



21st Century Skills – Realising Our Potential

IOSH response to the
UK Government's consultation
on its White Paper

consultative
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Introduction

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has 27,000 members and is Europe's largest body for individuals involved in occupational safety and health (OSH). A chartered body, we are the guardian of OSH standards of competence in the UK and provide a range of both professional development and awareness training courses. As an independent organisation, the Institution regulates and steers the profession, maintaining standards and providing impartial, authoritative guidance on OSH issues. We have recently worked extensively with the Employment National Training Organisation (EmpNTO) to develop health and safety vocational standards for both practitioners and non-practitioners. Also, within the European arena, IOSH is the UK National Co-ordinator and the Secretariat for the *European Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations* (ENSHPO), whose remit includes the development of pan-European competence standards for OSH practitioners.

IOSH members work at a variety of strategic and operational levels and across all employment sectors and our 14 Specialist Groups can provide forums for discussion and consultation on sector-specific OSH issues, including: construction; education; healthcare; offshore; public services; railways; retail; rural industries; and telecommunications. We welcome this important invitation to comment on the White Paper *21st Century Skills – Realising Our Potential*, recognising that a strategy to 'skill' the population offers a unique opportunity to incorporate the appropriate level of OSH in all skills training and education from the outset.

General Comments

The Institution believes that an understanding of risk concepts and health and safety (H&S) awareness should begin at school and to be reinforced and developed throughout a life-long learning process. Education and training in these areas can help individuals to develop risk management skills that will be valuable in all aspects of life, helping to inform their decision-making and thereby potentially improving the quality of their lives. At an organisational level, having a 'risk literate' workforce will help to increase and protect an organisation's skill-base, encouraging safe and healthy decisions and behaviours, preventing accidents and ill health, and reducing absences. Moreover, on a societal level, better risk management by employers will help reduce the massive costs, both human and financial, associated with work-related deaths, injuries and ill health. In addition to the 'rights and responsibilities' already set out in table 2 of the White Paper, we would like to see that individuals have the right to expect opportunities to develop sufficient skills to protect their own health and safety and that of others.

IOSH is pleased to note that H&S is now part of the national curriculum at all key stages and is keen to help in the development of appropriate teaching resources for schools via our Education Specialist Group. We have already worked with HTI, DfES, LSC, HSE and others to produce the Bunzl plc sponsored 'theatre in education' *bsafe* performance, launched last year in London and piloted by the 'CragRats' theatre group to nine schools across the country so far. The Institution has also involved schools both locally and nationally in two successful *European Week for Safety and Health at Work* awareness-raising initiatives: the first, a H&S Quiz for 5 and 6 year-olds in Leicester; and the second, a chemical-safety poster competition for 7 to 16 year-olds nationwide. IOSH has produced guidance aimed at those involved in education and the preparation of young people for work, titled *Preparing young people for a safer working life* (2000), freely downloadable from:

<http://www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/saferworking%2Epdf>

In addition to inclusion in the national education curricula, we support the government's *Revitalising Health and Safety* (action point 34) aim that risk management skills should be an integral part of professional curricula for 'safety-critical professions'. However, IOSH also believes this requirement has much wider application and that risk and OSH issues should be included in training for other professions, such as medicine, teaching and management and the new range of 'Vocational Foundation Degree' courses. It is also important that those involved in advising business start-ups and in arranging modern apprenticeships and work placements for young people, eg Business Link, Connexions and Enterprise Advisers, have adequate knowledge and skill in H&S as specified by the EmpNTO units designed for this activity.

In the drive to address our national skills gap, we should be mindful of the likelihood that we will need to address the H&S requirements of more potentially at-risk people in the workplace e.g. school children and young people (undertaking vocational qualifications and work experience); immigrant workers; those who have been out of the workplace for many years; disabled and rehabilitated employees; and an increasingly ageing workforce. This may present new challenges and opportunities in terms of H&S training for employers, employees and others involved. In order to help employers fulfil their legal duty to ensure the H&S competence of their employees, we believe it would be helpful if the recognised standards established for H&S training provision were more widely used, and if the government worked to ensure that such training is both accessible and affordable. We would see this information as being a vital inclusion in the proposed *Employer Guides to Good Training* and that the 'new guarantee' of free tuition for adults lacking good basic employability skills and the existing *Skills for Life* programme should include H&S training. We would be pleased to work with the government to develop the successful IOSH 'passport' scheme to deliver basic H&S

awareness training to all new workplace entrants, utilising the new *Skills for Business Network, Centres of Vocational Excellence* and *Jobcentre Plus* and linking to the proposed 'skills passport' or 'skills foundation'. The White Paper refers to the objective of achieving 'sustained employability' and IOSH firmly believes that basic skills in H&S and risk awareness are essential in the delivery of this key aim. The increased emphasis on vocational qualifications and the government's drive to increase the uptake of vocational training must also address the H&S aspects of all the vocations concerned. Although there is a requirement for H&S to be included in vocational training recognised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the considerable variation across these units can result in some being less effective than others. The use of the units produced by EmpNTO would, in our opinion, help address this problem and increase the transferability of the necessary H&S awareness. We strongly believe that H&S should be totally integrated within qualifications for all workplace activities, so that when employees undertake skills training they automatically receive the required level of H&S training. This would also help to dispel the impression that some employers may have of H&S training being a bureaucratic and expensive 'add-on'. IOSH takes the view that public funding of vocational training and work-based qualifications should be in part dependent upon there being an adequate level of H&S embedded in them. It is our belief that this requires good levels of H&S awareness in those responsible for deciding the allocation of public funds in this area.

Conclusion

In addition to the legal and moral case for good H&S management, IOSH believes it is probably true that, if asked, most employers would acknowledge "people are the company's most valuable asset" and that consequently, protection of employees is vital to their interests. It is by ensuring the health and safety competence of their workers that businesses help maintain their reliability and their skill and experience base – crucial in today's competitive environment. Adequate H&S skills are essential in achieving this and IOSH, as an independent professional body with a vision of '*A world of work which is safe, healthy and sustainable*', would welcome further opportunity to assist and contribute to this important strategy and to the ongoing work of the national Skills Alliance in its drive to raise skills.

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