**Carrying out practical work at home**

**Purpose of Guidance**

At the time of writing, we must assume that schools will be employing a Blended Learning model for part of the next academic year. In this scenario, some work will take place in school and other tasks will be completed at home.

It is worth noting, though, that even when schools do return to full occupancy, there may still be some occasions where it is desirable for certain learners to attempt some practical work at home. The aim of this guide is to provide guidance that will allow this to happen safely.

**Background**

A school technology room or science lab is a closely supervised environment with a number of safety features built in. Those supervising are highly trained. There is obviously no guarantee that this situation exists in the average home. Risk assessments for school practical work will have to be reviewed to determine whether additional control measures are needed in the home, or indeed whether the activity is entirely unsuitable for the home environment. Be particularly aware that an activity that is viewed as low risk in a school may require additional control measures to reduce the risk to the same level in a home setting.

**Factors to take into account when reviewing risk assessments**

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| **Does the activity require PPE?** | If so, then it almost certainly should not be carried out at home by younger students. PPE is usually the least favoured option in industrial environments because it requires people to be responsible enough to wear it. In schools, the level of supervision is such that we can rely on PPE for protection. That level of supervision will not necessarily exist at home. |
| **Does the activity involve equipment or materials that require special storage?** | If so, the activity should not be carried out at home, but bear in mind that small quantities of materials may be safe enough. |
| **How will kit be transported home?** | It would not be appropriate for students to transport craft knives home, for example. If chemicals are to be used, can they be transported safely? |
| **Consider younger siblings and cognitively-impaired adults** | The materials may be safe enough for use by the student, but what about others in the household who may have access to them? Please see the section on Parent/Carer Involvement. |
| **Environmental considerations** | Are any of the materials or products harmful to the environment. If so, how will they be recycled or disposed of? |
| **Don’t make assumptions regarding the safety of equipment / material already in the home** | There are plenty of things on supermarket shelves that are not considered safe for use by children, even when supervised – dual voltage hair dryers, dishwasher tablets etc. |
| **Something doesn’t suddenly become dangerous just because it’s used in the context of an experiment** | Children put vinegar on their chips without resorting to PPE. There is no need for them to wear it when experimenting with small quantities of vinegar. Nobody wears safety glasses when making a coffee. |

**Results of risk assessment**

There are three possible scenarios:

* The activity can go ahead – there are no control measures required. This would be the case, for example, if only tools such as scissors were being used, or chemicals such as sugar or salt.
* The activity can go ahead provided certain control measures are in place.
* The activity is not suitable for home.

**Parent / Carer involvement**

If an activity requires control measures, parents and carers should be informed and their active consent sought **in advance.** We do not recommend that you send a ‘five steps’ (as was) risk assessment form home. Simply describe the equipment being sent home and the purpose of the activity. List any hazards. Bullet-point the control measures. It is probably best not to use the phrase ‘control measures’ as it will not be familiar to many people. ‘Safety instructions’ is fine. The parent or carer can then decide if the activity can be carried out. Point out to the parent that the activity has been assessed as suitable **for the pupil** if they follow safety instructions. Materials supplied are not necessarily suitable for use by other members of the household, for example younger siblings, adults with dementia.

**Making activities safer**

This practice is already widespread in practical science and technology. We use small quantities of chemicals in low concentrations where possible and low voltages for experiments involving electricity. These measures can slow down processes, but that may not be an issue for a pupil working at their own pace at home.

**Packing and transporting material**

The factors to consider here are fairly obvious:

* Use containers that will not break
* Protect sharp points, e.g. using a cork
* Use tape over the ends of batteries to avoid shorting
* Label individual containers and apply any necessary warning symbols

As long as the risk from Covid-19 remains, procedures for disinfection will still be needed. Material can either be wiped with sanitiser. Alternatively, it can be bagged and left to quarantine for 72 hours before being distributed to pupils. A zip-lock bag containing the materials for the activity and instructions could be used. Equipment which has been returned can be left in a tub and quarantined for 72 hours.