

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

‘Acting together’: Helping GB work well

Our contribution to the debate about future HSE strategy

RoSPA has been a proactive partner in the delivery of HSE strategy across the Revitalizing Agenda, ‘Being Part of the Solution’ and now through contributing to ‘Helping GB work well’.

RoSPA very much welcomes the opportunity to participate in the debate about HSE’s future strategy, having been involved in both the Glasgow and London launches of the campaign.

RoSPA has consulted with members of the [RoSPA National Occupational Safety and Health Committee](#) (NOSHC), chaired by Martin Isles, Special Advisor – Health & Safety, Mineral Products Association (MPA), UK, and collated contributions to play our part in joining the conversation linked to the new strategy.

RoSPA particularly welcomes the title, ‘*Acting together*’. The sense of engagement with stakeholders in both Glasgow and London was tangible. Key messages such as ‘Good health and safety is good business’, we believe, resonate with the GB health and safety community. RoSPA recognises the positive benefits of encouraging individuals and organizations to consider a [wider vision for health and safety](#) where each of us has to be prepared to take ownership of health and safety related issues and play their part, whether at work, on the road, at home, at school or at leisure.

Acting together

RoSPA supports the underpinning premise the broader ownership of health and safety where stakeholders work in partnership to deliver change. The RoSPA NOSHC committee is only one example of how RoSPA seeks to influence and campaign for change through working in partnership.

Within Scotland, RoSPA contributes to the [Partnership on Health and Safety in Scotland Committee](#) (PHASS), an action-orientated forum which delivers through working in partnership addressing issues within a Scottish context and industrial make-up. As a consequence stakeholders understand [Scotland’s Health and Safety Network](#), where they ‘fit in’ and who to speak to to make a difference. This has delivered success and we suggest there is merit in considering shaping a similar forum for other constituent parts of GB.

The impression given during the recent strategy launch was that in addition to the traditional role of regulator and enforcer, the HSE perhaps sees itself as a facilitator that can further develop the GB health and safety network. HSE could consider building on the experience of its Small Business Trade Association Forum (SBTAF) and establish a new national Health and Safety Stakeholder Forum to act as a guide and adviser and to link all parts of the system together in a common approach to performance improvement.

There is, RoSPA believes, a need to understand what the GB health and safety network ‘looks like’ and perhaps this could be an outcome from strategy discussions? This ‘map’ with the workplace at the centre would reinforce the connection to HSE as the prime mover whilst signposting businesses to promoters and supporters of better health and safety.

This network could be used to encourage the inclusion of health and safety related information in decision making and engagement with business partners. Reinforcing the importance of influencing the supply chain, not just the producers and users, there is a need to engage with the designers of plant and equipment and involve them in the conversation. HSE does have a role to play in bringing them to the table.

Within the world of work, inspection and enforcement are not the only tools available to achieve improvements in health and safety performance. RoSPA believes that exemplary sentencing is important but ultimately education and advice are important in effecting change. The move towards on-line communication through the HSE website and associated apps is to be commended. The move towards '[Open Policy making](#)' is welcomed. However, going forward, sufficient resource must be devoted, not only to maintaining and developing the website and on-line presence, but in engaging widely across the health and safety and other networks that influence the workplace.

Examples include helping to promote work related road safety (the biggest cause of work time deaths and serious injuries), promoting transfer of workplace health and safety knowledge and skills to help workers stay safe outside work (3-4 more injuries to workers occur outside working hours), supporting the health safety development of apprentices, using the workplace to promote wider health education, working with ACAS on agendas such as absence management and employee involvement and cooperation.

There is a national social and business case for better health and safety (particularly health in its widest sense), based not only on cost saving to employers and the NHS but on using the sensible safety agenda to develop a culture of safety and cooperation at all levels in society. Just like the leaders of our most successful businesses, Government should come to understand the fundamental importance of good health and safety to the success of society, and be prepared to back the strategy with suitable and sufficient funding. RoSPA has articulated the 'spend-to-save' potential of good health and safety performance and seeks to influence where opportunities are provided.

Tackling ill health

Whilst accident reduction remains a key focus in sectors such as construction, agriculture, forestry and waste the balance of effort must shift towards tackling work-related health damage, particularly long latency conditions associated with persistent and sustained exposure to low-level and harmful contaminants in the workplace.

The key to tackling the health damage challenge is a major redoubling of effort to raise awareness of health hazards at work. RoSPA recognises the role of HSE as a catalyst and the value added by the [Tackling Occupational Disease](#) hub. Electronic media holds great promise here but face-to-face engagement is key too. As a founding partner RoSPA commends the campaign, '[Health risks at work: do you know yours?](#)', led by Safety Groups UK ([SGUK](#)), supported by RoSPA, and the '[No time to lose](#)' campaign led by [IOSH](#).

RoSPA NOSHC believes there needs to be high level information sharing between professional bodies and others to assist in developing an holistic approach to tackling occupational health. We have taken the first step towards this by bringing together campaigns led by our members and others on our website.

Each sector of the economy needs a high-level 'health risks champion' and HSE should seek to work with other players at the grass roots to help develop local and sector level health champions. The [HSE Estates Excellence](#) model lends itself to this and there are opportunities linked to working with and through members of the professional bodies linked to [POOSH](#) and [POOSH Scotland](#).

The aim has to be to create zero tolerance of workplace exposures that are harmful to health. In this context, the right to a 'clean air working environment for all' is fundamental. All sectors need to commit to this, with time-based targets for exposure reduction and eventual elimination of dust.

With regard to asbestos there should be a national survey identifying whether organisations understand 'duty to manage', towards establishing a national asbestos alliance to help develop a clear, safe national management/removal/disposal policy with time-based targets.

There is the opportunity to establish NHS based/led services that can help employers and employees to develop action plans to tackle stress/mental health issues and musculo-skeletal disorders, the latter encompassing ergonomic advice and early access to physiotherapy.

Action on workplace health hazards also provides a basis for workplace health education (weight loss, diabetes, smoking cessation, exercise, alcohol, mental health). HSE should cooperate with public health bodies such as Public Health England, understand their priorities and seek to work together to promote this approach while also persuading such bodies to expand their remit into occupational health risks awareness raising. The connection between HSE and Local Authorities could be strengthened to assist in transferring key health protection messages to local businesses.

Managing risk well

It is widely accepted that HSE needs to use its resources for proactive work with a focus on those businesses and sectors with the highest risks and the poorest health and safety records. We would suggest that businesses which have effective health and safety management systems and culture (characterised by clear director leadership and strong workforce involvement – attested to by independent audit) should be 'put on trust' to manage their affairs without HSE intervention (unless there is an accident or a complaint).

Such 'Higher Performers' need to be encouraged and empowered to assure good standards throughout their supply chain partners through the provision of support and use of suitable assurance regimes. Care must be taken however to ensure that these are effective and do not lead to over-bureaucratisation and proliferation of 'blue tape'.

Following serious health and safety related incidents, HSE should use their enforcement powers, where appropriate, to require failing businesses to use nominated, competent, external experts to undertake investigations and to supervise health safety management audit and change programmes, sharing the results with HSE.

Greater use should be made of remediation alongside suspended sentences to ensure that businesses found guilty of particular health and safety offences deal with underlying weaknesses in their approach to health and safety management. There also needs to be a new HSE led focus on improving organisational readiness to investigate and learn from accidents and incidents.

More effective risk management can ultimately only be better assured through higher standards of risk literacy. This means ensuring that education about hazards, risks and choosing sensible controls is a thread woven into education, through pre-school, schools and colleges, permeates the development of apprentices and is a clear feature in the education of future managers. Business schools in particular need to be challenged to include effective coverage of health and safety risk to assist in a societal shift from being risk averse moving towards an understanding of risk benefit.

RoSPA's ['Wider vision for Health and Safety'](#) places traditional health and safety concerns firmly within a public health perspective, promoting the message that if businesses truly understand the impact of accidents they should extend their thinking beyond the prevention of harms during working hours. The impact on families and communities is staggering, people of working age experience three to four times as many injuries requiring A&E attendance outside working hours as they do in the workplace, accounting for 10 per cent of all lost time.

For many organizations the route to attaining compliance is sufficiently challenging however we believe that there are positive benefits to be gained at societal level through the extension and transfer of occupational health and safety knowledge and skills to help workers and their families to stay safe outside the workplace.

HSE has a role here in identifying those organisations that are in a position to move 'beyond compliance' and signpost to simple interventions such as the inclusion of off-the-job safety scenarios within routine health and safety training; a regular focus on off-the-job (OTJ) accidents in daily safety briefings and communications; and bringing in outside safety experts into the workplace as part of overall safety and health education and wellness programmes. The business case for the 'Wider Vision for Health and Safety' rests not just on reduction in lost staff time but improved morale and encouraging stronger, more joined up safety culture.

Supporting small employers

Being small does not necessarily mean 'low risk' but it can mean lacking the resources needed to be able to manage the same health and safety challenges faced by large organisations.

Regulatory simplification and simpler electronic guidance can help but the key to raising standards in smaller and medium size enterprises (SMEs) is the provision of external face-to-face help.

The external 'help systems' which exist to support SMEs in all other respects, need to be expanded and re-tuned to enable them to help SMEs tackle health and safety issues as well.

Trade Associations have a role in providing access to SMEs, the Mineral Products Association (MPA) is one example; despite approximately 75% of quarry products being produced by just four multinationals, SMEs account for 50% of 'best practice' submissions to the MPAs annual H&S Awards scheme now in its 30th year. The MPA is a past winner of RoSPA's Prestigious 'SME Assistance Trophy'.

HSE, working with and through its partners, identified through a health and safety mapping exercise could potentially act as a catalyst leading to the development of health and safety strategies and support services of bringing trade associations, trade unions, local Chambers of Commerce, Local Authorities, universities, major clients and contractors and local safety groups together around specific topics.

A simple 'two sides of A4' 'Health Safety Action Plan' for SMEs as an alternative to health and safety policy statements and written risk assessments would be a significant step forward.

Keeping pace with change

Anticipating and adapting to change means not just keeping abreast of evidence about new hazards, risks and solutions, nor indeed understanding and adapting to organisational and structural changes in the economy – it must also mean being alive to changes in social and political attitudes towards health and safety risk itself and being sufficiently fleet-of-foot to adapt creatively in response.

One leading edge example is that of Safequarry.com renowned and respected globally, with 'auto-alerts' and associated apps to ensure engagement. Tripartite bodies such as the 'Quarries Partnership team', chaired by HSE, have opted to have their online activities hosted on this site.

For health and safety to prosper and attract the kind of enthusiastic support from the partners which it needs to support its agenda, it has not only to continue to demonstrate its relevance but it also has to show how it can deliver value into other agendas. For this reason there has to be a wider vision for health and safety at work, which extends beyond legal compliance and connects with other national policy agendas which relate to security, prosperity and social development.

HSE also needs to remain alive to the threats and opportunities which are associated with globalisation and global trends from increased international trade, inward investment, migration and even climate change. We believe HSE also has a role in helping to build health and safety into the UK's overseas development efforts.

Sharing our success

RoSPA believes passionately in the need to exploit more creatively and effectively the knowledge and expertise that lies within the wider UK health and safety system – particularly the expertise that lies within higher performing businesses. HSE's role should be to help facilitate its release and provide direction to parts of the system which could benefit from it.

Sharing success encourages all to abandon any silos that may exist, be they local, regional, national or global. The provenance of good ideas and innovations is unimportant. It's the sharing the learning and implementing that counts!

Following a period of consultation led by our NOSHC and building on RoSPA's success in developing a 'Higher Performers' forum in Scotland, a new Awards Excellence Forum will be launched to coincide with the 60th Anniversary of the RoSPA Occupational Safety and Health Awards. This as a major contribution towards the new HSE Strategy, and encourages HSE to work with RoSPA to unlock the potential associated with this grouping.

RoSPA is an enthusiastic supporter of this new strategy and will proactively seek further opportunities to contribute to the next stages in its development: business-to-business learning, buddying, case study development and dissemination, health safety exchanges, open days, twinning of health and safety committees, health safety internships, and many other similar innovations designed to spread knowledge, the list is endless...

Our one caveat is that whilst in RoSPA's experience pro-active partnership working 'works', Government needs to provide resources to ensure 'we' better mobilise, exploit and coordinate existing health and safety assets, both within and beyond the UK.

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