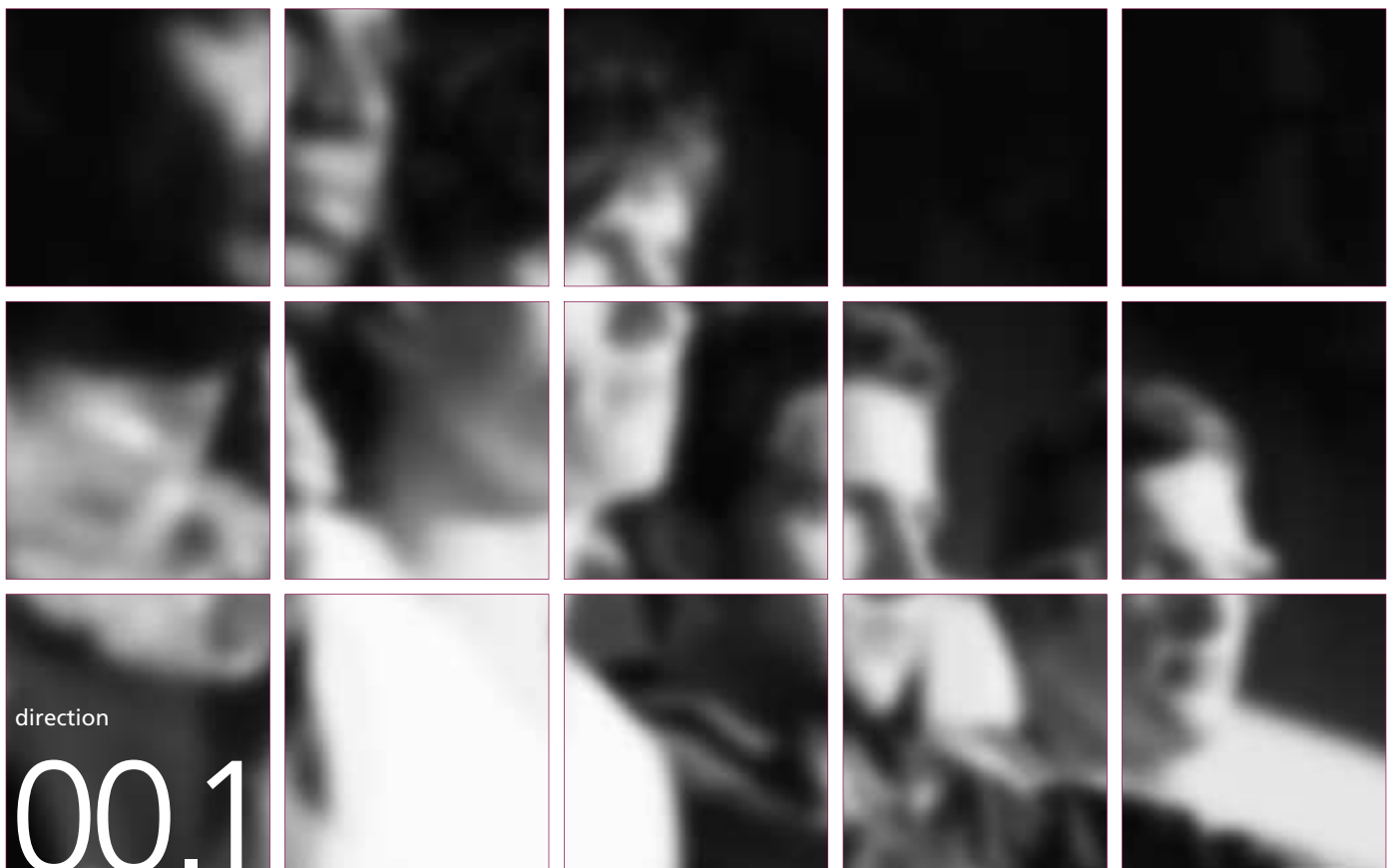




Educating for health and safety

Preparing young people for a
healthier and safer working life





IOSH publishes a two-tier range of free technical guidance. Our guidance literature is designed to support and inform members and motivate and influence health and safety stakeholders.

Direct info

Brief, focused information on health and safety topics, typically operation- or sector-specific.

Direction

Strategic corporate guidance on health and safety issues.

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Introduction

IOSH believes that a considerable amount of pain, suffering and financial loss could be avoided by ensuring that young people are suitably prepared to deal with the hazards and risks that they may face during their working lives.

The primary aim of this document is to set out the Institution's views and to act as a focus for change. We wish to challenge all stakeholders, including IOSH members, to review their attitudes, perceptions and practices.

In a review of the occupational safety and health system in this country in the early 1970s, the Robens Committee noted: "Much of the evidence submitted to us drew attention to the importance of emphasising safety in schools and colleges, particularly where young people are embarking on courses of study in which they get their first introduction to workshop practices."

Though there are initiatives under way which address some of these issues, this comment, made 30 years ago, is just as valid today.

Since the first version of this document was published, various changes have occurred. Health and safety is now covered in parts of the English national curriculum and the government has issued a strategy statement aimed at 'revitalising' health and safety. The strategy document contains two action points which cover risk concepts in the curriculum and health and safety coverage in the education for safety-critical professions. These moves are warmly welcomed by IOSH.

IOSH welcomes your views and comments on this document. Please send your responses to: Technical Affairs, IOSH, The Grange, Highfield Drive, Wigston, Leicestershire, LE18 1NN, UK.

Executive summary

IOSH believes that, as far as possible, the education of young people should prepare them for the world of work by helping them to avoid accidents and work-related ill health and that this process should start at the earliest possible stage.

In schools...

- Health and safety should be more fully integrated into the curriculum within subject areas such as science, information technology, history, mathematics, geography and literature.
- Additional training in social skills should be provided to enable young people to question unsafe practices effectively.
- The teaching of safety-related concepts should be incorporated into the continuous education and training of teachers.
- All schools should appoint a 'safety champion' to develop health and safety knowledge within the curriculum.
- Preparation for work experience placements needs to be consistent, incorporating a thorough examination of health and safety issues.
- Young people should be provided with health and safety information before starting part-time work.

In further and higher education...

- The integration of health and safety with relevant subject areas should continue into further and higher education, reflecting the fact that those progressing to these levels are more likely to be the opinion-formers of the future.
- Health and safety management processes should be added to the core subject matter of relevant degrees, and care should be taken that the term 'relevant' is not interpreted too narrowly.
- Health and safety needs to be a key part of teacher training, reflecting the standards laid down by the Employment National Training Organisation (Employment NTO) which define competencies in health and safety for people in all workplaces.

In work...

- Prior to a young person starting work the employer should undertake suitable risk assessments (as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999), taking into account the person's relative inexperience, immaturity and lack of awareness of common workplace health and safety hazards.
- Induction programmes should take account of the young person's individual capabilities, and consider the hazards encountered in specific roles.
- Because of their inexperience, there needs to be closer supervision of young people than for most adult employees, so the role of the supervisor is vital.
- Employers should consider introducing mentoring programmes in the workplace so that young people have a knowledgeable colleague to turn to in the event of a problem.
- A questioning approach should be encouraged, with positive recognition for frequent feedback on health and safety performance.

How government can help...

- Clear guidelines should be issued to schools.
- Suitable training should be provided for teachers.
- Those responsible for vetting work experience placements should be required to have basic competence in health and safety.

1. Preamble

Young people are the foundation of our future society. Unfortunately, some never fully realise their potential, falling foul of a workplace accident or occupational disease, and suffering disability, pain and anguish.

IOSH believes that, as far as possible, the education of young people should prepare them for the world of work by helping them to avoid accidents and work-related ill health.

Preparing young people to recognise risks and to take suitable precautions has many benefits. Potential victims avoid the pain, suffering and financial loss associated with accidents and ill health; employers avoid disruption, upset and financial loss; while society as a whole benefits from reduced treatment, support and rehabilitation costs.

It is clear that young people must be persuaded of the value of working safely. However, this cannot be achieved successfully via a single intervention. It must be a gradual process which emphasises that health and safety management is integral to all workplace activities.

It is important to make it clear that it is not just immediate and obvious risks which need to be considered, but also those long term, insidious risks which can lead to occupational disease.

Young people do not live in isolation. Their environment, workplace culture and family, the media and the community in which they live all influence their actions. Although many of these areas fall outside the scope of this document, any action which concentrates exclusively on the formal education of young people will have a limited impact. The subject needs to be considered in a holistic manner, identifying as many areas of influence as possible.

This document concentrates on four areas of influence:

- within school (including work experience)
- within further and higher education
- within work
- by government.

The Institution recognises that these areas are at least partially targeted by current employment and educational programmes. But if we want further reductions in

workplace accidents and ill health, more needs to be done.

The primary aim of any programme must be to equip young people with the skills and understanding to protect themselves and others in a world of risk. A realistic perception of risk and an understanding of actions that can be taken to prevent accidents and ill health are the basis of a healthier and safer working life.

Subsidiary aims must be:

- to improve the ability of young people to avoid occupational diseases and injury from specific hazards
- to foster understanding about the management of occupational safety and health, so that young people will appreciate that not all risks can be removed immediately
- to provide young people with sufficient social skills to challenge unsafe behaviour or unsafe conditions with confidence.

2. The influence within school (including work experience)

Schools can play an important role in developing an ethos and culture of 'safe-working'. IOSH also believes that cultivating an understanding of the concept of risk benefits the overall development of individuals. Action within schools is considered under five headings:

- the integration of occupational safety and health within the curriculum
- the provision of continuous education and training for teachers to support risk education
- the championing of health and safety within schools
- the preparation of young people for work experience
- the preparation of young people for part-time work.

2.1 The integration of occupational safety and health within the curriculum

Hazards and risks faced in the workplace are integral to the work being performed. It is therefore desirable to integrate health and safety as fully as possible into the curriculum, emphasising that attention to health and safety is part of the best way to undertake a particular task. Risk concepts have recently been introduced into the

“Young people must be persuaded of the value of working safely”

“The aim is to equip young people with the skills to protect themselves and others”

“Health and safety should be integrated as fully as possible into the curriculum”

“Pupils need to have communication skills to question unsafe practices”

teaching requirements for art and design, science, physical education, design and technology, and information and communication technology. School visits to local safety centres, offering ‘experience’ of different types of risk, are becoming increasingly common. However, while such initiatives are welcomed, IOSH believes that risk concepts should be adopted more widely within the curriculum, and suggests that pupils should be encouraged to develop a questioning approach towards hazards and risks.

Those more closely associated with the education system are competent to determine exactly how to implement this. However, the following examples of good practice are offered for consideration:

- more emphasis can be placed on health and safety in science lessons by involving pupils in a risk assessment process. For example, pupils can be involved in determining the hazards and risks and the precautions needed when working with particular materials or items of laboratory equipment
- in teaching information technology and keyboard skills, the importance of a good ergonomic posture can be highlighted, using practical examples
- in history, the development of the UK’s health, safety and welfare laws mirrors the social development of the country very closely. Examining this process can draw out interesting parallels
- health and safety examples can be used in mathematics. For example, pupils can be asked to calculate the cost of lost production as a result of an accident
- in mathematics and geography, pupils can use the fire evacuation plan and scale drawings to determine the quickest, shortest and safest evacuation routes
- in literature, the many references to occupational diseases and accidents in the classics can be considered.

In addition to the integration of health and safety with core subjects, young people would also benefit from further training in social skills. These are important because young people need to have the communication skills to question unsafe practices or conditions effectively, without causing offence. Indeed, questioning of this kind is a useful educational tool. Whether or not the practice under discussion proves to be unsafe, the individual will learn from the questioning process. Any programme of health and safety education which neglects this area will have a limited effect.

Improving the social skills of young people would also help them to resist peer group pressure in relation to subjects such as smoking and drugs, and to defuse potential workplace aggression.

There is a natural temptation to cocoon young people and to try to remove all risks. While this may protect young people, it does little to prepare them for the world full of hazards and risks that work represents.

Indeed, research has shown that cocooning young people in this way may serve to distort their perception of risk. However, presenting them with a controlled risk, suitably explained, will strengthen their ability to perceive risk accurately. It is also an essential element in their personal development.

Pupils need to understand that carrying out an adequate risk assessment is not meant to ‘prohibit’ activity. On the contrary, it is designed to ‘enable’ activities to be carried out. Unfortunately, safety often has a negative image, and is frequently used as an excuse to forbid or restrict activity. IOSH’s view is that, where possible, safety should be portrayed in a positive light in order to encourage future safe behaviour.

2.2 The provision of continuous education and training for teachers to support risk education

There are two important elements in educating young people in safety-related matters: teaching safely and teaching safety. Both elements have to be in place in order to gain maximum effect.

Schools must not only have the will to educate young people about occupational safety and health, they must also have the knowledge and skills to comprehend the risks and to convey teaching points accurately. It is therefore important that safety and the teaching of safety-related concepts are incorporated in the continuous education and training of teachers.

To provide students with good role models, teachers need to be able to identify relevant hazards, take appropriate precautions, and explain clearly why precautions are needed.

2.3 The championing of health and safety within schools

IOSH believes that each school needs a ‘champion’ in order to maintain a focus on health and safety education. A natural tendency to concentrate on the curriculum subject being taught could lead to the

“Schools need to appoint a champion to maintain a focus on health and safety”

health, safety and risk awareness content being overlooked over time. A champion helps to ensure a continued safety focus by introducing new ideas and concepts.

This is too important to be left to chance. IOSH encourages all schools to appoint safety champions who are trained and competent to ensure the continuous development of health and safety knowledge within the curriculum.

This can be made even more effective by encouraging young people to act as student volunteers in support of the safety champion.

The safety champion, however, also needs full formal support. School governors can help by ensuring that health and safety is a standard section on their agenda.

2.4 The preparation of young people for work experience

The Health and Safety Executive has produced good guidelines for the preparation of students for work experience. However, it would appear that the guidance is not always applied consistently. It is worth emphasising that work experience placements, including the preparation of students, should be carefully managed.

Initially, discussions should be held with the student in the classroom prior to the work experience placement to cover how to deal with basic requirements such as:

- identifying and reporting hazards and accident and ill health reporting
- the use of personal protective equipment and other protective measures
- the need to follow instructions carefully.

Following the work experience placement, a debriefing session should be conducted. This ensures a sharing of experience among the students, and emphasises the importance of a healthy and safe working environment. It also enables lessons learned during the work placement to be absorbed fully.

In addition, the feedback session provides the school with information on the standards of health and safety of specific organisations (and is particularly useful in detecting any deterioration).

It is of prime importance that the work experience placement is safe for young people so that it:

- can be completed without injury
- can provide an opportunity to learn about the management of occupational safety and health in the workplace.

Those responsible for assessing the suitability of a work experience placement (normally the school or the central organiser) should ensure that:

- a suitable health and safety management system exists in the organisation
- the employer has properly identified the hazards present in the workplace and has taken suitable precautions
- the work is suitable for young people to undertake.

The above process is critical to ensure the safety of young people on a work experience placement. IOSH considers it essential that those undertaking the assessment should be suitably trained in health and safety and should be competent to assess the standard of safety management systems (a standard for this purpose has been developed within the Employment NTO's generic health and safety units).

A suitable induction training programme and a monitoring scheme at the employer's premises would promote a higher level of health and safety and should ensure that pupils maximise their learning opportunity. Those responsible for the organisation of the placement must satisfy themselves that adequate supervision will be provided by the employer to prevent harm coming to young people during their work experience.

2.5 The preparation of young people for part-time work

For many young people the first experience of work may be on a part-time basis, and the risks faced here are no less than those in full-time employment. However, in some cases, the formal induction procedures for part-time staff are not as rigorous as those for permanent or full-time staff.

Young people must, therefore, be given information and advice when they are about to start part-time work. School is a natural place to do this, in the same way that pupils should be briefed before starting a work experience placement.

“Students need to be prepared for work experience placements, and debriefing sessions should also be held”

3. The influence within further and higher education

Champions should also be in a position to be able to inform their colleagues of their health and safety responsibilities.

4. The influence within work

So far this document has been about preparing young people for the world of work; but it is when a young person actually enters that world that he or she is most vulnerable.

Prior to a young person starting work the employer should undertake suitable risk assessments (as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999), taking into account the person's relative inexperience, immaturity and lack of awareness of common workplace health and safety hazards.

The results of these assessments should be used to determine which roles the young person may fulfil, which jobs they may be prohibited from undertaking, and any additional training or further precautions required. Involving the young person in this process helps to facilitate the learning of safety-related concepts.

Employers should establish induction programmes which take account of the young person's individual capabilities, and consider the hazards encountered in specific roles.

Employers should understand that the inexperience of young people makes them more vulnerable to injury and to the effects of peer group pressure. There needs to be closer supervision of young people than for most adult employees, so the role of the supervisor is vital. The trade union safety representative or representative of employee safety can also play an important part.

Employers should have mentoring programmes so that young people have a knowledgeable colleague to turn to in the event of a problem. The safety representative can operate as the knowledgeable mentor and guide in the first few days and can act as an effective conduit for raising health and safety concerns.

Employers should encourage young people to ensure that their own actions reduce risks to health and safety in the workplace and meet the standards defined by the Employment NTO, which reflect real working practices.

“Those progressing to further and higher education are more likely to be the opinion-formers of the future”

Further and higher education provide an opportunity for concepts established in earlier studies to be developed and reinforced. The emphasis on health, safety and risk should reflect the fact that those progressing to further and higher education are more likely to be the opinion-formers of the future.

3.1 Sixth form and beyond

The integration of health and safety with relevant subject areas should continue into further and higher education so that the message ‘the correct way is the safe way’ continues to be reinforced.

3.2 Degrees and higher qualifications

Those taking degrees are more likely to take up senior positions in their future careers. It is therefore important that health and safety is reinforced at this level, particularly as a business issue and as a correct method of working.

Some degrees give health and safety inadequate coverage, and some do not cover the subject at all. This is clearly out of step with what is one of today's key business concerns.

Health and safety management processes should be added to the core subject matter of relevant degrees. However, the term ‘relevant’ should not be interpreted too narrowly. Science and engineering degrees obviously have a strong need for a health and safety input; but so do fashion and art subjects. And it is not only the nature of the work undertaken which needs to be considered, but also the roles that these graduates may eventually fulfil.

3.3 Teacher training

Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring the health and safety of future generations. Health and safety needs to be a key part of teacher training, reflecting the standards laid down by the Employment NTO which define competencies in health and safety for people in all workplaces.

Ideally, specialist modules should be available to enable the school safety champions referred to earlier to undertake the training they require. This may include many of the elements of risk perception that occur in other parts of the curriculum.

“Employers need to take into account a young person's relative inexperience, immaturity and lack of awareness of health and safety hazards”

Employers should ensure that training programmes do not omit important but rarely occurring events, such as infrequent maintenance tasks that may require different precautions from day-to-day activities.

Employers should examine formal and informal reward systems in order to ensure that they promote safe behaviour. A questioning approach should be encouraged, with positive recognition for safety and frequent feedback on health and safety performance.

5. The influence that government may exert

Ultimately, the government sets the agenda for education and can give a definitive lead by:

- issuing clear guidelines to schools
- providing training for teachers
- requiring that those responsible for determining the suitability of a work experience placement have sufficient training to recognise an adequate level of supervision and an adequate standard of health and safety. This could be achieved by requiring all those involved in work experience placements to adopt the Employment NTO standards in health and safety.

Definitions

Hazard

The potential to cause harm.

Risk

The likelihood that harm will occur and the severity of the consequences.

Young people

People who are in full-time education and who have not yet experienced the world of work. This is a deliberately wide definition,

which covers many more people than the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. This is because young people may be ill-equipped for the hazards of working life until they have had substantial experience of them.

Work experience placement

A placement on an employer's premises in which a pupil carries out tasks or duties similar to those performed by employees, but with the emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience.

Workplace

A single area, or multiple areas, where work is undertaken.

Safety representative

A union-appointed safety representative under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

Representative of employee safety

A representative appointed under the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.

Reading

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“Government can give a clear lead”

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IOSH is Europe's leading body for health and safety professionals, representing over 26,000 members. Principally a UK-based organisation, it also has an expanding international membership, with members in over 50 countries.

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