

Learning about risk

► **Diana Smith and Cassius Francis provide a brief overview** of the work of the LASER Alliance, an organisation that brings together safety and risk education practitioners with the aim of helping people, especially children, learn how to make responsible decisions about safety by experiencing risk.

Ensuring the safety and health of young people in the workplace should be a priority for all employers.

The HSE states that: *"Anyone new to the workplace will be facing unfamiliar risks from the job they will be doing and from their surroundings. This is the case for many young people. Workers are as likely to have an accident in the first six months at a workplace as during the whole of the rest of their working life.*

"The extra risk arises due to:

- *lack of experience of working in a new industry or workplace*
- *lack of familiarity with the job and the work environment*
- *reluctance to raise concerns (or not knowing how to)*
- *eagerness to impress workmates and managers."*

It is the belief of many safety and risk education professionals that not enough is being done to deliver consistent, relevant, education with young people entering into the workplace for the first time.

In the last five years, between 2008/09 and 2012/13:

- 20 young people (below the age of 19) were killed in the workplace
- There were 3,816 serious injuries involving broken limbs, amputations and serious burns
- There were 14,350 injuries leading to at least three days off work. (7 days 2012/13¹)

There are various organisations that have developed safety and risk education packages for young people, however, often these organisations are competing against one another, leading to inconsistencies in core content and availability to the general

populous. Many of these organisations have specialist knowledge in their own field, for example, railway safety or water safety, however, they are not always educationalists and may not be coherent with the requirements of their learners.

Similar could be said of some education-alists, in that some developed packages will address knowledge and understanding, however demonstrate little to no practical experience or exposure which may reinforce key learning and enable learners to refer back to it at a later stage.

Safety and risk education within schools is equally inconsistent as there are varying aspects of subject specific hazard awareness provided and no specific requirement for formal safety and risk education.

The curriculum for 'safety and risk' falls with the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) programme which is a ►



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► **The Flashpoint Lifeskills Centre (FLC) in Bodmin, run by Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, which features a range of scenarios, including kitchen, farm and beach safety, which enable children to gain practical, hands-on experience such as learning how to make a 999 emergency call**

non-statutory subject. Being non-statutory, many schools may wish to opt-out of teaching PSHE programmes. Furthermore, due to the Academy status of many primary and secondary schools in England today, teaching of the National Curriculum is also optional, potentially creating an even larger gap in the delivery of safety and risk education in general.

A broader scope is required in order to deliver more relevant and consistent safety and risk education for our young people. Resources are required which can be accessed freely to those not only in formal educational institutes but also to those in industry who are recruiting young people and may require structured guidance on content and delivery of risk education.

Safety education

McWhirter and Vallender (2010)² suggest that High Quality Practical Safety Education (HQPSE) seeks to go beyond the delivery of knowledge, understanding and skills, to help children develop risk competence appropriate for the age (or developmental stage) of the child. HQPSE should be empowering for the child and help to develop resilience as part of their overall wellbeing. They go on to define HQPSE as that which can be recognised because it has clear aims and objectives which:

- help children and young people develop risk competence appropriate for their age and developmental stage;
- use active, interactive and experiential

learning in a variety of challenging but controlled environments;

- develop injury prevention knowledge, skills, perceptions and attitudes;
- encourage and support reflection on these attitudes;
- is quality assured against evidence-based standards;
- encourages personal responsibility for keeping themselves (and others) safe; and
- is part of a wider strategy to prevent unintentional injury.

This approach provides a sound structure for those developing and delivering safety and risk education, and is key to adopting a holistic approach to ensuring key messages will be retained and retrieved at a later stage when a real-life situation requires a decision to be made by a young person.

HQPSE, underpinned by the 10 principles

Useful links

The LASER Alliance
www.lasersafety.org.uk

High Quality Practical Safety Education
www.lasersafety.org.uk/background/safety_education.htm

Young people at work, HSE
www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/index.htm

for effective safety education (see box on page 29), are the benchmark for practitioners when planning, developing and delivering their risk education programmes.

LASER

Learning About Safety by Experiencing Risk (LASER) is an approach used by safety and risk educators to facilitate delivery of 'hands on', practical, interactive educational scenarios that enable young people to identify and deal with hazards in a fun and engaging way.

Hosted by RoSPA, and sponsored by the Gas Safety Trust, the LASER Alliance (LA) is a membership organisation (members range from individuals to large organisations) committed to helping people learn how to make responsible decisions about safety and risk. It aims to provide a forum to bring together safety and risk education practitioners, enabling them to participate in local and UK-wide networks, sharing resources and best practice. The underlying ethos is to promote learning about safety by experiencing risk – "learning by doing".

This is achieved by:

- working with members who promote 'learning by doing';
- sharing effective practice to improve injury prevention across the UK;
- providing an accreditation service for relevant projects across the UK;
- becoming a portal (web-based) for high

Safety education resources

An online 'resource profiler' has been developed to support the practical safety and risk education work of the LASER Alliance, its members and those involved in producing resources. The profiler helps with the process of developing resources and answers questions about whether the resources are going to deliver quality safety education. It is designed to be of maximum benefit to those working on the development stages of child safety education resources, however it can also be used when looking at which resources to purchase; to ascertain the strength of existing resources and possible resources you may need to develop in the future; and to assess which resources may complement resources you already have or are planning to purchase. A paper copy of the profiler is also available.

www.profiler.lasersafety.org.uk

Name of Centre	Region (& Postcode)	Website
DangerPoint	North Wales (CH8 9RL)	www.dangerpoint.org.uk
Flashpoint	Devon & Cornwall (PL31 1HA)	www.flashpointcentre.co.uk
Lifeskills	Bristol (BS1 6XN)	www.lifeskills-bristol.org.uk
Lifewise	North East (S66 8LB)	www.lifewise999.co.uk
Safeside	West Midlands (B7 4HW)	www.safeside.org.uk
The Risk Factory	Edinburgh, Scotland (EH14 1RL)	www.theriskfactory.org
Warning Zone	East Midlands (LE3 5AG)	www.warningzone.org.uk

quality resources, available to download for non-profit-making organisations;

- involving participants in the development of the LASER Alliance mission.

Regional LASER co-ordinators host annual events which focus on local issues and bring together local LA members to network and share best practice. These events prelude a national annual event which plays host to organisations from the private and public sector with a focus on promoting practical safety education.

The alliance mantra “as safe as necessary not as safe as possible” is tempered to acknowledge the fact that some degree of risk-taking is an important part of life. Without learning to safely manage risks our children and young people cannot fulfil their full potential and as adults may never realise their dreams.

A number of LASER Alliance members operate safety centres (see box above) which are permanent facilities that host a number

of scenarios covering issues related to home safety, road safety and internet safety, as well as local issues which may relate to crime or water safety amongst others. Many centres also have scenarios such as shops and pubs, which relate to the social aspect associated with those environments, although these particular scenarios can also be utilised from a workplace point of view. For example as retail and hospitality are well known to be the first entry to the world of work for many young people, these scenarios are perfectly placed to impart workplace safety issues that may face young people entering the workforce for the first time. In fact, many LASER practitioners facilitate scenarios about occupational safety related issues for primary and secondary school students. For example, scenarios can focus on building site safety, electrical safety and farmyards.

A recent survey of LASER practitioners in the north of England identified that onsite

activities/permanent centres/workplace inductions were popular forms of safety and risk education delivery. The survey also found that these resources were most effective (when evaluated against other forms of delivery such as worksheets, DVD’s and interactive drama). Results also acknowledged that blended learning approaches – utilising a variety of delivery methods – were the most effective form of delivering safety and risk education. However, there is a general consensus that while a blended approach would add value to a variety of learning styles, delivery of such approaches depends very much on an organisation’s resources in terms of time, personnel, and funding available.

Many of the permanent safety centres recruit volunteers, which provides an ideal opportunity for organisations that want to involve their employees via their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy (contact the Laser Alliance or see safety centre box for website details of your nearest centre).

Scenarios and resources are central to LASER activity. LA members can also benefit from the LASER Accreditation Programme. Accreditation is a voluntary quality assurance programme for providers of practical safety education. It aims to be the preferred mechanism and mark of quality for LASER practitioners wishing to assure local and wider community members of their commitment to educational excellence and quality.

References

1. Health & Safety Statistics Report 2012/13, HSE
2. Defining high quality practical safety education, J McWhirter and J Vallender on behalf of CSEC, 2010 www.csec.org.uk/archived-website/tools/info/safety_education_defintion_0310.pdf

10 principles for effective safety education

1. Encourage the adoption of, or reinforce, a ‘whole school’ approach within the wider community
2. Use active approaches to teaching and learning (including interactive and experiential learning)
3. Involve young people in real decisions to help them stay safe
4. Assess children and young people’s learning needs
5. Teach safety as part of a comprehensive personal social and health curriculum
6. Use realistic and relevant settings and resources
7. Work in partnership
8. Address known risk and protective factors
9. Address psychosocial aspects of safety, eg. confidence, resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy
10. Adopt positive approaches which model and reward safe behaviour within a safe, supportive environment

More details at: www.lasersafety.org.uk/background/ten_principles.htm

Diana Smith runs DRS Safety Ltd and is a specialist workplace safety and risk education consultant. She is also a regional champion for the LASER Alliance.

Cassius Francis is the LASER Alliance co-ordinator and RoSPA youth liaison worker.

The 2014 LASER Alliance conference takes place this month (Thursday 20 February) at Safeside, West Midlands Fire Service, Birmingham. For details email: cf Francis@rospa.com or call 0121 248 2025.