CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

ISO 14001, ISO 45001 and ISO 45003

Meet Cardiff University in Wales, UK. Leading teaching and research Russell Group University. NQA clients for ISO 14001, ISO 45001 and the groundbreaking standard ISO 45003, which gives practical guidance on managing psychological health and safety at work.

Since 1883, Cardiff University has been an educational cornerstone for undergraduate, postgraduate and research students globally.

The University is one of the UK's most research-intensive universities, with 7500 staff supporting their daily operations.

Alongside ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) and ISO 45001 (Health & Safety Management), Cardiff University is an NQA best practice example of ISO 45003 (Psychological Health & Safety at Work Management).

Cardiff University's motivation for ISO 45003 certification

Senior leadership involvement is vital in management systems – something Cardiff University ensures with each ISO certification.

The drive for ISO 45003 (Psychological Health & Safety at Work Management) stemmed from Cardiff University's Health, Safety & Wellbeing Committee and Executive Board.

Both parties – Cardiff University and NQA – recognised that ISO 45003 was the next step in developing health and safety and pre-existing ISO 45001 (Health & Safety Management) certification.

According to Cardiff University, "We saw compliance with ISO 45003 as a natural evolution of our commitment to physical health and safety – evidenced by our pre-existing ISO 45001 certification. We wanted to create a more holistic approach, bringing physical and psychological health and safety risks management into a single [integrated] management system."

The conversation around mental health continues to grow, with Cardiff University and ISO 45003 leading the way.

The research behind psychological safety at work

Cardiff University's decision to pursue ISO 45003 certification was also backed by a powerful societal case around psychological safety.

The **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** found that fatal workplace injuries declined by around 90% between the Health and Safety at Work Act being introduced in 1974 and 2020/21.

While the downward trend in fatalities and physical injuries continues, UK workplaces have seen a steady rise in psychological injuries. Stress, anxiety and depression accounted for 50% of all self-reported, work-related sickness absences in the UK during 2020/21 (HSE).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health-related sickness absence cost UK employers around £45 billion annually **(Deloitte and Mind, 2020)**. This has since rise to £51 billion per annum (Deloitte, May 2024).

Cardiff University's decision to pursue ISO 45003 reflects HSE research studies and trends.
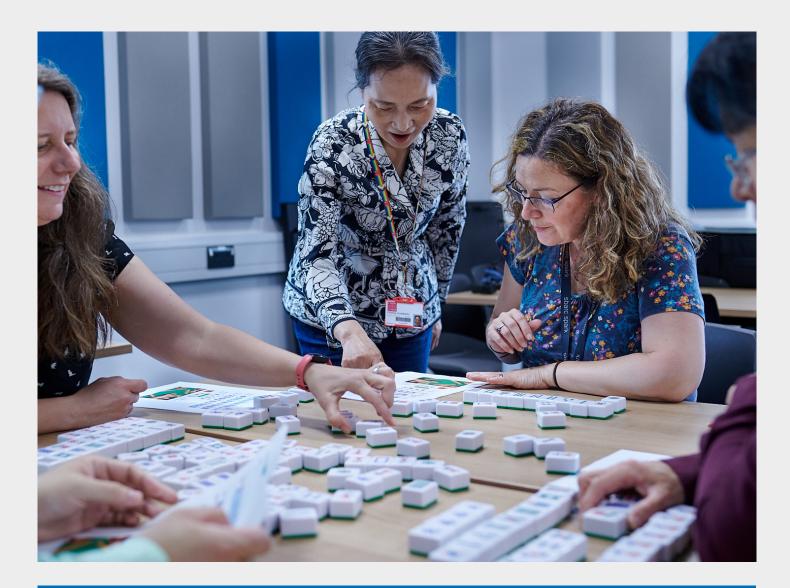
> " It is this concerning picture that makes ISO 45003 so important. As the first internationally accepted standard for psychological safety in the workplace, ISO 45003 is a powerful aid to preventative practice. We are proud to be compliant with this groundbreaking ISO standard. "
>
> **Cardiff University**

Taking the steps to ISO 45003 certification

Step 1:
Choosing NQA as the certification body

Cardiff University is a long-term client of NQA, having enjoyed and benefitted from this relationship.

"NQA has taken the time to understand us as an organisation, enabling them to challenge us and drive continuous improvement of the management system. The support they gave us to prepare for the demands of the ISO 45003 audit was instrumental in achieving this pioneering standard."

Step 2:
Preparing for the ISO 45003 audit

Cardiff University spent a year preparing for the ISO 45003 audit amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NQA gap analysis tool proved to be a valuable tool for the University, helping them:

- Gather a wealth of compliance evidence for the audit
- Receive suggestions about how to better present evidence
- Clarify how to define the ISO 45003 audit scope best

"Had we not undertaken this [gap analysis] exercise, we might not have been as well prepared for the official audit in May 2022. The gap analysis got us into the mindset of ISO 45003, which is a managerial philosophy as well as a methodology. It put us in a strong position for the final audit."

Step 3:
Succeeding with the ISO 45003 audit

Terry Fisher, NQA Principal Assessor for Occupational Health and Safety, was the lead auditor for Cardiff University.

"The audit days offered Terry the chance to test the reality of our psychological health and safety system. As he had reviewed the documentary evidence before arriving on-site, Terry could focus on a high volume of interviews with staff of various seniority levels across the University.

The interviews were testing and in-depth to give Terry a better 'feel' of things on the ground. He was then able to ask further questions and request additional documents to verify the personal statements. Terry finished the audit with a structured closing meeting, which clearly identified areas of best practice and those requiring further improvement."

Cardiff University first achieved ISO 45003 in July 2022, confirming their dedication to helping employees remain psychologically healthy and safe at work. They were re-audited in May 2024 and were again found to be compliant with the standard - offering compelling evidence of an ongoing commitment to workplace wellbeing.

The positive impact of ISO 45003 certification

Meeting the rigorous requirements of ISO 45003 has boosted Cardiff University in numerous ways.

The University has used the easily understandable ISO 45003 framework to become more psychologically literate and adopt a preventative outlook for students and staff.

Compliance with ISO 45003 formed part of Cardiff University's evidence base for the UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 3: Good Health and Wellbeing. In 2023, they were ranked 1st against this standard in the UK, and 31st worldwide (out of more than 1200 institutions), according to the Times Higher Education (THE) impact rankings.

Each of these successes has led to Cardiff University winning an award from the University Health and Safety Association (USHA) – not to mention:

- Better attracting and retaining staff and students
- Offering credible advice to other universities

With these positive impacts Cardiff University demonstrates how ISO 45003 helps enhance awareness, practices and reputation.

Internal & external next steps with ISO 45003

Cardiff University has a list of goals to achieve, working with stakeholders locally and globally to ensure lasting positive change.

Internal next steps

- Use ISO 45003 to inform the University's strategy to support psychological safety (for staff and students).
- Keep pace with the standard as it evolves, including theoretical and practical improvements.

External next steps

- Review opportunities Increase support to communities struggling with the UK cost of living crisis and lingering health inequalities – by sharing evidence-based self-care practices.
- Continue advising other higher education institutions as a sector-leading organisation with ISO 45003 compliance – in the UK and abroad.
- Contribute to national and global agendas for change (e.g. Welsh Government 2015 Wellbeing of Future Generations Act).

There is plenty more on the horizon for Cardiff University, benefiting the University and beyond.

Final thoughts from NQA

NQA congratulates Cardiff University for their ongoing ISO achievements.

Alongside ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) and ISO 45001 (Health & Safety Management), the University paves the way for a more positive and mentally aware future with ISO 45003 (Psychological Health & Safety at Work Management).

Get to grips with the fundamentals of ISO 45003. Sign up for our half-day, self-paced eLearning.

Want to learn about standards like ISO 14001, ISO 45001 and ISO 45003? Visit our certification page.

Discover everything you need to get started with ISO certification. Speak to a friendly expert today.

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