Health and Safety Services

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH
Part of London and South East University Group

Guidance on Work at Height - Ladders and Stepladders

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1. Overview

This document provides guidance for the safe selection, inspection, and use of ladders and stepladders at the University of Greenwich. It incorporates practical safety measures and policy-level requirements to ensure compliance with relevant UK legislation, including The Work at Height Regulations 2005,The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER).

Improper use of ladders and stepladders can result in serious injury or fatality. All work at height must be properly risk assessed and only carried out by competent persons using suitable, well-maintained equipment. This guidance applies to all staff, students, and contractors using ladders on university premises, whether for maintenance, facilities work, teaching, or any other activity requiring access above ground level.

2. Definitions

"Ladder" - A leaning or extension ladder.

"Stepladder" - A self-supporting portable ladder.

"Short Duration" - Work that lasts no more than 30 minutes.

"Three Points of Contact" - Two feet and one hand (or body support) maintained during ladder use.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. Senior Leadership

This includes members of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE), Faculty Operating Officers (FOOs), Executive Directors, Deputy Directors, Associate Directors, Deputy Deans, or anyone on a senior managers contract. They are responsible for ensuring that adequate systems, resources, and training are in place within their departments. Senior leaders must champion safe work at height practices and hold line managers accountable for compliance with this guidance and associated risk management processes.

3.2. Line Managers

Line managers must ensure individuals under their supervision are competent, trained, and follow safe ladder practices. Managers must verify risk assessments are in place and confirm equipment is suitable for the task.

3.3. Estates and Facilities Department (EFD)

The Estates & Facilities Department (EFD) are responsible for ensuring that ladder use across the campus is managed safely. EFD oversees equipment procurement standards, storage practices, and ensures ladders used on-site meet regulatory standards. They also coordinate inspections and manage formal equipment logs including Crimson database entries.

3.4. Maintenance Technician Supervisors

They must supervise staff and contractors performing work at height using ladders and ensure that ladder safety procedures are followed, including pre-use checks and safe positioning. They may suspend work where unsafe conditions exist.

3.5. Health and Safety Services

Health and Safety Services are responsible for providing advice and support to ensure compliance with this guidance. They are expected to review ladder-related procedures and associated risk assessments when required. They may conduct audits or investigations following incidents or breaches of compliance and may suspend work where unsafe conditions exist.

3.6. Health and Safety Managers

Advise on technical and legal compliance, coordinate ladder safety initiatives, and oversee training provisions and equipment inspection programmes.

3.7. Health and Safety Local Officers (HASLOs)

HaSLOs act as the local point of contact for ladder-related queries. Support local ladder inspections, storage audits, and provide feedback on ladder incidents or near-misses.

3.6. All Staff

University employees must complete pre-use checks, report faults, and only use ladders for tasks confirmed to be low risk and short duration. They are also responsible for ensuring that equipment is suitable and that safety measures are adhered to throughout the operation. If unsafe conditions are observed, employees must halt work, report immediately and the ladder taken out of service.

3.7. All Students

Students are not permitted to use ladders unless formally trained and authorised. Their activities must be supervised by university staff.

3.8. Contractors

Contractors are responsible for complying with all university ladder safety standards. Their equipment must meet UK safety regulations, and they must submit risk assessments prior to work. Work must be coordinated with EFD.

They must not undertake any activity involving ladders and step ladders without a valid permit and must ensure that all personnel involved are competent and properly equipped. The designated responsible person within the contractor's team must ensure all ladder safety arrangements are understood and implemented, including appropriate equipment use and secure ladder positioning.

4. Guidance

This guidance aligns with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, The Work at Height Regulations 2005 and the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER). Ladders and stepladders must only be used when a risk assessment has confirmed their suitability for a short duration(no more than 30 minutes at a time), and for low-risk task. All users must ensure equipment is in good condition, appropriate for the task, positioned and used safely.

4.1. Before Using Ladders or Step Ladders

Before using a ladder or stepladder, consider the following:

a) **Is a ladder the right equipment for the job?**

- Ladder use is appropriate only for low-risk tasks of short duration (30 minutes or less), where other access equipment such as towers or platforms cannot be used.
- Short duration alone is not a sufficient reason; always check for safer alternatives.
- Ladders must be non-conductive (fibreglass or timber) when used near electricity.
- Tasks should ideally be done using one hand. Maintain three points of contact (e.g. two feet and one hand).
- Avoid using ladders for repetitive tasks at multiple locations to prevent errors from frequent repositioning.

b) **Is the planned location suitable?**

- Surface must be firm and level. Do not place ladders on bricks, pallets, or unstable bases.
- Check if the ladder can be properly secured. Most ladder accidents result from slipping or falling.
- Ensure the ladder is the correct height: users should reach their working height while standing at least 1 metre below the top.

4.2. Before Using Leaning Ladders and Performing Daily Pre-Use Checks

- **Stiles** – Not twisted, bent, or damaged.
- **Feet** – Present, clean, undamaged, and not worn.
- **Rungs** – Not cracked, bent, loose, or missing.
- **Locking mechanisms** – Working correctly and not deformed.
- **Steps/Treads** – Clean and secure.

Note: Defective ladders must not be used. Makeshift, homemade, or painted ladders are not allowed. DIY ladders (Class III) are unsuitable for university use. Use only ladders conforming to BS EN131 or Class I.

4.3. Positioning and Securing of Ladders

When positioning a ladder:

- Place on firm, level ground, not pallets, bricks, or vehicles.

- Rest against a solid surface, not glazing or fragile materials.
- Apply the 1:4 ratio rule (1 foot out for every 4 feet up).
- Keep clear of doors, traffic routes, and overhead power lines (minimum 6m unless proven dead/insulated).
- Set up exclusion zones with barriers or signs where needed.

4.4. Securing the Ladder

- Both stiles should be secured at the top where possible.
- If fixing is not possible, a second person must foot the ladder during use.
- Ladders over 5m must always be secured.

4.5. Before Using Stepladders and Performing Pre-Use Checks

- **Stiles** – Not twisted, bent, or damaged.
- **Feet** – Clean, intact, not worn or missing.
- **Steps/Rungs** – Secure and undamaged.
- **Locking mechanisms** – Functional and locking fully.
- **Platform** – Not split, loose, or buckled.

4.6. Positioning Stepladders Correctly

- Set all four feet on firm, level ground.
- Avoid resting against fragile or inappropriate surfaces.
- Avoid side-loading. Position stepladder facing the task.
- In tight spaces (e.g., storerooms), side-on working may be permitted if the ladder is fully locked and risk assessed.

5. Safety Measures

5.1. Safe Use Practice

- Carry only light materials or tools; preferably use a tool belt. Consider the combined weight of your body, tools, and materials.
- Always check the ladder label for the maximum safe working load (SWL).
- Always face the ladder and maintain three points of contact—typically two feet and one hand, or two feet and body support such as the knees or chest.
- If both hands must be used briefly (e.g., to start knocking in a nail or screw), ensure body support is maintained.
- For longer-duration two-hand tasks, consider additional fall protection or alternative access equipment.
- Do not lean or overreach. Your belt buckle or navel should remain within the stiles of the ladder.
- If the task is out of reach, climb down and reposition the ladder.

- Never move or extend a ladder while standing on it. Always descend first and reposition it securely.
- Do not use the top three rungs of a leaning ladder for working.
- The ladder must extend at least 1 metre above the work surface to provide adequate handhold and stability.
- Do not work from the top three steps of a stepladder (including the top platform) unless there is a suitable handhold. If this is required, a risk assessment must first confirm it is safe, and no safer alternative exists.

5.2. Inspection and Maintenance

All ladders and stepladders must undergo a visual inspection before each use to ensure they are in safe working condition. Any ladder found to be damaged or defective must be taken out of service immediately and reported to the relevant manager or safety officer.

In addition to daily checks, ladders and stepladders purchased for use by University of Greenwich employees must be:

- Registered in the Crimson insurance inspection database. This ensures they are subject to periodic formal inspections by the University's appointed insurance inspector.
- To enable this process, the details of each ladder, including its storage location, must be submitted to the EFD Health and Safety Team.
- Only ladders that meet British Standards (BS EN131 or Class I) are permitted.
- Makeshift, painted, or DIY ladders are not allowed under any circumstances.

6. Further information

6.1. Related HSE Guidance:

Further general guidance on Hot Work can be found on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) web pages; The Work at Height Regulations 2005,The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER).

6.2. Related University documents:

- Contractors working on University premises - appointment and control
- HSSXXX- Working at Height Guidance

6.3. Other related guidance:

- the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)
- The Work at Height Regulations 2005,The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Document History

Details of previous reviews are as follows:

Review Date	Reviewer	Summary of Review
dd-mmm-20	Name / Role	First revision (V.2020.1)
13-June-25	Michelle Owusua Appiah-Agyekum Health and Safety Advisor	Annual review – Content updated for web accessibility. HSE Guidance and regulations on Working at Height included.
29-10-2026	Chantelle Marriott Health & Safety Advisor	Updated with new logo and revision number

This document will be reviewed at least annually here after.