

NEU Guidance for Members, Reps and Local Officers

This briefing gives NEU guidance on the law's requirements on assessing the safety of practical activities and on taking steps to ensure that these do not pose risks to the safety of staff or pupils.

What is a practical activity?

This guidance is aimed at promoting safety in practical activities. Today, nearly every subject has some form of practical dimension, no matter which Key Stage is being taught.

Teachers' vigilance means that practical activities in schools are usually safe and accidents are thankfully rare. Nevertheless, teachers concerned about situations with which they are asked to cope when undertaking practical activities with pupils regularly approach the NEU.

In applying this guidance, it should be recognised that there is no easy single definition of what constitutes a practical activity. In the NEU's view, what matters is the nature of the activity and the circumstances in which it is being undertaken. Although some activities are inherently more hazardous than others, all practical activities can become hazardous in some circumstances due to factors such as pupil misbehaviour, poorly designed work areas, inexperience of teachers, ability of pupils, etc.

We all recognise secondary school subjects such as design and technology, art and science as "practical subjects". Other subjects regularly involving practical activities include ICT, drama, music and physical education lessons. Often, however, secondary school lessons in subjects such as languages and geography can include practical activities where safety considerations are as important as in those other subjects.

Practical activities also occur, however, throughout the primary curriculum involving a wide range of equipment from scissors to computers. Safety considerations are therefore also important in the primary sector in order to ensure the safety of pupils, particularly since primary teachers may be less familiar with some activities than secondary teachers who are subject specialists.

What the law says

The Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of employees and other persons on their premises. In schools and colleges this means that the employer - the local authority, governing body, academy trust, college corporation etc. - is responsible for taking steps to ensure the health and safety both of teachers and of pupils.

These steps should be identified by means of risk assessments. The legal provisions on risk assessment set out in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 state that hazards to health and safety facing staff and pupils must be identified, the risks posed by these hazards evaluated, and the measures needed to remove or reduce those risks identified and put in place. Risk assessments must be properly recorded, brought to the attention of staff and made available to them on request.

Risk assessments for practical activities are needed because of the likelihood that these activities will involve a potential risk to health and safety that is greater than usual. The principles applying

to risk assessments for practical activities will be similar to those that apply, for example, when assessing risks for outdoor activities on trips out of school.

Whatever the nature of the practical lesson, it is generally accepted that, as a minimum, some form of risk assessment should appear on the scheme of work and/or lesson notes. The more complex the risks, the more detailed the risk assessment will need to be. In many cases, however, all that is necessary is a brief note outlining the principal risks and the control measures needed to remove/reduce those risks. This would reflect the duty placed on all employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974 to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the health and safety of other persons who may be affected by their actions or omissions.

MODEL RISK ASSESSMENTS

For some activities, there are “model” or “generic” risk assessments available for work patterns, processes and equipment that are common to all schools. This avoids unnecessary duplication of work and also provides a quality standard and ensures consistency between schools. These could prove useful for areas such as design and technology rooms, gymnasias and science laboratories and for activities where teachers are involved in carrying equipment and manual handling.

All of these risk assessments should, however, not be simply adopted by the school without considering how they will be applied in practice and how they may need to be adapted or amended according to the school’s circumstances. In addition, schools must have a policy in place which sets out the protocols for managing any substances used in practical lessons; for instance, radioactive materials in science lessons.

Risk assessments must be kept under regular review to determine their suitability. For example, a further risk assessment should be carried out if a room layout is changed, new equipment is introduced or if a new pupil joins the class.

COMPETENT PERSON

Employers are obliged by legislation to appoint one or more ‘competent persons’ to carry out the measures needed to comply with the law. This is a very important matter in determining the extent to which teachers, in particular heads and deputies, should be involved in carrying out risk assessments on behalf of the employer.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on [‘managing for health and safety’](#) states that risk assessments should be carried out by someone with a knowledge of the process, activity or other function which is being assessed. If an external person, such as a consultant, undertakes the risk assessment, staff members (managers and workers) should still be involved.

For an individual to be deemed to be ‘competent’ under the Regulations, he or she must have ‘sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities’ to be able to undertake the task. This does not mean that a risk assessment can be carried out only by qualified health and safety specialists. It does mean, however, that anyone who is asked to carry out a risk assessment, or who agrees to do so, is entitled to be given proper support. It is also important to note that employees can be asked to contribute their experiences and feedback to the risk assessment without being the person tasked with completing the assessment. The HSE guidance states that ‘workers and their safety representatives are a valuable source of information’.

RISK ASSESSMENTS AND CONTRACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The professional duties of a head teacher include responsibility for managing health and safety in schools and colleges. This includes a duty to co-operate with the governing body and employer so far as is necessary to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements. As a result of

this, head teachers may be required by their employers or governing bodies to manage the process of risk assessment in their school. This does not necessarily require personal involvement in the completion of risk assessments but head teachers need to be sure that those to whom they delegate the task are competent.

Deputy and assistant head teachers may be required to undertake any of the professional duties of head teachers which are reasonably delegated to them. They may, therefore, also be required to manage the process of risk assessment. Heads of department or subject may, as a result of their managerial roles, be required to do so for their areas of responsibility. This does not necessarily mean, however, they must carry the risk assessments out themselves.

Teachers of practical subjects, including science, technology, design, art and PE, will need to be involved in risk assessments for areas within their jurisdiction. However, school/college leaders must be sure that subject specialists are fully competent both in the risk assessment process and in the specialist subject. Even where a teacher has the specialist knowledge and is competent to undertake risk assessments on behalf of the employer, the resulting risk assessments still 'belong' to the employer, who will be held liable if they are inadequate. CLEAPSS, of which more than 28,000 schools and colleges across England, Wales and Northern Ireland are members, provides advice and guidance on all aspects of practical work, including approaches to risk assessment. www.cleapss.org.uk.

Other class teachers, ie those who do not teach the subjects listed above, and do not have any management responsibility, have no obligation under their conditions of service to undertake formal risk assessments (if employed under STPCD conditions) and should not be directed to do so, but they may of course be willing to contribute their expertise on a voluntary basis, for example in respect of individual pupil risk assessments.

Non-teaching staff may be required to undertake risk assessments, on behalf of their employer, if this is provided for under their contract of employment and job description. But, as with other employees, the resulting risk assessments still 'belong' to the employer, who will be held liable for any inadequacies.

Further NEU guidance on risk assessment is available from the www.neu.org.uk.

Deciding whether practical activities are safe

Appendix 1 contains a checklist which considers the issues of greatest relevance in deciding whether practical activities are safe:

- the nature of the activity;
- supervision issues; and
- the suitability of the teaching area.

This guidance is aimed at teachers assessing the safety of activities but will also be useful to those undertaking risk assessments for the employer.

The following points relate to the areas covered in greater detail in Appendix 1.

1 THE NATURE OF THE ACTIVITY

The nature of the activity is possibly the most important matter to consider - some things are simply more inherently dangerous than others and the inherent risks need to be fully assessed before any further contributing factors are added into the equation.

2 SUPERVISION ISSUES

Supervision issues will impact upon the potential risks of an activity. Some activities will be more dangerous in some circumstances than in others. It is important to consider first the abilities and the training of teachers in charge of a particular activity.

Primary teachers, for example, may lack subject-specific risk management training for practical classroom activities required by some curriculum areas. Even secondary teachers may be less likely to have received such training than was once the case, as not all secondary teachers in charge of practical subjects are now trained specialists.

Consideration must also be given to circumstances where teachers are providing internal cover or are providing supply cover, and may not be specialists in the subject being taught. **If there are any doubts about the ability and experience of teachers supervising a practical lesson in any subject, then they should not be doing it at all.** For further information, please refer to appendix 1.

3 SUITABILITY OF THE TEACHING AREA

There are a number of important considerations to do with suitability. Whether the teaching area was actually designed for the activity being undertaken in the circumstances in which it is being undertaken will have a substantial influence upon the risk of accident or injury.

A further potential problem can arise when non-practical lessons are timetabled into rooms designed for a particular practical activity. Where such arrangements are unavoidable, any attendant risks would need to be appropriately identified and managed. For further information, please refer to Appendix 1.

CLASS SIZE

Class size is an issue which is key to consideration of all three of the above points.

The NEU has a policy which specifies class size figures which are considered the maximum acceptable numbers on both educational and safety grounds. These are called the NEU's "action policy" figures. Members may approach the NEU for support in seeking the reduction of class sizes which are larger than these figures.

For practical classes, the relevant figure is a maximum of 20 pupils. The NEU will, however, take into account the full range of health and safety factors considered earlier as well as simply the number of pupils in the class in giving support to members who are concerned about classroom safety.

APPENDIX 2 contains a fuller discussion of class sizes in practical lessons.

RISK ASSESSMENT - What steps should be taken?

The legal rules governing risk assessment demand that the first step is to eliminate the hazard. This can be done by carrying out the activity in a different way or by stopping the activity altogether. The following extract from the then DfES's guidance document, "Safety in Science Education" supports the need for such measures.

"It may be possible to adopt alternative methods for particular pieces of work. However, if the risks cannot be made acceptable, the activity must cease until it can be resumed safely."

There are various ways in which safety can be improved by modifying the way the activity is carried out. These include not using the equipment in that particular way; undertaking teacher demonstrations instead of allowing pupils to do activities themselves; having only some of the

class undertaking practical activities at one time; reducing the number of pupils - but not simply by excluding disabled pupils or those with special educational needs - or increasing teacher staffing or non-teaching support.

The rules governing risk assessment then provide that where hazards cannot be eliminated altogether, steps must be taken to reduce risks by provision and use of protective equipment. In industry, it may be necessary to continue activities that pose a substantial degree of risk. The safety first approach necessary in schools, however, dictates that hazardous practical activities should be discontinued where a substantial level of risk remains. Nevertheless, for every kind of practical activity teachers should give priority to ensuring the availability and use of protective equipment should be a priority for teachers supervising practical activities.

Practical steps in dealing with safety situations help illustrate how the above advice can be applied. For example, it is sensible to get rid of large, obsolete and unused equipment rather than keep it on the premises where it takes up space and obstructs circulation. If it is considered to be in too good a condition to throw out, it could be sold or given away.

What if the teacher believes activities are unsafe?

First of all, the issue should be raised with the appropriate senior member of staff and advice should be sought from the local authority subject adviser, if such a role exists. If the health and safety problem cannot be resolved in this way, the NEU Adviceline should be contacted.

Under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, employees are required to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. **This means that teachers can legitimately refuse to participate in activities which risk their own health and safety and/or that of their pupils.** Advice should, however always be sought from the NEU before doing so.

Access to specialist advice and guidance

Sources of guidance of a detailed and specialist kind relating to particular subjects are available to teachers from the DfE, HSE and various subject teacher associations. Some of these are listed in Appendix 1 to this briefing. Teachers should press for these to be made available or, where necessary, obtain them themselves.

Action points for NEU safety representatives

NEU safety representatives should:

- find out whether members have concerns about practical activities;
- find out whether risk assessments have been undertaken by a competent person or persons, and check that they have been kept under regular review;
- find out whether such risk assessments reflect the guidance in this document on safety precautions and other matters; and
- check whether relevant guidance documents are available.

APPENDIX 1: DECIDING WHETHER A PRACTICAL ACTIVITY IS SAFE

This guidance is aimed at teachers assessing the safety of activities but will also be useful to those undertaking risk assessments for the employer.

THE ACTIVITY

- Consider the nature of the activity - some things are simply more inherently dangerous than others and the inherent risks need to be fully assessed before any further contributing factors are added into the equation.
- Make sure that there are written risk assessments. This is particularly important for the most hazardous activities. Generic assessments are available for most design and technology and science activities, for example, from bodies such as CLEAPSS. As noted above, these set useful standards although they may need to be adapted to suit the circumstances.
- Workbooks and activity sheets should be examined to ensure they are not out of date and do not recommend activities which have since fallen out of use or even been banned.
- The type of equipment to be used should also be considered. The following questions should be asked.
 - What is the age of the equipment?
 - What is its quality and condition?
 - Is the equipment being maintained correctly, including regular services and inspections?
 - How suitable is it for use by the age group involved?
- All equipment should, of course, meet the requirements of the relevant legislation and relevant British Standards.
- Finally, safety precautions and protective equipment should be examined:
 - Are protective guards or other protective measures built into the equipment in place and being used?
 - Is protective equipment or protective clothing available and being used?

SUPERVISION ISSUES

Supervision issues will impact upon the potential risks of an activity. Some activities will be more dangerous in some circumstances than in others. You should consider first the abilities and the training of teachers in charge of a particular activity.

- How familiar are they with the activity?
- Do they have any relevant subject specialism? Have they been specifically trained in the particular activity? Is this training up-to-date – have they had recent subject-based INSET training?
- How confident do they feel about supervising?

Primary teachers, for example, may lack subject-specific risk management training for practical classroom activities required by some curriculum areas. Even secondary teachers may be less likely to have received such training than was once the case, as not all secondary teachers in charge of practical subjects are now trained specialists.

Consideration must also be given to circumstances where teachers are providing internal cover or are providing supply cover, and may not be specialists in the subject being taught. **If there are any doubts about the ability and experience of teachers supervising a practical lesson in any subject, they should not be doing it at all.**

Then there is the question of support for the teacher in supervising the activity.

- What is the extent of non-teaching staff support?
- Are they technicians or other adults?
- How do the above considerations of familiarity, training and confidence apply to them?

Next there are the pupils themselves.

- How familiar is the teacher with the pupils?
- How familiar are the pupils with the activity?
- Have the pupils been given training on the use of the equipment in question and in use of safety precautions?
- How old are the pupils?
- Are any of the pupils likely to be disruptive and possibly cause a risk to themselves and/or others?
- How many pupils are there? The number of pupils will affect the teacher's ability to supervise effectively. It may also be relevant in terms of the suitability of the teaching area and possible overcrowding, as indicated below, and in Appendix 2.
- Do any of the pupils have special educational needs or disabilities? If so, do these pupils require extra support or supervision from adults?

SUITABILITY OF THE TEACHING AREA

There are a number of important considerations to do with suitability. Whether the teaching area was actually designed for the activity being undertaken in the circumstances in which it is being undertaken will have a substantial influence upon the risk of accident or injury.

- Was the teaching area designed or adapted for the type of activity being undertaken?
- How many pupils was it designed for? Some spaces, particularly laboratories and workshops, were designed for particular group sizes - see Appendix 2. Putting larger groups into these spaces can create overcrowding and affect safety standards.
- Are the facilities provided in the teaching space adequate for the activity?
- Is there adequate space for circulation, access and egress?

Safety in practical lessons

- Are there any potential problems caused by layout, lines of sight, acoustics and noise?
- Have fire precautions been drawn up which specifically reflect the activities undertaken and the numbers involved?
- Does the area make necessary provision for people with disabilities?

A further potential problem can arise when non-practical lessons are timetabled into rooms designed for a particular practical activity. Where such arrangements are unavoidable, any attendant risks would need to be appropriately identified and managed.

NEU Health and Safety Briefing
July 2019

APPENDIX 2 – CLASS SIZES IN PRACTICAL LESSONS

(A) GENERAL NEU POLICY ON CLASS SIZES

The NEU's minimum staffing establishment policy includes the below aims. The NEU has also set figures for class sizes which the NEU regards as excessive and requiring reduction.

MINIMUM STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT POLICY

Class Size

- (a) A maximum class size of 20 in respect of Early Years Foundation Stage classes which should be staffed on the basis of 2 adults (one qualified teacher and one qualified support staff member (minimum level 3 NVQ or equivalent)) per 20 children;
- (b) A maximum class size of 23 in Key Stage 1 classes;
- (c) A maximum class size of 18 in practical groups, including GCSE and other classes which involve teacher assessment of pupils;
- (d) A maximum class size of 21 in respect of classes of mixed age range;
- (e) Staffing establishments in relation to sixth forms to be such as to ensure a maximum class size of 10;
- (f) A maximum class size of 26 in all other timetabled classes (i.e. other than those listed above);
- (g) The maximum class size and minimum staffing ratios for mainstream schools as determined at the start of each academic year, taking account of the number of children with special educational needs and emotional and behavioural needs in order to provide effective teaching and learning for pupils in each class. In some cases this will require the allocation of additional qualified teachers;
- (h) The maximum class size and minimum staffing ratios for special school classes as determined at the start of each academic year, taking into account that pupils in special schools or units have a need for specialist SEN teachers together with provision for additional teachers/support staff to enable the teacher in charge to deal with the frequent issues which arise with pupils with special educational needs.

EXCESSIVE CLASS SIZES

The Union's policy on class sizes sets out the following limits which, if exceeded, raise the possibility of the Union seeking to enforce these limits through industrial action if the situation cannot be improved by negotiation:

26 pupils in the case of Early Years Foundation Stage classes with one teacher and a support staff member with minimum NVQ level 3 qualifications;

27 pupils in the case of Key Stage 1 classes;

24 pupils in the case of mixed age classes;

20 pupils in the case of practical classes (see section B below);

Safety in practical lessons

15 pupils in the case of classes of pupils needing particular small group or individual attention; and

30 in other cases.

(B) CLASS SIZES, ROOM SIZES AND SAFETY IN PRACTICAL LESSONS

The longstanding convention – and NEU action policy – that class sizes in practical lessons should not exceed 20 has no basis in law in England and Wales, neither is it explicitly set out in DfE guidance.

The 1918 Education Act limited practical classes to 20 pupils. The Elementary Education Code 1922 - Statutory Rules and Orders 1922, No. 1432, made under Section 118 of the Education Act 1921, Chapter 2 Paragraph 14, expanded on an earlier regulation, and stated that: “*The number of children on the registers of any class in Domestic Subjects, Handicraft, Gardening and other practical subjects must not exceed 20, except that this number may be increased to 40 in classes in Handicraft provided that the class has at least 2 teachers if more than 20 children are registered*”.

Regrettably, this legislation is no longer in force. Regulations do exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where no practical class may exceed 20 pupils, with certain caveats and exceptions in the case of Northern Ireland. In England and Wales, however, it is necessary to determine class sizes on a risk assessment basis, taking account of the provisions of a number of relevant guidance documents as appropriate.

> General Health and Safety Legislation

The *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974* places a general duty on the employer (be it local authority, governing body, academy trust, free school or sixth form college corporation) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its staff and pupils. This means that it is the employer’s responsibility to put such arrangements in place with regard to class size in practical lessons that the risk of harm be properly controlled, a process which should be done by means of a suitable risk assessment – as required by the *Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999*.

A thorough risk assessment on class size in practical subjects will determine the available space, equipment, furniture, activities and pupil characteristics and from thence the appropriate staffing levels and maximum pupil numbers. A risk assessment will entail a careful examination of hazards likely to exist, an assessment of whether the particular hazards are likely to harm anyone and what precautions need to be taken. Employers have specific legal duties to carry out risk assessments for all areas of workplace health and safety, and to appoint a ‘competent’ person or persons to carry them out.

If the rooms are so designed that, as the teacher circulates within the work area, a clear view cannot be obtained of all working situations, it will be necessary to reduce the size of classes. Supervision in work areas is complicated by the fact that the teacher will occasionally need to obtain materials or equipment from the store, where direct visual contact is very likely to be impossible.

Inexperienced teachers need time and support in order to develop the demanding skills required for the successful delivery of practical lessons. A suitable ‘cap’ should be placed on pupil numbers in practical classes taken by less experienced teachers.

Where pupils clearly possess good self-motivation, capacity for forethought, anticipation of hazards and a ready understanding of advice and instruction, it is often possible for them to be taught safely in groups of ‘official’ size (see specifications in guidance quoted below).

Safety in practical lessons

Decisions on class sizes might be influenced where appropriate support staff can be timetabled to assist during the course of practical sessions, for example with some aspects of equipment use and the collection of materials from stores and elsewhere.

> DfE guidance

Mainstream school buildings

DfE non-statutory area guidelines on space standards for mainstream school buildings (part A) and sites (part B) for all age ranges from 3 to 19 are contained in "[Building Bulletin 103: Area guidelines for mainstream schools](#)". This guidance supersedes the previous area guidelines in Building Bulletins (BB) 98 and 99, recommending reduced minimum internal and external areas.

Pupils with special educational needs – special schools and mainstream

Many pupils with SEN are at particular risk in practical activities and this is an important factor when considering group size. It is possible that those with statements of special needs and/or education, health and care plans (EHCP) will require additional support for practical activities depending on the nature of their learning difficulty. Where the range of abilities in a class is very mixed or a high proportion of pupils have special needs, class sizes should be reduced.

[Building Bulletin 104: Area guidelines for SEND and alternative provision](#) sets out non-statutory advice on

> The Design and Technology Association (DATA) and British Standard 4163

[DATA](#) advises that at KS3, class sizes of 20 should normally be manageable, reducing to 18 at KS4 and 16 for post-16 classes. It furthermore suggests that determination of class size will "require the exercising of professional judgement by the head teacher and the subject leader".

Another authoritative source of guidance is [British Standard 4163:2014](#) on safety in design and technology in schools. BS 4163 states that '*in England and Wales the recommended maximum number of students in any one work area is 20 students with one competent, qualified teacher*' (para.3.1). The employer may choose to control the risk by another means but it must control the risk. For example, the employer may decide to employ two competent and qualified teachers for one group in an area if the number exceeds 20.

> Science laboratories

As far as science classrooms are concerned, the now out of print DfEE publication "Safety in Science Laboratories" 1996 states that "*There is no statutory limitation on class size in any subject in schools in England and Wales. Teachers who are concerned that risks in practical work are increased to an unacceptable level because of the class size should report their concerns to the head of their science department and, if necessary, their head teacher. It may be possible to adopt alternative methods for particular pieces of work. However, if risks cannot be made acceptable, the activity must cease until it can be resumed safely.*"

Building Bulletin 80, *Science Accommodation in Secondary Schools*, which is an archived publication and "should not be considered to reflect current policy or guidance", recommends a space range of 83 to 99m² for a group of 30 KS3/4 pupils, adding that "*the range of activities being undertaken, the level of storage kept in the laboratory, the number of pupils with special needs, and the type of furniture system used can all affect area requirements*".

It should also be borne in mind that some local authorities will have established their own rules about maximum class sizes for science lessons. Laboratories in Hertfordshire, for example, are

Safety in practical lessons

designed to allow 2m² free floor space (excluding the area occupied by benches and cupboards etc.) for pupils aged 11-16 years. This is considered to be the amount of space required for safe working. The authority also specifies that in laboratories with fixed benches each pupil needs approximately 700mm of bench space.

> **Physical education**

Again, no statutory limit is placed on class sizes in PE lessons. In determining staff/pupil ratios, therefore, it is necessary to rely on health and safety legislation and in particular the risk assessment process (see below).

In particular, when determining the size of teaching groups in PE, account should be taken of:

- the nature of the activity;
- the location of the activity – e.g. indoor/outdoor; and
- the age, experience, maturity, competence and behavioural/emotional characteristics of the pupils.

The school or local authority has a responsibility to carry out 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessments in all curriculum areas, including PE. Where there is a gap in such provision, the school/local authority is failing to comply with the law.

If there is a risk assessment, but in the professional opinion of PE staff/Head of PE it is insufficient with regard to its provisions on class sizes, the matter should be raised urgently with senior management in order that it might be properly reviewed.

Should such a review be unsatisfactory in the professional opinion of PE staff/Head of PE, or should a request to undertake one be ignored, contact should be made with the [NEU Adviceline](#).

> **Artificial football pitches**

There have been some recent reports citing a potential link between artificial 3G football pitches and certain types of cancer.

The concerns relate to the small pellets used in artificial turf, which are made from used car tyres, and can be ingested or become lodged in wounds during football games. Testing in the USA has shown that pellets can contain substances such as lead and mercury. However, there has yet to be similar testing carried out in the UK, so it is not currently possible to confirm if pellets used on artificial pitches in the UK also contain these substances.

As the link is yet to be proven or disproven, the NEU would suggest that schools take these issues into account when completing their risk assessment for Physical Education if artificial pitches are used during lessons.

> **Other practical subjects**

The above table gives useful indications of minimum standards across a range of other practical subjects including music, drama and art. In the view of the NEU, what matters is the nature of the activity and the circumstances in which it is being undertaken (see section on risk assessments above). Although some activities are inherently more hazardous than others, all practical activities can become hazardous in some circumstances due to factors such as age and ability of pupils, design of work areas, experience of teachers etc.

> **Other points**

In addition to maximising the safety and wellbeing of pupils, there is a need to recognise the effect of class size on teacher stress and to consider at what point this becomes a health and safety

Safety in practical lessons

issue – for both teacher and pupils. A significant factor affecting the mental and physical health of a teacher might be the mutually reinforcing effects of excessive stress and pupils' frustration caused by a lack of individual attention in over-large classes. Teachers generally are aware of the potential areas of danger in the classroom, and stress can be caused by continually trying to identify and anticipate problems.

It should also be recognised that some equipment in design areas can generate significant noise, thereby causing physical stress when teachers are obliged to talk above the noise. Checks should be undertaken to determine if the regulations governing noise at work are being complied with. If maximum exposure levels are exceeded, remedial action must be taken – the simplest and most effective being class size reduction. Teachers should also be vigilant for signs of vocal strain: NEU guidance on voice care and classroom acoustics can be found on the NEU website.

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

> Association for Physical Education (afPE)

The [Association for Physical Education](#) (afPE), is an association for advisers, lecturers, inspectors, consultants, advisory teachers and other professionals with qualifications in physical education, sport and dance. It exists to promote and maintain high standards and safe practice on all aspects and at all levels of physical education.

> Association for Science Education (ASE)

The [Association for Science Education](#) is a community of teachers, technicians, and other professionals supporting science education and is the largest subject association in the UK.

> Design and Technology Association (DATA)

The [Design and Technology Association](#) provides up to date information on all major developments which have an impact on D&T, including the new National Curriculum and GCSE reforms.

> CLEAPSS

[CLEAPSS](#) exists to support practical science and technology in schools and colleges. All local authorities in England and Wales are members of CLEAPSS, so any teacher working for a local authority can make full use of the many services this organisation provides, including resources, helpline, conferences and courses. Teachers working for other employers will need to check whether their employer is a member of CLEAPSS before accessing services.

> Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

[Woodworking Information Sheets](#)