



Helping Great Britain **work well**

2016

Foreword



When people are harmed by work it leads to pain and suffering for individuals and their families, disruption and damaged reputations for companies and costs to the whole economy that make businesses, and Britain, less competitive.

Nobody wants that to happen and, more importantly, we cannot afford it to happen. It is vital that everyone is able to play their part in keeping Britain's economy running as effectively and efficiently as possible.

I was inspired to hear through the strategy road shows about businesses – large and small – that know effective health and safety management allows innovation, enhances productivity and enables growth. They are exemplars for everyone in the health and safety system.

That's why this new system strategy has my full backing. It will help ensure Great Britain maintains its world-class health and safety record, whilst also maximising the wider benefits that the system can bring.

Tackling workplace ill health is rightly a key theme. Some 23 million working days are lost each year because of it. Individuals, employers and the state incur an annual cost of around £9 billion from ill health due to today's working conditions. So reducing workplace ill health is a must for Britain's well-being and prosperity.

Another key theme in the strategy is ensuring that businesses – especially SMEs – know how to take the right actions easily and efficiently. Legislation and guidance have already been simplified but more needs to be done, and the strategy sets out how.

I was impressed with the energy and drive that has gone into creating the new strategy, involving stakeholders at events held around Great Britain and discussions over social media. It is now vital that the impetus is maintained and that the theme on ownership is taken up by everyone in the system – whatever your role, you have an active part to play in delivering on the strategy's potential. If that happens, we really will all be helping Great Britain to work well.

Justin Tomlinson MP

Minister for Disabled People (covering HSE)

Helping Great Britain work well: A new health and safety system strategy



I want to thank all those who have participated so far in our Helping Great Britain work well engagement programme and the vital discussions we had about the new strategy for Great Britain's occupational health and safety system.

The conversations we have had during the first two months of 2016 have made it clear that we have strong support for all of the themes in the new strategy. We have spoken to hundreds of people directly and reached millions more through social media. But what we have seen is more than just 'support', there is a huge amount of energy and a desire to get involved in driving improvement in all parts of the system. This gives us every confidence that we can maintain our health and safety record as one of the best there is. Now we need to move forward at pace.

There is broad agreement among those with whom we have engaged that preventing harm to workers and the public is integral to businesses being successful and achieving sustained growth. Our collective challenge is to ensure that this is known, understood and becomes embedded firmly in everyone's thinking – and in all of our actions.

The principles of our system are sound and have stood the test of time:

- Those who create risks have a responsibility to manage those risks – placing the ownership of risk in the right place.
- Action should be proportionate to the risks that need to be managed – which means we need well-thought-out measures to be applied that are tailored to each business, to the nature of the work undertaken and the people who work there.

Too much complexity and bureaucracy has built up around health and safety. We heard many people say that we already have the knowledge to make the themes of the strategy a reality. The message that this is about being smarter – not simply doing more – resonated with our audiences. By keeping things as simple and straightforward as possible we can ensure that all businesses see this as enabling them to be successful and productive.

We now need to see real ownership of this strategy – by the many, not just a few. This is not HSE's strategy, it is for the whole of the system and everyone in it.

HSE will continue to take its responsibility as the prime mover, working with co-regulators, colleagues across government and other stakeholders to ensure our regulation stays simple and effective, and that our guidance is accessible to all. But broadening ownership of the ambition to improve health and safety is the key to our success.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to keep building a 21st-century, world-class occupational health and safety system that will help Great Britain work well.

If we can all come together to help achieve these things, maintain the gains made in safety, and seize the opportunity to give health the same priority, it will help improve productivity, keep business costs down, help keep workers safe and well, and protect members of the public.

Dame Judith Hackitt DBE
HSE Chair



Executive summary

Key points

- **Great Britain has a health and safety record to be proud of.**
- **Six new priority themes will help Great Britain to work well.**
- **Everyone in the health and safety system should play their part.**

Great Britain's health and safety record is the envy of much of the world. Central to this is protecting people by managing risk in a proportionate and effective way, supporting innovation and increasing productivity. The challenge is to improve even further on this impressive record. HSE is seeking to influence the system through the Helping Great Britain work well strategy.

While HSE's position as a regulator ensures it will remain the key player, there is a role to play for everyone who has a stake or interest in improving health and safety in the workplace. This is what is called 'the system', not an abstract concept, but networks of organisations and individuals, including, among others, employers, employees, industry and trade bodies, supply chains, third-sector bodies, insurance and legal bodies, workers' representatives, professional institutions and government, as well as co-regulators and many others. Put another way, this means all those who undertake, or influence, workplace activities and attitudes.

The Helping Great Britain work well strategy sets out the priority themes for us to focus on over the next five years. It is important to acknowledge at the start that this will not be at the expense of what is already done well, but the areas identified here are those on which all will need to focus their efforts collectively to make the greatest improvement.

HSE will continue to be a prime mover, whether through ongoing regulatory reform, working in partnership with stakeholders, carrying out inspections, assessing safety cases and reports, or where necessary taking enforcement action.

HSE will look to act increasingly as an enabler, supporting businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), by providing simple, accessible and relevant advice and challenging so-called 'experts' who overprescribe and overinterpret requirements. This should facilitate proportionate, appropriate and effective risk management, encouraging all those in the system to take much greater ownership of health and safety and ultimately help Great Britain work well.

To provide a focus for this important work, HSE has set out six strategic themes that will bring a renewed emphasis on improving health in the workplace, as well as building on the highly successful track record on safety.

The six strategic themes

- Acting together:** Promoting broader ownership of health and safety in Great Britain.
- Tackling ill health:** Highlighting and tackling the costs of work-related ill health.
- Managing risk well:** Simplifying risk management and helping business to grow.
- Supporting small employers:** Giving SMEs simple advice so they know what they have to do.
- Keeping pace with change:** Anticipating and tackling new health and safety challenges.
- Sharing our success:** Promoting the benefits of Great Britain's world-class health and safety system.

Nationwide engagement

These strategic themes were discussed with key players – representing all sectors and organisations with an interest in health and safety – during a nationwide engagement programme in January and February 2016.

The feedback suggested unanimous support for the overarching objective to help Great Britain work well.

Key messages in support of Helping Great Britain work well

- We can be proud of Great Britain's record on occupational health and safety – it's one of the best in the world.
- Getting risk management right is an enabler for innovation and growth, and is integral to business success, as well as the well-being of workers.
- Everyone in the system needs to play their part and make Great Britain work well. We all have a responsibility.



Six strategic themes

Key points

- **There needs to be broader ownership of health and safety.**
- **It is important to highlight and tackle the costs of work-related ill health.**
- **Wider recognition is needed of the business benefits that come with proportionate approaches to risk.**
- **Too many SMEs are still unaware that straightforward advice and simple guidance is available that can help them manage their health and safety responsibilities.**
- **We all need to horizon scan and 'design-in' effective risk management of new or emerging technologies and business models.**
- **There are benefits for Great Britain and British industries by promoting our health and safety approach around the world.**

Through the discussions that have recently taken place, there is a strong desire to renew the ambition for health and safety in Great Britain. The outcomes are already among the best in the world, but there is absolutely no sense of complacency and the ambition is to continue to innovate and change, keeping ahead of new developments in the workplace as well as international trends.

The six themes are the basis for agreeing a collective way forward that will help Great Britain work well. The themes have received widespread support across different sectors during the engagement process and provide a strong platform on which detailed delivery plans can be developed, in partnership with stakeholders.

The new strategy is built on a basic premise – by acting together in a supportive and encouraging environment, complemented by effective and proportionate regulation and risk management, the system can be greater than the sum of its parts. For HSE, the strategy also provides a clear direction on where resources should be targeted to greatest effect.

The result will be greater and wider ownership of the issues, with businesses able to enjoy the improved productivity that a strong health and safety culture will generate, while workers will be healthier and safer.



Acting together

Health and safety should not be a responsibility assigned to a particular individual or part of an organisation, but an integral part of everyone's role. There needs to be much broader ownership of the issues. This means engaging everyone who shares the responsibility for helping Great Britain work well, because they have a vital role in managing risk and preventing damage to individuals, businesses and the economy.

Across each nation, region or sector, we need collective ownership that best reflects local circumstances. The regulators will retain their key roles, providing targeted advice and guidance for key audience groups and taking enforcement action when and where necessary. Encouraging others to take ownership of health and safety will be critical in making this theme successful. This means everyone collaborating to reach those who may have been less engaged.

Case study: **Powering Improvement in the energy industries**

Energy Networks Association (ENA) is the voice of the electricity networks in Great Britain. ENA, Energy UK and four trade unions, with support from HSE, launched their Powering Improvement initiative with the purpose of making the energy industry world leaders in health and safety performance.

A review highlighted both the challenge and progress in achieving reductions in the number of incidents and injuries and the initiative helped contribute to a 40% reduction in fatal, major and lost-time incidents.

Powering Improvement provides an overarching framework of support to individual company programmes and is proving effective in helping achieve the further step change required in the drive towards leading performance.



Tackling ill health

Work-related ill health is a problem for every section of society, with conditions ranging from cancer and other long-latency diseases, to stress and musculoskeletal disorders. Greater awareness of the harm, costs and preventability of work-related ill health should drive collective action to improve health outcomes.

This will require long-term and coordinated action across all sectors, bringing in additional partners such as the NHS and others to support the substantial behaviour change and awareness programmes that will be required.

A key element of this theme will be in earlier prevention, which is more cost-effective than trying to intervene when a person is suffering from more serious ill health. This will involve a greater focus on health issues at work, while continuing to ensure that maintaining standards around safety remains a priority.

Case study: **Reducing occupational asthma**

One of the leading causes of occupational asthma is exposure to isocyanates, chemicals which can be found in paints that are used in vehicle repairs.

A four-year project involving representatives from across the vehicle repair industry and HSE identified new, practical ways of training workers.

These helped reduce exposure to dangerous chemicals among the 12 000 workers in the industry by taking simple steps such as demonstrating how to use a spray booth properly. Since the intervention, biomonitoring of workers has increased and exposure levels remain lower, demonstrating an improvement in exposure control.



Managing risk well

Successful organisations understand that sensible and proportionate risk management is integral to delivering their business. This approach supports growth, enables innovation and protects an organisation's most vital asset, its people. Positive outcomes can include reduced sickness absence, lower costs and a good reputation. Promoting this compelling business case should help even more businesses to make the most of the many benefits a good health and safety culture can bring.

Sharing examples of practice, supported by targeted, relevant advice and information will allow the system to set a common understanding of what proportionate health and safety looks like. Health and safety professionals have an important role to play. Helping businesses of all sizes get it right in an efficient and effective way will build trust and improve standards.

Case study: **Learning occupational health by experiencing risks (LOcHER)**

This new approach is engaging the next generation of young people in health and safety. It was developed by students at colleges in partnership with leading health and safety industry specialists and supporters, including Safety Groups UK.

Apprentices learn about occupational health risks, helping embed an understanding of key risks and ways of committing them to their long-term memory. They were given control over how they learned and recorded their discoveries. The students designed posters and created documentary films using their mobile phones to demonstrate what they had learned about occupational health risks. They shared their discoveries via social media with other students at colleges around the world.

The approach works because learning is enhanced and retained for longer if it happens in a fun way. This involves a variety of different learning experiences, such as listening, reading, audiovisual, demonstrations, discussion groups and practice by doing. The intention is that the students will take the good practices they have learned into workplaces when they go into industry.



Supporting small employers

Reaching micro and small businesses can be difficult, but not impossible. Working together, much has already been done to help small businesses, but there are opportunities to work smarter. Already many large businesses and intermediaries have developed efficient supply chains and productive relationships by working with and supporting small businesses.

Many organisations also provide free help and support to SMEs outside their supply chains through cross-sector initiatives.

For SMEs, managing workplace risks shouldn't be complicated or costly. Making support available which is quick and easy for small businesses to understand, so that they can fulfil their obligations, remains a challenge for all sectors.

It will also be important to identify who the key influencers are for SMEs, working with them to raise awareness levels about the peer and expert support that is out there.

Case study: **Estates Excellence**

Estates Excellence has helped more than 6500 British small businesses better understand and manage their health and safety risks. Through the scheme, large employers, regulators and organisations such as local fire and police services have worked together to provide bespoke, free support to small businesses on industrial estates with high levels of accidents and ill health.

Estates Excellence has now trained well over 6000 people and has helped small businesses learn from the knowledge and experience of other businesses.



Keeping pace with change

Great Britain leads the world in anticipating and tackling the new health and safety challenges that come with social, economic and technological change.

This ability to horizon scan, when combined with the deep knowledge and unrivalled expertise of the system, means that anticipating new health and safety challenges is an area where Great Britain can play a leading role, for example through HSE's world-leading research capabilities. They are already being put to use helping Great Britain, as well as countries around the world, to improve health and safety, as well as better business outcomes.

To remain a world leader in risk management, Great Britain needs to develop high-quality capability, anticipating the workplace challenges of tomorrow and using the flexibility of our goal-setting approach to solve them in ways that enable innovation and the use of new technologies.

Tackling the problems of tomorrow today is a responsible investment that protects workers, enables new and different approaches and provides the new knowledge, skills and expertise Great Britain can share internationally.

Case study: **The hydrogen economy**

Being prepared to invest in health and safety has been key to the successful development of Great Britain's emerging hydrogen economy.

Over the past decade industry, academia and HSE have been working together to define codes and standards that have laid the groundwork for the safe introduction of hydrogen-powered, fuel-cell electric vehicles and the development of a safe refuelling infrastructure. The latest addition to this is a wind-powered refuelling station which opened in Sheffield in September 2015.



Sharing our success

Everyone can take pride in Great Britain's world-class reputation for health and safety and promote its success at home and abroad. Creating a world-class system is a goal we can all unite around and benefit from as a source of inspiration and achievement, and can also be pleased to support.

This strategy has largely concerned itself with improving standards in Great Britain. But we should also look to share best practice and the latest thinking and innovation around the world. This can help influence health and safety systems overseas and make it easier for British businesses to expand into new markets and territories. The work can also bring commercial opportunities for selling British health and safety 'products' or consultancy.

Case study: **London 2012**

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games construction project has shown that building projects on time, and within budget, does not mean compromising on the health and safety of workers.

Soon after London was awarded the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, HSE met with the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to agree very clear targets of what standards were expected, encouraging strong leadership and sharing of good practice. The top level commitment to health and safety was made clear from the outset and helped create a safe working environment for the thousands of workers on site.

As a result, there were no fatal incidents, a first for an Olympic build, and an impressively low number of injuries and dangerous occurrences during the staggering 66 million hours of work. To ensure others from the construction industry could build on that good work, HSE cooperated with the ODA and others to identify and analyse the health and safety good practice and lessons learned from the London 2012 construction project.

The knowledge and the lessons learned from the construction of the Olympic Park and preparing and staging the Games is now being shared to help raise the bar within construction and event sectors, and act as a showcase for Great Britain.

Making it happen

Key points

- **Maintain the gains made in safety, while giving health the same priority.**
- **Broader ownership of health and safety issues can lead to improved productivity and business benefits, while protecting workers.**
- **Collective and concerted action is required by everyone in the system to help Great Britain work well.**

Great Britain's health and safety record is the envy of much of the world. Building on a sound regulatory framework which has stood the test of time, the last five years have been guided by the Be part of the solution strategy. But as a number of factors have changed, including new technologies, social change and a renewed focus on occupational health, it is timely to look again at where the focus for the next five years needs to be.

The fundamentals remain:

- strong and visible leadership;
- collaboration and partnership, including genuine worker engagement;
- directors, managers, supervisors and workers having the competence to identify and control the risks created by their work activities;
- having public confidence in the safe running of high-hazard industries.

The focus of the strategy is to provide direction to the wider health and safety system for Great Britain and all those who are involved in, or interact, with it so that a much greater collective contribution to improving outcomes can be made. HSE is committed to playing its part to improve outcomes and deliver on its responsibilities as the independent regulator and prime mover in the system.

HSE will be there to support those efforts by capturing and promoting successful approaches and developing measures to track progress towards the delivery of the themes. The leadership from HSE will give others in the system the confidence to take more ownership.



For the whole of the health and safety system, there are a number of commitments to help Great Britain work well. The system, including HSE, should:

- encourage and recognise improvements, being increasingly joined up to deliver improved outcomes and minimise unnecessary burdens on businesses;
- continue to promote the risk-based, goal-setting regulatory regime that has served health and safety in Great Britain so well;
- work with partners in the system to make workplaces safer and healthier, providing a level playing field for responsible employers with regulators and co-regulators, by advising, promoting, and where necessary, enforcing good standards of risk control;
- use proportionate, risk-based regulation to support better outcomes, innovation and the safe use of new technologies;
- develop services and products that contribute to improved management and control of risks, sharing our knowledge here at home and further afield;
- continue the dialogue and conversation with stakeholders to make the system better, always looking to provide simple, pragmatic advice and support.



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