

Use and Management of Balconies

Risks include:

- The potential for someone to fall or jump from a balcony particularly if a balcony is being used for recreational or entertainment of visitors/guests or because of impaired mental or physical health – possibly caused by alcohol or other substances.
- The Building Regulations require that edge protection should be at a height of 1.1 metres. They should also withstand a lateral force of 700 kN (force that an object exerts on another stationary object ie. people against the edge protection) per metre run.
- Items falling over the edge of the balcony gathering sufficient momentum to injure persons below or cause property damage.
- Environmental pollution such as noise, light, smoke and falling material, which may directly affect passers-by and residents. Any balconies below?
- Other balcony users – including window cleaners, maintenance staff and contractors.
- Security of the premises because entry could be gained through open balcony doors. Intruders have been known to climb up the outside of our buildings.
- The security and safety of the areas one needs to pass through to access and egress the balcony - for example it might be a laboratory or area containing hazardous or valuable materials and items, or confidential documents.
- Risks to or from items being transported safely through these areas (i.e. furnishings /food and drink/wastes /other materials)?
- Being able to hear the fire alarm whilst on the balcony especially if the door is closed.

The higher up a building one is, the greater the wind speed. For the use of balconies, this means an increase in several specific risks:

- Injury or building fabric damage occurring if the doors are opened or left open in windy conditions.
- Loose items being blown off the balcony, particularly if the wind speed suddenly increases or changes direction.
- Windblown fires, where fire quickly spreads with the strength of a blowtorch, either from outside the balcony, or from within the building, to other floors.
- Being unable to hear a fire alarm sounding within the building.

The following applies to all College balconies to include designated roles on Building Managers and Responsible Person:

1. Generally, the use of external balconies will not be permitted.
2. Requests for use will be subject to approval by the Building Manager who has responsibility for the building.
3. There must be a named member of Departmental staff to be the **Responsible Person** to coordinate with the Building Manager for the one-off or continuing/frequent use of any balcony.
4. Requests for use must be accompanied by carefully written risk assessment, provided by the **Responsible Person**. Consideration and approval will be given by the relevant Building Manager.
5. The **Responsible Person**, is responsible for the following:
 - ensuring the risk assessment is up to date and has been approved by the Building Manager;
 - being present during use;
 - control of access and security measures, emergency procedures including any Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEPs), and any relevant training required for this purpose;
 - Evacuate the balcony, make safe and closing off the balcony if they consider the weather conditions makes its use too hazardous;

- At the end of use, clearing the balcony of all materials and furniture and returning the key to security;
- 6. The Building Manager, has the right to prevent access to the balcony if other persons take priority at the time (such as emergency maintenance work, scheduled window cleaning or maintenance, use by contractors for project purposes).
- 7. If the Building Manager considers the weather conditions to be unsuitable for the use of balconies they can cancel any previously permitted use and/or halt an existing use and close off the balcony, for example if it is windy or there are icy/snow conditions or if the weather suddenly changes.
- 8. Some balconies may only be used during set hours to avoid disturbance of other surrounding residents.
- 9. The Building Manager will conduct a pre-use check of the balcony with the **Responsible Person** prior to issuing them with the key.
- 10. Balconies are not to be used for smoking, BBQs, patio heaters or any similar combustion sources and the doors must be kept shut and locked when not in active use.

The following must be considered and be included in risk assessments for the use of any balcony.

1. What is the intended use?
2. Is this a one-off use or continuing/frequent use?
3. What is the intended start and finish dates and time(s)?
4. What will impact be on surrounding residents?
5. Will any additional lighting be needed – if so, how will it be provided?
6. Who or what is directly above and below the balcony – how could they be impacted by noise, light, or falling items?
7. Can the building fire alarm/beacon be heard/seen if the balcony doors/windows are closed?
8. Can all intended users including those with mobility impairments evacuate safely from the balcony and then to a place of safety?
9. Is there a current Generic Emergency Evacuation Plan (GEEP) or a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)? Consider amending any current PEEPs to include egress from the balcony.
10. How many people will be using the balcony at any one time? Is there sufficient space to maintain social distancing?
11. Will all those using the balcony be members of the relevant department with swipe access throughout the building. If not, how will they be able to move within the building (e.g. to toilets or to the exit)?
12. What areas need to be gained to access and egress the balcony? For example, a laboratory or office area containing hazardous or valuable materials and items, or confidential documents?
13. What equipment or other items are to be transported through these areas to the balcony? How are furnishings/food/waste/other materials to be transported safely to and from the balcony? (ie. to ensure there are no spills or scalds on route on stairs, lifts and offices - and that food and drink is not carried through laboratory areas). What are the associated manual handling risks?
14. What associated safety or security risk controls are to be implemented?
15. Is fixed seating in place on the balcony - if not, where will seats be obtained from? (Note: the use of lab furniture is not permitted).
16. Will any hot or cold food or beverages be consumed on the balcony?
17. How will the use of alcohol be controlled by the Responsible Person?
18. Where will waste materials (empty food and drink containers, tissues, unwanted food etc), be deposited to ensure animal and insect pests cannot access them?
19. If the balcony is to be used frequently, and it has no fixed seating, are temporary furnishings required and where will these be stored between use?