



South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch

Joint meeting 21st November 2019



South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group

Topic: *Young people in the workplace*

Speaker: Stuart Mason, Health & Safety Adviser, Gilbert Giles & Gordon Ltd, Kendal

Venue: *The Netherwood Hotel*, Lindale Road, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6ET.

James Woolgrove, Past Chairman, *South Cumbria Occupational Health & Safety Group* welcomed *IOSH* and *SCOHSG* members to the meeting. He then introduced Stuart Mason, who had kindly agreed to be our replacement speaker at short notice because Barbara Hockey, Head of Vulnerable Workers team, *HSE*, Bootle had been advised that, as a Government Official, she should not make presentations to stakeholders during the election due to purdah regulations.

Stuart said that he planned to use his work experience to show members how attitudes to training young people for work had changed during the last 30 years. He used his experience as a young worker to show how workplace attitudes to risk taking had evolved to protect young workers from their youthful exuberance.

He explained that he had been brought up on a farm; an inherently dangerous work/home environment where children were expected to take on responsibilities at a young age. He said that this still applied but that the introduction of modern farming equipment meant that there was a greater awareness of the need to protect farm children from potentially life-threatening situations.

Stuart then described his experiences as a young employee at a time when personal protective equipment was basic and not always provided.

Stuart then referred members to a helpful *HSE* publication: *A brief guide to health and safety for employers* INDG364(rev1), published 06/13. He said that this publication was designed to introduce young people, embarking on work experience placements, to the world of work, to help them understand the work environment and to help them choose future careers or prepare for employment. He said that the *HSE* guidance defines a young person as anyone under 18.

He explained that learning to understand workplace risk and how to deal with it can be one of the biggest benefits offered by a work placement because work experience pupils will be new to the workplace and will be undertaking unfamiliar jobs in unfamiliar surroundings.

Stuart said that *HSE* emphasised the importance of providing young employees with clear instruction, training and supervision to enable them to work without putting themselves and other people at risk. He explained that young employees are likely to need more supervision than adults to enable line managers get a clear idea of the young person's capabilities and ability before they are deemed competent to undertake workplace tasks unsupervised. *HSE* recommend that appropriate workplace supervision should be based the tasks being undertaken and should be designed to identify young employees' aptitude, and their training needs.

Stuart then emphasised the importance of checking that young employees have understood their instruction and training because they are unlikely to have the confidence to ask for further help if they have not fully understood their instructions. He said that it is crucial that young employees understand:

- Why they are being asked to follow specific procedures especially if they are unfamiliar with their workplace hazards.
- That they have a duty to take care of their own health and safety and that of workplace colleagues and visitors who may be affected by their actions.

He illustrated this with examples of hazards encountered during his first jobs in agriculture and the haulage business.

Stuart then considered what else employers needed to do to check that their management systems catered for the needs of young employees. He suggested that when a young employee joined the work force it was necessary review risk assessments for the areas where he/she would be working and amend them, if necessary, to take account of the young person's level of competence. This may include provision of an induction session(s), additional job supervision, site familiarisation, and training in the fitting, use and care of protective equipment if appropriate.

He reminded members that if young employees will be working in a high-risk environment it will be necessary to ensure that additional training about control measures for specific risk factors is undertaken before the young employee is allowed to work in that area. For example, where there is potential exposure to: radiation, noise and vibration, toxic substances, or extreme temperatures that are covered by specific UK health and safety regulations. Stuart illustrated this by showing pictures of high-risk work areas and discussing ways of ensuring that inexperienced employees understood the potential risks that they faced. It was agreed that one of the best ways of supervising young people in these environments was for them to work alongside a competent employee who had the ability to mentor them constructively – easy to say, but much harder to find suitable mentors in practice!

Stuart then looked at how the requirements of UK health and safety law affected the management of young and inexperienced employees. He reminded members that every employer must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all their employees, irrespective of age.

Under the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* 1999, employers have a responsibility to ensure that young people are not exposed to risk due to:

- Lack of experience.
- Being unaware of existing or potential risks due to inexperience and lack of training.
- Lack of maturity (physical and psychological) – for example, it is necessary to check whether, or not the task is beyond their physical or psychological capacity by checking the young employee is capable of safely lifting weights and of remembering and following instructions;

Other important considerations are:

- The layout of the workplace;
- The physical, biological and chemical agents they will be exposed to.
- How they will be expected to handle work equipment.
- How the work and processes are organised.
- The extent of health and safety and task training needed.
- Risks from specific agents, processes and tasks.

Stuart then showed members illustrations of how new technologies and engineering design techniques have made many workplace tasks easier, more efficient and safer - the downside of this being that the employee who had the skills to repair and maintain manual workplace equipment have largely been superseded by 'expert' technicians who are not based on site.

He ended his presentation by drawing members' attention to observations made by *Make UK*, a manufacturers' organisation. They had suggested that, in a world where more people own a mobile phone than a toothbrush, and where many people are reputed to have a shorter attention span than goldfish, it is important to reassess ways of engaging employees in workforce in health and safety.

They also noted that some organisations struggle to know how to engage with employees from Gen-Z to 'digital native' millennials because each generation group prefers to receive and provide information in different ways. Therefore, a 'one-size fits all' approach to

employee engagement with health and safety will not work. Stuart said that it was important for employers to find ways of drawing on the workplace knowledge of experienced employees while encouraging respect and knowledge sharing between them, and their younger colleagues, who often have a better understanding of the potential applications of new technologies in the workplace; both are important.

James Woolgrove, Chairman, *SCOHSG* then thanked Stuart for giving members such an interesting overview of the management needs of young and inexperienced employees and presented him with a small token of our members' appreciation that he had prepared his presentation at such short notice.

He then encouraged members to network with one another and the speaker over tea and coffee.

Related HSE web site links:

HSE strategies and plans: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/strategiesandplans/index.htm>

HSE sector plans: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/strategiesandplans/sector-plans/index.htm>

HSE health priority plans: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/strategiesandplans/health-and-work-strategy/index.htm>