



University of Otago

ISO45001 Occupational Health and Safety Management System

TITLE: OHSMS Context Document
OHSMS REF: Planning and Objectives

Organisational Context: Health and Safety

The Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS) outlines the requirements and guidance material for the University of Otago to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all, preventing work related injury and ill health. The University strives to continually improve the health and safety performance for all staff, students, visitors and contractors working at the University, including any location where the work may be conducted.

The University has a broad range of legislative requirements applicable to the health and safety of all operations; while compliance is a requirement, the aim of the OHSMS is to minimise the risk of harm to any individual.

The OHSMS covers all teaching, research and support service activities conducted on all University campuses and locations, and where off-campus activities and research are conducted, including:

- Consideration of and compliance with relevant legislative, regulatory and statutory obligations
- Corporate governance including due diligence and duty of care
- Hazard identification, risk assessment and risk management for routine and non-routine activities
- Event and incident prevention initiatives
- Training, awareness, communication and consultation requirements
- Consideration of the external factors that can influence H&S at the University

1 The University as a ‘Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking’ (PCBU)

The Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAW) Section 5 binds the requirements of the Act to the University as a Crown Entity and is a PCBU in its own right. Therefore, the requirements of the Act apply with respect to workers, volunteers and contractors working at University locations or campuses, or for the University at any location. It is the purpose of this OHSMS to outline how the University meets its HASAW duties and obligations.

2 Duty of Care for Students

The University has 20,000 plus students enrolled including an international student cohort. A large contingent of first year domestic students are accommodated in university colleges (3000 plus beds). In conjunction with attending lectures and studying, students are assimilating into a new community,

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particularly for first year students leaving home. All of this equates to a high level of pastoral care for students' health and safety, to ensure the best outcomes are achieved during their time at Otago.

Postgraduate students have increasing responsibilities and may be authorised to work in higher risk areas (such as laboratories) without direct supervision. Often senior students are tutoring or participating in undergraduate courses and conducting independent postgraduate research. The HASAW s 36 (2) states the primary duty of care:

A PCBU must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of other persons is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking.

While the University does not employ students, there is clearly the duty of care to ensure no harm to those in the place of work, and this is further defined by HASAW s 36. Therefore, the OHSMS must prevent harm to those involved due to University work activities.

3 External issues

As an entity of the Crown, the political environment is a constant external influence. As a Crown entity, it could be argued that the University carries the expectation of a higher level of compliance, and health and safety management includes reputational risks to the University. The University is a public space and as such, many visitors and tourists visit the campus location, requiring a high level of care for all those interacting with the University.

COVID-19 significantly impacted the University through the restrictions on international students and international travel, as well as local restrictions through the various COVID-19 levels, student number fluctuations and changes to core business delivery. The lessons learnt from COVID-19 have been incorporated into our business plans for future pandemic preparation. Flexibility in teaching and working arrangements have changed significantly, and the pandemic further empathised the pastoral care expectations of students.

The current NZ economic situation post-COVID directly impacts all businesses, including the University. With the decreasing revenue due to the reduction of international student enrolments, and increasing costs, the University is required to reprioritise expenditure. As health and safety requirements cannot be a casualty of this process, attention to detail and the consideration of health and safety in projects and future decisions is necessary as hard decisions are made. This includes managing the psychosocial risks generated during challenging times.

As the University implements the Vision 2040 strategic plan and Pae Tata: Strategic Plan to 2030, with an ambition to be Ti Tiriti o Waitangi led, the health, safety and wellbeing expectations of and for Māori

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and our Pacific Partners. The University is embedded in the Dunedin community, and consultation with these stakeholders must be included in our health, safety and wellbeing plans.

Climate change and its resulting impact is in the forefront of businesses following the recent weather events. The University has to plan and adapt to prepare for future significant weather events, as well as taking responsibility for sustainability and our carbon footprint. The impact of climate change on health and wellbeing is a part of the sustainability planning process,

4 Internal issues

An organisation of the size of the University will always have an environment of ongoing change. This includes staffing changes, the inclusion or cessation of courses of study and research projects as supported by research funders, depending on the needs of the country, location of work and different approaches to employment (part time, semester only, online or offline, etc.).

The academic year is very prescriptive with peaks and troughs, such as exams, semesters, etc. This has a flow-on effect for professional staff administering the University requirements, and the associated workloads.

The nature of research, being innovative and novel, means new processes and practices are continually evolving, limiting the application of standard operating procedures and relying more on effective risk assessment. Fortunately, research staff are the experts in their fields and often the best placed to undertake the risk assessment.

Research can be controversial particularly around the areas of genetic modification, engineering and the use of animals in research and teaching. These inherent risks not only require physical controls but psychosocial management including extending to staff whanau.

5 Safety in design

The University has an extensive capital development programme with new buildings and significant refurbishments planned. The University has design guidelines and project management procedures that incorporate health and safety in design requirements including consultation with end users, experts and a documented approval process of final design, modifications to design and post-occupancy review.

6 Management of Change

The university has management of change (MOC) processes to assist staff and facilitate the required changes. Within these MOC processes, there are dedicated Change Manager resources for the

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implementation and management of staff wellbeing during projects and where change is occurring. The Occupational Health Team provide additional support in conjunction with the Change Manager(s) and the provision of the Employee Assistance Programme, etc.

7 Workplace activities

The University as a place of work is extremely complex by location and activity. The work locations can be anywhere in New Zealand and internationally, from remote locations to working in private homes. Many students are required to attend work placements as a part of course requirements and staff often work with and in other institutions and workplaces. Work can be directly or indirectly supervised and can be student-lead.

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