

Guidance for the Evaluation of Method Statements for Entry into Vacant Premises and Unallocated Space

What is a Vacant Premise?

Vacant Premises are buildings which are no longer used for core activity and have been closed off to prevent unauthorised access and intruders. These spaces cannot be accessed without a Permit to Access which is issued by Estates.

What is an allocated space?

Unallocated spaces are singular or multiple rooms that have not been allocated to Faculties, Schools, Departments, or Support Services. To prevent unauthorised use these spaces have been secured with locks which are controlled by Estates.

Building Register

Coventry University maintains a register of all areas within its estate including vacant premises and unallocated space. Information on each space is available from the building database which is accessible from the Estates intranet pages

Hazards in Vacant Premises and Unallocated Spaces

Contamination by Hazardous Materials or Substances – dependant on the previous use of the building or space certain parts may have residual chemical or biological contamination that may be a risk to health. The building or space may also have contamination of asbestos in building materials or risers which if disturbed may be a risk to health.

Low Levels of Lighting - spaces that have not been occupied for some time may have lighting that is below the standard for occupied space due to damage from de-occupation or damaged from theft and vandalism. Whilst emergency lighting is installed where necessary, faults may have developed since the last formal inspection and may not be operational.

Damaged Services and Electrical Systems – services in the building such as water pipes, electrical cables and heating systems may have been damaged during de-occupation or damaged from theft and vandalism. It is possible for such services to be live or dangerous.

Compromised Emergency Escape Routes – in order to secure buildings and spaces additional locks and security devices may have been installed to prevent unauthorised access. Such security measures may impede exits from the building in the event of an emergency. Fire alarm systems where fitted will be maintained and operational.

Uneven and Irregular Floor Surfaces – when spaces are vacated by the building users floor surfaces can be damaged or left uneven as a result of the relocation of furniture and equipment. This may result in trip hazards being present in the building which could be the cause of falls. The risk of falls is increased in low lighting situations.

Precautions for Vacant Premises and Unallocated Spaces

As a **minimum** the following precaution should be applied to all access into Vacant Premises and Unallocated Spaces;

1. The entry into the space must be subject to the University's Permit to Access System; no other local arrangements or contractors systems should be accepted. There permit must not be issued until a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and safe system of work has been supplied by the company or individuals undertaking the work.
2. Those entering the space should be aware of any residual hazards that remain once the space has been vacated.
3. The entry into the space should involve an effective communication system which enables lone working procedures to be followed.
4. Safe access and egress to the space should be identified in the safe system of work; this may need to provision of temporary escape routes. Clear and conspicuous safety signage must identify that entry into areas left open for access is prohibited.
5. Suitable lighting should be available during the task either from existing lighting in the area or supplementary lighting such as battery powered lighting. In either case emergency lighting should be available to aid escape in the event of a power failure.
6. Where necessary Isolation of mechanical and electrical equipment. Isolation requires the physical disconnection of the flow of power to the equipment in such a way that they cannot be accidentally reenergised. This will usually require isolation and locking off of the plant at the distribution board or at the local isolation switch. Any devices used to lock off equipment should only be removable by those working in and controlling the space.
7. The wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as overalls, safety footwear, gloves, and dust masks. Consideration should be given the specification of PPE where a contaminated atmosphere may exist.

Further Guidance

Further Guidance on safe working in vacant premises and unallocated spaces is available from the Estates Department and the Safety and Risk Management Team.