

Joint statement on ventilation

Introduction

Working together, we recognise the importance of ventilation as a key part of enabling the health and wellbeing of people across higher education. This is especially important going into winter months when windows start to get closed, and infections can spread more easily.

We share a commitment to the improvement of ventilation and indoor air quality across HE workplaces and want to build upon the improvements made during the Covid-19 pandemic, and where reasonably practicable go beyond minimum standards, and recognise the wider benefits of clean air in our workplaces.

Law

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must abide by statutory health and safety obligations, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Current [legislation](#) requires that effective and suitable provision shall be made to ensure that every enclosed workplace is ventilated by a sufficient quantity of fresh or purified air. To achieve this aim, HEI's are advised to maintain their ventilation systems and monitor technical developments in such systems that are shown to have positive impacts on the health and wellbeing of an HEI community.

What ventilation is and why it is important

Ventilation is the process of introducing fresh air into indoor spaces while removing stale air. Letting fresh air into indoor spaces can help remove air that contains virus particles and prevent the spread of respiratory infections. Good ventilation could also dilute other pollutants in the air and has also been linked to health benefits such as better sleep and concentration, and reduced sickness absence from work.

World Ventil8 Day is a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of ventilation as a crucial part of enabling health and wellbeing of people along with [examples](#) on improved health outcomes and managing complex trade-offs.

Risk assessment

As an HEI, the minimum you must do is identify hazards, evaluate the risk, and take action to eliminate the hazard, or if this is not possible, control the risk. The Health and Safety Executive provides [guidance](#) to assist HEIs in assessing the workplace to identify poorly ventilated areas and decide on the actions to take to improve ventilation.

Carbon Dioxide Monitors

Where there is concern about the levels of ventilation in shared spaces, e.g. in a room with no mechanical ventilation and little obvious natural ventilation, it may be possible to assess the effectiveness of the ventilation by using carbon dioxide monitors.

The HSE provides [guidance](#) in the application of carbon dioxide monitors as a tool in the risk assessment process, and also additional [examples](#) of how to improve ventilation such as planned maintenance schedules of the ventilation system.

Consultation and Communication

Current legislation provides a framework of requirements for trade union representation and employee involvement in health and safety. HEIs are to engage with employees and/or their representatives about matters affecting their health and safety; **ventilation** is one such area.

HEIs should work with trade union representatives, staff, and students to resolve issues regarding ventilation. Sharing the findings from the ventilation risk assessment and listening and responding to ventilation concerns are an integral part of meeting that duty.

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