



South Cumbria &  
North Lancashire Branch

## Joint meeting 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022



South Cumbria Occupational  
Health & Safety Group

**Venue:** Crooklands Hotel, Crooklands, Kendal

**Topic:** ***Competence: how can workplace competence be assessed? A common sense approach.***

**Speaker:** Sam Duxbury, SHE Manager, *Walter Carefoot & Sons* (Construction) Ltd

Phil Sedgwick, Chair, *South Cumbria Occupational Health & Safety Group (SCOHS)* gave members a warm welcome to our first joint face-to-face meeting with *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch* since the beginning of the pandemic. He then introduced our speaker, Sam Duxbury, SHE Manager, *Walter Carefoot & Sons* (Construction) Ltd.

Sam began his presentation by explaining that we “...*don't need to reinvent the wheel...*”

He defined workplace competence as:

- The ability to do something well and efficiently.
- A combination of skills, training, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely.

He said that it is important to ensure that employees are competent because competent employees are less likely to have an accident or create an unsafe environment and they are more likely to complete tasks correctly and efficiently. This is important for workplace safety and for an organisation's bottom line. Competent employees are less likely to make mistakes. This also improves profitability and reduces the need to correct expensive mistakes.

Sam then considered the relationship between skills, knowledge, training, and work experience. He concluded that all these factors played an important role in the development of workplace competence. It is therefore important that employers and managers have a robust system for assessing the competence of employees to undertake their workplace tasks. He suggested that competence assessment by employers and managers should include evaluating employees':

- *Knowledge:*
  - Certification: check that certificates are valid and for the person doing/applying for the job.
  - Qualifications: check that certificates are valid and for the person doing/applying for the job.
  - Training: on the job, workshops, specialist courses etc...
- *Skills:*
  - Check employee's ability to use knowledge and training to develop practical aptitudes for specific workplace tasks.
  - Evaluate by practical tests, observations and looking at previous work.
  - It is important that managers do such checks before allowing employees to work unsupervised.
  - Appropriate communication skills.
- *Experience:*
  - Check CV is genuine by asking specific questions about experience listed.
  - Confirm experience by evaluating skills (see above).
  - Ensure that familiarity with tasks does not lead to careless working and/or the use of unsafe short-cuts.

- *Training*
  - Ensure that on-the-job training is undertaken by a competent person.
  - If practical ensure that external training is provided by competent, qualified trainers who are affiliated to a relevant professional body.

Sam went on to observe that every job requires a specific set of knowledge and skills but that the specific skills needed vary depending on the type and complexity of the job. This means that workplace competence assessment and training processes need to be tailored to take account of the skills and knowledge employees need to perform their job.

Sam then considered the use of common workplace assessment processes such as:

- Self-assessment forms.
- Assessor reviews: evaluating self-assessment forms, observations, identifying development needs, creating a development plan etc...
- Regular re-assessments.

As with all such tools it was how they are used that is important. He emphasised that all such processes needed to be appropriate for the job. One size does not fit all. Sam then explained the management system that his employers used as a framework for ensuring that employees are competent to and can do their jobs safely. As you would expect it includes policies covering health and safety that overlap with policies to protect the business's viability. These policies cover:

- Assessing Job Applications / CVs.
- Conducting job interviews.
- The content of induction processes.
- Regular audits and inspections – including competence assessments.
- Evaluation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- Regular appraisals.
- Accident Investigations leading to improved risk assessments and updated systems of work.
- Quality Procedures to check methodology and worker competence.
- Use of third-party assessors.
- Compliance with Health & Safety legislation especially:
  - Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
  - Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998.
  - Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015.

Sam illustrated this section of his presentation with examples of what can happen during construction work if managers and employees are not competent to do their job. He stressed that it was important that managers assessed the competence of their team and took responsibility for ensuring that work tasks were well planned and adequately supervised if necessary. A good manager does not sit in his/her office all day filling in forms and writing reports! They also have responsibilities to ensure that their team members are competent to do their jobs well and safely.

Sam fielded questions during his presentation that generated some lively and thought-provoking discussion.

Phil thanked Sam for giving members such a worthwhile and informative talk with practical tips and presented him with a small gift as a token of members appreciation. This was followed by notices from Ian Dandy who encouraged members to take this welcome opportunity to network with one another.

**Related UK Government and HSE web site links:**

What is competence? [What is Competence? - Competence in health and safety \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/competence/)

Managing health and safety regulations 1999: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/managing/legal.htm>

Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998: [Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations \(LOLER\) \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/loler/)

Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015: [Construction - Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015 \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/)