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A Guide to Supervising Learner Health and Safety

Any supervision must be appropriate to the risks identified and should consider the learners capabilities, needs and experience. Any person under 18 years of age in the workplace is recognised as vulnerable in law and extra precautions may be needed due to their relative inexperience and possible lack of physical abilities and risk perception.

Employers' Role

Employers are required (amongst other things) to provide:

- a safe and healthy place of work
- safe plant and equipment
- safe methods of working
- a safe means of handling and storing items.

To ensure the above is delivered in the workplace, supervision of learners is of critical importance. Studies have shown that more than 50 per cent of accidents to learners in the workplace are associated with unsafe methods of working and inadequate supervision, and research by the Institute of Educational Studies (IES) in 2009 confirms the correlation between inadequate supervision and learners conducting unsafe acts whilst at work.

Employers need to provide supervisors with adequate time, training, resources and support to enable them to supervise learners. A supervisor of a learner may not necessarily be someone with the title of supervisor or team leader. It may be a co-worker who has the necessary competence to show a learner the safe and correct way of carrying out a task so that they learn safe behaviours as part of their learning.

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Supervisory Support for the Young Person

You as the supervisor have a key role to play in relation to the learner as a guide, coach, mentor and role model. To carry this out you will need to be able to build a rapport with the learner, have good communication skills and be competent in managing hazards to minimise risks.

Where the risks are not acceptable for the learner with the controls in place, then the task should be prohibited to the learner until they have progressed to a stage where they can perform the task using the correct control measures. Work experience candidates are likely to be prohibited from some high-risk activities as they are not undergoing detailed and prolonged training towards a recognised occupational qualification and will not have the time to gain the competence required.

It is essential that there is a close liaison with any trainer who is responsible for coordinating the learning programme. Any accidents, incidents or absences owing to occupational illness should be reported to the provider immediately as the provider will need to liaise with the relevant funding sponsor/body on accidents, ill health, harassment or bullying of the sponsored learner.

See [HSE publication INDG364 'The Right Start'](#) for additional information.

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Prohibitions and Restrictions

The following are not intended to be a complete list of prohibitions for learners (especially young ones), only examples. Control measures should already be in place for the protection of employees, learners and others in the workplace as part of risk-assessment and management processes:

- beyond their physical or physiological capacity (for example, excessive loads, activities requiring substantial technical knowledge / experience to ensure safety, activities associated with risk-taking, such as operating construction plant – unless adequately trained)
- involves safety-critical activities requiring sustained vigilance or concentration
- involves harmful exposure to agents that are toxic, carcinogenic, cause heritable genetic damage to an unborn child or chronically affect human health
- involves harmful exposure to radiation
- involves risks of accidents which the young person may not recognise or avoid due to their lack of safety and risk awareness, experience or training
- exposure to extremes of cold or heat, noise or vibration; young people over the minimum school leaving age can do this work under special circumstances, which are as follows:
 - the work is necessary for their training
 - the work is supervised properly by a competent person
 - the risks are reduced to the lowest level, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Further details may be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive, local environmental health officer and your local education authority.

See HSE publications:

HSG165 'Young people at work'

HSG199 'Managing health and safety on work experience'

Occupational Risks

Some occupations carry greater inherent risks than others and require stricter control measures to prevent ill health and accidents occurring. The planning of these is essential to prevent the learner from being exposed to unacceptable risk. Sources of harm (hazards) requiring control include work equipment, substances, work environment, work methods, people, biological substances and psycho-sexual pressures.

Risk assessments need to be carried out prior to a learner starting a task for the first time. This involves identifying the hazards present in the task and assessing the likelihood of an injury and the severity of the injuries that may occur. Risk is a combination of the likelihood of an event happening and how serious the consequences would be if it happened.

Remember, what may be considered safe for an experienced adult may not be safe for the younger employee. Restrictions may include prohibiting certain tasks or equipment, or using one-to-one supervision whilst the task is carried out.

Measures to prevent injury need to be made clear to everyone, should be recorded in the risk assessment and should be part of the safe work procedures people follow.

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Controlling Risks

There is a hierarchy of control measures which must be applied when managing health and safety risks. These are given below in order of effectiveness:

- elimination of the risk completely, for example, prohibiting a certain practice or the use of a certain hazardous substance
- substitution by something less hazardous or of a lesser risk
- enclosure of the risk in such a way that access is denied
- guarding or the installation of safety devices to prevent access to danger points or zones on work equipment and machinery
- safe systems or methods of work that reduce the risk to an acceptable level
- written procedures, for example, job safety instructions, that are known and understood by those affected and the risk assessment for the task to show the control measures required
- adequate supervision, particularly in the case of young or inexperienced persons
- training of staff to appreciate the risks and hazards
- information, for example, safety signs, warning notices
- Personal protective equipment and clothing (PPE/C), for example, eye, hand, head and other forms of body protection.

In practice, a combination of the above is usually used.

Remember that the degree of supervision required is proportional to the risk.

Workplace Assessment

Your Handy Checklist

Items			Comments
	Yes	No	
Fire exits clear			
Aisles clear			
Fire extinguishers in place			
Storage/housekeeping			
Machine guards			
Ventilation			
Heating			
Washing facilities			
Safety signs			
Cleanliness			
PPE worn (PPE/C)			
Safe work methods in use			
Lighting			
Floor surfaces			
Electrical items			
Designated separation of traffic and pedestrians			
First aid			

Information, Instruction and Training

You will need to provide adequate information, instruction, training and supervision according to the learner's needs. This starts with an induction into the organisation and workplace and should be conducted as soon as possible after the learner has started.

Besides organisational and job information, it should include as a minimum:

- emergency procedures
- prohibitions and restrictions
- introduction to key staff
- tour of premises
- hazards, risks and precautions
- how to report any accidents
- who to report any accidents to
- the names of the supervisor and deputy
- the named competent person for health and safety
- location of the health and safety policy
- employees'/learners' health and safety duties.

It is good practice to record any health and safety training you give and check understanding afterwards.

You are also there to act as a role model in health and safety matters and to reinforce rules and procedures.

Once the individual has received information, instruction or training, you will need to maintain supervision until the individual gains competence at the task.

From time to time you will need to provide refresher training depending on the complexity and changing nature of the job and the individual learner's ability.

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Supervisors' Support for the Learner

Mentoring

Acting as a guide, coach, counsellor and instructor.

Instructing

Explaining how things are carried out and the standards required; often through a demonstration or a toolbox talk.

Training

Assisting others to gain new knowledge/skills through structured and planned tasks.

Motivating

Providing encouragement to enable the learner to work to their potential.

Supporting

Providing the appropriate work culture and supervisory support to encourage maximum benefit for the learner.

Clarifying

Ensuring communications are clearly understood through the use of questioning and feedback.

Checking

Using observation and questioning to check the learner's understanding and the work standards.

Advising

Suggesting possible courses of action to achieve a given result based on your own experience and opinions.

Enforcing

For example, rules on safe behaviour, possibly through disciplinary measures.

Role model

Acting as an exemplary model of good practice.

See the Agency publication 'Safe Learner Blueprint', which will assist in identifying the elements to be considered to ensure the learner develops safe behaviours at work.

This publication can be found on the www.safelearner.info website.

Useful Information Sources

Health and Safety Information

www.safelearner.info

www.young-worker.co.uk

HSE Infoline Tel: 08701 545 500.

HSG199 'Managing health and safety on work experience', HSE publication.

HSG165 'Young people at work: a guide for employers'

INDG163Rev 'Five steps to risk assessment', HSE publication.

INDG275 'Managing health and safety, five steps to success', HSE publication.

INDG213 'Health and safety training', HSE publication.

HSG65 'Successful Health and Safety Management', HSE publication.

These are available from HSE Books

www.hsebooks.com

OHSAS18001:2007 'Specification for occupational health and safety management systems', BSI publication.

Supervisory development:

www.iosh.co.uk

www.rospa.co.uk

www.britishsafetycouncil.co.uk

www.nebsmgt.co.uk

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Feedback

We hope you have found the information of use in this booklet and welcome further suggestions on: safelearner@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

Related Reading

- Safe Learner Blueprint – Skills Funding Agency
- Standards for Health and Safety – Skills Funding Agency

Available from www.safelearner.info

This information is provided by the Skills Funding Agency solely to promote and encourage good practice in learner health and safety. It is not a legal commentary or authoritative guide. Definitive guidance should be sought from the Health and Safety Executive.

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