

## Employing Apprentices: Safety on the Job

Information  
Sheet

This information sheet is written for people who employ apprentices. It provides a summary overview of how to fulfil your duties as an employer and protect apprentices, who may be more at risk of injury and ill health.



## Apprentices and occupational safety and health

### The apprentices you employ may:

- be under 18 years old, and legally, as the employer, you must carry out a risk assessment before they start work or when there is a major change in the place of work, further information is available [here](#);
- have never worked before and be less aware of occupational safety and health;
- be a number of years into your apprenticeship and continuing to learn the skills necessary to keep yourself and others safe and healthy at work; or
- have previous experience in a different work setting that may have had either a 'positive' or 'poor' safety culture. This experience may influence how they think about occupational safety and health, and their expectations.



### Why might apprentices be at an increased risk?

Apprentices may be at increased risk of accidents or ill health at work. As the employer, you may need to implement extra control measures to protect their health and safety.

#### This may be because of:

- a lack of awareness or knowledge of occupational safety and health;
- a lack of or reduced experience in a particular workplace or industry;
- being unfamiliar with the job activities and the work environment;
- not knowing or understanding the workplace culture (i.e., "the way things are done around here");
- not knowing how to raise safety and health concerns or not wanting to;
- an eagerness to do well at work and impress colleagues and managers;
- reduced physical and mental maturity, particularly for younger workers; and
- a poor safety culture at the organisation (i.e., failure to consult with workers on health and safety matters; not acting on the lessons learned from what goes well and what goes wrong).





## Vulnerable workers

Vulnerable Workers are people who may be particularly sensitive or over-exposed to potential health and safety risks in comparison to the general working population.

The definition of vulnerable workers is very broad and includes (1) 'sensitive risk groups' and (2) other groups of workers who can be considered vulnerable. There are specific occupational safety and health considerations for 'sensitive risk groups' such as young workers (under 18-year-olds), along with other groups of vulnerable workers.

An apprentice may be considered a vulnerable worker as they may be under 18 (i.e., sensitive risk group or young person in the workplace) or due to other personal and job factors.

More information on vulnerable workers is available [here](#).

## Vulnerable Workers



### Sensitive Risk Groups

e.g., young workers, night and shift workers, and pregnant, postnatal, and breast-feeding employees.

### Other Vulnerable Workers

e.g., older workers, migrant workers, gig workers, workers new to the job, workers with disabilities, workers with underlying health conditions etc.

## What is expected of me as an apprentice employer?

Under health and safety law, employers have certain duties to **all** employees (including apprentices).

These duties relate to positive safety behaviour.

These include:

- providing and maintaining a safe workplace, machinery and equipment;
- managing work to ensure the safety, health and welfare of employees;
- identifying hazards, assessing and controlling risks (in a written risk assessment);
- putting a safety statement in place, reviewing it regularly and making it available to employees;
- preparing and updating emergency procedures;
- consulting with employees and safety representatives (if appointed) on health and safety issues;
- providing appropriate training, information and supervision, taking into account, for example, the complexity and familiarity of the task to the apprentice and the apprentice's learning style and pace;
- making workplace hazard information, protection measures, and safety representative name(s) (if appointed) available to all employees;
- providing and maintaining personal protective equipment (PPE), where required;
- reporting certain accidents to the HSA; and
- covering the cost of any health and safety measures required.

### Essential health and safety terms:



**A hazard** is anything that can cause injury or ill health, such as electricity, dangerous fumes, working at heights, unguarded machinery or moving vehicles.



**Risk** means the likelihood that someone will be harmed by a hazard and the severity of the harm.

**The risk depends on:**

- how often the hazard is encountered,
- severity of potential injury, and
- number of people who might be exposed to the hazard.



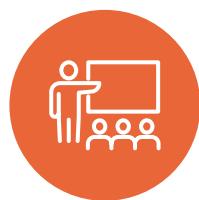
## What additional measures should I put in place to protect apprentices?

Employers may need to put in place additional health and safety measures to protect apprentices.

These might include:



completing a young person risk assessment for apprentices under 18 years of age and following the restrictions in the [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(General Applications\)\(Amendment\)\(No.2\) Regulations 2016](#);



providing an induction that includes a walk-around of the workplace and emergency procedures, employee roles and responsibilities, the name and contact details of the safety representative, and the location of welfare facilities;



delivering information, instruction, and training in a language and manner that the apprentice understands;



considering vulnerable workers in risk assessments;



encouraging apprentices to raise concerns and explaining how this can be done;



addressing issues affecting apprentices with all employees, e.g. at safety committee meetings;



additional supervision; and



ensuring that apprentices understand the information, instruction and training they need to work safely.



### Top Tip:

Simple language and visual aids (e.g. a walk around of the workplace or pictures/graphics) can help communicate safety messages more effectively.

## Consultation - the key to effective safety management

The most effective way to ensure that workers, including apprentices, follow safe work procedures is to involve them in developing and reviewing those procedures. It is crucial to value and consider the workers' opinions since they perform the job and can provide valuable insights.

Employers need to consult with employees in advance on anything carried out in the workplace that could significantly affect safety and health. Any work activity covered by health and safety law should be discussed.

### Consultation must cover:

- any risk protection and prevention measures;
- specific high-risk work activities, e.g. live electricity, work at height, excavations;
- the appointment and the duties of staff with safety and health responsibilities;
- the outcome of risk assessments on workplace hazards;
- the preparation of the safety statement;
- safety and health information to be provided to employees;
- notifiable accidents or dangerous occurrences;
- the engagement of safety and health experts or consultants;
- the planning and organisation of safety and health training; and
- the planning and introduction of new technologies.

Employees may decide to select and appoint a safety representative to represent them to management on all matters related to health, safety, and welfare in the workplace. A safety representative can support the consultation process (please note: a safety representative must be appointed on a construction site with more than 20 persons employed). Further information on safety representatives can be found [here](#).





## What can I expect from an apprentice?

All employees, including apprentices, have duties under Irish health and safety law.

These include:

- cooperating with the employer on health and safety matters;
- attending training provided by the employer and following instructions received;
- not engaging in poor behaviour that puts themselves or others in danger, e.g. horseplay;
- using tools, equipment and PPE as they have been instructed and trained;
- reporting dangerous work situations or hazards to a manager or supervisor if they see them;
- becoming familiar with the risk assessments in your workplace and following the control measures that you have put in place to reduce the risk of injury and ill health;
- ensuring that they are not under the influence of drugs (including prescribed or over-the-counter medications) or alcohol at work, where the intoxication could endanger their own or another person's safety; and
- informing you if they are taking medication that might pose a risk to the safety of anyone at work.



### Key point

All employers (including employers of apprentices) should demonstrate positive safety behaviour. **This might include:**

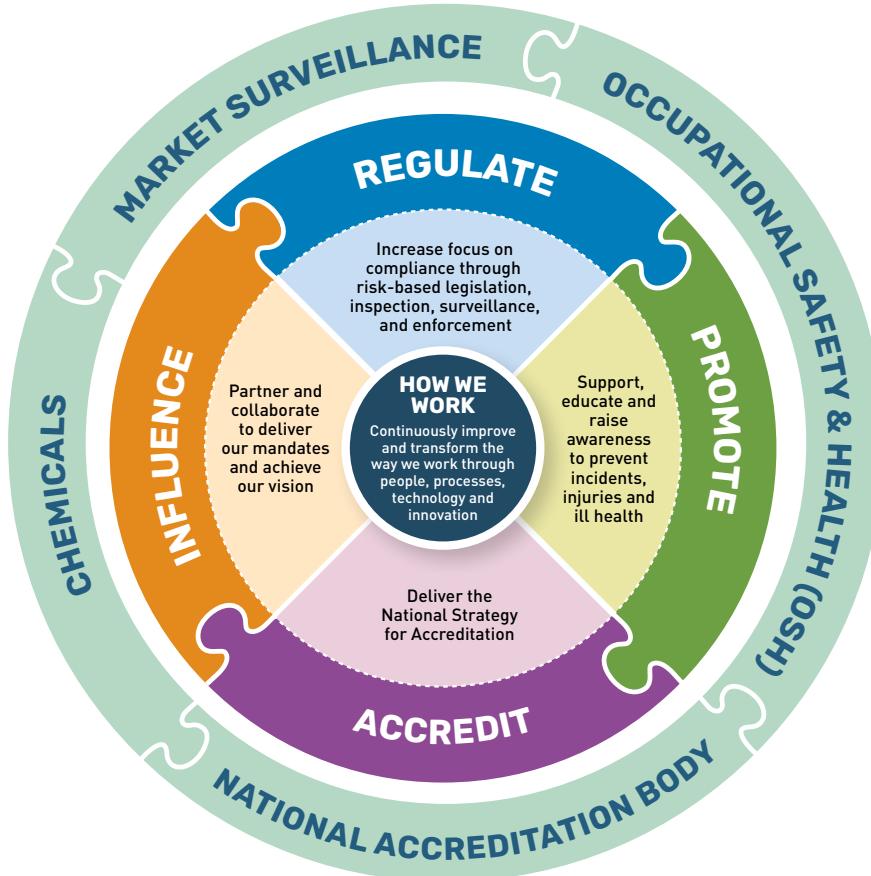
- prioritising and committing to safety (for example, by stopping unsafe work practices even if this means work takes longer to complete);
- providing up-to-date training that includes new workplace technologies and methods in use;
- encouraging hazard reporting, for example, if a machine is broken or faulty;
- consulting and involving employees to improve workplace safety;
- following the risk assessments and safety procedures in place; and
- leading by example.

[hsalearning.ie](https://hsalearning.ie) has over 50 free online health and safety awareness-raising courses, including “**Health and Safety in the Workplace for Apprentices**” and “**Workplace Safety, Health and Welfare Induction**”.

# Who are the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), and how can they help?

The HSA enforce occupational health and safety laws to keep people safe and healthy at work and to safeguard people from the adverse effects of chemicals.

We visit thousands of workplaces every year to promote and educate on health and safety. We investigate workplace accidents and complaints. We also create resources to support employers and employees in improving workplace safety. These resources are available for free from [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie).



If you wish to make a complaint or have a query about workplace health and safety, you can contact us by phoning 0818 289 389 (Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm) or emailing [contactus@hsa.ie](mailto:contactus@hsa.ie)

## Further information

- [www.hsa.ie/education](http://www.hsa.ie/education)
- [www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/vulnerable\\_workers/vulnerable\\_workers.html](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/vulnerable_workers/vulnerable_workers.html)
- [www.hsalearning.ie](http://www.hsalearning.ie)
  - 'Health and Safety in the Workplace for Apprentices.'
  - 'Workplace Safety, Health and Welfare Induction.'
- [www.besmart.ie](http://www.besmart.ie) is a free online risk assessment and safety statement tool.



## Contact our HelpDesk:

Email: [contactus@hsa.ie](mailto:contactus@hsa.ie)

Phone: **0818 289 389**

or visit: [www.hsa.ie/education](http://www.hsa.ie/education)



An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta  
Health and Safety Authority