To underpin occupational safety and health (OSH) education in schools and colleges it is necessary to formalise it in curriculum requirements. The report reviews how the Member States have been including OSH and risk education in their national curricula.1

There is considerable progress and activity at both primary and secondary education levels in terms of both implemented and planned actions in the Member States. Actions to include OSH in education at the curriculum level include:

- statutory requirements;
- voluntary curricula;
- guidelines and resources to support the statutory requirements and voluntary curricula;
- formal recommendations;
- national guidance and resources in cases where no curricula have been set;
- promotional campaigns to support the above;
- approaches linked to safe and healthy schools.

Cooperation on education at the European level is resulting in a convergence in the core subjects and learning objectives in schools across the Member States. Risk education and OSH are generally not treated as a stand-alone subject; instead opportunities are being taken to incorporate them into the learning objectives of other relevant subjects in school curricula, such as science, physical education, health education and citizenship. It is therefore important to develop risk education and OSH learning objectives for the core curriculum subjects for different age levels.

In introducing OSH and risk education into the curriculum, a strong partnership approach is often taken involving bodies such as OSH authorities, education ministries and curriculum authorities. As national curricula change and develop, OSH authorities also need to be able to influence this process at the proposal stage.

Many innovative resources have been produced at national and regional levels in the Member States to support teaching. Resources and classroom teaching plans that are linked to the curriculum will be most useful.

In some Member States, such as Sweden, integrated approaches are taken whereby risk education is linked to a safe learning environment for teachers and pupils and also the health of the pupil at school. Some initiatives are supporting risk education in schools while at the same time providing support to schools to improve safety in school buildings. Pupils may be actively involved in school safety issues, for example through the designation of pupil safety representatives — which is a legal requirement in some Member States — and pupil participation in hazard spotting in schools.

While there are some excellent resources available for teachers, much less attention has been paid to the preparation of teachers themselves. It is recognised that teachers need training in how to deliver risk education; if they do not have such training, and risk education is just one option on the curriculum to choose from, they may be reluctant to attempt to teach it and opt for a topic that they feel more comfortable with, even if they have been provided with good resources. Therefore, training programmes are needed for existing teachers and OSH and risk education teaching needs to be included in the curriculum of teacher training courses for future teachers. Teachers at all levels of education need this preparation.

The greatest challenge is to mainstream OSH into university education in order to reach future engineers, architects, medical professionals, business professionals, managers, etc. The mainstreaming of OSH into university-level courses is the least well-developed area for various reasons, which include their greater autonomy. Actions to include OSH in relevant courses such as engineering or business studies are therefore ad hoc, and often dependent on the interest of individual professors or particular advocates within professional bodies. Professors need convincing of the need to include OSH in courses. They also need relevant materials. Nevertheless examples of good practices do exist, for example in the area of engineering.

Success factors for mainstreaming OSH into education curricula include to:

- make a clear commitment and provide adequate resources;
- set objectives for mainstreaming OSH into education in the national OSH strategy;
- base activities on research into what is taking place in reality, what can be realistically achieved, what works best, etc.;
- develop close cooperation with education authorities and especially with curriculum-setting bodies;
- identify opportunities in the education curriculum and seek to influence the curriculum as it changes and develops;
- tailor proposals and initiatives to the core curriculum and current teaching policy and methods, including the integration of risk education across the compulsory and non-compulsory curriculum; key areas for integration include the frameworks for personal, health and social education and citizenship; risk education should also be incorporated into health-promoting schools (‘healthy schools’ programmes);
- provide OSH/risk education resources appropriate to the various curriculum subjects and age levels;
- provide professional development in risk education for teachers and trainers; training is needed for teachers at all levels, both as part of the professional development of (existing) in-service teachers and in trainee teacher programmes; consider the needs of others involved in education such as those involved in the management of schools and parents too;
- develop a school-level OSH qualification that fits in with the school qualification system;
- develop partnerships with key promoters of risk education to achieve a consistent approach and avoid duplication;
- pilot initiatives and monitor and review progress;
- exchange experiences and network;
- place learning about risk within a whole-school approach to safety and risk; the approach should cover both a safe learning environment for pupils and staff health and safety; link this in turn to ‘healthy school’ initiatives.

Further information

Further information on mainstreaming OSH into education is available at: http://osha.europa.eu/priority_groups/young_people