Health and Safety at the University of Oxford
A Strategic Plan for the Next Five Years
Supporting Statement

Introduction:

Health and safety is important. Sometimes it may feel that it takes up valuable time and resources, however the safety and health of our staff, students and visitors must be a core part of the way the University operates. Effective health and safety implementation prevents accidents, reduces risk to people and property. It ensures compliance with statutory requirements, and reduces the potential for harm to health. At Oxford we undertake many activities leading to the creation of hazards that can expose members of our community and visitors to risks to their health and safety. These hazards need to be managed so that the risks they pose are kept as low as is reasonably practicable. Everyone has a role to play in the delivery of health and safety practices. We are all accountable to each other.

The University strives to meet the highest standards of health and safety performance and does so to support and enhance research and teaching in this world leading institution. A failure to meet these high standards could result in service and reputational impact.

Every one of us working together to achieve these high standards is the **aim** of this strategic plan over the next five years.

The University, divisions, departments and services have some examples of fantastic work being undertaken to manage safety and reduce risk. This plan builds upon this work, with the **objective** of developing a better partnership to ensure that we have a robust and resilient approach to safety management that is both sustainable and continues to reduce risk.

A concise visual 'map' of our health and safety priorities and themes (see below) has been developed and the current version is attached. This map also incorporates measures by which we can assess the implementation of the plan. It also indicates current levels of performance (as of December 2016) and proposes where we should be by 2023 (i.e. our targets). This statement supports the map.

The Need for a Strategic Plan:

The need for a strategic approach for health and safety was identified as a key challenge in 2010 by a review group considering 'The Leadership of Health & Safety'. At that time the University also adopted an HE sector based audit toolkit called 'HASMAP' (**H**ealth **a**nd **S**afety **MA**nagement **P**rofile) and set a target of achieving 'Level 3', a level of substantial assurance where there is 'a systematic approach taken to the management of health and safety' that is 'robust in delivering effective control of risk'. A recent performance review noted that:

i)   The University's current level of health and safety performance is generally acceptable, but does not match its aspirations for a world leading teaching and research institution

ii)   Performance has improved over the last seven years, but has recently levelled-off, as indicated by the results of the biennial Self Assurance Toolkit and departmental audits

iii)   Performance overall has not achieved level 3, agreed after the 2010 Leadership Report, with the areas of risk control, compliance, communications, leadership, and review – needing the most improvement

iv)   The growth of collaboration and partnership working both across the University and with external organisations could be impacted by the inconsistencies of performance and application across the institution

v)   Current performance relies heavily on key individuals to maintain effective management. This is not a resilient or robust position and can create issues related to policy interpretation, difficulties in translating guidance into local standards, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and training

vi)   Key areas for improvement across the University include risk assessment, competence, consultation, planning, and risk control

This Strategic Plan focusses on these performance issues and sets out, under seven themes, the activities and targets.

Oxford Safety Values:

Underpinning the aim of achieving the highest standards of health and safety that support and enhance research and teaching are a set of safety values:

i)   **Active, Visible Leadership and Commitment**:
   a.   Applies to leadership at all levels within the University. Leaders include, Heads of Division, Heads of Department, Service Heads, Principal Investigators, Research Group Leaders and other Supervisors. Leaders should be seen to be actively involved in accepting accountability for the risks created by activities under their control. Commitment is shown through effective induction and training as well as ensuring the right resources are proportionately allocated to control risks

ii)   **Mutual Accountability**:
   a.   Subscribing to the philosophy that we are all accountable to each other to ensure the health and safety of the University community
   b.   Acknowledging that everyone has a responsibility for health and safety and has accountability at some level. Working together and developing key partnerships across the University are critical to good health and safety

iii)   **Sensible, and Proportionate, Risk-Based Approach**:
   a.   Risk based approach – prioritising high risks whilst managing all cross-university risks. Building upon sensible risk management principles, using effective risk profiling and implementation of proportionate controls
   b.   The principles of sensible risk management, as adapted and adopted by the University are:

      i.   Enabling research and teaching and not stifling them;
      ii.   Ensuring that staff, students, visitors and the public are properly protected;
      iii.   Providing an overall benefit to the University community and societies by balancing benefits and risks, with a focus on real risks – both those which arise more often and those with serious consequences;

1.   Health and Safety Management Profile (2015) – University Safety and Health Association

iv. Ensuring that those who create risks manage them responsibly and understand that they will be held accountable if they fail to manage real risks responsibly;

v. Enabling individuals to understand that as well as the right to protection, they also have a legal duty to exercise personal responsibility

c. Proportionate controls are:

i. The measures taken to control risks that are commensurate with the hazards presented

iv) **Consistency**:

a. Consistency of responsibilities should equate to consistency of endpoint application (not necessarily consistency of translation and developed operation).

Strategic Priorities and Themes

The Strategic Plan focusses on four key priority areas and these priorities are split into seven themes. Each theme will have an associated, dynamic action plan that is to be reviewed annually. The implementation of these theme action plans will be monitored with a strategic risk register for health and safety.

In collaboration with divisions, departments and services, theme action plans will be developed to assist in translating the Strategic Plan into activities at a local level. These will be dynamic documents reviewed on an annual basis, alongside a review of strategic plan implementation by the General Purposes Committee and the Health and Safety Management Committee.

Priority 1 – Leadership
1. Theme – Active Leaders

Active leaders take responsibility and accountability for the risks created from activities under their remit. Leadership responsibility occurs throughout the University structure, from first line supervisory academic and management roles in both academic and service settings, academics leading student activities, research group leaders (principal investigators), and heads of department and division, to senior role holders, including the Vice-Chancellor.

Responsibility and accountability for health and safety cannot be delegated, but its implementation and the day-to-day tasks and activities can. Active leaders ensure they are fully informed of their responsibilities and the risks they need to assess and control.

They will plan the effective use of resources to ensure health and safety risks are reduced to as low as reasonably practicable and set objectives to improve performance. Active leaders participate in communication and consultation processes, including health and safety committees, inspection and investigation, reviews, and audits.

To support leaders, during the period of the Plan, the Statement of Safety Organisation (SSO) will be reviewed and revised to develop a more active document that clearly assigns leadership, as well as support roles. The SSO will also enable the development of appropriate action plans to deliver improved health and safety.

A bespoke induction and training programmes for leaders will be developed to enable them to fully understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to health and safety.

2. Theme – Planning

Planning relates to the management of risks, emergency procedures, effective use of safety resources, and the assignment of roles. Many risks are not immediately apparent or obvious and some risk management requirements are created by statutory requirements. The University has written health and safety policies, with supporting guidance, to help leaders understand their duties in relation to health and safety.

Key to planning is the identification of significant hazards and assessment of the risks they pose. Leaders are required to ensure these activities are undertaken and recorded.

To support leaders in planning for health and safety, there will be a refresh of the University's health and safety policies. This will produce clearer statements of the standards required and provide information on the assignment of roles and responsibilities. Online access to these revised policies will be improved and an online risk assessment database and toolkit is proposed.

A well-functioning health and safety committee can support planning and decision-making. Clear communication and the provision of instruction and training ensure safe working practices.

An audit of health and safety committees will be carried out to assess current processes and analyse the need for clearer guidance to be provided by the Safety Office.

A guide to emergency planning will be produced and the process for developing emergency plans and procedures rolled out across the University.

Priority 2 – Competence and Knowledge
3. Theme – Competent Health and Safety Advice

Access to competent advice and support is vital in ensuring excellence in health and safety. Competent advice and support ensures a sensible and proportionate approach, as well as enabling sustainable risk reduction. The University, divisions and departments all invest in providing competent health and safety support and advice. There are a number of advisory and support roles within the organisation and the effective use of this resource and how they work together to best support the University community is a core part of this theme.

In a University setting – competence is a combination of skills, experience, subject knowledge, and sometimes having the relevant qualifications. However, the University has not fully defined competence in relation to defined health and safety support roles.

This theme is not about developing rigid qualification requirements. It is about ensuring those providing support, guidance, and advice do so in a way that ensures sensible approaches, achieves compliance and maintains proportionate controls.

To support this theme there will be a review of existing health and safety support roles. This review will consider the role definition, the level of executive authority attached to them, and related competency requirements. To enable role holders to achieve the competency requirements, development opportunities will be made available.

4. Theme – Training and Development

Effective health and safety is a shared activity and delivery of it often requires people to be trained or offered other development opportunities. Undertaking a training needs analysis ensures that the most benefit is accrued by targeting training and development to relevant people, at the right level and at the right time. Training and development is not necessarily a face-to-face activity, although currently the majority of training is delivered in this manner. A more flexible approach to training provision is required, the proper recording of training, for example on personnel files or as part of an authorization process, is necessary.

An institution-wide training needs analysis will be performed, and from this a targeted, multi-platform training programme will be developed. Online delivery will be explored, as will options for the recording of training.

Priority 3 – Partnership
5. Theme – Arrangements, Communication, Collaboration

Working together is a core feature of this Strategic Plan. To achieve this, formal and informal processes are needed. A partnership approach will also support the growth in interdisciplinary and collaborative working, both internally and externally. The wide variety of collaborations means that a tiered approach is required, so that proportionate actions are taken to ensure health and safety is effectively owned, lead and managed. Arrangements for health and safety management can include local (within department / division), institutional (cross department / division), national and international sectoral (between universities) and industrial collaboration (between business partners and the University). At a local and institutional level collaborative arrangements can be informal, but agreement on responsibility for health and safety is necessary. In more formal arrangements, partnerships and agreements, contractual terms and conditions may be appropriate.

Effective communication is necessary to support the delivery of this plan and many of the theme-related activities. A variety of communication tools and channels are available and these will be utilised as necessary. Health and safety committees are an important piece in this jigsaw and should provide a means for information transfer and interpretation.

To support this theme an analysis of current agreements will be carried out, focusing on health and safety arrangements. A communication plan to support implementation will be published and as mentioned above, a review of health and safety committees will be performed.

Priority 4 – Risk Management
6. Theme – Risk Assessment

The identification of hazards and assessment of risks is a legal requirement and enabler to excellent health and safety performance and, allied with effective controls (theme 7), risk reduction.

The focus is on real risks, i.e. those with serious consequences and those that arise more often. Risk registers record identified hazards and the mitigation activities (controls) that are in place or planned to reduce the risks produced. Risk assessment is a dynamic process requiring regular review when activities change. It is also a process built on the sensible risk management principles set out earlier in this Plan.

To support this theme, the University will produce guidance on developing operational risk registers. It will also refresh the policy on risk assessment and look towards providing an online risk assessment database and toolkit for departments to utilise.

7. Theme – Control Systems

The implementation of proportionate controls to manage risks is the outcome of many of the previous theme activities. Action plans with assigned responsibilities and timeframes are an essential part of risk management.

One area of work that is not immediately apparent is that of statutory testing and maintenance – those activities where a legal duty to regularly test equipment etc. is placed upon the University by statute (e.g. lifting equipment.)

Unfortunately failures do sometimes occur and the effective reporting and investigation of incidents and accidents is a way to ensure lessons are learnt and preventative actions taken.

The monitoring of the implementation of action plans and other controls is also required. Inspection, reviews and audits are all methods by which controls can be monitored, or further risks identified.

To support this theme, the University will look towards providing an online accident and incident system that incorporates an investigation toolkit.

A rolling programme of reviews and audits will be undertaken. Guidance on the requirements for statutory testing and maintenance will be updated.