

Communication and Consultation

Background

Communication and consultation with workers is essential ensuring effective health and safety in your charity. Talking to, listening to and involving your employees can provide real benefits, such as:

- Improved performance and risk control by workers flagging up deficiencies in systems.
- Increased ownership of workers with safety measures gained through their involvement.
- Safer and healthier workforce as a result of this.
- Improved morale of workers from showing you value their opinions.
- Increased productivity and efficiency.
- Positive safety culture created by all of the above points.



Involvement and communication should be a 2 way process

Image: Employ Me Now

Legislation

By law you must effectively communicate and consult with your workers on health and safety matters. Consultation and communication however is a very broad topic. As a result of this, parts of many different pieces of legislation apply, including the following:

- [The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 \(HASAW\)](#)
- [The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 \(MHSWR\)](#)
- [The Health and Safety Information for Employees Regulations 1989 \(HSIER\)](#)
- [The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 \(SRSCR\)](#)
- [The Health and Safety \(Consultation with Employees\) Regulations 1996 \(HSCER\)](#)

As their scope is so wide the 'key requirements' of these pieces of legislation in relation to consultation and communication are summarised in the next section.

The HSE have a [dedicated webpage on consultation](#) with lots of simple, easy to understand information. On other dedicated pages of their website they also have further information on [communication](#) and [worker involvement](#).

Key Requirements

Key Requirement	Content of requirement
Communication and worker involvement	<p>Effective health and safety in a charity requires good communication up, down and across the organisation. This is particularly important in terms of providing information to workers on hazards and control measures from risk assessments.</p> <p>The information should be communicated appropriately, taking into consideration:</p>



- Size, structure and layout of the organisation.
- Competence of workers.

For example, a large multi-site charity may have committees set up that have worker representatives attend where information can be fed back to show the workers view and communication take place. A smaller, single site, charity may communicate and consult directly with workers. Some communication may need to be verbal and direct, other information could be written and circulated or displayed, e.g. on health and safety noticeboards.

Effective communication and consultation requires good worker involvement. Worker involvement on health and safety is simply a two-way process requiring both parties to talk, listen, share and solve problems and make decisions together. Involvement helps to create ownership of health and safety and can have significant benefits for your organisation.

The HSE have produced a list of [key actions for ensuring effective communication](#) and tips on [effective worker involvement](#).

Requirements on information provided



Information provided to workers should be comprehensible, not confusing

Image: Shutterstock

Certain pieces of legislation places requirements on the information communicated to employees and workers. [HASAW](#) requires it to be provided 'so far as is reasonably practicable' to ensure the health safety and welfare of all employees (or workers). This means that enough information should be provided so that they can be properly informed on how to act in a safe way.

Under [MHSWR](#) the information provided must be 'comprehensible'. This means it should be able to be understood and comprehended by your workforce.

<p>Health and safety law poster</p>	<p>The HSIER place a requirement on charities to ensure that if they have any employees the health and safety law poster (also called health and safety what you need to know) is on display. It should be in a readable condition, in a position that is easily seen and accessed by workers.</p> <p>For smaller organisations, with very few employees, leaflets or pocket cards can be given out to workers, instead of the poster, as they contain the same information. Where this takes place, people should sign to state they have received a copy.</p> <div data-bbox="986 248 1378 786" data-label="Image"> </div> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The health and safety law poster</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Image: HSE</p>
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<p>Preparing and documenting a safety policy</p>	<p>HASAW places a requirement on charities to prepare and revise as often as needed (normally annually) a statement of health and safety policy. Where 5 or more persons are employed (including volunteers) these statements should be documented.</p> <p>A safety policy, put simply, is just a document showing the organisations intent, responsibilities and arrangements in terms of health and safety. It provides standards and practices to work towards helping to give an overall direction for an organisations health and safety. It should show the organisations commitment to health and safety at a senior level.</p> <p>There are several example policies and a tool to help you write your own safety policy on the dedicated webpages for safety policies on the HSE's website.</p> <p>Once created, it should be brought to the attention of workers. This can be achieved in many ways, such as being shared during worker's inductions, placing it on a health and safety notice board and directing people to it, sharing it during staff meetings, etc.</p> <div data-bbox="842 1352 1358 1693" data-label="Image"> </div> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Health and safety policies should be documented if 5 or more persons are employed</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Image: HSE</p>
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<p>Consultation - when to consult?</p>	<p>Consultation is a process that involves you giving information to your workers, listening to them and taking account of what they say before making any health and safety decisions. There is no specific time frame for how long to consult on health and safety issues, other than it needing to be 'in good time'. Timeframes should therefore be adjusted in relation to the complexity of the issue at hand.</p> <p>It is beneficial for consultation (and communication) to take place informally on an ongoing basis to ensuring regular communication across the organisation on health and safety. This can help to ensure decisions made on health and safety are the right ones.</p> <p>Formally there are some specific occasions when consultation needs take place. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction of any measure which may substantially affect their health and safety at work, eg the introduction of new equipment or new systems of work. • Arrangements for getting competent people to help them comply with health and safety laws. • The information you must give your workers on the risks and dangers arising from their work, measures to reduce or get rid of these risks and what employees should do if they are exposed to a risk • The planning and organisation of health and safety training; and • The health and safety consequences of introducing new technology.
<p>Consultation - how to consult?</p>	<div data-bbox="941 268 1364 616" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="997 638 1364 705" data-label="Caption"> <p><i>Effective consultation involves listening to your workers</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="1045 728 1364 772" data-label="Text"> <p>Image: Silver Bullet Group</p> </div> <div data-bbox="367 1344 845 1814" data-label="Complex-Block"> <p style="text-align: center;">Formal Consultation Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a safety representative • Through an elected 'representative of employee safety' • Directly with workers </div> <div data-bbox="901 1344 1380 1814" data-label="Complex-Block"> <p style="text-align: center;">Informal Consultation Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and working groups • Safety circles • Departmental meetings • Employee discussions • Employee suggestion schemes • Staff surveys • Toolbox talks </div> <p>Depending on whether you have safety representatives from trade unions, or representatives of employee safety, or nothing, will affect how you 'formally' consult with your workers. This is explained more in the box below. The HSE have produced a simple leaflet that also explains this in more detail.</p>

Safety Reps vs
Representatives
of Employee
Safety

If you recognise trade unions in any part of your organisation the [SRSCR](#) will apply to your charity. You should formally consult with workers who are part of that union will be through their 'safety representatives'. The HSE have summarised the [key requirements of this legislation](#), including the [duties of safety representatives](#) on their website.

If you do not have trade unions in your organisation the requirements of [HSCER](#) will apply. You may have representatives of employee / worker safety who you should formally consult with workers through. In smaller charities it is also common for neither unions nor other representatives of employee / worker safety to be in place. In this cases formal consultation should take place directly with workers. Again the HSE have summarised the [key requirements of this legislation](#), including the [duties of representatives of employee / worker safety](#) on their website.

In larger organisations it can be common for some parts of to have workers who are members of recognised trade unions and others where they are not. In this case, you may have to consult both:

- Health and safety representatives appointed by recognised trade unions under [SRSCR](#)
- The remainder of your workforce, either directly where practical, or through representatives of employee safety under the [HSCER](#).



If in place, workers should be formally consulted through safety reps / representatives of employee or worker safety

Image: BJR Safety

Safety committees

To enable good management of health and safety, communication and an opportunity for consultation, safety committees (or other similar names) should be set up. These committees should meet regularly, at a frequency relevant to the size of the premises, with quarterly being good practice. Their purpose is to consult on relevant health and safety matters, discuss issues, helping to make decisions on future planning. The membership and potential agenda items are summarised in the table below:

Membership	Potential Agenda Standing Items
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management representatives• Worker representatives• Other relevant representatives e.g. service users• Sufficient people to ensure all workplace groups are represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statistics e.g. accident records, ill health, sickness absence.• Accident investigations and subsequent action.• Inspections of the workplace by enforcing authorities, or other persons.• Risk assessments, procedures and policies.• Health and safety training.• Ongoing changes in the workplace affecting health, safety.

On the HSE's website there is also some [simple guidance on health and safety committees](#).

Unique Challenges

When considering how to communicate and consult workers, there are some specific considerations needed based on typical charity settings, including:

- The diversity of an organisation can make it difficult to getting information from the top to the bottom or vice a versa.
- Ensuring that volunteers are effectively consulted on health and safety, as often they are under or not represented by unions or representatives of employee safety.
- Getting volunteers and non-employed workers to take on board health and safety information provided to them.
- Getting the right people, including volunteers and non-employed, involved and engaged in safety committees.
- Ensuring the information provided is easily understandable by your workers.