

**UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.****FIRE SAFETY ADVICE NOTE NO 3.****Means of Escape and Fire Exit Operation/Clearway checks.****1. Introduction.**

- 1.1 Means of escape is the term used to describe the ways out of a building and then to a place of safety where people can disperse. It is therefore a collective term which may include doors, corridors, internal and external staircases and ramps and it may also extend to routes outside of the building.
- 1.2 Once people have started to evacuate a building their safety should not be compromised by fire or smoke so means of escape are invariably protected by walls, floors and self-closing doors made from fire resisting materials. There are commonly also cross-corridor doors designed to contain smoke spread and these are also fire resisting and self-closing. Doors on escape routes, including cross-corridor doors, must not be secured in the closed position by any means.
- 1.3 Internal fire resisting doors cannot stop fire or smoke spreading unless they are closed so self-closing devices are an essential part of means of escape. Some doors are fitted with hold open devices linked to the fire alarm which automatically release and close on activation of the alarm. For this type of doors it is essential that nothing can impede the full closure of the door/s when the alarm activates.
- 1.4 Final exit doors do not usually need to be fire resisting or self-closing but they do need to be readily accessible and easily openable without the use of a key.

**2. How can you tell if it's a designated Means of Escape/Fire Exit?**

- 2.1 Means of escape routes are provided to ensure occupants can escape to a place of safety should a fire occur. It is essential that all designated means of escape routes are kept clear, unobstructed and free from combustible items. Fire exits are provided to ensure that the occupants of a building can egress safely in case of a fire.
- 2.2 A designated Means of Escape should have fire directional signage. They usually have a break glass point and often, fire extinguishers close by. Fire exits should have a sign on them and should be kept as a clearway on both sides of the door.

### 3. What do Means of Escape/Fire Exit provide?

- 3.1 The safety of our occupants and University buildings is paramount. A well-managed means of escape leading to a fire exit allows occupants to reach a place of safety in the event of a fire or other emergency. Such arrangements are dependent upon ensuring that they are available for use at all times, that they are well lit with emergency lighting (in case of mains power failure) and well signed so that the routes are easy to follow. All such routes are vital and need to be kept clear of obstacles and available for use at all times.
- 3.2 Human behaviour dictates that people will usually try to leave a building by the same route that they came in by. Whilst staff and students do receive training and every building has fire evacuation procedure notices, on their own these cannot be relied upon to elicit the desired response. It is therefore important that alternative exit routes are adequately signed.
- 3.3 Directional and final exit signs must be visible and where necessary, illuminated. In simple terms, people should be able to “turn their back” on any fire they discover (anywhere within a building) and follow the exit signs to get out. If the existing signage doesn’t do this, it is likely that additional signage will be needed.

### 4. Checking that the Means of Escape are readily available.

- 4.1 The means of escape are an essential element of any buildings safety arrangements so it is vitally important that anything that may compromise the means of escape is identified and actioned immediately. The only way to ensure that the means of escape are maintained fully available is to undertake regular inspections. Checking that final exit doors are not locked or otherwise unavailable needs to be checked **on a daily basis**. Other aspects of maintaining the means of escape can be done less frequently as per the table below:

MoE issue	Checking frequency
Final exits easily openable without the use of a key and unobstructed - inside and out. NB. Check that the door is not linked to any security alarm and if necessary, liaise with Security before opening.	DAILY
Corridors and staircases unobstructed and free of combustible materials.	WEEKLY
Internal fire doors – working smoothly and self-closing effectively.	MONTHLY
Wayfinding – do directional exit signs lead you to a final exit? Are there exit signs above all final exit doors?	6 MONTHLY

- 4.2 An obstructed means of escape or a fire exit that cannot be opened easily are serious safety matters and must be actioned immediately. Some issues can be locally resolved but where this isn’t possible, the Estates Helpdesk should be

contacted immediately so that remedial action can be taken. In extreme cases the Fire Team should be contacted.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 it is not anticipated that this visual check is work intensive, remember it is a quick visual check and the majority of our Means of Escape/Fire doors should be perfectly clear to see, clear of obstructions and available. It is only rarely the odd one which should require referring to the help desk, but by ensuring that this is the case and that any issue is dealt with in a timely manner, it will ensure that everyone within our buildings are safe from fire if one should occur.