

BSP FAQs

Introduction

These questions have been developed to help you when you are compiling your portfolio. Think of your portfolio as a job application/interview; you need to be able to demonstrate to someone who doesn't know you well (or at all), exactly what you have done, how you did it and what was achieved.

1. [Is this scheme only for institutional/corporate BSOs?](#)
2. [What does my mentor do?](#)
3. [What does my assessor do?](#)
4. [How much evidence is needed for each unit?](#)
5. [How much detail do I need to present in my evidence?](#)
6. [Can I use the same evidence for more than one unit?](#)
7. [I am finding it difficult to provide evidence for certain units as I don't have direct experience of the issue eg because of the size of my organisation, what should I do?](#)
8. [How should I present the information?](#)
9. [How do I submit my portfolio?](#)
10. [How much time will it take me to prepare my portfolio?](#)
11. [Do I need permission to do the "Others" optional unit?](#)
12. [Some of the material in my evidence is confidential, what should I do?](#)
13. [I don't have access to some of the source material for my evidence because, for example, I have moved jobs or the material is confidential, what should I do?](#)
14. [Can I use testimonials eg from former employers, as part of my evidence?](#)
15. [What happens to my portfolio after it has been assessed?](#)
16. [Should I keep my portfolio once it has been assessed?](#)
17. [I plan to submit my portfolio under "Grandparent rights", but what happens if I miss the deadline?](#)
18. [I don't work in the UK, can I submit a portfolio?](#)

1. Is this scheme only for institutional/corporate BSOs?

No – although individuals working at the institutional level may find it easier to provide evidence, if you are a BSO working in a large, complex bio-department who has responsibility for managing biosafety of that department, you should be able to prepare a portfolio. Remember, although you may be departmentally based, think about the contributions you may have made to the development of institutional policies and procedures and any support you provide for the institutional BSO eg deputising, working directly with them during audits etc. [Back to list of questions](#)

2. What does my mentor do?

Your mentor is there to help you produce your portfolio to the required standards. Having a mentor is not a requirement for completion but one will be appointed if you request it. You will be told who your mentor is when you register on the scheme and you should initiate contact with them. When having this initial conversation, it is probably worth having had a first pass of the evidence that you are going to supply so that you can discuss any obvious gaps or shortfalls in evidence.

Remember that your mentor is not paid for this role and is there primarily to help clarify issues, not to review material as you produce it. You should establish your own “rules of engagement” with your mentor at the outset, so both sides are clear on the nature/degree of contact that is expected.

If your mentor and assessor is the same person, it is probably worth indicating when you plan to submit so that they can plan-in time for the assessment process. [Back to list of questions](#)

3. What does my assessor do?

Your assessor provides a formal report on your portfolio to the ISTR Executive Committee (ISTR EC). They can either:

- Recommend you for acceptance onto the BSP register;
- Require improvements, clarifications and/or additional evidence – this will mean entering into a dialogue with your assessor until such time as they are satisfied that you have met the required criteria; or
- Reject the portfolio.

The ISTR EC does not see your portfolio, only the report from the assessor. These reports are formally considered when the ISTR EC meets (currently 4 times a year). [Back to list of questions](#)

4. How much evidence is needed for each unit?

It was anticipated that the minimum evidence that you would need would be a summary of single project or piece of work. However, if you think that your evidence is weak, for example, you are describing the management of an on-going activity such inspection inspections, you may need to indicate numbers and types of inspection and/or add detail about the development of inspection programmes and the procedures to be followed. [Back to list of questions](#)

5. How much detail do I need to present in my evidence?

There needs to be sufficient information in the summary that allows the assessor to understand what you did, including the rationale for the piece of work and those you consulted in taking the project forward. You should describe the processes involved eg meetings, presentations, training etc. Finally, you need to outline the outcome(s) of your work; can you describe what successful implementation looks like eg feedback from staff, reduced accident rates, fewer non-compliances identified during inspections etc. The detail comes in the evidence supplied but be choosy about the exact evidence given. For example you don't need to provide detail of every time the issue was discussed at meetings but rather provide the key paper given to the institutional health and safety committee which summarises the position and the recommendations being made. [Back to list of questions](#)

6. Can I use the same evidence for more than one unit?

Yes, but you need to be clear how the evidence applies. For example if you have developed an institutional code of practice on the management of biosafety, you can point to specific sections eg on the transport of infectious substances as some or all of the evidence in that area (eg under Units 3b or 4). You may also find it easier to roll units together when describing a piece of work and assembling evidence, in particular under Units 5a and b (risk management and control). [Back to list of questions](#)

7. I am finding it difficult to provide evidence for certain units as I don't have direct experience of the issue eg because of the size of my organisation, what should I do?

Under grandparent rights, where you need to provide evidence a detailed understanding in respect of a mandatory unit and you don't consider that you have enough direct experience of the issue, eg investigation of incidents, you will need to provide sufficient evidence in other areas eg development of and delivery of training or running of exercises to demonstrate that you have the knowledge of this area. If you cannot provide sufficient evidence for a particular unit, it may be better to transfer to the 5 year scheme and develop/acquire the evidence before submission of your portfolio.

If you are developing your portfolio based on 5 years experience and lack evidence in particular mandatory area, you should work to develop skills in that area if possible. If this is difficult, for example few accidents are reported, therefore few investigations are carried out, you could look to see if there are opportunities to investigate near misses or hazard observations ie precursor events or else develop a training programme that equips staff to investigate. [Back to list of questions](#)

8. How should I present the information?

There is no set format for the portfolio. The key thing to remember is that the assessor needs to be able to navigate the information easily and move from the summary to the evidence cited without too much effort. The format could be totally electronic, making use of hyperlinks to websites or attached electronic documents (Word, PowerPoint¹ etc).

A paper-based portfolio is equally acceptable but will need clear sign-posts eg index tabs/numbering so that evidence can easily be located.

Example of eformat below – the whole portfolio consisted of 2 Word documents:

- An overview document that contains the summary and justification for each unit. Evidence is cited but without links. Plans (ie future CPD) for the future are also indicated.
- An evidence document which contains an index table with hyperlinks to all the inserted/attached/embedded documents

¹ When inserting Powerpoint presentations, to keep the size of the overall document down, convert the presentation to an Adobe file and insert this as an object. The presentation can then be opened by clicking on the inserted object

Excerpt from Summary/justification:

2d: Organisational arrangements: Record keeping at the institutional level		
Summary and justification	Evidence	Plans for the future
<p>Sealability checks on Containment Level 3 laboratories – University of Liverpool has a number of operational Containment Level 3 laboratories. Following initial inspection of these laboratories, it was apparent that only some were carrying out regular checks on the sealability of the room. Initially I carried out leak tests myself of all the operational laboratories so that I could establish a baseline record. I also trained some users. But, following the publication of the HSE guidance, I devised a procedure to ensure that regular checks were made and a central record held; this consisted of practical guidance, a recording form, including a record of remedial works. By maintaining a central record, I was able to remind users when re-tests were due, and also ensure that current information was readily available for HSE in the event of an inspection.</p>	<p>Link to guidance and forms on UoL website Copy of actual report as example</p>	<p>To implement a similar standard at UCL</p>

Excerpt from evidence document

2d: Organisational arrangements: Record keeping at the institutional level	<p>UoL guidance on testing sealability of CL3 laboratories and recording form - http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/safety/workareahazards/biosafety/coshh/sealability.pdf http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/safety/workareahazards/biosafety/coshh/Containment_Level_3_laboratory_form.doc Example report * (NB link will not work as document is not embedded here)</p>
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[Back to list of questions](#)

9. How do I submit my portfolio?

Your portfolio should be submitted to the Scheme administrator with the final fee payment (£150 for ISTR members, £175 for non-members). Your portfolio will then be forward to your appointed assessor for review. If your assessor and mentor are the same person, you should let them know you are about to submit so they know that it's on its way to them. [Back to list of questions](#)

10. How much time will it take me to prepare my portfolio?

It is difficult to give an exact time. A first pass of the units would probably take half a day but putting all the information together will take longer. Those who have already submitted have indicated that they spent no more than a working week in total. [Back to list of questions](#)

11. Do I need permission to do the "Others" optional unit?

No, but it is suggested that you at least discuss this with your mentor to ensure that you are able to provide sufficient evidence in support of the unit. [Back to list of questions](#)

12. Some of the material in my evidence is confidential, what should I do?

You do not need to provide names of persons, their role/job title should be sufficient if needed? Depending on the nature of your work, you may need to discuss this with the relevant department in your organisation, as they may need to review your portfolio before submission. Simple redaction of names, room numbers or any other specific identifiers on any documents that are submitted as part of the portfolio is acceptable. [Back to list of questions](#)

13. I don't have access to some of the source material for my evidence because, for example, I have moved jobs or the material is confidential, what should I do?

Although you may not have direct access to some material, consider whether there is anything publically available eg on a website, in conference proceedings that indicates the final outcome of a piece of work, eg a Code of Practice. You should still be able describe the process in detail and you may wish to support this with evidence from a third party. For example a manager or colleague who worked with you who is able to corroborate your contribution/role. [Back to list of questions](#)

14. Can I use testimonials eg from former employers, as part of my evidence?

Yes. These may be helpful to corroborate your contribution or the role that you played especially where you do not have direct access to supporting material. [Back to list of questions](#)

15. What happens to my portfolio after it has been assessed?

If you would like your portfolio returned, please let your assessor know when you submit it. Please note that all material is treated as confidential and is only seen by your assessor. Material will be destroyed in not required by the applicant following a successful application. [Back to list of questions](#)

16. Should I keep my portfolio once it has been assessed?

It may be helpful to refer back to original material; especially this is to be developed further for future submission of your CPD portfolio. [Back to list of questions](#)

17. I plan to submit my portfolio under “Grandparent rights”, but what happens if I miss the deadline?

If you miss your allocated deadline, then you lose the right to use evidence going back further than 5 years and will have to submit your portfolio as a conventional candidate and only use evidence from the last 5 years. [Back to list of questions](#)

18. I don't work in the UK, can I submit a portfolio?

There is no specific requirement to be UK-based in order to submit a portfolio. Your assessor will have sufficient knowledge to be able to judge the adequacy your evidence regardless of location. However, their knowledge of your local legal framework may be limited, so they may need additional clarification in respect of this unit. However, your evidence should be sufficient to demonstrate that you have interpreted the legal framework appropriately, not just that you can list the relevant laws/statutes that apply. [Back to list of questions](#)