

## NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

**DATE:** Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021

**TIME:** 13:45 - 15:00

**METHOD:** Zoom Meeting

**CHAIR:** Alison Thewliss MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary on Working at Height

### MINUTES

The session began with a private meeting for the Group's Annual General Meeting. **Existing Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary on Working at Height, Alison Thewliss MP** welcomed attendees and the formal election took place.

The following parliamentarians were elected as officers of the group:

**Alison Thewliss MP (SNP, Glasgow Central) – Chair**  
**Nigel Mills MP (Conservative, Amber Valley) – Vice Chair**  
**Chris Stephens MP (SNP, Glasgow South West) – Vice Chair**  
**Jason McCartney MP (Conservative, Colne Valley) – Officer**  
**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green Party) - Officer**

The income and expenditure statement for the year 2020/2021 was agreed by the group as a true record and can be found on the APPG website [here](#).

External attendees were then permitted to join the call and the wider meeting began. The Chair welcomed guest speaker **Sarah Newton, Chair of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**. Joining Sarah Newton was **Dr Helen Balmforth, Project Director for the Discovering Safety Campaign**.

The Chair thanked parliamentary officers and colleagues who continue to champion working at height and workplace safety issues and thanked the APPG sponsor, the [Access Industry Forum](#) (AIF). She said that falls from height account for the highest number of fatalities across all sectors in UK industry, and that the group were keen to learn more about the HSE's flagship [Discovering Safety](#) campaign and how it is using data to develop solutions for maximum safety benefit. The Chair also highlighted that whilst fatalities have reduced and campaigners should be proud of the progress made, 29 fatalities is still too many.

As the Chair passed to Sarah Newton to begin her presentation, she reminded attendees that we must continue to strive for further progress to ensure that everyone returns home from work safely.

## 1. Sarah Newton, Chair of the Health and Safety Executive

**Sarah Newton** thanked the Chair for her introduction and began her presentation by introducing **Dr Helen Balmforth** to members, who was in attendance as the Project Director of the HSE's Discovering Safety campaign.

Sarah outlined that HSE data can be used in an innovative way to improve health and safety performance. She noted that there are 2.3 million fatalities each year with approximately 650,000 of these deaths caused by falls from height. The Discovering Safety campaign hopes to reduce these numbers by using data insights to improve health and safety performance and there is great potential for progress to be made.

Sarah advised that success of the Discovering Safety campaign will depend on partnerships, including academia and industry, where they will combine scientific expertise and knowledge, ensuring the HSE remain proactive and not reactive. The campaign has completed phase one, which looked at proving the concept, and the second phase is on developing sustainable outputs and is focused on construction. Phase three, due to start in 2022, will focus on maximising reach with other sectors.

With much of the archived data stored in Microsoft Word documents, Sarah outlined how state-of-the-art text mining tools, specific for health and safety, are being developed to scale the mining of this data within the six priorities areas, which includes working at height. The text mining technology aims to maintain the context and semantic content of the data and, utilising automation, new patterns, trends and insights can be identified. Sarah said that a key objective of Discovering Safety is to make an impact for stakeholders and drive improvements in health and safety performance.

More information about the campaign can be found on Discovering Safety website, but for the purposes of this meeting, Sarah explained that she would like to focus on two aspects:

### **The Construction Risk Library**

Sarah gave details about pilot projects which are underway that use a 'Building Information Management' (BIM) tool that highlights safety information, which can be incorporated into projects from the design stage. Early industry feedback has been positive, with potential hazards being identified early and mitigated before injury or harm is encountered.

### **Leading indicators for health and safety performance**

Sarah noted that a long-standing challenge with health and safety is the limits of working with lagging indicators and there is a clear benefit to identifying the right leading indicators before any harm occurs. They are working with eight industry stakeholders on a trial basis to develop predictive, analytic and risk rating tools that forecast future risks and help identify future risk prevention initiatives.

She encouraged attendees to get involved as working with industry partners is key to delivering a successful campaign.

Sarah concluded by reaffirming that Discovering Safety is committed to innovation and becoming more effective. She explained that the HSE are committed to their primary mission of fewer fatalities and injuries. It is hoped by using data and insights in an innovative way this will improve safety by changing working practises.

## 2. Question and Answer Session

The Chair thanked Sarah for her presentation and invited questions.

Alison asked about near-miss incidents and how this data can be captured to get ahead of potential injuries.

Sarah said that taking a comprehensive view of data and working with a range of stakeholders enables the HSE to pull a lot of data together. This will highlight actions that can be taken to prevent harm from happening in the first place.

Helen said leading indicators includes this type of near miss data. Sarah emphasised that the more data is collected the better and it will benefit everyone.

**Toby Townrow, Business Development Director, Drone Evolution** raised that several times their work has revealed health and safety breaches and asked for the panels views on what contribution drones can make.

Sarah said any member of the public or workplace can phone the [HSE concerns helpline](#) if they suspect a breach has, or is, occurring so immediate action can be taken. She said that everyone has a responsibility in this area.

Helen added that the HSE are looking at new ways of collecting data, which includes technology such as drones.

**David Thomas, Director, Heightsayfe Ltd** highlighted what he felt was a piecemeal approach and asked if safety alerts can be collated, anonymised and the trends shared within the software.

Helen said the HSE were focusing on the large data archive already held, but they welcome new data and other sources. She directed David to the Discovery Safety website, where he could make contact with the team, where a further conversation could take place.

Sarah said that anonymising data is a step forward as it allows insights to be shared.

**Richard Whiting, UK General Manager of IPAF** asked whether the Discovering Safety programme will speed up the release of accident and incident data to industry.

Helen responded that anonymising data will make sharing easier. This will be automated and therefore the HSE will be able to access the full archive of data which should improve speed.

**Ray Cooke, Health and Safety Advisor, No Falls Foundation** queried unstructured data and suggested a solution would be to implement dropdown menus to deliver more structured data.

Sarah replied that the HSE feels the work they are doing will address this problem in a different way. She said that maintaining the semantics and how free text was written could give a richer source of information and preserve more insights than dropdown menus. This is being tested via new tools currently in development.

Helen said the HSE are trialling tools that automate assigning risk facts to RIDDOR free text. This would open the door to insights that could not be obtained using a different format that is contained within free text RIDDOR comments.

**Dave Joyce, National Health, Safety & Environment Officer, Communication Workers Union** advised that Trade Unions want significant investment in the HSE to promote stronger enforcement and protections for workers. Trade Unions, he said want to see the HSE using legal sanctions firmly against employers in breach and they hope the relationships between the HSE, and Trade Unions safety representatives can be strengthened as they undertake preventative work. He added that there needs to be reform to protect workers in casual employment such as the gig economy.

Sarah said it was important that the HSE is a tripartite organisation, containing many different stakeholders, including good engagement with Trade Unions. She felt that the HSE have supported workers well throughout the pandemic and will continue to improve relations with the TUC and Trade Unions. She acknowledged the health and safety challenges of the gig economy and said the HSE will be focusing moving forward on collaborating with other regulators to tackle poor employment practises.

**Gary Wolpole, Safety, Health and Environment Officer, National Federation of Roofing Contractors** asked how the Discovering Safety campaign would support micro and nano organisations who work at height but not on tier 1 construction projects.

Sarah said that the HSE has developed an app that clearly sets out basic health and safety advice and the HSE construction division have developed a construction industry playbook. She commented that the HSE constantly review what more can be done and that tier 1 construction sites have a role to play in sharing best practise.

Helen said HSE are looking at linking image data so information can be drawn from an image to highlight potential risks. This innovation would be useful to workers in the gig economy.

Sarah highlighted that these techniques would also assist workers where English is not their first language.

**Keith Dymond, Director, Barrow Training Partnership** asked about falls through gaps as he has designed a new product that quickly fills in gaps in construction projects. He added that he had found it difficult to find statistics on falls through gaps.

Helen said the BIM trial looks to design out risks. The HSE are working with industry to identify risks and resolve them at design stage, including fragile roofs (*which another attendee had raised as a specific example in the chat*).

The Chair raised that many accidents happen because people fail to notice risks on an activity, for example farming, that they may have successfully undertaken many times before.

Sarah said that whilst the meeting is focused on construction, HSE are aware that accidents and fatalities happen in agriculture and that is also a priority area for the HSE.

**Tony Seddon, Managing Director, Fall Arrest Safety Equipment Training (FASET)** said his colleagues in the AIF would welcome becoming involved in the Discovery Safety campaign and asked how they could contribute.

Sarah welcomed their participation and urged them to visit the Discovering Safety website and use the contact details to get in touch with the team.

**Peter Bennett OBE** welcomed and supported any initiative that improves understanding of incidents. He asked for more information on screen scraping and how this can improve intelligence and understanding.

Helen said the software “scrapes” web pages on a global scale to access additional information. Text mining tools would refine the information into clear insights however further work is needed to refine this technique.

David Thomas, Director, Heightsayfe Ltd asked if Discovering Safety were working with CROSS. Sarah confirmed the HSE does work with CROSS.

**Beth Sidwell, Account Director, Connect (APPG Secretariat)** said that all attendees would no doubt have sympathy for the funding cuts that have been experienced by the HSE in recent years. She asked how the work of the Discovery Safety campaign would be balanced with the new responsibilities of the HSE, who will be acting as Building Safety Regulator, whilst continuing to innovate and reduce workplace deaths.

Sarah said that the HSE are honoured to have been chosen as the Building Safety Regulator and that they would learn from the process as an organisation. She explained that the HSE already undertake other regulatory roles which are funded separately from their existing health and safety work. The new responsibilities as Building Safety Regulator will also be funded separately by Government and therefore do not remove resource from other budgets.

The Chair drew the meeting to a close, inviting closing comments from the speakers.

Sarah Newton thanked the APPG for the opportunity to attend the meeting and offered to return to update the Group further, once the third phase of the Discovering Safety campaign was completed.

The Chair thanked the speakers and attendees for their contributions and reminded attendees to engage with the HSE on the important issues discussed. She said that details of the next virtual meeting would be circulated as soon as possible and will feature a discussion on the No Falls Charter.