

SSERC and Risk Assessment

The law dictates that employers are responsible for providing risk assessments for any hazardous activities undertaken by their employees. SSERC is here to help.

While the employer cannot delegate this responsibility, they can and generally do delegate the process to those closer to the 'action'. Teachers and technicians in schools are more likely to be in the best position to appropriately assess the risks in schools as they are more familiar with the context.

To meet their obligations, employers must:

1) Provide instructions and training for those carrying out the risk assessment.

SSERC can support the first of these by providing training in the risk assessment process for relevant staff. We run courses online, face to face at SSERC and (on request) onsite for employers. These focus specifically on the situations that might arise in Science and Technology departments.

2) Ensure risk assessments are carried out and that the findings of these risk assessment are communicated to the relevant people.

SSERC has no enforcement powers but we can support schools and colleges by:

- Providing guidance on how to carry out risk assessments and suitable recording templates.

- Providing model risk assessments for activities for which we have instructions. In addition to the sciences, we also have model risk assessment for Design & Technology, Home Economics and (coming shortly) Art. (If used, these must be adapted, taking into account the particular circumstances in which the activity will be carried out.)
- We also have a range of model risk assessments for more general school activities: school trips, sports activities, firework displays etc.
- Providing help with supporting staff in the production of new risk assessments.
- Providing Codes of Practice in Biology that allow the activities described there to be carried out without further risk assessment.



Health & Safety in Biology

In Biology, we have taken a slightly different approach: we have produced two Codes of Practice that cover most Biology activities carried out in schools and colleges, for Microbiology and for Materials of Living Origin. By following the Codes of Practice, employees are complying with the findings of risk assessments that have already been carried out. As such, if teachers are working within the Codes of Practice there is no requirement for any specific risk assessments to be carried out. However, the employer's guidance on assessing risk and recording risk assessments should be followed.

- If an activity falls outwith the guidance in the Codes of Practice then an individual risk assessment for that activity must be carried out.
- As most common activities are covered by the Codes of Practice, those requiring separate risk assessments tend to be the more unusual ones. This is where SSERC can help again.

New or Novel risk assessments

SSERC cannot, of course, have risk assessments available 'off the shelf' for every activity that goes on in a school. But where existing SSERC guidance does not fully cover all aspects of a novel activity, we have the expertise to research the hazards of unfamiliar materials and processes and advise on how to deal with them safely. We can also offer assistance with the process of assessing new activities. Detailed guidance on the process can



be found in the document ([Risk Assessment in Project Work](#)) It is aimed primarily at chemistry but applicable across the sciences and beyond. We can also talk through the procedure with individual teachers or technicians. As always, any staff who are unsure of any anything at all relating to risk assessment (or any other aspect of Health & Safety) are encouraged to get in touch with us here at SSERC: we are happy to help.



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