GUIDANCE ON THE PURCHASING AND USE OF LASER POINTERS

Laser pointers used in the University should be of Class 1 or Class 2 as defined in the British Standard for laser safety. Pointers of a Class higher than Class 2 should not be used unless advice on their use has been sought from the University’s Radiation Protection Advisers.

The misuse of laser pointers (sometimes referred to as laser pens) reported in the press has generated public concern over the safety of these devices. The British Standard for laser safety sets out seven Classes of laser, these are Class 1, Class 1M, Class 2, Class 2M, Class 3R, Class 3B and Class 4. The higher the Class number, the greater the power of the laser and the hazard posed by the laser.

The British Standard provides advice on the use of lasers for demonstrations, displays and exhibition and states that only Class 1 or Class 2 devices should be used in unsupervised areas. Laser pointers used by, for example, professional lecturers in the workplace are considered to fall under this category.

The Radiation Protection Division of the UK’s Health Protection Agency (HPA) has endorsed this advice and considers that Class 1 or Class 2 laser pointers should be adequate for most teaching applications. The HPA has urged Trading Standards Authorities to use their powers to remove laser pointers of a Class higher than Class 2 from the general market. Such devices are too powerful for general use as laser pointers and present an unacceptable risk of eye injury in normal reasonably foreseeable use.

Schools/Support Services should purchase laser pointers only from reputable suppliers in the UK who will sell laser pointers only of Class 1 or Class 2. The pointers should be marked clearly with the Class assigned under the British Standard. Laser pointers should not be purchased overseas where higher powered lasers are often freely available. Schools/Support Services should also review existing laser pointers which are in use to confirm that they are Class 1 or Class 2 and are marked accordingly. Advice on existing laser pointers and on purchasing new pointers can be obtained from the Audio Visual Unit in Old Aberdeen or from Audio Visual at Foresterhill.

Anyone who wishes to use a laser pointer of a Class higher than Class 2 should first seek advice from the University’s Radiation Service or the University Safety Adviser.

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