

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR OBTAINING SAFETY APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Policy

Research is a crucial activity of a University. The University has an obligation to provide a healthy and safe environment for the conduct of research activities, and at the same time to ensure that such research activities do not impose an unacceptable risk to the personnel of the University. Administrative bodies of various research funds also require that the safety aspects of research projects be addressed before they are given consideration for funding allocation. It is the University's policy to use the risk assessment approach in the research safety approval system for both external and internal funding/admission applications.

2. Scope of Safety Approval System

Research activities of various scales are going on in the University everyday. At the present stage, three types of research activities are included in the safety approval system; they are:

- (a) Research projects supported by the Research Grants Council (RGC) Competitive Earmarked Research Grant (CERG),
- (b) Research projects supported by the Central Research Grant of the University,
- (c) Research degree projects (MPhil/PhD programmes).

These three types of research activities account for the bulk of the University's research efforts. As safety approval is given on a project basis, safety approval obtained for one type of application may be used for another type of application if the research project concerned is virtually the same for both applications. The procedure for obtaining such approval is laid down in the following sections and will be reviewed by the Health, Safety and Environmental Committee on a regular basis.

3. General Procedures for Safety Approval

At the stage of filling in the application documents for the targeted research activities, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator or supervisor (in case of PhD/MPhil admission) to decide whether safety approval is required and indicate accordingly in the application. The safety aspects to be considered are as follows:

- Chemical
- Biological
- Ionizing radiation
- Non-ionizing radiation

Principal investigator/supervisor should refer to the *Safety Approval Checklists (HSE Form 22-BS, CS, IR, NIR)* for guidance on determining the need for safety approval. If one or

more of these areas have been indicated as requiring approval, the principal investigator/supervisor should proceed to fill in a ***Safety Approval Application Form (HSE Form 23)***. This application form includes a risk assessment section on those safety aspects requiring approval which would help the applicant to consider systematically the risk of the research activities and to determine the necessary control measures.

The duly completed ***Safety Approval Application Form (HSE Form 23)*** should be submitted to the concerned Departmental Research Committee (DRC) which is the formal authority for safety approval.

The concerned DRC should appoint a staff member with sufficient research and/or safety background to coordinate the assessment of the submitted ***Safety Approval Applications***. The coordinator should arrange for the Safety Approval Application to be assessed by HSEO and, where appropriate, by a departmental staff member who is familiar with the relevant research area. Comments on the application by both HSEO and the involved departmental staff should be communicated in writing to the coordinator.

The coordinator, upon being satisfied that an application is acceptable on safety grounds, should then recommend to the chair of the DRC to issue formal safety approval. The recommendation should be made by using the ***Safety Approval Recommendation Form (HSE Form 24)***. Formal approval should be given by the DRC by signing Part E of the ***HSE Form 23*** and returning the original copy to the principal investigator/supervisor. The formal safety approval document should be kept by the principal investigator/supervisor who should then indicate on the research application about the safety approval or, if required, attach the safety approval document to the research application.

4. Appeal Mechanism and Arbitration

In case the DRC rejects a ***Safety Approval Application*** based upon the recommendation of the assessment panel, it may require the applicant (the principal investigator or supervisor) to re-submit a revised ***Safety Approval Application Form (HSE Form 23)*** incorporating additional risk mitigation measures. If the applicant has a grievance against the decision of the DRC, he/she may take the matter up to the Chairman of the University's Health, Safety and Environmental Committee for a final decision. A special panel may be commissioned by the Chairman of the Health, Safety and Environmental Committee to arbitrate the case.

Also, in the case that the coordinator receives conflicting comments on an application from different parties, the concerned DRC should investigate the case, and seek advice from the Chairman of the Health, Safety and Environmental Committee before making a decision.

5. Central Monitoring

HSEO, with the assistance of Research Office (RO) and the relevant research funding administration bodies, would play a central monitoring role to ensure that all targeted research funding applications go through the appropriate safety approval procedures. As part

of a monitoring function, HSEO may require a principal investigator/supervisor to provide documentary evidence that he/she has gone through the process of risk assessment and obtaining safety approval for a particular research project. Attention of the Management will be drawn to those cases not complying with the approved procedures.

A simple flow chart summarizing the proposed arrangement is attached.

6. Information and Assistance

Necessary documents for obtaining safety approval are listed below and available from the HSEO homepage.

- **HSE Form 22-B** Safety Approval Checklist - Biological Safety
- **HSE Form 22-CS** Safety Approval Checklist - Chemical Safety
- **HSE Form 22-IR** Safety Approval Checklist – Ionising Radiation Safety
- **HSE Form 22-NIR** Safety Approval Checklist – Non-ionising Radiation Safety
- **HSE Form 23** Safety Approval Application Form
- **HSE Form 24** Safety Approval Recommendation Form

Principal investigators/supervisors may contact the following information sources for further information on the following areas:

Administrative procedures for safety approval	Chairman of DRC / HSEO
Risk assessment and safety approval checklist	HSEO (Ext. 8396)
Overall procedures for research applications	RO (Ext. 5020)

Flow Chart for Obtaining Safety Approval

