



“Safe start” – Occupational safety and health from education to the workplace: Findings and recommendations

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Introduction:

According to EU statistics young workers under 25 are more likely to suffer non-fatal work accidents than other age groups¹. Those starting a new job are especially vulnerable. Young workers need to be placed in safe and suitable jobs that are matched to their abilities and given adequate training and supervision. Parallel to this they need to receive risk education, from the nursery through to university, to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviours for when they enter work. EU-OSHA has collected information on the jobs young workers do and the risks they are exposed to at work, and analysed examples of good practices to prevent occupational safety and health (OSH) risks to young workers, in order to identify trends, innovative methods and success factors²³. Similarly, EU-OSHA has examined good practices for including risk education in schools⁴⁵.

¹ Eurostat

² *OSH in figures. Young workers – facts and figures – thematic report*, EU-OSHA.

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/7606507/view>

³ *Preventing risks to young workers: policy, programmes and workplace practices*, EU-OSHA, 2009.

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/TE3008760ENC/view>

⁴ *Mainstreaming occupational safety and health into education. Good practice in school and vocational education*, EU-OSHA, 2004. <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/313/view>

⁵ *OSH in the school curriculum: requirements and activities in the Member States*, EU-OSHA, 2009.

<http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/TE3008521ENC/view>

What good practice tells us:

The good practices come from a variety of EU Member States. They show that to be effective, young worker training must be part of a health and safety management approach based on risk assessment. Innovative features of training included: more experienced young workers sharing their OSH experiences with newer recruits and acting as mentors; using competitions to stimulate interest and motivate workers; feeding the results of student work back into workplace risk assessments; linking the training to a recognised diploma; empowering young workers to participate fully in workplace health and safety. Several examples were developed in partnership with various organisations. They are often simple and cost effective interventions that resulted in business benefits and savings.

In the school setting, successful examples embed risk education throughout the school curriculum, building it into core subjects as diverse as science, arts and crafts, physical education and health education, among others. This is the best way of making it part of everyday life, as well as taking account of the very packed school curriculum and the many teaching demands already placed upon schools. The most effective approach is to combine the provision of risk education with the management of workplace health and safety in schools, with both staff and pupils being actively involved in hazard spotting and implementing solutions in their schools - this is known as the 'whole-school' approach.

Additional observations and recommendations suggested by the cases include: mainstreaming a youth dimension into all prevention actions; ensuring the consultation and active engagement of young workers – listening to them and taking account of their suggestions; the value of mentoring both to the older workers acting as mentors and young workers; using active, participatory methods where students and young workers solve real work problems and feeding the results back into the risk assessment process; covering 'female' and 'male' jobs; applying the methods being developed by educators in schools to health and safety training in the workplace.

Conclusions from good practice:

A two-way strategy is needed to combat risks to young workers: a prevention culture needs to be promoted among new recruits, but also at all levels of education. Both at work and school active learning methods should be used, keeping close relevance to real work and circumstances. But it is important to remember that training will only be effective if it takes place within the context of an effective safety culture and management system to prevent risks, with top-level management commitment and where actions are based on risk assessment.

Broader recommendations from EU-OSHA's work include:

Occupational safety and health should be integrated into youth employment policy, youth accident prevention policy and education.

It is important for the future that EU members prioritise mainstreaming injury prevention and safety promotion into national, vocational and professional curricula.

The education system should deliver relevant health and safety information for students of all ages with special emphasis on those preparing for work experience and young apprentices. Learning objectives on risk /OSH education need to be embedded throughout the core curriculum subjects. It should be delivered within a 'whole-school' approach to safety and health.

Strategic-level health and safety and risk education should be embedded into business and management disciplines, especially MBA programmes and for those studying to be architects, planners, designers, engineers, doctors and teachers.

In addition, it is important that employers provide adequate induction and other health and safety training for all levels of the workforce, from boardroom to shop floor.

To enable the above recommendations it will be necessary for "joined up" working between policy areas of national governments to develop and promote standards for legal adolescent employment and to raise awareness and health literacy in parents, children, employers and relevant professional groups.

Continued efforts are also needed by EU members to share best practice in promoting risk education and to collect more detailed data on the types of circumstances of work accidents to children and young people still at school to help target interventions.

Finally, EU Member States should take note of the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board Resolution 128/15 Child Injury Prevention of 24 January 2011, which included wording to remind countries of their obligations to prevent child labour and address risks at work faced by young people under 18. The 11th recommendation on child injury protection (EB128.R15) concerns the need "to raise awareness and health literacy, in particular child safety among parents, children, employers and relevant professional groups about risk factors for child injury, especiallyworkplace hazards,and lack of child supervision ". EU-OSHA fully endorses this.