

# THE RIGHT START

Work experience for young people:  
Health and safety basics for employers



Work experience introduces young people to the world of work and is a valuable and essential part of their education. HSE sees it as an excellent opportunity to give them a good grounding in health and safety.

Your contribution as a work experience provider is greatly appreciated. This leaflet will help you, and those responsible for work experience in your company, ensure that young people have their health and safety protected while they are with you.

## INTRODUCTION

When you offer a work experience placement to students you have the same responsibilities for their health, safety and welfare as for all your workforce. Under health and safety law, these students will be regarded as your employees.

As an employer, you will already have to carry out a risk assessment. This means looking at what in your work could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

This leaflet tells you what you need to do when assessing the health and safety risks to all the young people in your workforce below the age of 18, including work experience students. It will also give you some idea of the sort of questions work experience organisers (and this may include schools) are likely to ask you about your health and safety arrangements.

### Definitions of young people and children by age

It is helpful to know how people are defined by age in health and safety law, especially when working out what the young person is allowed to do:

- **a young person** is anyone under 18 years old (referred to in this booklet as 'young people');
- **a child** is anyone who has not yet reached the official age at which they may leave school, just before or just after their 16th birthday (this is often referred to as the minimum school leaving age (MSLA)).

## ASSESSING THE RISKS

Under health and safety law, you must assess the risks to young people under 18 years old, **before** they start work/work experience and tell them what the risks are.

You should also:

- take into account that these young people are likely to be inexperienced, unaware of health and safety risks and physically or mentally immature;
- put in place measures to control the risks which will remove them altogether or reduce them to the lowest possible level;
- let the parents/guardians of any students (and employees) below minimum school leaving age know the key findings of the risk assessment and the control measures taken **before** the young people start work/work experience; and
- keep a record of the main findings of the risk assessment, if you have five or more employees (including young people on work experience).

You may be able to use or adapt a general risk assessment for young people doing the same job or work experience. But in all cases you will need to:

- cover all the necessary features listed on the opposite page;
- keep the risk assessment up to date;
- look again at the risks if you have reason to believe that the original assessment no longer holds good; and
- bear in mind any information about the young person's needs which may be passed on by the work experience organiser, the school or the parents.

You can find out more about risk assessment in the following HSE publications:

- *Young people at work. A guide for employers* - contains advice on what is required and how employers may be helped by organisers in informing parents/guardians;
- *Five steps to risk assessment* - a brief guide to help small businesses prepare a risk assessment.

## SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT

The law requires you to take account of a number of points in your risk assessment **before** a young person starts work or work experience.

Try to look at your workplace from an adolescent's viewpoint. What dangers will they recognise? They may not be fully grown - will they find their workplace awkward and the tools too big?

In particular you should look at:

- how the workplace is fitted and laid out (and the particular site where they will work);
- what type of work equipment will be used and how it will be handled;
- how the work is organised;
- the need to assess and provide health and safety training;
- the nature of any physical, biological and chemical agents they may be exposed to, for how long and to what extent; and
- the risks from certain work hazards (you will find further information on the nature of specific risks to young people in *Young people at work: A guide for employers*. This includes any work they cannot do because of their age).

You must not allow the young person to do the work where you find that a significant risk remains in spite of your best efforts to take all reasonable steps to control it.

## OUTCOME OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT

Your risk assessment may bring to light certain risks which young people cannot be exposed to under health and safety law.

You must protect your young employees and work experience students from the risk of accidents or ill health which they are unlikely to recognise because:

- they are inexperienced; or
- have not been trained; or
- they may not pay enough attention to safety.

### Restrictions on work

The overall rule is that young people under 18 years old must not be allowed to do work which:

- cannot be adapted to meet any physical or mental limitations they may have;
- exposes them to substances which are toxic or cause cancer;
- exposes them to radiation;
- involves extreme heat, noise or vibration.

Young people who are **over** the MSLA can do this work under very special circumstances, which are:

- the work is necessary for their training;
- the work is properly supervised by a competent person; and
- the risks are reduced to the lowest level, so far as is reasonably practicable.

**Children below the MSLA must never do work involving these risks whether they are employed or under training such as work experience.**

## TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Young people need training most when they start a job or work experience. They need to be trained to do the work without putting themselves and other people at risk.

It is important that you check they have understood training which covers, for example:

- the hazards and risks in the workplace;
- the control measures put in place to protect their health and safety;
- a basic introduction to health and safety, for example first-aid, fire and evacuation procedures.

Young people will be facing unfamiliar risks from the job they will be doing and from their surroundings and are therefore likely to need more supervision than adults. Good supervision will also help you to get a clear idea of their progress in the job and to monitor the effectiveness of their training. You can find out more about supervision good practice in two helpful guides produced by the Learning and Skills Council (see the 'References' section for details).

Employee or trade union health and safety representatives can play a valuable role early on, for example by:

- introducing the young person to the workplace;
- helping with their ongoing training; and
- giving you feedback about particular concerns, especially as the youngster may not feel confident to speak to their boss directly.

## QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT BE ASKED WHEN OFFERING WORK EXPERIENCE

Schools or work experience organisers need to satisfy themselves about your management of health and safety. This is part of their legal responsibilities towards the young people they send to work placements. You can expect them to ask you questions such as:

- Do you have a health and safety policy and how do you carry it out? (It must be written down if you have five or more employees, including work experience participants.)
- Have you carried out a risk assessment recently and does it cover the particular risks from the work experience?
- Have you taken the necessary measures to control these risks?
- Is there a named person in the workplace who will be responsible for work experience students?
- How will work experience students be supervised and given health and safety induction and training?
- Can you draw up a clear plan of the work experience?
- Will you provide any necessary personal protective equipment?
- Can you make appropriate arrangements for young people with special needs, for example those who have particular disabilities or learning difficulties? (The work experience organiser should give you full information and any necessary advice well in advance of the placement. You will need to alter the risk assessment to take account of this.)

The work experience organiser may ask about other things which show that you pay proper attention to health and safety, for example:

- Have you registered with the appropriate health and safety enforcement authority? (You can ring HSE's InfoLine for more information on how to do this – see back cover for details.)
- What are your systems for dealing with any accidents and emergencies?
- Do you arrange training on fire procedures for staff and work experience students?



- Do you provide first-aid equipment and keep records of first-aid treatment?
- If required, are trained first aiders available?
- Is an accident book available and do you know about your legal duties to report accidents?
- Have you carried out an assessment of substances which might cause ill health under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999?
- Do you have adequate insurance, including Employer's Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance and Motor Vehicle insurance where required, and does that cover extend to work experience students?
- Do you consult employees on health and safety and have you appointed employee health and safety representatives?

## **WHEN THE WORK EXPERIENCE ORGANISER VISITS YOUR WORKPLACE**

When visiting the site of a work experience placement, the work experience organiser will be looking for pointers which show that you pay proper attention to the health, safety and welfare of your employees. You should already have taken into account these factors in your risk assessment, for example:

- housekeeping;
- lighting;
- seating;
- guarding of machines;
- fire precautions;
- electrical wiring;
- toilets and washing facilities;
- provision of personal protective equipment.

**This is not a complete list** and there are other important things to consider such as how noisy the workplace is.

The work experience organiser may ask you to sign a written agreement which can be especially helpful in making the responsibilities of both sides clear. Sometimes this is combined with consent from the parent/guardian and the young person. For instance, the parent/guardian will be able to see your risk assessment and control measures and at the same time you will be able to see information on, for example, the health of the student.

The agreement could also set out:

- a plan of work for the placement;
- arrangements for instruction and training before the work starts; and
- how the young person will be supervised and who will be responsible.

## REFERENCES

The following Health and Safety Executive publications are available from HSE Books (see back cover for details):

*Managing health and safety on work experience: A guide for organisers*  
HSG199 HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1742 4

*Young people at work: A guide for employers* HSG165 (Second edition)  
HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1889 7

*Management of health and safety at work. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L21* (Second edition) HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 2488 9

*Five steps to risk assessment* Leaflet INDG163(rev1) HSE Books 1998  
(single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 1565 0)

The following DfES and Learning and Skills Council publications are available free from Prolog, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ (Tel: 0845 602 2260 Fax: 0845 603 3360):

*Improving work experience - A good practice guide for employers* DfES guide EG1G

*Raising standards. Supervising learners' health and safety* Learning and Skills Council GPS/RS/7

*Raising standards. Health and safety supervision of learners in the workplace* Learning and Skills Council GPS/RS/6

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk) (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's InfoLine Tel: 08701 545500 Fax: 02920 859260 e-mail: [hseinformationservices@natbrit.com](mailto:hseinformationservices@natbrit.com) or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG. You can also visit HSE's website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 15 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 2547 8. Single free copies are also available from HSE Books.

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INDG364

**Printed and published by the Health and Safety Executive**

C1500 09/02