

# Health & Safety Bulletin

January 2017

WARWICK  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

## Responsible Research

**Northumbria University receives a fine of £400,000 for failing to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of persons not in their employment, namely students. The University were also accused of not ensuring that those involved in research were competent to perform the work.**



This bulletin is to remind those working in any research to refer to the health and safety guidance aimed at the Higher Education sector entitled, '[Responsible Research - Managing Health and Safety in Research](#)' which was published in October 2012 and covers a wide range of research fields.

**Whilst the research in question may not relate directly to the type of research we conduct here at the University of Warwick, it clearly demonstrates the need to ensure that a full risk assessment of the research is conducted and that full consideration is given to the competence and supervisory needs of those conducting any research.**

The [BBC news feed](#) contains further information: In brief, the students were each given a dose of caffeine equivalent to 300 cups of coffee, and were admitted to intensive care for dialysis as a result after a calculation error led to violent side-effects. They had been given a 30g dose rather than the required 0.3g dose: such a dose could have been fatal.

The prosecution claimed that the researchers "were not experienced or competent enough and they had never done [this aspect of the research] on their own before" and there was no risk assessment in place for the research activity in question.

Whilst both students have made a full physical recovery, they do suffer from some longer term effects, and it is anticipated that civil claims for compensation will ensue.

The prosecution was carried out by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following serving an improvement notice in April 2015 and months of investigation by the HSE with the individuals concerned and the senior management team. The fines were for breaches of:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Section 3 – Duties of Employers to non-employees, and,
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Regulation 3 – Absolute duty for employers to ensure that '**suitable and sufficient**' risk assessments are carried out.

Staff involved in research activities are reminded that risk assessments must be carried out and clearly documented **before research commences**, and that such risk assessments must include consideration of the competence and supervision of those carrying out the research.

Information on risk assessment is available through the University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing web-page on [Risk Assessment](#). This web-page also contains a link to the UCEA/USHA/IOSH guidance '[Responsible Research](#)', which gives practical examples of risk assessment and health and safety management in relation to different types of research work.

Useful links:

[Report all incidents and near misses](#)

[Health & Safety webpages](#)

[Need advice on health & safety](#)