



**Universities
Safety and Health
Association**

Conference Programme*

**Wednesday 7th - Friday 9th October 2026
Aston University**

Welcome from the USHA Chair

Welcome to the USHA Conference 2026 and thank you for joining us at Aston University for what promises to be an engaging and thought-provoking few days of learning, networking and professional development.

As health and safety professionals working within higher education, we continue to navigate a rapidly evolving landscape. The challenges facing our institutions are increasingly complex, requiring us not only to provide technical expertise but also to influence, collaborate and lead at a strategic level. This year's programme has been designed with these challenges in mind, bringing together speakers, practitioners and thought leaders from across the sector and beyond to share knowledge, experiences and practical solutions.

Whether you are attending the Fire Safety Conference, the Health and Safety Conference, one of our specialist sessions, or simply taking the opportunity to connect with colleagues, I encourage you to make the most of everything the event has to offer. Some of the most valuable learning often comes from the conversations between sessions, the sharing of experiences, and the opportunity to build relationships with peers facing similar challenges.

On behalf of the USHA Executive Committee, thank you for your continued support of our community. I hope you find the conference both valuable and enjoyable, and that you leave with new ideas, fresh perspectives and renewed confidence to help shape safer, healthier and more resilient universities. I look forward to meeting many of you during the conference.

**Jane Ball
USHA Chair**

***The programme is in draft format and subject to change**

Wednesday 7th October

Fire Safety Conference

09:00 – 09:30	Registration, Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking
09:30 – 09:45	Welcome to Aston University Richard Billingham, Chief Operating Officer, University of Aston Introduction to Fire Safety Conference USHA Fire Group Chair
09:45 – 10:30	ACOP Update Tasmin Lester & Fiona Wilson, National Code Advisors, ACOP
10:30 – 11:00	Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking
11:00 – 11:45	Hidden compliance gap in fire and smoke dampers An overview of legal responsibilities and what has changed, appointment of responsible qualified contractors and how compliance looks like. John Cousins, Managing Director, NAAD Training Academy
11:45 – 12:30	Experience with the Building Safety Regulator and information management requirements complying with The Building Safety Act and associated Legislation. Fire safety behaviours of contractors, the risks they introduce, tightening up contractual terms and conditions, new standards & guidance being introduced on the handover of information on completion of works. Margaret Sackey, Director of Building Safe Ltd & Gary Watts
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch, Exhibition & Networking
13:30 – 14:15	Learning before loss: What CROSS reports can teach universities about fire safety Confidential reporting enables the fire safety profession to learn from concerns, near misses and failures before they lead to serious consequences. Drawing on reports submitted to Collaborative Reporting for Safer Structures UK (CROSS-UK), Dr Peter Wilkinson will explain how the reporting system works and explore recurring lessons with particular relevance to universities and other complex estates. The session will consider what reported concerns reveal about design assumptions, alterations, compartmentation, fire safety management, communication and the sometimes difficult boundary between technical compliance and the way buildings are actually used. It will also examine why warning signs can be overlooked, how organisations can create a culture in which concerns are raised and acted upon, and how fire safety professionals can use CROSS reports to inform their own practice. The emphasis will be on learning, professional curiosity and sharing knowledge before experience is acquired through failure. Dr Peter Wilkinson, Fire Engineering Consultant, Cross-UK
14:15 – 15:05	Public behaviour in fire and other mass emergencies Effective preparedness for fires requires accurate understanding of public behaviour in emergency evacuations. Misconceptions about public behaviour can lead to counterproductive and even dangerous emergency management strategies. In this talk, I present the latest research evidence and psychological theory on public behaviour in fires and other mass emergencies. Far from panic being a typical response, the research presents a more complex picture. This includes delays in evacuation and supportive behaviours from 'zero responders'. Findings from our own programmes

	of research on behaviour in emergencies are now being used in the National Fire Chiefs Council National Resilience programme, the Cabinet Office's guidance on communication in crisis, and the training given to event safety managers around the world. I present recommendations, based on this research, to enhance preparedness for fires through group psychology. John Drury, Professor of Social Psychology, University of Sussex
15:05 – 15:35	Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking
15:35 – 16:15	How to Recruit for Potential, Not Just Experience • Why the perfect candidate often does not exist • How to separate essential requirements from nice-to-haves • How to identify transferable skills • How to assess attitude, learning ability and commercial awareness • When to hire for experience and when to hire for potential • How businesses can widen their candidate pool without lowering standards • How to avoid rejecting strong candidates for the wrong reasons • An Apprentice's own experience – what attracted them to the sector and what has been their experience so far George Wilson, Principle People Dinah Caparucci, University of Sussex
16:15 – 16:30	Conference Close
16:30 – 17:30	Drinks & Networking

Wednesday 7th October

Health & Safety CPD Session

14:00 – 16:00	When do reasonable adjustments become unreasonable? Louise Mansfield, Legal Director and Solicitor Advocate, Bevan Brittan LLP Bevan Brittan
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16:30 – 17:30	Drinks & Networking
17:30 – 19:00	Free Time
19:00 onwards	Informal 'Birmingham Balti Experience' Dinner

Thursday 8th October

Day 1 Health & Safety Conference

09:15 - 10:00	Registration, Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking		
10:00 - 10:20	Conference Welcome Jane Ball, USHA Chair Aston University Welcome Professor Colin Grant, Vice Chancellor & Chief Executive, Aston University		
10:20 – 11.05	Sphere of Influence Mapping: From Technical Expert to Strategic Leader Prof. Neil Budworth, Director, Health, Safety & Wellbeing: Loughborough University Dr Kate Broadhurst, Senior Lecturer: Strategy and Innovation Loughborough Business School: Loughborough University What to Expect: This session will help your transition from being positioned as technical H&S experts to strategic leaders who influence at the highest levels of your organisations.		
11:05 – 11:30	Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking		
11:30 – 11:45	Headline sponsor introduction - The Estate That Thinks Rik Hutchins, Director of SOTERweb		
11:45 – 12:10	Updates from the USHA Special Interest Groups		
12:10 – 12:50	Martyns Law-Implications for safety and security in the education sector Terri Nicholson, Strategic Risk and Security Advisor, Peregrine Risk Management Michael Orchard, Former Assistant Chief Constable-Dep Senior National Coordinator CT Policing UK This session will feature a fireside chat where the speakers will explore a range of issues likely to affect the education sector; a threat update will set the scene, followed by discussion on site specific and event related scenarios.		
12:50 – 13:50	Lunch, Exhibition & Networking		
13:50 – 14:20 (session 1)	Parallel Sessions <i>(Sessions are repeated once - members choose 2 to attend on the day)</i>		
14:30 – 15:00 (session 2)	How to Hire the Best People: Attracting Candidates in a Competitive Market George Wilson & Kim O'Brien, Principle People Attracting strong health and safety professionals is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly when organisations are competing on salary, flexibility and speed. In this interactive session we will explore the practical steps universities can take to strengthen their candidate proposition and attract the right people.	Engaging Senior Leaders through Storytelling Jane Ball, Head of Health and Safety, The Open University Simon Walklate, Deputy Director, University of East Anglia CMIOSH How do you capture the attention of busy senior leaders? This session explores how storytelling can transform health and safety communication, helping professionals influence decision-making,	From Reactive to Proactive: Embedding H&S Practices in STEM Dr Zoe Ayres, Head of Laboratory Facilities, The Open University. This session will explore the journey of ensuring a proactive approach to safety within STEM Laboratory settings, from lab users to senior leaders, through promoting best practice and establishing a sense of ownership through shared goals.

	Attendees will leave with a practical seven-point checklist they can apply before their next vacancy goes to market.	strengthen engagement, and inspire action at the highest levels.	
15:00- 15:15	Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking		
15:15 – 16:00	Assuring Health & Safety: from Council to Campus Key questions: What does “suitable and sufficient” assurance look like, and how do we evidence control effectiveness? Universities collect extensive health and safety data, but how much shows whether people are safer? This session explores how assurance can be built from laboratories, campuses and home-working environments through to Council-level oversight, using higher education governance examples. It will consider how universities can move beyond activity measures towards proportionate, evidence-based systems focused on effective controls and real risk reduction. Dave Hall, University Secretary, The Open University		
16:00 -16:40	Legal Update Paul Verrico, Partner, Solicitor Advocate, Head of EHS, Evershed Sutherland, CMIOSH, FIIRSM		
16:40 - 17:30	Day 1 Close & USHA AGM		
19:00 – 19:30	Drinks Reception – sponsored by Bevan Brittan		
19:30 – 22:00	USHA Awards Dinner – Sponsored by Evaccess After Dinner Speaker: Scotty Mills		

Friday 9th October

Day 2 Health & Safety Conference

09:00 – 09:30	Registration, Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking		
09:30 – 09:45	Welcome & Day 1 Re-Cap		
09:45 – 10:15 (Session 1)	Parallel Sessions <i>(Sessions are repeated once – members choose 2 to attend on the day)</i>		
10:30 – 11:00 (Session 2)	Occupational Asthma: Lessons Learned from a HSE Prosecution Richard Rolfe, Head of Safety and Staff Wellbeing, Cardiff University This session explores Cardiff University's experience following a prosecution arising from occupational asthma cases linked to animal allergen exposure. Focusing on the investigation, control improvements and practical lessons learned, delegates will gain insights into managing occupational health risks and preventing similar incidents within their own institutions.	Buying of LEV systems - An introduction to BESA TR40. LEV Guide to Good Practice Adrian Sims, Secretary, LEV Association The legal requirements and management of LEV's focusing on the purchasing of these systems in line with the new industry guidance published by the Building Engineering and Services Association (BESA) in their document TR40. This is a walk through of the buying guide to ensure purchasers are in control of the prices from Stage 0 to Stage 8.	The Incident: The First 15 Minutes When a Lone Worker Doesn't Check In — and Who Responds Next Preeya Brown, Senior Customer Success Manager and Chales Hardy, Education Sector Lead, Critical Arc Most institutions have a lone worker policy. Far fewer have pressure-tested what happens in the minutes after someone fails to check in — who's notified, in what order, and whether anyone outside the Security team even knows an incident is unfolding. Using a single realistic scenario, CriticalArc — the company behind the SafeZone platform — will walk through a lone worker escalation in real time, then follow the same incident into its second tier of response. Security is rarely the only team that needs to know. First aiders, fire wardens and other workplace responders are often closest to the scene and need to be reached quickly. The second half of the session looks at how the right responders in the right building are activated automatically, how separate responder groups coordinate around one incident in real time, and how that shared picture holds up once Security arrives.
11:00 – 11:40	Refreshments, Exhibition & Networking		
11:40 – 12:25	Enhancing the Employee Experience in the Higher Education Sector The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) is the leading voice on employment and reward matters in the UK Higher Education sector. This session will provide an overview of UCEA's		

	work, current strategic objectives and priorities. We will hear about UCEA's work around the Employee Experience which recognises the essential role that good health, safety and wellbeing play in providing a positive employee experience. A recurring theme for UCEA's members in recent years has been workload - a key piece of work in this area, which highlights how HR and H & S professionals can work collaboratively to support the effective management of workload within their institution, will be discussed. Simon Sumner, Head of Employment Policy & Advice, UCEA Elaine Schegar, Senior Employment Policy Advisor, UCEA
12:25 -12:45	Launch of Union Consultation Scott Trim, Director of Campus Services, Aston University
12:45 – 13:45	Lunch, Exhibition & Networking
13:45 -14:30	Lightning Talks A series of quick-fire presentations on a range of topics related to health and safety in the university sector.
14:30 - 15:15	Stress risk assessment: A 'whole university' approach This session will outline the approach taken by the University of Birmingham in response to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issuing a Letter of Notification of Contravention relating to Stress Management. Andrew and John will cover what happened during the HSE's visits to campus and what has been done subsequently, including an update following the HSE's return to campus to review progress in September 2026. Andrew Page, Director of People and Culture, University of Birmingham John Philips, Interim Director of Health & Safety, University of Birmingham
15:15 - 15:30	Wrap up & Close