported** that the next meeting would be re-scheduled to accommodate the new Chair's diary and, as the previous year, would be held F2F/in-person only (*date/venue TBC*) **[ACTION: Committee Secretary]**.