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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

Workers' Safety Adviser Challenge Fund - round one Evaluation Report

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Cleared by Jonathan Rees on 5 July 2005

Issue

1. Agreement that the annexed report of the evaluation of the first year of the Workers' Safety Adviser (WSA) Challenge Fund should be sent to Ministers for information. No decisions on future of fund are required until further paper in early 2006.

Timing

2. For this meeting. Ministers are expecting the report in August 2005.

Recommendation

3. That the Commission notes the findings and agrees that the annexed report of the evaluation of the first year of the Workers' Safety Adviser Challenge Fund be sent to Ministers.

Background

4. Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, announced the creation of the WSA Challenge Fund in October 2003. Funds of £3m over three years were granted to HSC to take it forward. The Chair launched the Challenge Fund on 31 March 2004. Of seventy applications received, twelve projects were selected to receive funding in the first year (see annex 1, appendix B for details). Annex 1 sets out the background and evaluation findings. A more detailed evaluation report is available on request. Ministers and DWP officials have taken a close interest in the fund and we have therefore promised a copy of the evaluation report well ahead of decisions on its future.

Argument

5. The key findings are:
 - The WSA Challenge Fund **increased worker involvement** in the organisations recruited.

- The Fund has engendered attitudes and arrangements likely to lead to **health and safety improvements** – even in organisations with existing good standards of management.
 - The WSAs themselves do not require high levels of health and safety qualification to effectively promote worker involvement – communication skills are as important.
 - The Fund has not yet realised across the piece, the economies of scale over the pilot study that were envisaged.
5. **Positive impact on worker involvement:** The WSA Challenge Fund was effective in round one in increasing worker involvement. It led to employers adopting a more positive attitude towards worker involvement over the year. Workers showed a marked increase at year-end in willingness and confidence in becoming involved in health and safety risk management. The proportion of organisations with no form of worker involvement fell from 28% to 7%. High levels of WSA activity with workers resulted in large increases in the number of workers involved in hazard spotting, risk assessment and group discussions on health and safety.
 6. **Positive impact on health and safety:** Workers' Safety Advisers reported better attitudes and arrangements likely to lead to health and safety improvements over the course of the year, even in workplaces with a high baseline standard of health and safety management. This improvement is attributed to changes in management activity, rather than investments in physical hazard-reduction equipment.
 7. **Identification of key WSA skills:** The participants' views on the skill set required by WSAs to achieve effective worker involvement reflected a strong perception that 'softer' skills, such as communication, facilitation and conflict management were as important, if not more so, than health and safety qualifications, though most thought that a qualification and substantial experience were important too.
 8. **Cost effectiveness:** The operation of round one was significantly affected by the late start for the Fund with some projects unable to recruit their target number of workforces. This had an adverse impact on the cost-effectiveness of projects, as start-up costs in round one were high, primarily for WSA recruitment and training, whilst operational time was truncated. The average costs are broadly the same as in the 2002 pilot study, though the averages mask large differences in the performance of different projects. The economies of scale envisaged by setting up the Fund compared to the pilot tended to materialise only in those projects that had well-established partnerships.
 9. Projects in round one underspent their allocation of £812,000 by £101,000. This has been carried over into round two and steps are being taken to manage projects' spend more closely. As a matter of routine, HSE's internal audit team is auditing round one of the Challenge Fund to ensure propriety and best use of public funds.
 10. **Evaluation:** Evaluation materials were perceived by some projects to be excessive, and a barrier to securing the involvement of workplaces, particularly within the construction sector. This resulted in variable response levels between projects, with end-of-year figures which do not therefore give a completely accurate picture of improvements made in certain projects over the course of the year.

11. The evaluation process has been streamlined in response to these comments, and the need for correct and detailed evaluation was heavily emphasised during the application workshops for round two. The quality and timeliness of evaluation should improve for round two as a result.

12. **Key lessons learned** so far, which we will incorporate in the next round, include:

- The need for WSAs to acquire 'soft' skills alongside health and safety competence.
- The need to better publicise the application process.
- The need to make explicit to all projects the evaluation requirements before the new Round commences.
- The need to ensure that examples of good practice are communicated to participating projects.
- The need to ensure that participating projects spend in accordance with their planning.

13. **Next Steps:** Options will be identified for the possible extension (or otherwise) of the Fund beyond Round 3, to be presented to the Commission in early 2006, with resulting recommendations presented to Ministers.

Consultation

14. The Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, LACORS, the EEF and IOSH have been consulted. The Challenge Fund Management Board (see annex 1, appendix A) and the Challenge Fund Managers have been consulted on the evaluators' report.

Presentation

15. The WSA Challenge Fund is a visible sign of one of HSC/E's key messages, that "the people best placed to make workplaces safer from harm are the staff and managers who work in them. They do this best by working together."

16. The Challenge Fund attracted media interest, and we will seek to gather publicity for the publication of the Evaluation Report by promoting the headline findings. The positive outcomes from the Report will be prominently displayed at the TUC Congress to promote round 3 of the Challenge Fund.

Costs and Benefits

17. See annex 1, appendix C for a breakdown of costs. Benefits include better worker involvement and better attitudes and management arrangements likely to lead to health and safety improvements.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

18. Administration of the Fund continues to consume HSE resources, although this has decreased since the Fund Manager assumed day-to-day responsibility for the Fund. In addition to the £1m allocated for the Fund in 2004/05, HSE also spent about

£111,000 of its own resources. This was for consultancy work for setting up the Fund, the design of a logo and the first year of the evaluation of the Fund.

19. The Labour Party has made a commitment “to extend the WSA initiative” (see “People at work - forward not back”, published March 2005 and available at http://www.labour.org.uk/fileadmin/labour/user/attachedfiles/PDFS/people_at_work_forward_not_back.pdf). If the Fund is to be extended beyond round three, further funding will be required, and arrangements will need to be in place by end of March 2007 to allow for a seamless transition, and avoid the repetition of start-up costs. Options will be identified for the possible extension of the Fund beyond round 3, to be presented to the Commission in early 2006, with resulting recommendations presented to Ministers to allow for a final decision to be made in good time.

Environmental Implications

20. None

Other Implications

21. None

Action

22. The Commission is invited to agree that the annexed report of the evaluation of the first year of the Workers’ Safety Adviser Challenge Fund should be sent to Ministers.