



Key Risk Area (KRA)

KRA 2.11 Identifying and Managing Psychosocial Hazards in the Workplace

1. Purpose

This document provides guidance to the University community as to how to identify and manage psychosocial hazards within the workplace. The University of Newcastle, as part of its duty to provide employees with a safe working environment, seeks to identify and remediate any psychosocial hazards within the work environment.

2. Scope

This document relates to all health, safety and wellbeing activities under the management and control of the University of Newcastle and applies to affected staff, students, contractors, and visitors.

For the purpose of this document, references to 'the University' includes activity at all campuses of the University of Newcastle Australia, unless indicated otherwise, and applies to the University Council, Executive Committee, the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team, Leaders and Supervisors, and Workers.

3. Guidelines

3.1. Psychosocial hazards at workplace

Psychosocial hazards at work are aspects of work, including the design or management of work and how people interact, that may cause a stress response which in turn can lead to psychological or physical harm. These may stem from

- a) the way a job is designed, organised managed and supervised
- b) tasks or jobs where there are inherent psychosocial hazards and risks exist (e.g. first responders)
- c) the equipment, work environment or requirement to undertake the duties in physically hazardous environments
- d) harmful social factors at work, workplace relationships and social interactions.

The NSW Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (the “WHS Act”) describes ‘health’ as including both physical and psychological health. Under the WHS Act, the University, has a requirement to eliminate or minimise risk so far as reasonably practicable. The Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2022 describes provisions and obligations for the management of psychosocial risks in the workplace. The SafeWork NSW [Code of Practice : Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work](#) (the “Code”, approved under the WHS Act) provides advice in respect of managing psychosocial hazards at work with the aim to assist organisations to achieve compliance with health and safety duties. This guidance document is consistent with the Code of Practice.

3.2. Intent

The aim of this and associated documentation is to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of the University community and those who come into contact with that community. This document aims to provide guidance as to how to proactively identify and manage psychosocial hazards within the workplace consistent with [HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#).

This document should also be read in conjunction with, [Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative Workplace: Resolving Workplace Concerns and Conflict](#), [Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative University: Diversity and Inclusiveness](#), the [Code of Conduct](#) and all other policies which provide the framework for promoting and supporting appropriate standards of behaviour and managing workplace risks that may contribute to risks to psychological injury or illness.

Consistent with the Code, this document should:

- a) guide a systematic process to the identification and management of psychosocial hazards;
- b) assist members of the University community to identify and assess psychosocial hazards and risks within the workplace;
- c) reinforce the importance of considering psychosocial hazards when assessing other risks such as physical injuries to persons;
- d) guide the response to reporting a psychosocial risk or incident;
- e) identify processes to support safe return and recovery at work if harm should occur;
- f) assist the University to meet its work, health and safety responsibilities;
- g) decrease organisational disruptions and costs resulting from work-related harm, thereby improving organisational performance; and
- h) apply the values of honesty, fairness, trust, accountability and respect as outlined in the University's Code of Conduct.

This guidance is provided under the University [Work Health Safety Policy](#) (the “Policy”). Compliance with the provisions of the policy is compulsory. Breaches of the policy may result in action being taken under misconduct provisions of relevant agreements.

3.3. Guiding Principles

The University recognises its obligations under the WHS Act and the legal obligations of all workers to undertake work in a manner which does not adversely affect the health and wellbeing of others.

The University has adopted an integrated approach to creating healthy and safe systems of work which, in the case of psychosocial risk, the principles of which are;

- a) Prevent work related harm: by eliminating or minimising exposure to psychosocial hazards and developing positive organisational practices and culture;
- b) Intervene early: when individuals and teams report distress, supporting a review of psychosocial risk factors, adopting a risk-based approach, removing so far as practicable the source of harm whilst providing at-risk individuals with psychological support;
- c) Support individuals: with signposting to professional support, mental health first aid if required and programs to support return and recovery at work for work and non-work-related injury and illness;
- d) Promote flourishing: through raising awareness of good mental health and providing opportunities to engage in activities that promote wellness.

“Psychological safety” is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes and that the team and work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Psychological safety is essential to creating high performing teams and is a foundational principle of safe work environment.

“Psychosocial health and safety” is a risk based approach to identifying, assessing and controlling the hazards and risk of psychological harm.

The University recognises that psychosocial hazards can stem from a variety of aspects of the work environment including, but not limited to, the way work is designed, managed or supervised; social factors such as workplace relationships and social interactions; and tasks or jobs where there are inherent psychosocial hazards and risks.

Psychosocial hazards and appropriate controls will vary for every workplace. Whilst it is recognised that a psychosocial hazard may exist in isolation, in most circumstances hazards will occur with a range of psychosocial and physical hazards. Therefore, it is essential that

when physical hazards are assessed, the corresponding psychosocial affect on the workplace should also be assessed taking a risk-based approach.

Reasonable management action, when carried out in a lawful and reasonable way, may be uncomfortable or distressing to some, but it is a legitimate way for leaders and supervisors to lead, direct and control work.

The University does not tolerate any unwelcome or unfair treatment by any person or group of people whilst engaged in activity or business on behalf of or in association with the University which may create a psychosocial hazard for any person.

The University commits to the prompt and confidential treatment of workplace concerns or conflicts according to the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice.

3.4. Identifying psychosocial hazards

A psychosocial risk-based approach involves the application of a risk management framework defined by

1. identify – find out what could cause harm considering the underlying sources
2. assess – understand the nature and extent of the harm and the likelihood of this occurring
3. controls - to reduce the risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards given the circumstances.
4. review and monitor – to ensure the controls are effective in reducing the risk

A risk assessment is not something that only happens once, it is part of a continuous improvement process. It can be applied proactively or in response to an incident, injury or identified hazard.

3.4.1. How to identify hazards

To identify hazards the following information should be considered:

- a) employee surveys;
- b) hazard and incident reports;
- c) complaints and investigations;
- d) issues raised at health and safety committee meetings;
- e) absenteeism and staff turnover;
- f) workers compensation claims;
- g) advice from work health and safety professionals; and
- h) relevant work health and safety key performance indicators.

In addition to these information sources, leaders may identify hazards in talking to staff, specifically about work activities at various times and in different circumstances, for example, at times of heavy workload, or in the absence of a full complement of staff. Situations may also differ for experienced and inexperienced workers about different tasks and situations and about any concerns they may have.

3.4.2. Examples of psychosocial hazards

In identifying psychosocial hazards the following workplace factors should be considered:

- a) role overload
- b) role clarity/ambiguity
- c) lack of control/autonomy
- d) emotional and cognitive demand of the role
- e) change management approaches
- f) levels of support (supervisor and peer)
- g) work environment (including remote work and work design)
- h) recognition and reward
- i) systems of organisational justice
- j) workplace civility/conflict
- k) bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment)

Factors driving workplace hazards can include;

- a) the overall work environment;
- b) interactions and behaviours between people at work;
- c) the design and management of work units;
- d) resourcing decisions;
- e) the need for training, instruction and supervision;
- f) design and management of tasks;
- g) workplace environments;
- h) significant work changes;
- i) the introduction of new technologies, processes or procedures; and
- j) people attitudes and behaviours and workplace civility

3.5. Assessing and prioritising psychosocial hazards and risks

Where hazards have been identified, it is important to assess the nature, extent and likelihood of harm occurring in that context. Consider such things as:

- a) the seriousness of the risk considering likelihood and consequences;
- b) which staff are most at risk;
- c) whether risks are organisational-wide or apply to a specific group or a particular worker;

- d) what controls are currently in place (if any) and how effective they are

A risk assessment should be undertaken when:

- a) it is unclear if the psychosocial hazards may result in harm;
- b) it is unclear how risk assessments may interact with each other to produce a more significant risk; or
- c) changes are planned, or underway that may impact the effectiveness of controls.

Leaders can facilitate a risk assessment process which can be supported by appropriately skilled staff in Human Resources and Health Safety and Wellbeing teams. It is important to consult with workers in this process so as to fully understand the hazards identified and consider the impact of controls and how they may interact if implemented.

3.6. Controlling and reviewing psychosocial hazards

Every workplace is different. There may be a combination of control measures required, which may also impact on other hazards. It is important to focus on controls for those hazards that are identified and assessed.

Control measures to eliminate or minimise hazards and risks may include:

- a) redesigning work activities/good work design;
- b) ensuring safe systems of work, such as policies, procedures and practices are developed and followed in consultation with staff;
- c) providing sufficient information, training, instruction and supervision;
- d) making reasonable adjustments for individual workers;

To ensure the quality of controls, the leader should consider whether the controls are:

- a) adequate (eliminating or minimising risk);
- b) in place to the full extent possible;
- c) monitored and reviewed;
- d) actioned and changed if necessary.

3.7. Reporting and recording a psychosocial hazard or incident

Psychosocial hazards and incidents should be reported through the University's incident and hazards reporting system, AIMS. The person responsible for developing the action plan must follow a risk based approach and can seek the advice and support of Human Resources and Health Safety and Wellbeing.

The AIMS system must be used also to record action plans relating to removing the initial source of harm and any agreed actions to implement appropriate controls. AIMS can also record any safety investigation.

For all reports, but most often in the case of a matter of bullying or harassment involving an individual's supervisor, a confidential report can be made in AIMS or by contacting usafe@newcastle.edu.au. On assessment of the seriousness of the matter, it may be referred for immediate action and/or investigation including to external authorities if required.

3.8. Investigating a psychosocial risk or incident

Investigations should be undertaken in a fair, timely and balanced way. In the case of a psychosocial safety investigation the intent is to try and find out what happened and why, and what can be done to implement or improve the controls so the incident does not happen again.

Investigations may also follow a complaint investigation, where an individual seeks to identify if the matter investigated involves a breach of University policy or poses a further risk to other persons in the workplace. Investigations are generally (but not always) limited to reports of a serious workplace psychosocial incidents.

Depending on the circumstances, investigations may involve conversations with affected workers involving internal staff or external safety professionals or workplace investigators.

It is essential that investigations, including psychosocial assessment should be undertaken:

- a) by persons able to identify psychosocial hazards, sources of risk and causes, and are able to assess risks and recommend early intervention controls. This can be at a local level by a leader, the University Safety Team or Human Resource Services or and external professional;
- b) in a fair, objective and timely manner ensuring due process for both those who raised the issue and in the case of interpersonal conflict or bullying, workers who have had allegations made about them;
- c) with a risk-based approach
- d) whilst ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of affected parties is protected;
- e) whilst ensuring that affected parties (including managers and supervisors) are:
 - informed of their rights and obligations;
 - provided with a copy of relevant policies and procedures;
 - kept informed about possible outcomes, timeframes, rights of appeal and reviews; and
 - provided with adequate and fair support.

Psychosocial risks may be reported as a grievance or complaint, or as a potential breach of a [Code of Conduct](#) or the requirements of an employment contract. The University has existing systems in place to investigate and, if necessary, discipline such behaviour. However, for psychosocial hazards, a systematic work health and safety risk management process is necessary to identify, assess and control underlying causes of, and risks of exposure to affected workers by the behaviour.

Risks must also be controlled whilst a matter is investigated, and this may involve interim management action to ensure the potential for further harm is eliminated or minimised.

This document should be read in conjunction with other University of Newcastle policies including policies for the management of grievances and complaints including [Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative Workplace: Resolving Workplace Concerns and Conflict](#), [Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative University: Diversity and Inclusiveness](#), [Complaints Management Policy](#) and the [Code of Conduct](#).

3.9. Supporting return and recovery at work

The University has a responsibility to adhere to the NSW workers compensation legislation and in doing so, support timely, safe and graduated return to work. This is described in [HSG 5.4 Return to Work Program - Injury Management](#).

Proactively the University supports a mentally health workplace accommodating reasonable adjustment and Well to Work, recovery at work, through [HSG 5.5 Non-Workers Compensation Injuries and Illnesses](#).

The [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) is available to staff to engage in brief intervention, confidential psychological support and counselling. The University approach to Wellbeing is described in [HSG 3.5 Wellbeing](#).

For further information, staff are encouraged to contact the University's Health Safety and Wellbeing team or Human Resource Services.

4. Definitions

In the context of the Health and Safety Management System Framework:

Employer	Means the University of Newcastle (the University).
Executive Committee	Consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer, Chief People and Culture Officer and the Chief Financial Officer, the University Secretary and the President of Academic Senate.
Inherent requirements	Are the essential outcomes that must be achieved as part of a position. They are the tasks or skills that are a major part of the job; they cannot be allocated elsewhere or done a different way and have significant consequences if not performed.
Leader / Supervisor	Any member of the University who is responsible for supervising staff and/or undergraduate or postgraduate students and/or for leading research projects.
Worker	Includes an employee, conjoint, student on work experience, contractor, sub-contractor, and volunteer. A person is a worker if the person carries out work in any capacity for the University or another person conducting a business or undertaking, including work as: (a) an employee, or (b) a contractor or subcontractor, or (c) an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, or (d) an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking, or (e) an outworker, or (f) an apprentice or trainee, or (g) a student gaining work experience, or (h) a volunteer, or (i) a person of a prescribed class.
Workplace	Means any recognised or defined area, location or vehicle where workers carry out their work.

5. Responsibilities

A comprehensive list of health, safety and wellbeing responsibilities is provided in the [HSG 1.2: Roles and Responsibilities](#).

Specific responsibilities under this KRA include:

The University (Officers)

- The University of Newcastle has the primary duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health (including psychological health) and safety of each worker who is engaged, caused to be engaged, influenced or directed by the University.
- The University must ensure that psychosocial hazards at work are effectively managed by first trying to eliminate those hazards, and only if that is not reasonable,

then by minimising the remaining risks as far as is reasonably practicable. This includes consulting, cooperating and coordinating with other persons.

- The University's roles include ensuring there is a systematic approach to work health and safety management by:
 - i. identifying psychosocial hazards in the workplace through worker consultation;
 - ii. considering organisational experience, data and surveys;
 - iii. eliminating or minimising psychosocial hazards by redesigning work areas;
 - iv. providing safe systems of work by managing how, where and when work is done and who is involved in that work;
 - v. providing relevant information, training, instruction and/or supervision for workers on how to remove or minimise psychosocial hazards; and
 - vi. ensuring where required that actions are implemented early, and monitoring occurs of the work environment, processes and worker's health to prevent the onset of work-related psychological injuries or illnesses.
- In determining what is 'reasonably practicable', the University must take into account and weigh up all relevant matters, including:
 - i. the likelihood of the psychosocial hazard or risk occurring;
 - ii. the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or risk;
 - iii. the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate the hazard or risk; and
 - iv. what the University knows or ought reasonably to know about the hazard or risk and ways of eliminating the risk.
- The University has a duty to consult with workers:
 - i. who are likely to be directly affected by a health and safety matter;
 - ii. when carrying out risk management activities; and
 - iii. when it proposes changes that might affect the health and safety of workers.

Supervisors and Leaders

- Undertake training on identifying and dealing with psychosocial hazards and risks;
- Understand and be able to implement risk management;
- Talk to workers about psychosocial hazards at work;
- Proactively exercise due diligence to ensure they comply with all work health and safety legislative responsibilities;
- Take reasonable steps to meet their due diligence obligations concerning psychosocial hazards to health and safety by:
 - i. understanding their work health and safety legal duties;
 - ii. understanding the nature of the University's operations;
 - iii. understanding the hazards and risks associated with those operations;

- iv. having a method to stay up to date with work health and safety matters, including psychosocial hazards;
- v. commit to systematic health and safety management processes; and
- vi. take active measures to ensure management processes are implemented and are effective.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team and Human Resources

- Assist in the identification of psychosocial hazards at work
- Provide advice and support in managing psychosocial hazards at work
- Support appropriate escalation of serious matters and workplace investigations where appropriate.

Workers

- Take reasonable care for their own work health and safety;
- Ensure their actions or lack of actions do not harm others;
- Follow reasonable health and safety instructions, policies and procedures; and
- Advise issues to supervisors, managers or health and safety representatives.

6. References & Related Documents

The following documentation is referenced in, or applicable to this KRA:

[University of Newcastle Privacy Management Plan](#)

[University of Newcastle Enterprise Agreements](#)

[SafeWork NSW Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work](#)

[HSG 1.2 Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#)

[HSG 3.4 Wellbeing](#)

[HSG 5.4 Return to Work Program - Injury Management](#)

[HSG 5.5 Non-Workers Compensation Injuries and Illnesses](#)

[Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative Workplace: Resolving Workplace Concerns and Conflict](#)

[Promoting a Respectful and Collaborative University: Diversity and Inclusiveness Code of Conduct](#)

7. Amendment History

Version	Date of Issue	Approval	Section(s) Modified	Details of Amendment
1	February 2023	CPCO	-	Original version with latest amendment.
2	October 2023	CPCO	All	1. All sections reviewed for legal compliance