

Management of OHS and professional work practices within the School of Environmental and Rural Science

John Gibson, THoS ERS, May 28th 2008

This document is expected to be updated as procedures are developed and put in place. The current version will be available on the ERS web site in the “for our staff” section. Staff members should access the web copy to ensure they have the most current version.

Background

Maintaining the highest levels of OHS is a moral responsibility, an integral part of professional practice and a legislated requirement. Maintaining a clean and professional looking environment is an important component of maintaining OHS and is also extremely important in maintaining professional work practices and high esteem of our staff and students and ensuring that all visitors leave UNE with a positive image of our work practices and environment. While many areas of the School currently achieve high levels of OHS and professional appearance, this is not universally true across the school and some areas are in a very poor state, with some serious OHS breaches having occurred in recent months

Maintaining high level of OHS and professional work practice is a collective responsibility of all staff and students. Notwithstanding the collective responsibility, a clear delegation of responsibilities is required to ensure that OHS and work practices are maintained at the highest level and can be demonstrated to be at the highest level.

Management of OHS within School buildings and properties

In order to ensure high levels of OHS and professional work practices it must be clear to everyone who has responsibility for oversight of OHS in every space within the School. We also need a process for ensuring that people having OHS responsibility are supported to develop and maintain skills in overseeing OHS. A key component of OHS and of professional work practices is that all spaces are maintained in clean and professional appearance and that all equipment and samples not of immediate use are stored appropriately or disposed of.

To achieve the above, general staff within the school will be given explicit responsibility to oversee OHS and professional work practices within shared spaces managed by the School¹. This will involve mapping every space within the School so that someone is explicitly identified as having responsibility for each space. It is expected that technical staff will be allocated responsibility for laboratories, corridors, lecture theatres and rural properties.

¹ Shared spaces managed by the School include laboratories, animal handling facilities, rural properties, corridors and lecture theatres under School management. It does not include individual staff offices for which OHS responsibility rests with the occupants of the office and their supervisors.

Administrative staff will be allocated responsibilities for those spaces they maintain (eg their own offices and printer/stationery rooms). All staff and their supervisors will have responsibility for the office they occupy.

The School will appoint an OHS Coordinator whose role is to work 1) with general staff and the School Manager to map out responsibilities across the School, 2) take interim responsibility for OHS oversight in areas identified as not having someone in charge, 3) to assist staff assess the OHS status of School spaces, where required, 4) assist staff gain appropriate skills in management of OHS, and 5) with the OHS Working Group 4 to ensure that appropriate standards of OHS management are implemented across the School.

In order for staff with OHS oversight 1) to fulfil their responsibilities it is important that they are aware of who will be working in a given space and 2) they need to be assured that such people have the appropriate levels of skills to work in such a space, either supervised or unsupervised. We will develop a formal policy on supervision of people working in laboratories, field and other settings that have substantive OHS implications. In the meantime, all staff members should ensure that the person in charge of OHS oversight of a particular space is informed about who will be working in that space and under what level of supervision.

It is the responsibility of academic staff members to ensure that all staff and students reporting to them are suitably qualified to undertake the tasks assigned to them and to ensure that suitable supervision and/or training is provided for them to become qualified to work in a particular area.

Management of OHS while undertaking field work

A group led by Frank Leayr and Nick Reid has already made much progress in updating our procedures for authorising field work and ensuring high levels of OHS in the field. Recommendations for alteration of School and UNE procedures will be made soon.

In the meantime the School will use the current UNE forms <http://www.une.edu.au/ohs/forms.php> for authorisation for undertaking field work. The following additional principles and procedures will apply:

- 1) Academic staff members have responsibility for ensuring that all staff and students under their supervision and/or staff and students working on their projects have adequate OHS training and follow School and UNE OHS procedures. Academic staff members should also have seen and approved all requests for authorisation to work in the field by all such staff and students before they are submitted to the Head of School.
- 2) Everyone working in the field will be issued a First Aid pouch which is to be worn on a belt at all times while working in the field. Each individual is responsible for maintaining their first aid kit.
- 3) Everyone taking a 4WD vehicle into a remote location or off-road is required to have passed a 4WD training course or have viewed the UNE 4WD DVD and successfully

completed the UNE written test. Copies of the DVD are available from School Resource Office or the University Motor Pool. The test and driver assessment will be coordinated by the Motor Pool Supervisor, Mark Lawlor. Additional training may be required for driving in rugged and or remote terrain as determined by the supervisor, UNE Motor Pool or the Head of School.

- 4) Every person or group working in a remote location will carry with them an emergency contact device, being a mobile phone or satellite phone or satellite based emergency alarm, as appropriate to the location. Mobile phones may be those owned by the individuals involved, while satellite phones and emergency alarms will be supplied by the project or the School. The School maintains several satellite phones and emergency alarms for use on field work and should be booked in advance to ensure availability.

The role of OHS Working Group 4

At time of writing the terms of reference of OHS Working Group 4 (covering the Schools of Science and Technology and Environmental and Rural Science) are under review. It is expected that they and other OHS working groups will continue to play a key role in oversight of OHS within and between Schools. They will likely continue to undertake detailed reviews of OHS and are expected to provide a resource of expertise and advice in management of OHS, and ultimately oversee that the day-to-day responsibilities, structures and actions outlined in the present document do indeed lead to high standards of OHS.

Terms of Reference for School OHS Coordinator

- Reports to the School Manager
- Work with School Manager on all issues below so that School Resource Office has an up to date record of responsibilities, actions taken, actions planned and actions required to maintain high levels of OHS and professional appearance of all School spaces.
- Becomes a member of OHS Working Group 4
- Develop and maintain an inventory of school spaces and ensure that every space has a person identified who oversees OHS.
- Where a space has no one identified as having responsibility for OHS oversight, assume that responsibility personally until someone else is formally given the oversight responsibility.
- Work with staff identified as having oversight of OHS to identify any training required to assist them perform their OHS oversight responsibilities.
- Work with staff having OHS oversight to identify priorities for action to achieve and maintain a high OHS standard and professional appearance of the space.
- Work with staff having OHS oversight to ensure that OHS assessments are undertaken in a manner and frequency consistent with UNE policy and liaise with School Manager to ensure the School has a register of OHS assessments for all School spaces.

- Work with the School Manager to plan and budget for actions required to achieve high OHS standards and professional appearance.

Terms of reference for general staff oversight of OHS in School spaces

The following ToR are divided into individual responsibilities and collective responsibilities. The “person in charge” here means the staff member who has been given responsibility for oversight of OHS in a given space.

ToR for each individual (person in charge)

- Be familiar with OHS requirements and the need for professional appearance in the spaces for which they have responsibilities for OHS oversight. Where additional training will assist in performing such duties, be proactive in seeking such training.
- Undertake a personal assessment of OHS and professional appearance issues, seeking assistance (e.g. from School OHS Coordinator) as required.
- In consultation with School OHS Coordinator and colleagues, prioritise actions to address OHS and professional appearance issues.
- In collaboration with other School staff, plan and operate actions to achieve high levels of OHS and professional appearance.

Where the person in charge of a space observes that someone is:

- not properly trained to operate in a space.
- is observed to be performing acts that are inconsistent with high level OHS

then the person in charge can immediately discuss the matter with that person and, where necessary, instruct that person to cease their operations and leave that space. In such instances, the person in charge will inform the supervisor of the staff member or student involved and request that they arrange suitable training or avoid actions/behaviour of the person involved that are inconsistent with high standards of OHS. Where the supervisor and the person in charge are unable to agree on a suitable action, the matter should be elevated to the School Manager and where necessary to the Head of School for resolution. It is the responsibility of supervisor and not the person in charge to arrange training or change in behaviour of staff members or students not complying with high standards of OHS. The person in charge may agree with the supervisor that they will assist in providing suitable training on a case by case basis and as appropriate to the circumstances and other responsibilities of the person in charge.

ToR for collective responsibilities

OHS is a collective responsibility of all staff members and hence they should be prepared to assist in ensuring high standards are maintained at all times. Most general staff members operate within a grouping of general staff members within their area of the School and it is this grouping where initial discussions and assistance are normally developed.

- Assist colleagues to review OHS issues and develop a prioritised plan of action for achieving high levels of OHS.
- Assist colleagues in actions to improve OHS and professional appearance of spaces.

- Seek assistance from other staff members and groups² across the School where major tasks are involved and where failure to bring in assistance would delay implementation of high standards of OHS.
- When individually or collectively dealing with OHS issues, avoid tasks that would expose staff members to significant health and safety risks. For example, heavy lifting will be contracted out by the School and handling of hazardous substances should be conducted only by suitably trained staff members.

² Where many hands are needed, assistance should be sought from academic and general staff and post-graduate students.