

The principles outlined in the Health and Safety at Work Act recognise that workers have significant knowledge and expertise about the hazards and risks in the workplace, and can make a significant contribution to improving health and safety.

For these reasons, employers must consult with health and safety representatives (HSRs) and their workers when dealing with hazards and risks in the workplace. Proactive and regular consultation with workers can help to identify issues in the workplace and build strong commitment to health and safety.

Each workplace can agree on consultation arrangements that suit its own culture and existing processes. In addition to consultation via the HSRs and HSCs, where they exist, workers may be consulted through worker meetings, individual face-to-face discussions or meetings between the employer and the union representing the workers. In the school environment, consultation about health and safety can be easily integrated into the normal process of consultation about other matters.

If the workers are represented by HSRs, the consultation must involve those representatives if the matter relates to their work group.

This requires:

- sharing information about the matter with HSRs a reasonable time before it is shared with school workers
- inviting the HSRs to meet and consult about the matter or meeting with the HSRs at their request to consult about the matter
- giving the HSRs a reasonable opportunity to express their views, and
- taking those views into account.

Worker meetings provide a good forum for consultation on health and safety, including alerting workers to hazards, seeking their ideas on options to control risks and reporting progress on risk control plans. Just as importantly, encouraging workers to raise health and safety issues in meetings (and reporting back on how it is proposed to deal with each issue) demonstrates commitment and openness.

Each school needs to consider which meetings are most appropriate for consultation on health and safety and how frequently it should be put on the agenda of those meetings. Meetings where it may be appropriate to include health and safety on the agenda (in addition to the health and safety committee) include leadership meetings, administrative committee meetings, curriculum-related meetings, year level co-ordinators' meetings and workers welfare committee meetings.

Agenda items should be set in consultation with the HSR and should always include feedback on issues raised at previous meetings. The needs of both teaching and non-teaching workers should be considered.

Health and safety consultation should be considered each time the school reviews its general consultation arrangements. The consultation arrangements should be documented.