Foreword

The British Safety Council celebrates its 60th Anniversary this year. The organisation has a proud history of campaigning for the protection of people and of the environment. However, the world has moved on significantly in the last 60 years, so as part of our anniversary celebrations, we are launching a new manifesto to help shape our future.

A manifesto is a 'public declaration of intentions and objectives'. This document will shape and structure our policy and engagement work, and help us to articulate how we will deliver against our vision that no-one should be injured or made ill at work.

Traditionally focus has fallen on safety rather than health issues in the workplace. Until a few decades ago, Britain was an industrial economy and most people were engaged in heavy manual work in industrial operations. Thousands of people were killed or suffered serious injuries at work, and the target was therefore the immediate safety issues. Huge progress has been made since the Health and Safety at Work Act was introduced in 1974, establishing health and safety risk management as a core requirement in British workplaces. As a result, the number of fatalities and serious injuries has reduced significantly.

Times have changed too. Britain is now a professional and service-based economy which places different demands on workers; and as the number of accidents has decreased, there has been an increasing awareness of longer latency health issues.

Today, skilled and knowledgeable people are at the heart of the modern British economy, and employers are keen to support and retain them. Brexit has sharpened this focus too, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality and construction, where there is currently a dependence on skilled labour from other EU countries. Technological advances, and the changing nature of work, mean that many people can now operate effectively from any location with an internet connection. This can result in excessive working hours, but also allows people to work much more flexibly to accommodate personal and family requirements. The gig economy is changing employment relationships, and an increasing number of people work remotely, outside of a traditional workplaces and contracts, which can impact negatively on health and mental wellbeing.

Technology is changing the way that people engage in work processes too. Automation, augmented reality and artificial intelligence systems are increasingly commonplace, with repetitive, manual and precision tasks now routinely handled by machines. This offers an opportunity to remove people from potentially hazardous tasks and environments. People still fulfil a unique function in our workplaces, but their role is changing and there is a requirement to upskill the workforce so that they are equipped and able to engage at an earlier point in the process, or to work alongside new technology.

The time is right to focus on health as an enabler to work. However, this not just about employing and retaining people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. There is also a need to act on health and wellbeing for the whole working population. People are living longer and pensions are frequently no longer sufficient to support early

retirement. As a result, the workforce is aging, and many more people are having to manage the health effects of getting older whilst still at work. People need information and support to help them make healthy decisions, and timely access to medical services is a key requirement. Short-term illness and minor injury can easily result in long-term sickness absence if the issues are not addressed promptly. This has negative effects on the physical and mental health of the individual, results in costs for the employer and places demands on the medical and social care systems.

Awareness is also increasing around the importance of sustainability. There is a need to reduce the impact that our activities are making on the climate and on environments around the world. So many of the earth's resources are finite, and we must find new, smarter, ways to manage and replenish these important elements, which underpin every aspect of our lives, our health, our cultures and our economies.

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The regulatory system for health, safety and environmental protection in the UK is widely acknowledged to be world class. However, following the Grenfell fire tragedy there is some concern about the impact that deregulation might have had not least on the effectiveness of allied systems covering fire safety and building standards. There is also some concern about the potential impact of Brexit. Effective and proportionate regulation is a positive enabler for business. It is important that the regulatory system is kept under review to ensure it remains up to date and fit for purpose, however, care must be taken to find the correct balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

These are exciting and challenging times for businesses in the UK, and the British Safety Council is committed to leading the way in positioning safety, wellbeing and sustainability at the very heart of all our futures.

Mike Robinson
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