

Encouraging Young People into the Construction Industry

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I have worked in the construction industry for over 20 years, seen many changes and been involved in some amazing projects all over the UK. One thing that has never changed is the ongoing need for young people into our industry.

As a **CITB** Construction Ambassador and Chartered Safety & Health Professional I am passionate about encouraging our young people into construction, without their interest our trades and skills (the life blood of the industry) will basically dry up. Anyone currently working in construction will no doubt have experience of trying to recruit skilled workers, trades and plant operators. So, are we doing enough to encourage our young people to come and work with us? What are the barriers? The legal requirements? Indeed, what exactly is a young person?

So, let's start with the basics as defined in the law. A young person is anyone between 16-18 and a child is anyone under minimum school leaving age.

The legal requirements are quite clearly set out in Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 and as a Safety & Health Professional this should always be your starting point! This is backed up by the HSEni guidance document 'Employing Young People In

The Workplace' 2008. There are also work situations and workplace hazards that a child should not be exposed to, so please always check the legislation. Whilst there are no general age restrictions in legislation relating to the use of work equipment, there are specific requirements that must be taken into account when working with power presses, woodworking machinery and lifting equipment for example.

As an employer there are key things to address when employing any young person on a construction site. It is key that organisations manage these potential risks, these include:

- **Vulnerability** - young workers will face unfamiliar risks in new environments and may not yet have reached their full physical or psychological capability.
- **Risk assessment** - this will be specific to the young person and must address their inexperience, capabilities and general understanding of workplace hazards. Always share the findings of the risk assessment with the young person's parent or guardian.
- **Supervision** - This is key. All young people must be supervised by a competent person to ensure they are not exposed to workplace hazards they would otherwise not be aware of. Direct supervision is important when learning on the job and offers the young person a degree of protection.
- **The work is necessary for their training and development and is part of a recognised training scheme.** Once again competent supervision and an agreed training plan should be in place. It is good to assign the young person a dedicated mentor.
- **Working hours** - Under the Working Time Directive young people and children have different employment rights from adult workers and are protected in relation to the hours they can work. Always ensure you are familiar with the permitted working hours and set an agreed start and finish time for them.



Some of the scenarios I have personal experience of include:

- **'Our insurance won't cover us'** - always check with your insurance company and ensure the young person is covered by your company's public liability and employer's liability insurance, in most cases they will be.
- **'The Client does not allow young people on site'** - Is this the case? Do not be afraid to discuss this with the client or simply find out why this would be the case.
- **'They're not yet 16 so not allowed on site'** - This is a scenario I am coming across more often, and I suggest anyone under 16 is on a recognised work experience scheme. Indeed, the official line from HSEni is Children below the MSLA must not be employed in industrial workplaces such as factories, construction sites, except on work experience.

Consultation with the school is key to draw up an agreed work experience plan and all requirements within the guidance document above should be followed.

Industry wide there are various schemes to encourage our young people into the industry. If you are an employer I encourage you to look to local technical colleges, the Construction Industry Training Board, Education Authorities and Apprentices schemes.

Young workers can be a key asset to any business, bringing innovation, ideas and helping to sustain business growth.

In summary, let's give them opportunities to work in our industry, provide them with a safe working environment and allow them to gain vital experience.

