ROLE OF THE BIOLOGICAL SAFETY OFFICER (BSO)

The Biological Safety Officer (BSO) is a specialist adviser to the Head of School/Institute on matters relating to safe handling of biological materials.

The Head of School/Institute has the duty to ensure that policy is complied with in their area. In so doing they will usually need the assistance of someone with a detailed knowledge of the work, the associated hazards and risks, and the appropriate legislation and guidance on handling biological materials.

The BSO should be formally appointed by the Head of School/Institute so that they can act with their authority in dealing with biological safety. Deputy BSOs may also be appointed. It is now common practice within the University to appoint an academic member of staff to advise on the scientific elements of the work, while a Professional Services staff member provides advice on containment and assists with record keeping.

A list is given below containing the essential elements of a BSO’s functions, which can be divided into 4 groups: Advisory, Investigative, Record keeping and Monitoring.

Advisory role

- The BSO should be able to provide advice on local rules and procedures, risk assessment, appropriate facilities for the work, appropriate control measures and approval/notification procedures.
- The BSO should also be able to assist supervisors in identifying training needs within the School or Institute, in particular to ensure the competence of workers to carry out the work safely.
- The BSO should be the main point of contact with Safety Services for advice on occupational health and safety matters.

Investigation

- The BSO should investigate the circumstances of any accidents or untoward incidents involving biological agents, in liaison with the College Safety Adviser and Safety Services, and ensure that appropriate action is taken.
Record Keeping

- The BSO should keep an up-to-date record of work with biological materials and the locations.
- The BSO should liaise with Safety Services to ensure that documentation is maintained and made available on request.
- The BSO should ensure that local records of accidents and untoward incidents are kept.

Monitoring

The BSO has a key function in monitoring standards of safety performance. In particular the BSO should ensure that the following are reviewed on a regular basis:

- all work has been assessed and where appropriate approved;
- appropriate supervision is provided for the work;
- procedures for safe handling are being adhered to, by visits to laboratories and facilities;
- biological agents are stored and transported appropriately;
- decontamination is adequately controlled in routine activities, spillages and disposal;
- safety related equipment e.g. cabinets and autoclaves are adequately maintained and tested.