

Health and Safety Services
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To Safety Co-ordinators (for onward transmission to Deans of Faculty, Heads of School/Directorates, Safety Advisors, Safety Representatives)

From Dr Melanie Taylor, University Safety Advisor

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Distribution Dr S A Robson, Prof P Heggs, Dr J Bridger, S Collister, R Valentine

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Violence at Work

In the HE setting, work-related violence is fortunately rare, but it can and does occur. A recent incident to a member of staff involved an attack and physical injury from a knife wound to the chest. Generally speaking, for most people working on campus and with colleagues, the risks are exceedingly small; however, many university employees and students carry out visits off campus and the risks increase with factors such as lone working, home visiting, carrying equipment perceived to have some value, visiting sites with no obvious security presence, etc.

Health and safety law applies to risks from violence, just as it does to other risks from work. The HSE's definition of workplace violence encompasses "any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work". Thus, it can include a wide range of incidents in a wide range of workplace settings. The key legal requirement is for risk assessment of reasonably foreseeable violence. Heads of Schools and other senior managers should therefore ensure that any significant risks of workplace violence are assessed and details about reducing or controlling those risks are recorded. Advice on such risk assessments can be obtained from your safety co-ordinator.

Clearly, suitable controls will depend very much on the circumstances, but maintaining communication with people will usually be a key factor, as will staff training and information about how to recognise circumstances likely to promote or initiate violence, and how to deal with difficult people (where this is known or anticipated). The Staff Training & Development Unit run a number of relevant courses on request, and can develop bespoke training with managers (contact Rachel Valentine, x65850, rachel.valentine@manchester.ac.uk). Courses on personal safety are also available through STDU and run by Simon Collister, x57042, simon.c.collister@manchester.ac.uk

The HSE's webpages on violence, at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm>, include more information on the law, statistics, and case studies of how other employers have tackled this issue.

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