

Health and Safety Executive Board Paper

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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

Teleconferencing: strategy and proposals

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Issue

1. Wider provision of teleconferencing.

Timing

2. In the course of business. A programme of installation could start in April 2003.

Recommendation

3. That the Board agrees the proposal and asks BEU to take this work forward with D/Ds and LogicaCMG.

Background

4. Both the HSE Board and the Central Health and Safety Committee have asked for an HSE-wide approach to investing in more video- and audio-conferencing in order to manage travel-related health and safety issues. This paper outlines our policy and proposals.

Argument

Policy

5. HSE has an established policy of encouraging the use of existing video and audio conferencing facilities as a safer, less stressful and cost-effective alternative to travelling to meetings. Our current video-conferencing facilities are not however very extensive and also need to be upgraded.
6. Teleconferencing offers a number of organisational benefits, some tangible and measurable, and some subjective and personal, including:
 - improved work/life balance
 - reducing stressors and injury risks which arise through work-related travel
 - scope for improved productivity, because time that would otherwise have been spent travelling is available for other work
 - improved decision making through greater participation and shorter project timescales
 - supporting dispersed, collaborative team working, which will grow under the Change Programme, and remote management
 - more flexible use of scarce specialist/technical resources
 - reduction in travel and subsistence costs
 - environmental considerations
7. Our vision is that all HSE staff should have access to good quality teleconferencing facilities that enable and encourage staff to reduce travel and improve communications both internally and with more external organisations who have these facilities.
8. Our aim is that these facilities will be more widely available to those who need them, when they need them and that usage will be much higher than now. Using the facilities should be cost-effective, have a short pay-back time and can be financed by the savings in travel costs.
9. To achieve good levels of usage, staff will need to view teleconferencing as the first choice in arranging meetings, and managers have a responsibility to ensure staff consider this option.

Proposal

10. In recent years, we have used fixed videoconferencing between Rose Court and Bootle. Usage levels are about 60% of total time available, mainly between 10.00hrs and 16.00hrs, when usage is substantial. Greater usage was made when rail services were affected by the speed restrictions introduced following the Hatfield accident. There is a fixed installation in Lord Cullen House. Mobile installations have been introduced in Manchester and Birmingham. Usage has been lower than anticipated, mainly because the proposed meetings are with Rose Court or Bootle, which are already busy and because intra-divisional meetings are not possible.
11. We have also invested in a number of 'spider' phones that are used for audioconferencing. These are popular and widely used, but more could be provided. Both are valuable and support different kinds of meeting.
12. For videoconferencing, our proposal is to upgrade existing fixed facilities in Bootle and Rose Court, provide additional services through more mobile facilities in Bootle and

Rose Court, and arrange for services to be provided in all field offices through mobile units. These facilities would be managed under the REFIT arrangements for the next 9 years. HSE would want technology refresh, initial training in the use of the equipment, and service desk support as part of the managed service. For audio conferencing, our proposal is to work with D/Ds to ensure that all meeting rooms are provided with 'spider' phones, where needed.

13. While it would be feasible to split the work into distinct phases, and introduce more facilities gradually across HSE, the benefits would not be felt for some time. Intra-divisional meetings are as important as cross-HSE meetings, and a relatively quick, comprehensive programme would meet this need. A short programme also allows LogicaCMG to negotiate a better deal with suppliers, and HSE to realise the benefits earlier. The payback period will be within a year, equating to 300 1st class journeys between Bootle and Rose Court a year.
14. There are two further options. It would be possible to equip the very small field offices – Carlisle, Carmathen, and Poole - with audio facilities and save about £15k p.a. It would also be possible to expand on a largely audio-conferencing basis throughout and simply upgrade the existing video-conferencing facilities (with the addition of Norwich) and save most of the additional service cost. Neither option is recommended.

Consultation

15. The Business Improvement Programme Management Board has discussed proposal. They recommended that if the 'carrot' was attractive enough, the 'stick' would not be painful.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

16. The upgrade of our existing service is already included in the cost of the annual charge for 2003/2004 – principally covering the services between Rose Court and Bootle. Expanding videoconferencing as proposed, will cost approximately £75k per annum for the remainder of the REFIT contract period, to Autumn 2011. This is an indicative cost subject to contractual agreement. BEU propose to manage all costs centrally, including the actual communication costs. This will encourage greater usage, as it will be a service free at the point of use.
17. Paper B/03/014 indicated that the proposed expansion of the service is not affordable in BEU's indicative settlement, and as that paper suggests, the Board is invited to consider a transfer of resource to deliver the service. We suggest that this can be met from directorate travel & subsistence budget, pro rata to the size of their budget, eg the Operations Group would transfer 83% of the cost or £62k to fund the expanded service.
18. We propose to keep usage under review, which will help D/Ds consider future T&S budget requirements.

Other Implications

19. The CHSC may wish to consider what arrangements it wishes to put in place to monitor whether health and safety performance has improved from the introduction of an expanded teleconferencing service.
20. This proposal does not include HSL's facilities which has separate IT arrangements which they manage. All new installations would be able to connect with HSL. We will discuss with HSL how we can mutually benefit from these proposals.

Action

21. The Board are asked to agree the proposal, and that budget holders reduce their allocations to T&S to pay for the new service.