

Safety Note 54

Edition 2, May 2016

CHILDREN ON UNIVERSITY PREMISES

1 INTRODUCTION

Further to the “Children on University of Reading Premises” policy statement, this Safety Note provides further information for those who may need to consider the presence of children or young persons on campus. It includes information previously included in Safety Code of Practice 2 and approved by the University Health and Safety Committee.

The term ‘premises’ is used to refer to buildings and grounds. ‘Children’ refers to those who are of compulsory school age (i.e. under 16); a ‘young person’ is anyone under the age of 18.

2 BRINGING CHILDREN ONTO CAMPUS

The University is a place of work, and its buildings are generally not designed for children. The University therefore discourages the inappropriate attendance of children in the workplace. However it is recognised that members of staff may need to bring their children into work in exceptional circumstances, and that Schools/Function/Departments/Units may wish to hold events designed for children. Young persons and children may be on university premises for a number of reasons, most of them legitimate, including:

- Public areas e.g. Palmer building, Sportspark
- Use of the grounds for events
- Subject of a research project
- University nursery or pre-school
- Children of staff resident in or visiting university housing or halls
- Open days/ visit days
- Work experience
- Social occasions e.g. weddings
- Conference activities
- Visit with a parent
- Walking on the public right of way
- Trespassing.

The University owes a duty of care to all visitors, including trespassers. Although some responsibility can be delegated to e.g. a parent, the University’s general legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 is applicable and cannot be delegated. Should an accident occur which involves a child/young person, the University could be liable for prosecution for not providing premises which are safe and without risk. Likewise, a civil claim could be brought against the University. In these circumstances, the following requirements must be adhered to:

- Heads of School/ Department/Function are responsible for ensuring that risk assessments consider children/young persons visiting campus. The risk assessment must cover the activity to be undertaken, the built environment (see below), and supervisory arrangements (see below). The building manager and area health and safety co-ordinator should be consulted
- The agreement of the unit supervisor/manager must be obtained to bring a child into the working environment e.g. an office
- Young children must never be taken into, or allowed to enter, "high hazard" areas such as laboratories or workshops, or where the building features present a risk to them
- Children are not allowed in research laboratories. Older children (over 12 years of age) may be allowed to enter other laboratories such as undergraduate teaching laboratories or workshops, for educational reasons, but only under direct supervision when no hazardous work is being undertaken, and only with the specific permission of the laboratory or workshop supervisor. They are allowed in specially designed for school visits or work experience.
- Young persons (i.e. age 16 to 18) may be allowed to undertake work experience in undergraduate teaching laboratories, where approval has been given by the Head of School and by Health & Safety Services, but only where they can be supervised at all times by appropriately trained and experienced member(s) of staff
- In residential accommodation, those responsible within the University for taking bookings for groups that include children must ensure that the accommodation is suitable for children. It may be necessary to place a minimum limit on the age of children for whom the accommodation is provided, in particular for sleeping accommodation such as in Halls of Residence.

3 EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Visits with a parent are normally unplanned (and are generally discouraged). Bringing a child into work/ lectures should not be considered as an alternative for child care. Where an emergency situation arises, e.g. breakdown of normal child care, an employee may wish to come in for a short period in order to make arrangements relating to work, however they should then seek alternatives e.g. work from home.

Parents must not bring a child onto campus if they suspect that the child is suffering from a communicable illness e.g. chicken pox or norovirus, as this could be passed to others.

4 SUPERVISION

When children are on campus they must be adequately supervised. For organised university or departmental events, there must be adequate overall supervision provided by University staff, supported as necessary by e.g. parents, teachers, and group leaders (depending on the nature of the event). This supervision should be appropriate to the age and maturity of the child and the activity being undertaken.

For informal visits by the children of staff or students, the responsibility for supervision lies with the adult (parent, guardian etc.) who brings the child into the workplace. Adequate control and supervision must be exercised over children at all times while they are on University premises to ensure the safety of the child and to minimise disruption to others at work or study. Failure to do

so may result in the parents/guardian and child having to leave the premises. It is not acceptable to ask colleagues to supervise a child while the parent goes about their normal work.

Any other groups/organisations bringing children onto campus, with University approval, are responsible for supervising their group e.g. youth groups who may occasionally ask to use campus for an event such as a walk.

Young children should never be allowed to walk around academic buildings unaccompanied.

Any adult who in a work capacity may end up in a 1:1 situation with a young person or vulnerable adult, or has frequent or intensive contact with them, may need to undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

5 SAFETY IN DESIGN

When considering the design of new buildings and facilities, designers and the project steering group should consider whether the building is likely to be frequently made available for "public" events that could be attended by young children. If so, then children should be considered as part of the design process, and the requirements of the Building Regulations followed.

The majority of university buildings, including new build, have been designed for adults. They do not have features which would protect young children (under the age of 5), particularly if parental supervision fails. This may mean that young children have to be excluded from specific areas, unless supervision can be relied upon at all times to provide adequate control.

5.1 Protection from falling

The primary concern is protection from falling from height (Part K of the Building Regulations). Features that could make areas unsuitable are spiral staircases and handrails that can easily be climbed (over or through), leading to a fall.

5.2 Door self closures

Self-closures on doors can present a risk to children, whose fingers can become trapped, and possibly amputated.

5.3 Lifts and other equipment

Where equipment is installed that relies on sensors to operate it e.g. automatic or lift doors, checks should be made to ensure that sensors will detect a small child and they will not be trapped.

5.4 Welfare facilities

Many university buildings do not have toilets, hand-drying facilities or changing facilities which can be reached by small children. However the availability of facilities or alternatives should be considered in the risk assessment if an event is planned that will attract young children. Where buildings are being designed and built which children may be encouraged to visit e.g. some public buildings, suitable welfare facilities should be considered as part of the design process. In some circumstances temporary facilities may need to be installed e.g. handwashing for travelling childrens' farm visits to campus.

5.5 Work Experience/ Young Person employee

Where a child/ young person is on work experience, or employed as a young person, there is a legal duty to carry out a specific risk assessment. This should take account of:

- legal requirements and guidance which restrict the type and duration of work which young people are allowed to undertake
- the maturity, experience and capabilities of the young person
- the need for supervised training for certain activities.

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