

## Working at Height Guidance

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Falls from height continue to be the biggest single cause of fatal injuries and the fourth biggest cause of major injuries in the workplace.

In 2017/18, 35 fatal injuries and around 5700 major injuries were caused by falls from height at work.

### What is Work at Height?

“Work at height” means work in any place where, if precautions were not taken, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury.

You are working at height if you:

- work above ground/floor level
- could fall from an edge, through an opening or fragile surface or
- could fall from ground level into an opening in a floor or a hole in the ground

Work at height does not include a slip or a trip on the same level, as a fall from height has to involve a fall from one level to a lower level, nor does it include walking up and down a permanent staircase in a building.

The **Work at Height Regulations 2005**, apply to all work at height activities where there is a need to control a risk of falling a distance liable to cause personal injury. This is regardless of the work equipment being used, the duration of the work, or the height at which the work is performed.

Examples of where the Regulations will apply include:

- Using a ladder/step ladder or kick stool.
- Working on a scaffold or from a mobile elevated work platform.
- Working on the back of a lorry, e.g. sheeting a load.
- Arboriculture and forestry work performed in trees.
- Using cradles or ropes to gain access to parts of buildings.
- Climbing permanent structures, such as gantries or telegraph poles.
- Working close to an excavation area or a cellar opening, where someone could fall into it and injure themselves or others.
- Work on staging or trestles, for example at a theatrical performance or for filming.

### What do the Regulations Require?

Where, there is a risk of a fall, liable to cause injury, employers, or those who control the work at height activity, must ensure that:

- The work is properly **planned** and organised, taking account of weather conditions and possible emergencies
- Those involved in the work are **competent**

- The **risks have been assessed** and properly managed by following the hierarchy for safe work at height – avoid, prevent, mitigate; and give collective measures priority
- Any **equipment** being used for work at height is appropriate, used correctly and properly inspected and maintained

In addition to the employers duties above, the persons at work (employees, self-employed etc) have duties to:

- Report to their supervisor or manager, any activity or defect which is likely to endanger the safety of the employee or others
- Use any equipment or safety device provided to them for work at height, in accordance with any training and instructions given to them

## How do we do this?

**Plan the work properly:** There are three main steps employers, or persons in control of work at height activities, should follow to achieve compliance:

1. If you can avoid the need to work at height then do so – with a little planning, many activities can be conducted safely from the ground.
2. Where you can't avoid working at height, then you must take steps to prevent falls.
3. If there is any remaining risk of a fall you should take steps to mitigate the effect.

**Risk assessment** is the key to the proper planning and organisation of all work at height. Risk assessments must take place before work at height is done and should inform the selection and use of appropriate equipment.

When considering control measures to prevent falls or mitigate the effects of a fall, collective measures should be prioritised over personal measures, wherever possible.

Collective protection is equipment that does not require the person working at height to act to be effective. Examples are permanent or temporary guardrails, scissor lifts and tower scaffolds.

Personal protection is equipment that requires the individual to act to be effective. An example is putting on a safety harness correctly and connecting it, via an energy-absorbing lanyard, to a suitable anchor point.

NOTE: The Regulations do not ban the use of ladders or step ladders. As long as they are of the right type, in good condition and effectively secured, these can be the most practical option e.g. when the use of other work equipment is not justified because of the low risk and short duration (no more than 30 minutes at a time); or when there are existing workplace or site features which cannot be altered.

**Competence:** Every employer must ensure that no person engages in any work at height activity, including organisation, planning and supervision, unless they are competent to do so or, if being trained, is being supervised by a competent person.

Competence is a combination of appropriate skills, knowledge, training and experience, which collectively should enable a person to:

- Safely undertake their specified activity, at their level of responsibility
- Understand fully any potential risks related to the work activity (tasks and equipment) in which they are engaged
- Detect any defects or omissions and recognise any implications for health and safety, with the aim of specifying appropriate remedial actions that may be required.

The competence of staff who work at height should be assessed and additional training provided if necessary. This will include staff who plan and organise the work, as well as those carrying it out. Specific training should continue to be provided in selection and safe use of equipment for work at height, e.g. ladders and tower scaffolds.

Contractors who carry out work at height should provide risk assessment and method statements (RAMS) which comply with the Regulations and any relevant industry 'good practice'. Where RAMS identify the risk of falling from height to be high, e.g. work requiring scaffolding, towers, cranes or abseiling or any work at height on fragile surfaces or where there is no edge protection, a permit to work must be obtained from the Campus Estates Office, prior to the work commencing.

**Equipment:** Access equipment and work at height equipment should be subject to regular inspection and testing by a competent individual in accordance with any applicable legal or best practice requirements.

All ladders and stepladders should be visually inspected by the user prior to the activity being carried out – things to look for include:

- Missing screws, bolts or rivets
- Bent, cracked or missing rungs
- Painted rungs; paint can hide a number of defects and flaws
- Missing or damaged feet

See also the [University Guidance on the Use of Ladders and Step Ladders](#)