

HSE's Small Business Plan

Introduction

HSE makes an important contribution to the Government's Industrial Strategy commitment to create an environment that supports small businesses to flourish, grow and innovate.

By helping small businesses manage the risks from their work activities we can make a significant contribution to reducing occupational injury and ill health. We do this by using our full range of regulatory tools and techniques to support and promote compliance among all types of small business across all industry sectors.

As well as providing effective regulation, HSE also acts as an enabler, supporting small businesses' success by promoting and encouraging proportionate, appropriate and effective risk management as well as challenging those who overprescribe and overinterpret requirements.

HSE's strategic approach

There are an estimated 5.5 million businesses operating in Great Britain with less than 50 employees (2017 figures). HSE's approach to regulation is to primarily target its resources on a risk basis through HSE's Sector and Health at Work plans or through topic activities. Engaging small businesses is a major element of those regulatory activities and responding to the needs of small businesses in high-risk sectors is a well-established consideration for HSE's regulatory planning mechanisms.

Who is this plan for?

This plan is primarily aimed at providing guidance for small businesses new to health and safety or managing low-complexity risks who would not be engaged through HSE's higher-risk interventions, so they have the information they need.

HSE's small business priorities

There are two areas of focus for this work:

- improving our online guidance material, designing it specifically around user needs;
- developing new relationships to increase our reach and promote our guidance offer, eg exploring links with Companies House.

This work is complemented by other activities:

- improving our understanding of small businesses' attitudes and behaviours;
- undertaking more direct action to reach those engaged in higher-risk activities, using the full range of HSE's interventions;
- reducing the burdens associated with health and safety and promoting proportionate risk management.

Improving our guidance offer

For the majority of small businesses, online guidance is the most suitable form of support for their needs and it is also the most cost-effective use of HSE's resources. We have an established suite of guidance for small businesses with a particular focus on their must-do tasks and promoted under the H&S ABC brand. We know that when small businesses use this material they find it very helpful, but helping them find and access it presents a challenge.

Guidance has to meet users' needs and expectations of online material. This starts with understanding what small businesses most need help with, how they prefer to access online support and from whom.

Building on insight research, we are developing new digital content starting primarily with those who have limited health and safety risks to manage. This new content is being created around the needs of users; undertaking research to identify the top tasks businesses need help with and developing the content with end-users to ensure it satisfies their needs.

To enable more small businesses to make the most of our guidance and keep our offer up to date and in line with wider government approaches, HSE will:

- Continue to develop new digital content for small businesses, focused on the tasks most important to them and created and tested with actual users

Increasing our reach

To influence small businesses' awareness, attitudes and behaviours around health and safety at work, we need to increase our reach. A key priority is making Britain's small businesses aware that they can access proportionate, free guidance (H&S ABC), which is focused on their needs, will help keep their customers and staff safe, and will help them protect and grow their business.

Small businesses can be hard to reach for many reasons. There are the immediate challenges presented by their huge numbers, variety of business activities and dispersed location. There are also cultural and behavioural factors to be addressed and economic contexts to be considered. By developing a better understanding of these issues we will be able to design more effective approaches for reaching different small business audiences.

Working with others is essential for reaching our audiences. Intermediary and partner organisations play an important role in providing support to small businesses by promoting HSE's guidance or providing their own tailored support. However, organisations we work with also have limitations to the success of their engagement with small businesses. So we will revisit how we can best develop our existing relationships, as well as identifying and working with new partners that small businesses trust and rely on.

To many small businesses HSE is a remote organisation lacking in relevance to them. To address this we will:

- Continue to promote the H&S ABC guidance materials as our primary offer to small businesses through direct channels
- Integrate our guidance with other business initiatives offering support to small businesses
- Develop new ways of engaging with small businesses, making more use of social media and digital networks, eg through direct marketing using LinkedIn
- Collaborate with other parts of government to offer more joined-up advice and support for small businesses
- Develop the relationships we need with partner organisations to help us better engage with small businesses
- Work with local authority co-regulators and use their connections to small businesses in their area
- evaluate the effectiveness of new routes for engagement

Understanding our audiences

All our activities to support small businesses are informed by the robust evidence base provided by HSE's science and evidence strategy. Through our research we have developed a better understanding of the challenges small businesses face, the behaviours they exhibit, and the options available to improve our engagement with them.

To identify and develop more effective interventions to help small businesses, HSE will continue to improve its evidence base and understanding by:

- Undertaking and acting upon further insight research to understand people and behaviours in different sectors and business types
- Undertaking research to enable HSE to keep abreast of the changing landscape for small businesses and be proactive in supporting innovation and new technologies
- Engaging with other stakeholders and initiatives to share learning about the challenges faced by small businesses and what works well
- Evaluating our interventions and using the findings to further improve our engagement with small businesses and stakeholders

Targeting higher-risk activities

With limited resources HSE prioritises where and how it makes its interventions, focusing its most resource-intensive activities on those areas where the risks or hazards are greatest.

HSE employs its full range of interventions to regulate and support small businesses but given the volume and variety of small businesses operating in Great Britain, these activities are targeted and planned according to the priority group or issue that need addressing.

Where the presence of small businesses is a factor, their needs and characteristics are taken into account in the design and delivery of activities. These activities include encouraging sector-specific initiatives, using supply chains in innovative ways to promote good practice and inspection programmes backed by targeted communications.

HSE will continue to deliver support and effective regulation to small businesses across all its regulatory activities by:

- Taking the needs of small businesses into account when designing inspection and other intervention programmes
- Delivering and evaluating the planned interventions and activities that will achieve the strategic priorities set out in HSE's Sector and Health and Work plans
- Undertaking investigations and, where required, taking proportionate enforcement to address serious risk and non-compliance

Promoting proportionate risk management

HSE has done a lot over recent years to reduce the burden regulation can place on businesses. We know third-party requirements and advice can lead to businesses taking positive action on health and safety. However, there are still many small businesses that feel health and safety puts them under excessive or unnecessary demands.

Often, these demands are driven by requirements set by third parties not regulation but, for small businesses trying to do the right thing, the difference may be unclear or beside the point. This can lead them to take costly action that does not contribute to compliance and focuses too much on paperwork.

HSE will use its influence to promote the need for quality, proportionality and active risk management, and help businesses by:

- Providing advice on how to source competent assistance, use health and safety management standards proportionately, and make more effective use of certification and accreditation schemes
- Working with others to enhance transparency about the sources of health and safety rules, improve third-party advice and make procurement rules less bureaucratic
- Ensuring our guidance doesn't enable disproportionate rule-making and considering what training and support we can provide to third parties

Case studies

Making our digital content more accessible for small businesses

New insight research indicated that a mass audience of low-complexity small businesses found HSE's website overwhelming. To address this HSE has tested new user-centric digital designs and content with this audience to confirm what small businesses value and need.

The new guidance focuses users on how to complete common health and safety tasks (eg what to put in a first aid kit) using clear, concise, jargon-free language. Our content is now being designed to work on a range of mobile devices, optimised for search, and can be marketed easily via a variety of channels (eg social).

These significant reforms to HSE's publishing processes will increase the reach and effectiveness of HSE's guidance. Of the small businesses involved in testing, 80% confirmed our improved content and web designs improved understanding, would reduce their reliance on consultants, and increase their confidence to manage health and safety risks for themselves.

Engaging small businesses through relationship marketing

To reach new small business audiences, HSE has been testing a customer relationship marketing approach using the LinkedIn platform to capture contact details and business information to open up ongoing engagement.

Using profiles created by digital analysis of the HSE website and other sites used by small businesses, they are directly targeted on LinkedIn with paid-for adverts offering access to free HSE guidance as an incentive to sign up to receive further tailored content on health and safety topics via a series of regular eBulletins. To date, two rounds of adverts have been undertaken generating sign ups from 1305 small businesses and achieving a 30% open rate of the eBulletins.

Joining up with government to provide better support to small businesses

To improve the support available for small businesses and increase HSE's presence on GOV.UK, we are working with other parts of government in the 'Start a Business' service community to design and deliver joined-up, end-to-end services.

Sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the service community brings together skills and expertise from across government to apply a user-centred focus to delivering services. It also highlights opportunities for improvement or reduction in duplication of service delivery, and identifies projects that can have a tangible positive impact on the journeys of those who are starting a business.

Using buddying to share experience in the construction industry

As part of the work of the Construction Industry Advisory Committee's Supporting Small Employers Group, a client buddy scheme is being developed and delivered by the Construction Client's Leadership Group (CCLG).

The scheme is a free service for inexperienced, occasional construction clients to help them understand their obligations and duties as clients and get the best value from the construction process. These clients and their suppliers are often small business owners who are unfamiliar with their duties under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. The scheme pairs them with experienced construction client 'buddies' who provide advice and direct them towards guidance to help them navigate the construction process, including the management of health and safety risks.

Encouraging proportionality in the insurance industry

HSE has engaged extensively with Ecclesiastical Insurance to improve its health and safety guidance so that it describes a proportionate approach. Ecclesiastical's customer base comprises a large number of lower-risk organisations, many with extensive volunteer staffing and few or no paid employees. These organisations can find it difficult to translate what the law requires into practical and effective health and safety arrangements for their circumstances.

HSE provided advice to Ecclesiastical on what a sensible approach to actively managing risks might look like for their customers. As a result, the company's extensively redesigned web guidance now focuses more clearly on describing common-sense measures, with a light-touch approach to paperwork where this is not specifically required by health and safety law.