

Health and safety matters for students embarking on work experience



A short guide for teachers



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Introduction

Periods of work experience and work-based learning will be the first time that most young people experience the work environment. Good preparation and organisation of placements is essential if these opportunities are to be rewarding and safe introductions to the world of work. Through health and safety education students will develop a set of safe behaviours which they can transfer into their future working lives.

This guide will assist teachers in preparing their students for the health and safety aspect of their work experience programme. It offers practical information and advice on workplace health and safety that can be taught and discussed with students in the classroom before they embark on work experience. This process will enable students to commence work with a greater appreciation and awareness of health and safety issues.

This guide is being distributed to all work experience co-ordinators and is available to all teachers preparing students for work experience.

Legislation

Health and safety legislation is in place to protect workers (this includes students on work experience) or those who may be affected by work activities.

The safety, health and welfare of workers are covered principally by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005; the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007; and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2007.

These laws place general duties of care on employers, the self-employed and employees.

This guide is not intended as a legal interpretation of the law.



Safety Statement

One of the key health and safety requirements for any workplace is a safety statement. Teachers should help students identify what a safety statement is and its purpose.

The safety statement is prepared by the employer and is a written programme for managing safety and health in the workplace. It should begin with a policy statement on how the employer intends complying with the law.

The safety statement should be based on an identification of the hazards¹ and an assessment of the risks² in that particular workplace. The controls/precautions necessary to combat these hazards and reduce these risks (including the controls/precautions necessary to protect young and inexperienced workers) should also be included.

Employers must consult with their employees and make the safety statement accessible to them. They must also review the statement particularly when there is a major change in the place of work, or in the work to be carried out, to ensure that there is no significant risk to the safety and health of workers or others who may be affected by the work activity.

Students will encounter unfamiliar risks from the jobs they will be doing and from the working environment. They may also lack experience or maturity or be unaware of how to raise concerns. It is therefore important that everyone involved in the employment of young people understands:

- young people and the law; and
- risks to young people at work.



¹A hazard is anything at work which might cause you harm.

²A risk is the likelihood that harm could occur from a particular hazard and its consequences. Assessing the risks is the process of evaluating the risks in the workplace and putting in place the most appropriate controls/precautions in order to prevent accidents and work-related illness.

Common Health and Safety Hazards

The following table lists examples of some of the most common hazards found in workplaces. Teachers will find this table useful for educating students about workplace health and safety. Students will find some or all of these hazards addressed in the company's safety statement which should also explain the measures/precautions taken by the employer to prevent accidents and ill health arising from these hazards.



Slips	Slipping on spillages on a tiled floor. Slipping on a highly polished floor surface.
Trips	Tripping over something left on the floor such as a box or a stray cable. Tripping over loose matting or carpet tiles. Tripping over raised surfaces that you could not see.
Falls	Falling down steps or stairs. Falling off stepladders or chairs - especially if you are larking about.
Lifting and carrying	Referred to as 'manual handling' ³ you can injure yourself if you lift and carry anything incorrectly from a box of stationery to a tray of bricks.
Working with knives	Cuts and lacerations can occur when you work with knives - often this type of injury is the result of a knife slipping in the hand.
Working with food slicers	Cuts and lacerations. Amputation of a finger or thumb.
Working in proximity of running equipment and machinery	Getting 'caught' in running equipment or machinery - young workers are at significant risk of such injuries in a number of industries e.g. labourers in wood and paper manufacturing, metal fabrication, food and beverage processing, construction, machine operators, material handlers, bakers and cooks.
Tractors, farm vehicles and ATV's (all terrain vehicles)	Tractors account for the highest proportion of fatalities and accidents in agriculture each year. Vehicle operation, being crushed, struck, pinned under or falling from the vehicle are the causes of vehicle accidents. Those at risk include persons using the tractor and those who may be in the area where the tractor is operating.

³ Manual handling continues to trigger approximately one-third of all reported accidents; the next most common category is 'slip, trip and fall' incidents. Together, they accounted for over half of all reported accidents in 2007.



Working with hot substances or objects

Burns and scalds - typically these injuries involve hot water or steam; hot fats, oils or other food products; and equipment such as pots, pans, or trays.



Chemicals

All sorts of workplace chemicals may cause harm, from soaps in the washroom that irritate the skin, to toners in photocopiers, to the more dangerous acids used in industry.



Dust and spores (agriculture)

Sources of dust and spores include mouldy hay, straw or grain, compost used in mushroom growing, and poultry feathers and droppings. Exposure to these materials can cause both short-term effects (including irritation, bronchitis and breathlessness), and long-term effects (including asthma, chronic bronchitis, shortness of breath, weight loss, farmers lung and sensitization). Always wear the proper PPE.



Electricity

Electricity can kill or cause severe burns and must be treated with respect.

Make sure you understand the instructions before using any electrical equipment - if in doubt ASK - and report any damaged tools or electrical equipment, including plugs, cables or extension leads to the manager.



Visual Display Units (VDUs)

The main problems which can occur with the use of VDUs are related to the design of the job or workstation.⁴ A badly arranged workstation can lead to the adoption of a bad working posture with consequent pains in muscles and joints and also visual problems.

Make sure you know how to arrange your work and workstation to avoid awkward movements, reflections, aches and pains. Adequate breaks must also be provided if there is intensive or continuous use of VDUs in your office.



RSI

Repetitive strain injury (RSI) can occur if motions are repeated frequently (e.g. every few seconds) and for prolonged periods such as an eight-hour shift, resulting in the accumulation of fatigue and muscle strain. Effects of repetitive motions are increased when awkward postures and forceful exertions are involved.

⁴ A VDU workstation includes the keyboard, the VDU screen, printer, work chair, work desk and the VDU work environment (e.g. lighting, glare, reflections, humidity, and temperature) and software.



Noise

Exposure to high levels of noise, either continuously or as a loud sudden 'bang' from equipment such as cartridge-operated tools, can have a number of physiological and psychological effects on workers including stress, tinnitus and if exposed to high noise levels over long periods of time, permanent loss of hearing can occur.

High noise levels can also interfere with communications in the workplace, leading to an increased risk of accidents.



Temperature

Hot working conditions may cause you to suffer ill health. Comfortable working conditions should be maintained - as a guideline a minimum comfortable working temperature for indoor sedentary workers is 17.5 degrees centigrade and upper level for comfort is 27 degrees centigrade (when undertaking light duties). In addition, each enclosed workplace must be adequately ventilated.



Emergency procedures

Fire is a major hazard in any workplace. You must know and understand the procedures for evacuating the workplace in an emergency. These procedures should be included in the company's safety statement.

You must also know the procedures for first-aid treatment in the event of an accident. The names of the people responsible for any first-aid actions should be included in the company's safety statement.



Human behaviour

Your behaviour can also be a hazard if you act in a way that can cause harm, whether intentional or unintentional, to your colleagues e.g. shoving someone down steps or jokingly pushing someone into another worker.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The following FAQs should help teachers to clarify health and safety matters with students. Teachers will also find these useful for:

- selecting suitable work experience companies; and
- preparing students to become safety aware prior to starting work experience.

What should teachers look for when selecting companies for work experience?

Teachers selecting a company for work experience will find it beneficial to know what its main business activity is and where the student is likely to be employed. Teachers may also wish to find out if there is a health and safety contact person - perhaps a safety officer⁵ has been employed or the employees may have elected a safety representative.⁶ The company may have a human resources (HR) department with responsibility for health and safety matters and may also employ an occupational health nurse.

Some companies may have one or more safety personnel, others have none; however this is not an indication of how well or how poorly health and safety issues are managed. Companies have different requirements and vary in size and operations. In some cases, particularly in small or low-risk businesses, the employer may manage all health and safety operations.

Teachers may also wish to check if the company has previously taken on students and if so, ask about the outcome. A checklist for teachers can be found later in this guide. Students selecting their own companies may also find this information beneficial.

What are the health and safety responsibilities of (a) the employer and (b) the employee?

Employers are responsible for:

- creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace
- safeguarding the health and safety of their employees
- providing information, training and instruction to their employees
- ensuring a written safety statement is prepared and made available to all employees.

⁵ A safety officer is appointed by the employer to manage health and safety in the workplace. The employer maintains overall responsibility for health and safety in the workplace.

⁶ A safety representative is selected and appointed by the employees to represent them in consultations with the employer on matters of safety, health and welfare at the place of work.

Employees have a duty to protect themselves and others. They must co-operate with their employer and must ensure that they:

- are not under the influence of an intoxicant or in such a state that they might be a danger to themselves or others (*an employer may prevent an employee from working if it is apparent that he or she would be such a danger*).
- make correct use of any article or substance provided for their use or protection, including protective clothing and equipment; and
- report to their employer or supervisor any matter that could increase the likelihood of an accident or work related-illness occurring.

How can students on work experience access the company's safety statement?

The safety statement must be made available to students on work experience. Some employers give each employee a copy of the statement. Others make it available at a central location e.g. on the company notice board or intranet site. Sometimes the employer may refer to the safety statement as the safety policy.

Students must read the safety statement carefully, particularly the risk assessment sections relating to their job, and ensure that they fully understand this information. If in doubt, ASK.

Should all new workers (including students on work experience) receive induction training?

Yes, employers must provide instruction, training and supervision. Starting work for the first time can be a nervous and exciting time in a young person's life. Induction training is an essential part of the learning process when starting in a new job and the nominated supervisor will tell the student how to work safely and will arrange training for each job.

If a student has an accident at work who should report it?

If a student is injured in the course of his or her employment and prevented from performing the normal duties of their work for more than three calendar days, not including the date of the accident, the employer must report the incident to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

What is Safe Pass?

Safe Pass is a one-day safety awareness programme aimed at all who work on construction sites. The Safe Pass programme raises workers' awareness of the hazards on construction sites so that they will not be a danger to themselves or their co-workers.



Do students and seasonal workers need Safe Pass before working on a construction site? If so, who should pay?

Yes, the Safe Pass programme is aimed at everyone who works on a construction site, including new entrants. Students who want to apply for a job on a construction site for seasonal work must have the Safe Pass card. In this instance they would have to pay for it themselves before they are employed. More information on Safe Pass can be obtained from FAS (visit www.fas.ie or telephone 01 6070500).

What is PPE? Who should supply this?

PPE means 'personal protective equipment' and includes items such as ear protection, eye protection, safety shoes, and high-visibility vests.

Employers must supply PPE where risks cannot be eliminated or adequately controlled. If PPE is supplied this information will be contained in the risk assessment section of the safety statement.

PPE must be used correctly. Workers must comply with the training and instruction given on its correct usage. PPE must be replaced and maintained by the employer when required.

What are the rules in relation to sitting and standing at work?

As a general rule, if the job or a substantial proportion of the job can be done properly whilst sitting, the employer shall provide suitable facilities for sitting. A decision on whether you sit or stand will depend on the work activity and a site-specific risk assessment.

What health and safety provisions should be in place for employees with disabilities?

Safe access to and egress from and circulation within the workplace should be provided as necessary. Access to all welfare areas, e.g. sanitary facilities, washing facilities, facilities for taking meals, should also be provided. Employers should ensure that adequate assistance is available for the safe evacuation of those with a disability in the event of an emergency.



Is there specific legislation regarding young persons at work?

Yes, there is legislation regarding young persons at work. **The Protection of Young Persons⁷ (Employment) Act, 1996** is designed to protect the health of young workers, and to ensure that work done during the school years does not put their education at risk. The law sets minimum age limits for employment, defines rest intervals and maximum working hours, and prohibits the employment of those under 18 years of age on work late at night. Employers must also keep specified records for those workers aged under 18 years.

Further information on the Act is available from the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) (visit www.employmentrights.ie/en/ or Locall 1890 80 80 90). NERA is an office of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and has its headquarters in Carlow.

The HSA also has legislation regarding the 'Protection of Children and Young Persons'. This can be found under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007, Chapter 1 and Part 6, and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2007.

The HSA has produced an eleven-page guidance document entitled 'Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Chapter 1 and Part 6: Protection of Children and Young Persons' which includes information in relation to the employment of young persons, risk assessment, circumstances prohibiting employment of a child or young person, health surveillance, and agents, processes and work that children and young persons may require protection from. This general guidance aims to prevent occupational accidents or ill health and may be downloaded from the Authority's website at www.hsa.ie



⁷"young person" means a person who has reached 16 years of age or the school-leaving age (whichever is higher) but is less than 18 years of age.

Sample Checklist for Teachers

Teachers seeking suitable companies for student work experience opportunities may find the following checklist helpful when communicating with potential employers. Teachers may also wish to give a copy of this form to students who are locating their own placements. This is a non-exhaustive checklist and teachers are under no obligation to use it.

Name of company/employer: _____

Address: _____

Contact person(s):

(name and title) _____

(name and title) _____

Telephone no: _____ Fax no: _____

Email (if available) _____

Additional information: _____

Sample Checklist for Teachers

How many persons are employed by the company?	
Have you employed students previously? What type of work did they do?	
Is induction training provided? What areas are covered in this training?	
Who should the student report to on his/her first day?	
Has a safety representative been appointed?	
Do you have a safety statement/policy? <i>(all employers and self-employed persons must have a safety statement)</i>	
Do risk assessments take account of the needs of students and young workers?	
Are students prohibited or restricted from doing any work activity in your workplace?	
How will the safety statement/policy be made available to the student on work experience?	
If the student has an accident at work who should they report to?	
Do you keep records of accidents/injuries/ill health?	
Are fire drills carried out at intervals and emergency procedures explained to employees (including students)?	
Is there a canteen or facility for taking breaks at the workplace?	
Are students protected under the company's insurance policy?	

Sample Checklist for Students

Teachers may wish to distribute the following information to students. Again, this is a non-exhaustive list and intended as a guide only, however it may help ensure that students have important health and safety information regarding their work placement.

My contact at school is (insert teacher's name):	
If I am unsure about a health and safety matter I must contact:	
If I have an accident at work I must contact:	
The name of my workplace supervisor is:	
The person with overall responsibility for health and safety at my workplace is: (insert name and occupation)	
The name of the safety representative is:	
The safety statement/policy at my workplace can be found (state where):	
The things I am prohibited from doing and restricted from doing are listed here and have been agreed with my supervisor:	
PPE is supplied to me by:	
Emergency procedures have been explained to me. In the event of a fire I must:	
If I require first aid treatment I must contact:	

Additional Information:

Resource materials:

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) launched the **'Choose Safety'** programme as a pilot project in post-primary schools in the south-east and west of the country in September 2007. The programme is currently being rolled out to more schools. You can contact your local Education Centre to see if the programme is available in your area.

'Choose Safety' is a teaching and learning resource pack for post-Junior Certificate students. It is primarily aimed at Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes and students who are likely to engage in work experience.

The programme is approximately twenty hours and teachers can choose the lesson plans and activities suitable for their students and for the time-tabling constraints in their school. Further information and updates on 'Choose Safety' are available from the Education section of the Authority's website: www.hsa.ie.

The HSA's **Workplace Contact Unit (WCU)** is a helpdesk resource for employers, employees and the public. It can be contacted at:

Locall: 1890 289 389 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
 Fax: 01 614 7125
 Email: wcu@hsa.ie
 Post: Workplace Contact Unit, Health and Safety Authority,
 The Metropolitan Building, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1

The **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** in the UK provides guidelines for those involved with young people at work and on work experience.

This information is available at

www.hse.gov.uk or www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/workexperience/index.htm

The **Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)** in the UK has developed a Wiseup2work resource for young people and teachers. This is a unique information and activity hub for the under 21s, teachers, training providers, youth workers and employers. Further information is available at www.wiseup2work.co.uk/

The **Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)** has a website dedicated to young workers and employers of young workers.

Further information is available at www.youngworker.co.uk

The **Learning and Skills Council (LSC)** produces a range of guidance material covering various aspects of work experience. Further information is available at www.lsc.gov.uk

Statistical information:

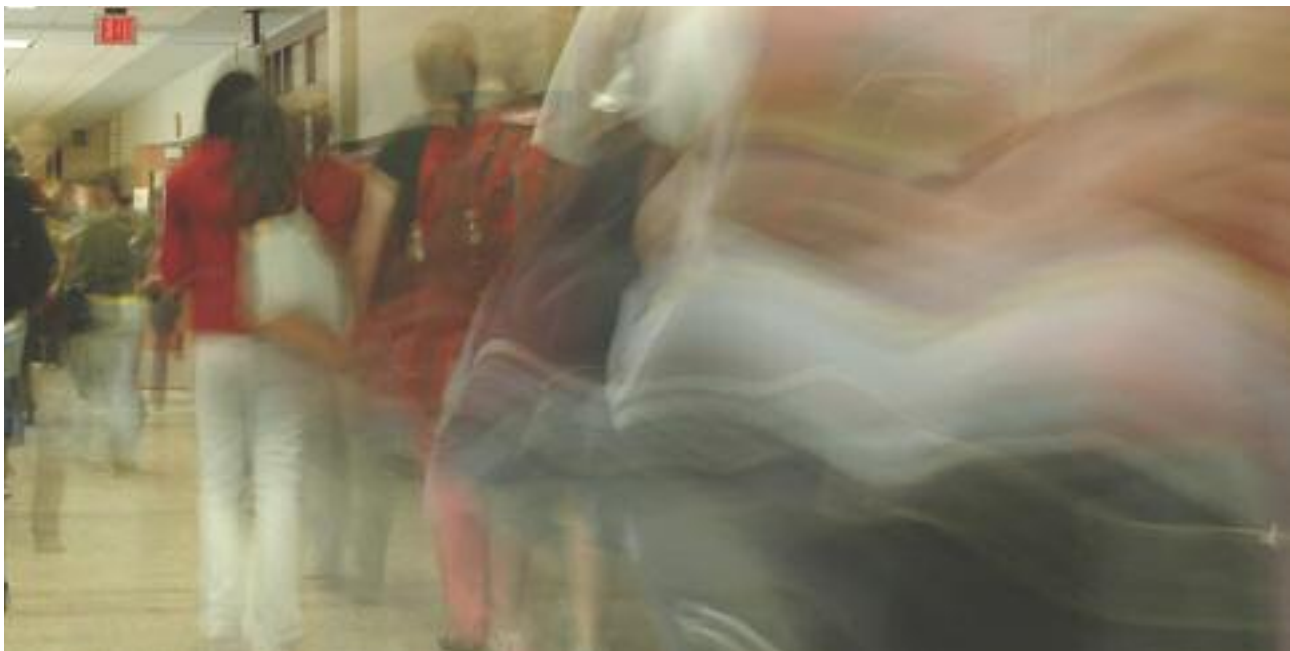
Increase in injuries to workers aged 15 to 19 years old

The number of reports of injuries to 15 to 19 year olds submitted to the Authority has increased, with 182 injuries reported in 2005, 330 in 2006 and 730 in 2007. This represents 10% of all reported injuries for 2007. Figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) suggest that workers in the 15-19 age band represent approximately 4% of those in employment (with seasonal variations).

The sectors with the highest number of reported injuries to 15 to 19 year olds were Construction, Manufacturing, Wholesale and Retail Trade, and Transport, Storage and Communication. In terms of the highest proportion of injuries in this age band, up to 20% of the injuries reported from the Hotel and Restaurant, 18% from Agriculture and 17% from the Wholesale and Retail Trade sectors in 2007 involved workers in the 15-19 age group.

The increase is not attributable to an overall increase in the reporting rate from these sectors. The CSO rates of injury for this age group do not show any discernible trend but the CSO warns that its figures are based on small numbers.

HSA, Summary of Workplace Injury, Illness and Fatality Statistics 2006-2007



Notes

Notes

*Working to create a
National Culture of
Excellence in
Workplace Safety,
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for Ireland*

HEALTH AND SAFETY
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