

Scientist who played a key role in the pandemic response is appointed chair of a new HSE committee



Cath Noakes, picture courtesy of Leeds University

A leading scientist who played an important role in Britain's response to the pandemic has been appointed chair of a new science committee.

Professor Cath Noakes led a sub-group of SAGE (UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) during the COVID-19 crisis. She will now chair a new committee that will offer assurance to Great Britain's workplace regulator the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Professor Noakes, who is professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings at the University of Leeds, has a background in ventilation, air quality, and infection control.

She will lead the new Science Quality Assurance Group (SQAG) at HSE, which will provide the workplace regulator with independent assurance on the relevance and quality of its scientific research. The advisory group will ensure important research into workplace health and safety is relevant, robust, and fit for the future.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Noakes co-chaired the Environment and Modelling sub-group for SAGE. She also advised the NHS, the World Health Organisation and several government departments. She was awarded an OBE for her services to the pandemic in 2020.

Professor Cath Noakes said: "It's a real honour to be appointed to this role as chair of a new committee that I believe can play an important part in ensuring science-based evidence used to protect people and places is of the highest quality.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing at first hand HSE's scientific expertise being put to full use during the pandemic ranging from fundamental studies on transmission through to the production of information videos on ventilation that helped inform workplaces of good practice in stopping the spread of the

virus.

“External experts drawn from relevant science and engineering disciplines, who are recognised as leaders in their fields, will now be asked to join the group which I’m privileged to lead.”

Chair of HSE, Sarah Newton, added: “Professor Noakes brings with her a wealth of scientific experience and her expertise and knowledge is a perfect fit as chair of our new committee.

“The newly formed Science Quality Assurance Group will consider how science and evidence delivered by HSE helps to maintain Great Britain’s record as one of the safest countries to work in while supporting our 10-year strategy. We look forward to working with the group and welcome Cath as chair.”

The Science Quality Assurance Group will have 12 members who will be independent, external experts drawn from relevant science and engineering disciplines. Members will be organised into four subgroups. Each subgroup will review scientific research carried out to support one or more of HSE’s strategic objectives in detail.

The four subgroups will be:

- Health and Safety
- Net Zero
- Chemicals Safety
- Buildings Safety

HSE is currently inviting applications for Independent Members of its new Science Quality Assurance Group (SQAG). To find out more click [here](#).

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Cath Noakes background information:

Professor Noakes is a chartered mechanical engineer, with a background in fluid dynamics. Her expertise is in building physics and environmental engineering, and she has led research into ventilation, indoor air quality and infection control in the built environment.

She joined the School of Civil Engineering at University of Leeds in 2002 as a postdoctoral researcher modelling air disinfection systems and was later appointed as a lecturer in 2007 and then promoted to Reader in 2010 and Chair in 2014.

Professor Noakes was Director of the Pathogen Control Engineering (PACE) research institute 2010-2014, and Director of Research and Innovation for the School of Civil Engineering 2014-2020. She is currently Deputy Director of Leeds Institute for Fluid Dynamics and Co-Director for the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Fluid Dynamics.

During the COVID-19 pandemic she co-chaired the Environment and Modelling sub-group for the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and

contributed to multiple advisory groups and initiatives through IMechE, CIBSE, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Academy of Medical Sciences, WHO, the NHS and several government departments.

She was Faculty of Engineering Athena Swan Lead 2014-2017 and led a successful Silver Athena Swan submission covering all five schools in the faculty. She was chair of the University Women at Leeds network 2013-2017 and in December 2021 was one of the guest lecturers in the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures.

Awards and professional recognition:

2022 – Honorary Fellow, Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE)

2021 – Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering

2020 – OBE for Services to the COVID-19 Pandemic

2020 – Royal Academy of Engineering Presidents Special Award for Pandemic Service

2018 – Academy of Fellows, International Society for Indoor Air Quality (ISIAQ)

2016 – University of Leeds, Women of Achievement Award

2014 – Recipient of IMechE Construction and Building Services Division Prize

2014 – Fellow of Institution of Mechanical Engineers (FIMechE)

2013 – Fellow of Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estates Management (FIHEEM)

Notes to editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. www.hse.gov.uk
2. HSE news releases are available at: <http://press.hse.gov.uk>