

Imperial College Union Policy Noise Policy

Audience: All Staff
Owner(s): Leadership Group
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1. Policy statement

Imperial College Union is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of its members, staff, customers, suppliers, visitors and all others who may be affected by its activities.

Imperial College Union recognises that good management of health, safety and welfare is essential to the success of the organisation and is a sign of a well-managed organisation.

Imperial College Union is committed to ensuring that procedures are in place to identify hazards, assess risk and set objectives to improve the management of health, safety and welfare.

Imperial College Union acknowledges its duty to ensure that all relevant legislation regarding health, safety and welfare is adhered to and that resources are made available to ensure health, safety and welfare.

Imperial College Union is committed to developing a positive safety culture, based on the involvement of staff and volunteers in health and safety management. Imperial College Union will therefore use consultative forums and mechanisms to involve staff and volunteers in health and safety management, and will endeavour to provide relevant training to all staff and students.

Imperial College Union commits to reviewing this policy at least every 2 years, or as and when necessary, with approval for the policy to take place at the Board of Trustees.

2. Introduction

Exposure to loud noise can cause permanent damage to your hearing. It may be temporary but it can often be permanent. It can take the form of hearing loss but can also result in sensations of permanent noise or ringing in the ears, known as 'tinnitus', which can prove even more distressing.

Employers have a legal duty to reduce the risk of hearing damage to their employees and there are actions which must be taken if noise exceeds certain defined limits.

What Are These Limits?

They are based around the concept of 'Action Levels' - the level at which action must be taken to reduce the harmful effects to those who would be exposed to the noise.

The first action level is set at 85dB (decibels) averaged over an 8-hour day. At this level, an employer must provide information and training to employees on the health implications associated with noise. They must also make hearing protection equipment available.

The second action level is set at 90dB. Above this level, an employer must do all that is reasonably practicable to reduce noise levels, using whatever control measures are available. Until effective controls can be implemented, use of hearing protection is mandatory. Each affected area must be declared a mandatory noise zone with appropriate Safety Signs put up and there must be regular health surveillance.

An example of this is:

- A normal conversation can register between 50dB and 60dB
- A busy high street might register between 78dB and 85dB
- A chainsaw can register between 115dB and 120dB

Noise Risk Assessment

The first step is to carry out a noise Risk Assessment if there is reason to believe that noise may exceed the first action level. A rough indication of when this level has been reached is when people have difficulty conducting a conversation at a range of about 2 metres apart. All findings must be properly documented, including the actual exposure calculations where they exceed the first action level. Then an action plan must be produced and the information made available to those who could be exposed to the risks.

Noise Protection

Once the noise level exceeds the first action level, an employer must provide hearing protection if an employee requests it. Should the noise exceed the second level, then an employer has to provide hearing protection whether or not it has been requested. They must also do all that is reasonably practical to ensure that employees use it properly and if employees refuse to comply, disciplinary action can be taken.

Various types of hearing protection are available, depending on the environment in which the noise is occurring. However, some basic requirements must be met namely:

- It must be at least effective enough to reduce noise exposure below the second action level
- It must be compatible with any other kind of personal protection which may be in use
- It must be suitable for the circumstances and environment in which it is going to be used

How Dangerous Can Noise be?

Apart from the risk of hearing damage, whether temporary or permanent, there are other risks associated with excess noise in the workplace. It interferes with communication in general and makes it more difficult to hear warning signals and alarms. Noise can also be a distraction, particularly sudden loud sounds which can startle people who are working around potentially dangerous machinery. Moreover, noise is often cited in stress complaints.

Prevention First

It is important to emphasise that Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) should only ever be considered as a last resort. Firstly, employers should seek to eliminate or reduce the intensity of the noise by engineering measures and/or reduce the amount of time that employees are exposed to it. Noise can present a real hazard in the workplace and its effects may take some time to become evident, but when they do, it is often too late to do anything about it.

As an important health and safety issue, noise is a prime example of 'Prevention being better than Cure'.

3. Responsibilities

Board of Trustees

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a statutory duty on organisations to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of its employees at work and other people who may be affected by their activities, e.g., membership, volunteers, members of the public.

The Board of Trustees, as the governing body of the Union, has overall and final responsibility for Health and Safety matters within the Union and for ensuring that Health and Safety legislation is complied with.

The Managing Director

The Managing Director has delegated responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and review of the Health and Safety Policy and associated policies. As required by the 'Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1993' the Managing Director is named as the 'competent person' who will ensure compliance with Health and Safety. In particular the MD is responsible for:

- The setting of Health and Safety standards and objectives.
- The allocation of the necessary financial resources.
- Identifying and allocating Health and Safety responsibilities to Senior Managers / Departmental Heads.

Leadership Team Lead

The Managing Director will delegate to a membership of the leadership team the following responsibility:

- Ensuring general risk assessments are undertaken and made available to all employees.
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of Health and Safety activities and the Union's Health and Safety Policy and associated policies and procedures, and for ensuring that, at the strategic level, performance standards and timescales are adhered to.
- Ensuring accidents are investigated and reported to the Board of Trustees.
- Putting in place arrangements to monitor the maintenance of the premises and equipment.
- Chairing the Students' Union's Operational Health and Safety Committee and ensuring it has the time, facilities and resources to carry out its business effectively.
- Keeping under review this Health and Safety Policy and the Health and Safety performance of the Students' Union.

Line Managers

Health and Safety is a delegated line management responsibility requiring managers to undertake operational Health and Safety duties identified in this Policy and individual policies and procedures associated with Health and Safety. All Departmental Heads will be trained in relevant Health & Safety courses (i.e., Risk Assessment, COSHH) and where appropriate (IOSH, NEBOSH) to ensure areas/ teams are managed safely.

Line Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that departmental activities are conducted in accordance with Union policy, legislative, and other formal standards and that those hazards having the potential to cause harm are risk assessed and identified controls are implemented.
- Ensuring that employees receive sufficient information, training and supervision on Health and Safety matters.
- Producing safe systems of work and the means for complying with this Policy and other individual policies and procedures associated with Health and Safety.
- Where necessary, organising supervision to control the working environment and the maintenance of safe standards.
- Investigating accidents, or near misses, to establish causes and prevent recurrence.
- The Health and Safety induction of new staff, volunteers and students and ensuring that information, instruction and training are provided to meet individually identified needs.
- Identifying and monitoring the adequacy of the specific Health and Safety responsibilities of staff and students.
- Reviewing the above arrangements at regular intervals, making adjustments as necessary.

Individual Members of Staff, Volunteers, Students and Visitors

Individual members of staff, students and visitors have a legal duty to co-operate and comply at all times with the Health and Safety information, instruction and training provided. They must bring to the attention of their line manager or duty manager, without delay, any hazards identified, or improvements identified as necessary. If a hazard is seen, it should be removed or dealt with as soon as possible if it is safe to do so. It should also be reported using the Unions incident reporting system as a matter of priority.

Individual members of staff and students have a duty to take reasonable care for the Health and Safety of themselves and for other persons whom their actions or omissions may affect. Specifically, no person shall intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare. Serious breaches of the Health and Safety Policy (e.g., misusing equipment, deliberately putting someone else's safety in danger) will be dealt with through the Union's Disciplinary Procedure.

Health and Safety matters may also be raised by any employee at 1-2-1 meetings, team meetings and at Town Hall meetings, which occur regularly.

Operational Health and Safety Committee

The Operational Health and Safety Committee will meet at least once per term, although additional meetings may be called by the Managing Director, Officer Trustees, or the Board of Trustees should the need arise. Membership of the committee will be determined by the Managing Director.

The Committee will have the following terms of reference:

- To maintain and review the measures necessary to ensure the Health and Safety of Union employees, students and others engaged in legitimate activities on its premises.
- To set and review H&S performance and objectives to improve H&S management and maintain a positive H&S culture.
- To monitor the management processes employed within the Students' Union to mitigate risk, notably the implementation and annual review of risk assessments.
- To monitor and review H&S related incidents, implement investigations and complete corrective action (where appropriate and necessary) in a timely manner not to exceed 6 months.

- To monitor and review the H&S audit and inspection process, both internal and external, and implement recommendations where appropriate.
- To monitor and review the adequacy and implementation of H&S related training, awareness and competency standards.
- To enable complaints and reports from employees to be investigated, remedial action to be implemented, and response provided.
- To submit an annual report to the Board of Trustees summarizing the committee's output and effectiveness.

In addition to the Operational Health and Safety Committee, the Board of Trustees may from time to time determine the need for a sub group of the Board to take on specific governance oversight of the Union's Health and Safety activity to ensure sufficient scrutiny and consideration is given to this area of work.

4. Arrangements

Bars & Venues

Our venues and bars are clearly the areas where noise checks are most required. Whenever we have music playing in our venues and bars, the bar manager (or staff member responsible) should check the noise levels on a regular basis, which will be dictated by the risk assessment for the space. The relevant staff member should at all times be able to access a master control for the volume and should turn the control down to ensure high levels of volume are not sustained for extended periods of time. All staff working in our bars & venues should always be able to access free hearing protection.

Clubs, Societies & Projects

Where some of our CSPs may be in charge of high volume music that is likely to surpass the first action level, the relevant responsible person (either the President of the society, or whoever is responsible for the event) should be trained as stated by this policy. They should provide a risk assessment which includes the relevant information as stated earlier in this policy. The person responsible should always be able to access a master control for the volume, if a relevant member of Union staff who has been appropriately trained asks for the CSP to turn down the volume due to valid concerns, then the CSP must either ensure the staff member has access to the master control or turn down the volume as requested by the staff member. The society are also responsible for ensuring all students working the event, always have access to free hearing protection.

General Arrangements

At any time where either staff, or students, will be exposed to volumes above the first action level, the relevant member of staff in charge of the space, has provided a risk assessment and provides free hearing protection as required.

5. Review

The Policy Owner is responsible for conducting a comprehensive review of their policies at a minimum of every 3 years or as required to stay current with applicable laws and/or Imperial College Policies.

The purpose of the review is to determine:

- if the policy is still necessary and accurate;
- if the policy should be combined with another policy or if it should be rescinded;
- if the policy is up to date with current laws and regulations and Imperial College policies;
- if changes are required to improve the effectiveness or clarity of the policy.

6. Training

Health and safety legislation requires employers to provide adequate health and safety training. The College provides a comprehensive training programme that is available to all staff and postgraduate students, mostly without charge. Undergraduate training is dealt with in departments.

Training enables staff to acquire the skills and knowledge that, with experience, make them competent in the health and safety aspects of their work. The College has a general duty to provide information, instruction and training and to provide a safe place of work under Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Regulation 13 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 also specifies a duty to ensure adequate health and safety training on recruitment, on being exposed to new risks because of a change of responsibilities, or because of the introduction of new equipment, new technology or changed systems of work.

The quality of the sessions is maintained through the use of in-house expertise and the use of outside consultants where appropriate. Certain courses lead to nationally recognised certification, for example, on successful completion of the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health Certificate.

Courses in the programme can also be tailored to meet the requirements of individual departments. Some courses are repeated throughout the year to enable as many people as possible to take part. External participants are welcomed on most courses; fees are indicated in the programme.

7. Safety induction

Building safety inductions are needed for all persons entering College premises, so that they have access to basic safety information