

OHS Body of Knowledge

Educators' Introduction and Update

July 2020

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1 Introduction to the OHS BoK

The *OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals* (OHS BoK) was developed in response to an identified need to define the collective knowledge that should be shared by Australian generalist OHS professionals as a basis for understanding the causation and control of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health. The OHS Body of Knowledge is not intended to be a definitive statement, fixed in time. Rather it is subject to continual reinterpretation and evolution as people engage with it, apply it, and extend it by research. The OHS Body of Knowledge is freely available to individuals interested in evidenced-based OHS practice.¹ It can be accessed at www.ohsbok.org.au with a synopsis available at <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/chapter-1-3-synopsis-of-the-ohs-body-of-knowledge/> and a chapter list at <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/chapter-1-2-contents/>.

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WorkSafe Victoria funded the development of the first edition of the *OHS Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals* published in 2012 assigning the copyright to the then Safety Institute of Australia (now the Australian Institute of Health & Safety, AIHS). Four further chapters were developed during 2013-14 with the support of Safe Work Australia with new chapters being added and existing chapters reviewed on an ongoing basis.

The quality and rigour of content of each chapter is ensured through selection of authors who are recognised national, and sometimes international experts in their subject. In most cases chapter development is informed by input from a Topic Specific Technical Panel and tested in focus groups of OHS professionals with each chapter peer reviewed and also edited by an academic editor. Each chapter provides a synopsis of the topic by reviewing the development of thinking and practice on the topic, the extent of the problem or the need for action, an explanation of the key concepts and principles of control. Each chapter features a section on implications for practice.

Building on the recognised international application of the OHS Body of Knowledge and where mutual interests align, development of new chapters and review of existing chapters is in partnership with international OHS bodies. The benefits of such partnerships were evident in the two chapters on process safety which were published in 2017 as a result of a joint project with the Institution of Chemical Engineers Centre for Safety and the 2019 chapter on *Ethics and Professional Practice* developed in conjunction with the Board of Canadian Registered Safety Professionals (BCRSP).

For further details on the background and development of the OHS BoK see

Pryor, P. (2019). Developing the core body of knowledge for the generalist OHS professional. *Safety Science*, 115, 19-27.

Pryor, P. (2019). Introduction. In *The Core Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professionals*. 2nd Ed. Tullamarine, VIC: Australian Institute of Health and Safety. Retrieved from <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/foreword-acknowledgments/#1548328004981-b89ce6eb-6a9a>

2 OHS BoK as an accreditation requirement

Providers of OHS professional education accredited by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board (AOHSEAB) have been assessed as meeting a range of criteria addressing: student attainment; learning environment; teaching; research training; quality assurance; governance and information management.

Under the accreditation standard for *Student participation and attainment*, the criteria for *Learning outcomes and assessment* include:

- 1.9 The program includes integrated tasks and structured learning experiences that address the conceptual structure of the OHS Body of Knowledge as defined in the current version of the Accreditation Information Pack.

In completing the application for accreditation education providers are required to indicate the concepts and sub-concepts (chapters) of the OHS BoK addressed in their program and the depth to which they are covered.

It is not expected that education programs would address the totality of the OHS BoK. For the purposes of accreditation, the scope of the Body of Knowledge is limited to that with which a new graduate would be expected to engage and so is somewhat limited. It is expected that while there will be breadth to the new graduates' knowledge there will also be depth in some areas so that the program addresses the OHS Body of Knowledge from an advanced theoretical and technical perspective, with both breadth and depth in some areas.

3 OHS BoK as it applies to graduates

The OHS BoK forms the basis for certification of OHS professionals by the Australian Institute of Health & Safety. New graduates from programs accredited by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board may apply to be certified as a Certified OHS Graduate (COHSGrad). Having completed 3 years of experience in an OHS professional role those holding an accredited AQF 7, 8 or 9 level OHS qualification may apply to be assessed for Certified OHS Professional (COHSProf). (See <https://www.aihs.org.au/certification>). Graduates of accredited programs are deemed to have met the qualification requirement for certification while graduates of other programs have their qualifications individually assessed.

Having met the qualification and experience requirements, applicants for certification are required to complete a capability assessment which includes submission of one or more *Practice Reports*. These reports require the candidate to review a recent project to reflect on how they applied key concepts from the OHS Body of Knowledge and how they demonstrated the relevant practice capabilities. (See <https://www.aihs.org.au/certification/forms/apply-forupgrade-certification>). Students can be prepared for the certification application process through assignment(s) set as part of their studies requiring them to reflect on a project and document their reflections in the format required by the Practice Report. Such activity also increases the student's/graduate's familiarity with the OHS BoK.

4 A closer look at the OHS BoK and related resources and their use in OHS professional education

The OHS BoK “defines the core knowledge with which a generalist OHS professional should be able to engage ...”. This means that students and professionals should be familiar with the concepts, the evidence for the concepts and be able to discuss how they might apply in practice. The OHS BoK is not a text book, nor a course of study or a ‘how to’ manual. It is not expected, or desired, that educators “teach the OHS BoK”. It is expected that:

- The content of the chapters informs course development
- The relevant chapters are listed in topic specific core reading material
- That student discussion and report referencing demonstrate familiarity with the content of the OHS BoK
- With the evolving nature of OHS knowledge and practice students contribute to critical discussion around the evolutionary needs of the OHS BoK.

While the core of the OHS BoK is a series of topic specific chapters, the OHS BoK web site shows that the OHS BoK is much more than that.

Home page <https://www.ohsbok.org.au>

- Explains why the OHS BoK is important
- Gives links to podcasts, videos and presentations which introduce the OHS BoK including to students and explains how the OHS BoK supports the translation of research to practice
- Provides updates on current news and projects.

Structure <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/conceptual-structure/>

- The diagram describing the conceptual approach to the OHS Body of Knowledge provides a mental model that should underpin the students’ developmental ‘journey’.
- The diagram also highlights that understanding and managing OHS is not a straight line. OHS professionals can’t start at Chapter 1 and work their way through to the end. Also, they can’t expect all the answers to a particular problem or question in one chapter. Rather they need to draw on the concepts (chapters) to build up the knowledge to answer the question, solve the problem to develop a strategy.

Chapters <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/bok-chapters/>

Each chapter can be downloaded separately. Users are advised to read chapter 1.1 *Synopsis* and 2 *Introduction* which provide background to the information contained in individual chapters. Readers should also note the copyright requirements and the disclaimer before using or acting on the information.

Each chapter page on the website includes:

- An Overview of the chapter with abstract and key words

- Chapter Download page with a quick view of the table of contents and a link to the chapter for download
- Author bio information
- Learning outcomes for the chapter together with a document explaining how the learning outcomes are structured and their intended use
- A range of freely available resources specific to the chapter topic.

The OHS BoK chapters are freely available on the OHS BoK website, www.ohsbok.org.au. Educators and program developers should provide students with the link to individual chapters rather than download the document to their learning management system. This enables us to track the level of usage and interest and also ensures that students have the most up-to-date versions.

To optimise the value of the OHS BoK for education and professional development learning outcomes have been developed for each technical chapter. While the learning outcomes should inform the development of learning and assessment activities they not intended to be specifically included in the program documentation but rather describe what will be expected of the new graduate when they enter the in the workplace. Thus they provide both educator and students with a vision for the educational outcomes of each chapter.

5 A quick summary of recent changes and updates

The OHS BoK is being continuously reviewed and updated. The year 2019 saw the development of a new web site, review and updating of existing chapters and addition of new chapters. All original chapters have been or are being reviewed and updated. Some chapters have had relatively minor reviews others have had extensive updates. As at time of writing, reviews have been completed for 22 chapters with reviews in process for a further six. Seven of the original chapters have been deemed as requiring major review or a new chapter. Seven new chapters have been added in the last 12 months with seven in various stages of development. (See summary of chapter updates on the web site under *Development*)

I particularly draw your attention to four new chapters.

10.2 Organisational Culture

The original chapter on organisational culture has been retitled and republished as 10.2.1 *Organisational Culture – A search for meaning*. Dr David Borys has written a new chapter as a companion to that chapter, 10.2.2 *Organisational Culture – Reviewed and Repositioned*. Together, these two chapters provide an opportunity for student discussion of the importance of the evidence base in OHS practice not only as it relates to the topic of ‘culture’ but more generally in OHS practice.

34.3 Health and Safety in Design

Incorporating ergonomic, engineering and OHS expertise this chapter not only explores the concept from a holistic view it introduces the role of the generalist OHS professional as a 'black hat' and provides a tool to support OHS professionals in this role.

37.4 Workers Working from Home

Developed in response to the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the government recommendation for workers to work from home where possible, this chapter builds on the limited literature and draws on the outcomes of a survey and interviews with OHS professionals to develop principles for OHS practice to inform the design of work for working from home. In doing this, the chapter highlights the need for OHS professionals to be adaptable and take a holistic view of work and workplace design that goes beyond checklists and inspections.

38.3 Ethics and Professional practice

Ethics is a vital part of the OHS professional education which is often neglected or educators find it difficult to teach in a realistic way that engages students. This new chapter is a seminal work in OHS. It not only presents some ethical theory, it also explores ethical challenges in OHS practice and provides some models for thinking about and acting on ethical issues in OHS practice. From an education perspective, the chapter includes some scenarios to facilitate discussion. Related resources on *Ethics and Professional Practice* are on the web page for the chapter web under *Chapters* on the OHS Bok web site include resources to support 'ethical conversations' which can be used as a teaching resource.

We are also just completing a major review of chapter 39.1 *The OHS professional as a critical consumer of research*. This chapter should be a key reference for students embarking on OHS professional studies. It provides a basis for understanding the need for OHS practice to be informed by research together with a review of the types of research, research design, data collected and the key features of an academic paper as a basis for critical review. A framework for critical review of research papers is presented. We will send out a bulletin when the updated version of this chapter is posted.

Keeping in contact

As Manager OHS Body of Knowledge Development, I maintain an email list of OHS Educators. While we have not sent updates in recent times we plan to keep you updated in the future and would like to promote discussion on how you are using the OHS Body of Knowledge in your curriculum design and delivery.

If you are an OHS educator, whether in Australia or internationally, and want to confirm your inclusion on the email list just send an email to me at manager@ohsbok.org.au with your name, institution, location, program/qualification and of course your email.

