



Health & Safety Noise Policy

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¹ or earlier if change in legislation or on risk assessment

Amendment Control

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1.0	Aug 2015	
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Policy Summary

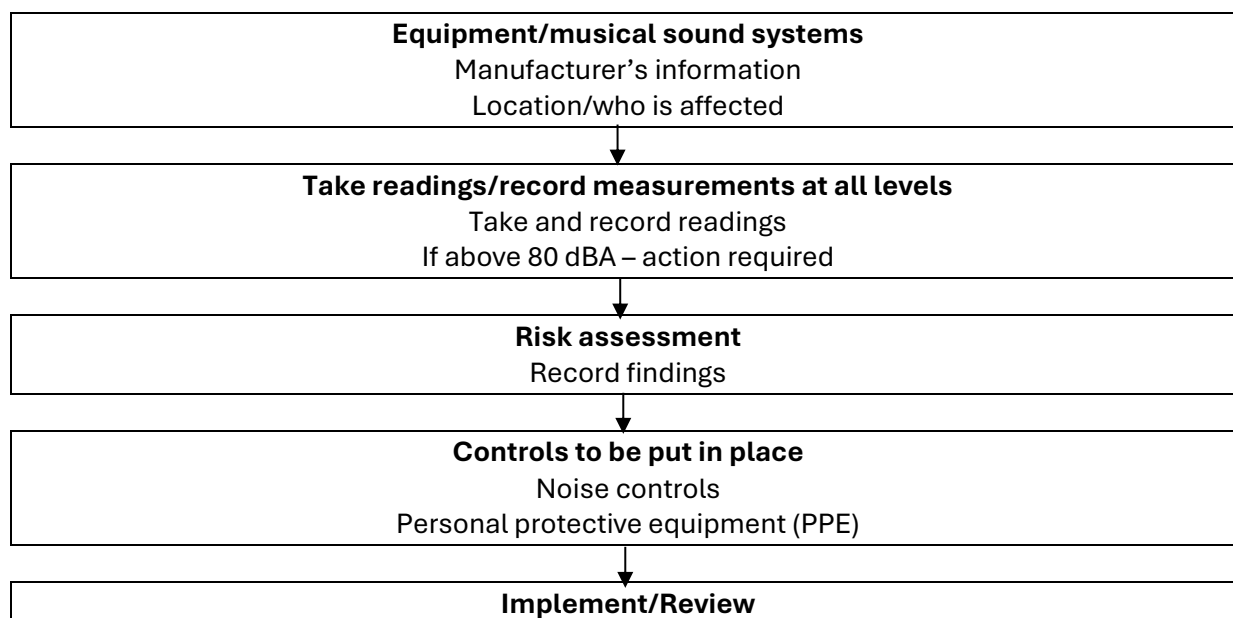
The Control of Noise at Work Regulations have implications for some of the work activities undertaken in the University. This can include noise from machinery and industrial equipment but also equipment such as vacuum cleaners as well as music and entertainment activities taking place within the University. Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) or industrial deafness has long been recognised as a preventable industrial disease and, to this end, the Control of Noise at Work Regulations outline the necessary preventative measures.

The Regulations place statutory obligations on the University to carry out an assessment on the noise levels in those areas where staff, students, visitors and contractors are likely to be exposed to noise at or above defined action levels. Depending on the levels of noise measured and the period of exposure the University is obliged to introduce certain preventative and/or protective measures. Failure to carry out noise assessments or introduce preventative/protective measures can lead to prosecution under the Health and Safety at Work (HSWA) Act.

This policy covers:

- responsibilities
- exposure limit values and action values
- monitoring
- assessment of the risk to health and safety
- eliminate or control exposure to noise
- hearing protection
- responsibilities
- maintenance and use of equipment
- health surveillance
- information, instruction and training

Equipment/sound system – noise assessment flowchart



Notes:

1. Equipment will present more noise over its lifespan with wear and tear.
2. Ensure PPE has correct rating.
3. Consider other people in the area – staff, lecturers etc.

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1. Introduction

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations place a duty on employers to ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise in their workplace which could cause them to lose their hearing or to suffer from tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears).

Hearing loss caused by exposure to noise at work continues to be a significant occupational disease. Hearing loss caused by noise at work is preventable, but once someone's hearing has gone, it will not come back.

Recent research has shown that exposure to noise at work can also cause or contribute to work-related stress, causing a loss of concentration, fatigue and tension and increasing the risks of ill-health associated with stress and other significant health issues.

It is not only employees working with loud machinery that are at risk. Those working in service areas, open plan offices and teaching areas could also suffer from impaired hearing from their workplace.

Working in a noisy environment can also lead to difficulties in hearing instructions, safety warnings, disorientation and failure to identify other potential dangers.

This policy will outline how exposure to noise from university equipment, musical sound systems and other workplace noises is assessed and control measures which can be put in place in order to reduce any risk and therefore comply with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations.

This policy is aimed at staff, students, visitors and contractors who may be exposed to noise on campus.

The policy also covers the selection of plant, equipment and systems of work to minimise noise both at the workplace and in the environment.

2. Responsibilities

Deans of School and Directors of Service are responsible for ensuring that any measures taken to reduce noise levels, in compliance with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations, are maintained and used.

Where Schools/Services are looking to purchase or hire in plant/equipment, the minimising of noise needs to be considered both at the workplace (i.e. below the Lower Exposure Action Value – see section 3) and in the environment. The purchasing of plant and equipment or the hiring strategy must be kept under review to ensure the policy of adopting quieter tools/equipment that manufacturers introduce with the same capabilities and without other adverse effects, e.g. weight, HAV etc.

Employees have a duty under the HSWA and Noise at Work Regulations to safeguard their hearing and are responsible for co-operating with the measures introduced by the University to protect their health and safety.

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These duties include making use of any noise reduction or hearing protective equipment provided.

Students must follow all given instruction and guidance regarding any control measures in place to reduce noise in the workplace and must wear any noise reducing PPE recommended for them. Users (staff and students) are also responsible for the correct use and safe and clean storage of any PPE provided.

Contractors will be obliged by the University to identify any equipment or work methods brought into the University premises or grounds whose operation will exceed the action levels. The University reserves the right to prohibit noisy items of equipment or work methods where quieter alternatives are available. This requires to be covered in the contractor induction by the contract administrator. It will be the responsibility of the Dean of School or Director of Service engaging the contractor to ensure compliance with the University's policy on noise.

Contractors need to be aware that although their work activities may not exceed the lower exposure action level, nuisance noise can still affect local neighbours. Where work has to be done outside of normal working hours, the latter will only be permissible where there is no effect on local residents or businesses. Nuisance noise affecting neighbours will be addressed by complying with the Control of Pollution Act and liaison and compliance with Local Authorities over specific limitations.

Contractors will be responsible for supplying the appropriate PPE for their employees.

3. Exposure limit values and action values

The Noise Regulations require you to take specific action at certain action values or noise levels. These are:

- The levels of exposure to noise for staff, students, visitors and contractors over a working day or week.
- The maximum noise to which staff, students, visitors and contractors are exposed to in a working day.

Lower exposure action values

- Daily or weekly exposure of 80dB
- Maximum noise (peak sound pressure) of 135dB

Upper exposure action values

- Daily or weekly exposure of 85dB
- Maximum noise (peak sound pressure) of 137dB

Levels of noise exposure which must not be exceeded – Exposure limit values

- Daily or weekly exposure of 87dB
- Maximum noise (peak sound pressure) of 140dB

Note - Where personnel are subjected to marked variations in noise levels then the weekly personal noise exposure number will apply.

Exposure action values

The Noise Regulations define 'exposure action values' – levels of noise exposure which, if exceeded, require you to take specific action. There are 'lower' and 'upper' action values.

You need to compare your estimated noise exposure with the action values to know what specific actions are required of you in addition to your general duty to reduce risks from noise.

	Lower exposure action value (decibels)	Upper exposure action value (decibels)
Daily or weekly personal noise exposure ($L_{EP,d}$ or $L_{EP,w}$)	80	85
Peak sound pressure (L_{Cpeak})	135	137

More information can be found here on the HSE's Noise at Work document – <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg362.pdf>

Even where noise does not exceed the lower exposure action levels, noise can still be regarded as a nuisance.

Note – Nuisance noise, while not specifically addressed within the Control of Noise at Work Regulations, can have an adverse health affect and needs to be addressed.

4. Monitoring

A number of activities in the University have already been identified as producing levels of noise at or above one or more action levels and measures have been adopted to reduce the exposure levels. However, the School or Service may have purchased equipment, machinery, etc. since the introduction of the Regulations which when installed and used will exceed the action levels. In such cases it is essential that the relevant Dean of School or Director of Service informs the University Health and Safety Team.

It should be noted that personnel do not need to be exposed to a noise for the whole of a working day for the statutory limits to be exceeded. Likewise personnel may be exposed to highly variable noise levels, e.g. because they move about and use noisy equipment/tools as required.

As an approximation, an assessment should be carried out wherever personnel have to shout to be clearly heard by someone at 2 metres distance, or they find it difficult to talk to each other because of the noise levels.

Where there is doubt the Health and Safety Team will arrange for the noise levels to be measured. Should the measurements confirm that the noise levels are being exceeded, recommendations will be made to the School or Service on noise reduction measures.

Noise assessments should be reviewed if there is any reason to consider they are no longer valid or there has been a significant change in the work.

The change could arise from:

- the installation or removal of machinery
- changes in work patterns or use of machines
- changes in building structure
- machine layout
- the age of the equipment (wear and tear) and lack of maintenance.

Dependent on which noise action level is exceeded will determine the measures to be adopted to protect personnel. In some circumstances noise reduction techniques will be required, in others, the issue of ear protectors will suffice. **Reliance on ear protectors should be seen as a last resort.**

Results of personal noise exposure monitoring will be issued in report form to the Deans of School or Directors of Service, Human Resources & Development (Occupational Health) and to the individual(s) concerned.

Records of noise assessments and of any preventative/protective measures introduced will be kept by the University Health and Safety Team and the relevant Dean of School or Director of Service. All records will be retained for a minimum of 5 years and all personal dosimetry records shall be retained by Human Resources (Occupational Health) for a minimum of 4 years (such records will not be available to third parties without the signed consent of the individual concerned).

5. Assessment of the risk to health and safety

Where the University carries out work which is liable to expose any person to noise at or above a lower exposure action value, the School or Service shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risk from that noise to the health and safety of those personnel. The risk assessment shall identify any control measures required in order to reduce risk and to meet the requirements of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations.

In conducting the risk assessment, the School or Service shall assess the levels of noise to which people are exposed by means of:

- Observation of specific working practices.
- Reference to relevant information on the probable levels of noise corresponding to any equipment used in the particular working conditions.

- If necessary, measurements of the level of noise to which personnel are likely to be exposed can be recorded. The School or Service can then assess whether any persons are likely to be exposed to noise at or above :
 - a lower exposure action value
 - an upper exposure action value
 - an exposure limit value

The risk assessment shall include consideration of:

- The level, type and duration of exposure, including any exposure to peak sound pressure.
- The effects of exposure to noise on persons whose health is at particular risk from such exposure.
- So far as is practicable, any effects on the health and safety of persons resulting from the interaction between noise and the use of toxic substances at work, or between noise and vibration.
- Any indirect effects on the health and safety of personnel resulting from the interaction between noise and audible warning signals or other sounds that need to be audible in order to reduce risk at work.
- Any information provided by the manufacturers of work equipment.
- The availability of alternative equipment designed to reduce the emission of noise.
- Any extension of exposure to noise at the workplace beyond normal working hours, including exposure in rest facilities, supervised by the School or Service.
- Appropriate information obtained following health surveillance, including, where possible, published information.
- The availability of personal hearing protection, with adequate attenuation characteristics to prevent hearing being damaged.

The risk assessment shall be reviewed regularly, and forthwith if:

- There is reason to suspect that the risk assessment is no longer valid, or
- There has been a significant change in the work to which the assessment relates and where, as a result of the review, changes to the risk assessment are required, those changes shall be made.

The personnel concerned or their representatives shall be consulted on the assessment of risk under the provisions of this regulation.

6. Eliminate or control exposure to noise

The University shall ensure that risk from the exposure to noise for all personnel is either eliminated at source or, where this is not reasonably practicable, reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

If any person is likely to be exposed to noise at or above an upper exposure action value, the School or Service shall reduce exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable by establishing and implementing a programme of organisational and technical measures, excluding the provision of personal hearing protectors, which is appropriate to the activity.

The actions taken by the School or Service with regard to the general principles of prevention are set out in the Management of Health and Safety Regulations. The School or Service shall consider the following:

- Other working methods which reduce exposure to noise.
- Choice of appropriate work equipment emitting the least possible noise, taking account of the work to be done.
- The design and layout of workplaces, workstations and rest facilities.
- Suitable and sufficient information and training for personnel, so that work equipment may be used correctly in order to minimise their exposure to noise.
- Reduction of noise by technical means e.g. acoustic curtains, enclosures around static noisy equipment.
- Appropriate maintenance programmes for work equipment, the workplace and workplace system.
- Limitation of the duration and intensity of exposure to noise and appropriate work schedules with adequate rest periods.

The School or Service shall ensure that personnel are not exposed to noise above an exposure limit value or, if an exposure limit value is exceeded, then they must carry out the following:

- Reduce exposure to noise to below the exposure limit value.
- Identify the reason for that exposure limit value being exceeded.
- Modify the organisational and technical measures taken in accordance with the maintenance and use of equipment to prevent it being exceeded again.
- Purchasing of plant and equipment or the hiring strategy must be kept under review to ensure the policy of adapting quieter tools/equipment that manufacturers introduce with the same capabilities and without other adverse effects e.g. weight, HAV etc.

Where rest facilities are made available to personnel, the School or Service shall ensure that exposure to noise is reduced to a level suitable for their purpose and conditions of use.

The School or Service shall adapt any measure taken in compliance with the requirements of this policy to take account of any person whose health is likely to be particularly at risk from exposure to noise. The staff concerned or their representatives shall be consulted on the measures to be taken to meet the requirements of this policy.

7. Hearing protection

If in any area of the workplace, under the control of the University, where people are exposed to noise at or above an upper exposure action value then the School or Service shall ensure that:

- The area is designated a Hearing Protection Zone.
- The area is demarcated and identified by means of a sign specified for the purpose of indicating that ear protection must be worn.



- Personal hearing protection must be made available so that it eliminates the risk to hearing or reduces the risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.
- Personnel will be informed, issued with suitable hearing protection and instructed to wear such protection at all times whilst in the designated hearing protection zone.
- Access to the area is restricted where this is practicable and the risk from exposure justifies it.
- Compliance with Hearing Protection Zone requirements must be monitored and enforced by Management.
- No person shall enter this area unless they are wearing the correct type of personal hearing protection.

Records should be kept of the issue of protectors to individuals and any problems encountered in their use. Provision should be made for protectors and other equipment to be inspected periodically and repaired and replaced as required. Proper provision should be made for clean storage of protectors.

Where ear protectors are recommended:

- Wearers required to be instructed as to why they are being issued
- Where and how they should be worn
- How they should be stored, maintained and replaced.
- Whenever possible users should be given a personal choice of protectors to ensure that the user is comfortable.
- All hearing protection is personal issue only.
- Where the use of hearing protection is deemed to give rise to other and, perhaps, more serious hazards, a separate risk assessment shall be made.

Hearing protection should only be considered as a last measure. Where noise levels at the workplace are identified as likely to exceed the Lower Exposure Action Value, noise reduction techniques such as engineering methods should be utilised first before resorting to the issue and use of hearing protection equipment.

Note - care should be taken that protectors do not over protect. Any protector that reduces the level at the ear below 70dB should be avoided since this over-protection can cause difficulties with communication and hearing warning signals. Users can become isolated from their environment, leading to safety risks, and are likely to remove the hearing protection exposing their hearing to risk of damage.

Where workplace noise levels cannot be maintained below the Lower Exposure Action Value but do not reach the Upper Exposure Action Value then personnel who may be affected must be advised and suitable hearing protection made available for those that ask.

8. Maintenance and use of equipment

Ensure that any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for personal use is properly used, in efficient working order and in good repair.

Any defects need to be reported to the line manager or staff member in charge of the area. Any defective equipment is to be removed from use and replaced.

Ensure that maintenance is carried out on noise producing equipment to maintain or improve on noise emissions.

9. Health surveillance

If the risk assessment indicates there is a risk to the health of any person, then the provision of health surveillance shall include testing their hearing. A record will be kept of any employee undergoing health surveillance by the occupational health support.

Where Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) is suspected and the assessment indicates a further review, the HSE have stipulated this will require referral to an appropriately qualified doctor (i.e. an Occupational Health Physician [OHP]). The risk assessment will need to be reviewed.

That individual must be assigned to alternative work where there is no risk from further exposure to noise taking into account any advice given by the doctor or occupational health professional.

Following a baseline assessment continued health surveillance is provided for a review of the health of any person who has been exposed and should be carried out every 2 years and then every 3 years thereafter unless a cause for concern is identified.

10. Information, instruction and training

Where an employee is exposed to noise which is likely to be at or above a lower exposure action value, the University shall provide those individuals with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training.

The training shall encompass the following:

- Nature of risks from exposure to noise.
- Organisational and technical measures taken to eliminate or reduce the exposure.
- Exposure limit values, both upper and lower.
- Significant findings of the risk assessment, including measurements taken.
- Availability and provision of personal hearing protectors.
- Why and how to detect and report signs of hearing damage.
- Entitlement to health surveillance.
- Safe working practices to minimise exposure to noise.
- Collective results of any health surveillance undertaken, with no way of identifying a particular person.

The information, instruction and training shall consider any significant changes in the type of work carried out.

Any persons carrying out work in a noisy area must have suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training.

More information can be found here on the HSE noise calculator - [HSE noise calculator](#)