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your health and safety practitioner

– using international standards to judge competence

When recruiting a health and safety practitioner or engaging a contractor, you need to be able to trust that the practitioner's advice is robust, current and accurate. Poor safety advice is a risk to both the organisation and those you seek to protect.

Health and safety is a diverse field. Depending on the role, a health and safety practitioner could be managing chemical and gas safety, preventing falls from height, rolling out safety culture, advising on ergonomics, implementing organisation-wide safety strategies, reporting to the executive team or board, managing budgets and projects, or investigating incidents. The spectrum is huge.

Anyone can be a health and safety practitioner

There is no requirement to register as a safety practitioner in New Zealand. Anyone

with an interest can give advice on keeping people safe and healthy in the workplace. Nurses, doctors and lawyers are among many professionals who need to be registered. This could arguably apply to safety practitioners.

Looking for a qualified health and safety practitioner

Health and safety practitioners can register with local and international organisations, which offer grading pathways and programmes in continuing professional development (CPD).

- New Zealand practitioners could join:
 - The New Zealand Safety Council (NZSC)
 - The New Zealand Institute of Safety Management (NZISM)
 - The International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM)
 - The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)

However, it's difficult for recruiters to differentiate between the organisations and assess the value of their grades. Even the practitioners struggle to decide which organisation is most likely to give them robust independent verification of their competence.

To keep it simple, NZISM and IOSH are

working together under a memorandum of understanding to give New Zealand health and safety practitioners access to the latest information, and a clear grading pathway through the profession. The IOSH and NZISM grading systems require practitioners to be actively and continually involved in their development and the maintenance of their competence.

The IOSH grading system

IOSH is the world's largest health and safety organisation. It's based in the UK and has over 39,000 members. Eleven percent are based outside the UK, and this number is growing.

About 100 New Zealand health and safety practitioners belong to IOSH. Members have access to the latest safety information internationally, support in their roles as practitioners through mentoring schemes, as well as an online magazine and forums. Professional membership of IOSH is recognised internationally, and health and safety practitioners in New Zealand can join IOSH directly.

Some practitioners prefer belonging to a local organisation, with its benefits of networking and seminars and so join the NZISM. NZISM is completing a local professional grading and development framework based on IOSH's and members will be able to log their professional development online using the IOSH online database. The grading and development records will be locally assessed and while the NZISM grading will not have the same international standing as IOSH grading, it offers local employers an indication of a practitioner's competence.

You can help raise the standards

Practitioners who belong to IOSH or NZISM have to abide by a code of ethical conduct – so you have recourse to complain about the service or advice

provided if you need to. A practitioner who doesn't abide by the code of ethical conduct can have their membership terminated. This is good for your organisation, and good for the majority of health and safety practitioners out there, who care about their profession.

Professional health and safety organisations aim to raise standards of health and safety, and provide support and development for practitioners. When you engage a practitioner who is a member of a professional organisation, you help to raise the standards of health and safety advice provided.

The value of continuing professional development – the 'grading pathway'

To achieve the varying grades of membership with IOSH or NZISM, a practitioner has to meet set criteria that confirm they have achieved minimum levels of qualification and experience.

You can use the practitioner's grade of membership as confirmation of their level of competence. The gradings don't replace an interview or an engagement process, but they can support your decision-making.

experience

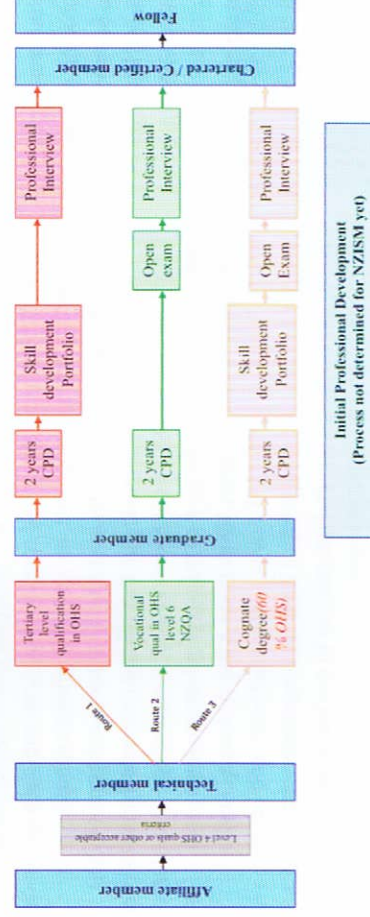
■ ***Fellow (CFIOSH).** Someone who has been Chartered or Certified for at least five years and has contributed significantly to the profession.

* The Graduate to Certified member process for NZISM is still under development.

Under IOSH, practitioners who want to progress from Graduate membership to Chartered membership are required to demonstrate both the academic understanding and practical experience of the principles of health and safety.

They also need two years of continued professional development. They then write a skills development portfolio, sit an exam, or do both, depending on the route they took to Graduate grade level. Finally, they attend a professional technical interview with an independent panel.

There will be times when a very experienced practitioner cannot achieve a grading reflecting their competence. For example, if they do not have a tertiary level qualification, they may find it difficult to progress past Technician grade, or they may choose not to progress through the grading pathway. Used as a benchmark,



This diagram shows the IOSH grading pathway for members – which NZISM's grading pathway is to be based upon.

The grades

■ **Affiliate.** Someone with an interest in health and safety but no formal qualifications, or who does not want to be a professional member and undertake CPD

■ **Technician (TechIOSH / TechnZISM).** Someone with an initial health and safety qualification

■ **Graduate (GradIOSH / GradNZISM)** Someone with a tertiary level health and safety qualification and some experience

■ ***Chartered (CMIOSH).** Someone with a tertiary level (or equivalent) health and safety qualification and significant

their CPD using the online 'MyIOSH' tool.

The CPD process

The practitioner writes a development plan which identifies the areas of safety and health where they could improve, their areas of interest, areas of strength and their ultimate career aim. This can be done in conjunction with performance reviews, and should involve objective performance feedback where possible.

The practitioner then identifies activities which meet the objectives outlined in their development plan. The activities should maintain their existing knowledge and skills, develop transferrable management skills, for example budget management, project management, or computer skills, and also add new knowledge and skills.

These activities may be formal courses, but any activity which results in the practitioner developing or improving their skills and knowledge count. This could include presenting at conferences, self-directed research, undertaking a new activity in their work, or shadowing someone.

Once the activity has been completed, the practitioner considers (reflects on) the value that the activity added to their knowledge and skills, and adds a number of credits or points to that activity. The practitioner needs to collect 30 credits over a three-year period.

Audit and peer review

At the end of each three-year period the CPD record is archived. A percentage of all members, chosen at random, are audited and peer reviewed by the professional organisation and members who have been trained as CPD auditors.

Card-carrying members

All IOSH members carry a card showing their membership number, grade and card expiry date. This card is linked to their membership subscription, so only those who are maintaining their professional development and membership will have a current card. NZISM is considering the use of membership cards.

Professional membership is not a panacea for all health and safety woes. However, belonging to a professional organisation is a good way for practitioners to demonstrate that they have achieved a level of competence and that they are maintaining it.

Knowledge about the professional membership of health and safety advisers will support your decisions as HR practitioners, and give you confidence that the health and safety advice you get can be relied upon. Use this alongside your other recruitment processes. And if a safety practitioner applies for a role or a contract and they are not a member of a professional body – question why. ■

