



GMBSOs - Appointment and Role

Appointment and Role of GM Biological Safety Officers

Heads of Schools are required to appoint a local GM Biological Safety Officer (and deputy) to cover those areas where genetic modification work is undertaken. In some Schools, activities are split between different sites or buildings in which case it may be necessary to appoint more than one GMBSO. The appointment of a GMBSO is a University Court requirement rather than a legal requirement.

A person appointed as a GMBSO should have relevant experience and expertise to enable them to carry out their role effectively. Typically this would mean experience of working in a containment laboratory (or similar facility) and familiarity with the type of work undertaken in the area they cover. It is important GMBSOs are able to recognise risks associated with the particular types of work involved and to be aware of the measures required to control such risks.

The primary role of the GMBSO is to advise and assist the Head of School in the management of health and safety matters related to biological risks, including those associated with genetic modification work. The GMBSO should liaise closely with the School Safety Adviser and other local safety advisers since many aspects will overlap with other activities taking place in the laboratories.

Since the role of GMBSO is an advisory one to the Head of School, it is appropriate as with other health and safety roles, there be a direct reporting line to the Head of School rather than into the general management structure at some other level. Naturally, the GMBSO should, and is expected to, use their discretion as to whom the most appropriate person is to liaise with over a particular matter and in many cases this would probably be heads of Divisions/Institutes/Centres etc. The ability of safety advisers (GMBSOs being just one example) to draw matters directly to the attention of senior managers makes them aware of any problems thus enabling them to ensure appropriate actions are taken in a timely and effective manner.

GMBSOs should be overseeing arrangements for biological safety on a location basis (corresponding to how the GM safety committees have been set up). This will inevitably mean there are instances where they oversee researchers from different Schools. The GMBSO should report to their own head of School, that is the one responsible for health and safety at the particular premises. If there is an issue that pertains to researchers from another School, it is for the head of School who is responsible at the premises to liaise with the researcher's head of School to ensure any necessary action is taken. Where there is a large group present from another School, a Deputy GMBSO who is a member of the other School should be appointed to cover those particular areas. This Deputy GMBSO would report to their own head of School.

It is a requirement of the University Court that all Schools, institutes, centres, etc prepare and issue statements of School health and safety policy which will highlight local hazards, controls, procedures etc., relevant to the particular School, etc. GMBSOs should be actively involved and assist School Safety Advisers in the production, implementation, monitoring and review of School policies and procedures as they relate to biological safety. For those areas where work with pathogens or genetic modification work is carried out, there should be local policies/documentated procedures in place that include

- Disinfection procedures;
- Waste disposal procedures;
- Laboratory rules/working practices;
- Handling of sharps; and
- What to do in the event of an accident or incident.

GMBSOs are not expected to carry out GM risk assessments themselves (except for their own work) but it is anticipated they will co-ordinate and oversee the implementation of risk assessments throughout the areas they cover. GMBSOs should ensure the GM Safety Committee reviews and approves the risk assessments in advance of work starting and that records of risk assessments and proceedings of GM Safety Committees are maintained for at least 10 years after work is completed.

The School Health and Safety Committee should carry out regular School inspections in order to identify the hazards and risks associated with School activities, and establish that these are being adequately controlled, or set in motion remedial measures. For those areas where work with pathogens or genetic modification work is carried out, the GMBSO should advise and assist as appropriate.

School Safety Advisers are required to monitor to ensure that staff and students are receiving suitable and adequate training. For those areas where work with pathogens or genetic modification work is carried out, the GMBSO should advise and assist as appropriate.

Various types of notifications have to be made to the enforcing authorities for biological work. GMBSOs should ensure the necessary notifications are made and consents and licences obtained in advance of the work starting. GMBSOs are expected to keep up to date information on the types of work ongoing in the areas they cover and this to be readily available on request from the Health and Safety Department. The University Biological Safety Adviser will provide help and advice on what is required.

The term Officer rather than Adviser has been used in the title of this post since it is the one traditionally used in association with GM work and that used in guidance produced by the Health and Safety Executive. However, it is an advisory and co-ordinating role and the terms Officer and Adviser can be used interchangeably. Use of the former does not imply any additional legal obligations or duties. GMBSOs are appointed on the same basis as other safety advisers and for further information on legal aspects of their

appointment should consult the section in the School Safety Advisers Handbook (available on the Health and Safety Departments website).

Like the School Safety Adviser, the GM Biological Safety Officer has no statutory obligations specifically laid upon him or her, but should act as a focus for the flow of health and safety information to, from and within their School. The GMBSO will be the primary point of contact for liaison on biological safety matters between the University Biological Safety Adviser and the School.

A model list of duties which a Head of School may delegate to a GMBSO is outlined in Appendix 1. These duties will automatically be assumed by default in the absence of any alternatives being issued. Unless an additional appointment is made within a School, it is assumed the GMBSO will advise on all aspects of biological safety and that reference to biological safety includes GM. The duties of a Deputy GMBSO would run in parallel.

Biosafety Unit
Health and Safety Department
University of Edinburgh
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Appendix 1

MODEL LIST OF DUTIES OF A GM BIOLOGICAL SAFETY OFFICER

The duties of the GMBSO should include:

1. Being fully familiar with the relevant parts of the University Health and Safety Policy and with the School health and safety policy(s).
2. Providing advice to members of the School on matters of biological health and safety and in particular assisting the School Safety Adviser in advising the Head of School on the formulation and revision of School health and safety policy and procedures as they relate to biological safety.
3. Assisting and advising the School Safety Adviser when acting with the delegated authority of the Head of School in matters of urgency relating to biological safety.
4. Referring promptly to the Head of School or the University Biological Safety Adviser on any biological health and safety problems which cannot be resolved locally on a timescale commensurate with the risk. Referral should always be made of any matters where the GMBSOs advice or recommendations are not accepted.
5. Liaising with the University Biological Safety Adviser and other central advisers for biological health and safety matters.
6. Notifying the University Biological Safety Adviser of new micro-organisms brought into the University.
7. Providing information on request to the University Health and Safety Department as to the types and locations of various work including making an annual report of GM activities as required by the University Court.

8. Attending meetings of the local GM Safety Committee and ensuring it meets at least annually, and, when necessary, attending meetings of the School health and safety committee.
9. Ensuring appropriate risk assessments have been made for all GM work and these are reviewed and approved by the GM Safety Committee in advance of work starting and that records of risk assessments and proceedings of GM Safety Committees are maintained for at least 10 years after work is completed.
10. Ensuring the necessary notification required for GM work are made to the Health and Safety Executive (via the University Biological Safety Adviser) in advance of work commencing and, where necessary, that appropriate consents or approvals are received.
11. Ensuring the necessary licences required for work with certain animal or plant pathogens (or materials that may contain these) are obtained by members of the School.
12. Advising and assisting, as appropriate and in relation to biological safety matters, the School Safety Adviser in conducting or co-ordinating systematic health and safety inspections and accident investigations (with Safety Representatives of the recognised Trade Unions having employees working in the School), to identify unsafe or unhealthy conditions or work practices, and monitoring that preventative action is recommended and pursued.
13. Ensuring that accidents, near misses and instances of occupational ill health relating to biological hazards are reported to the School Safety Adviser.
14. Disseminating biological health and safety information and reports to appropriate members of School staff and students.
15. Assisting the School Safety Adviser in ensuring that new members of the School receive adequate induction with respect to biological health and safety matters.
16. Assisting the School Safety Adviser in identifying members of the School for appropriate:
 - biological health and safety training events;
 - occupational health/medical surveillance regards biological risks;
 - and liaison with other internal or external health and safety specialists.
17. Assisting the School Safety Adviser in monitoring in the School that, in relation to biological safety:
 - a high standard of housekeeping is maintained;
 - adequate precautions are taken relating to any special existing or new biological hazard;
 - adequate precautions are taken regarding any changes to be made; plant, equipment (eg microbiological safety cabinets) and processes are being maintained as required by any relevant statutory provisions;
 - staff and students are suitably informed, instructed and trained;
 - adequate health and safety records are maintained where appropriate, i.e. as required by relevant statutory provisions or by University or School health and safety policy;
 - safe working practices and procedures, together with any necessary risk assessments for project work (especially for postgraduate students), are complied with;
 - personal protective equipment needs are assessed and that sufficient

suitable personal equipment is available and used;
and other aspects that legislation or University/School policy may dictate are catered for.

18. Assisting the School Safety Adviser in reviewing periodically health and safety procedures within the School (as they relate to biological safety).
19. Such other health and safety duties that may be assigned by the Head of School.

These duties will only occupy a part of the time of the person concerned, but the Head of School should ensure that sufficient resources, in terms of time, finance and space are allocated to enable the GMBSO concerned to function efficiently and effectively.

Note: The information contained within these pages is for use by University of Edinburgh personnel only.

If you wish to discuss any issues relating to the above documents please contact the University Biological Safety Adviser.