

Apprentice supervision in construction

The supervision of apprentices in the construction industry is a significant responsibility for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). It is important that you understand your obligations under South Australian work health and safety laws.

SafeWork SA, industry partners and the community have an expectation that PCBUs will adequately supervise apprentices to ensure their health and safety.

Work health and safety legislation

Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)* (WHS Act), PCBUs have a primary duty of care for ensuring the safety of workers and to provide information, instruction, training, and supervision that is necessary to protect workers from risks to health and safety.

Under the *Training and Skills Development Act 2008 (TSD Act)*, PCBUs are required to provide qualified and experienced supervisors to oversee the day to day management and training of apprentices to fulfil their legal obligations. The Training and Skills Commission's guideline for persons who supervise apprentices or trainees (the guideline), sets out specific details on supervisor requirements and supervisor/apprentice ratios.

Where a registered employer (e.g. GTO) places an apprentice with a PCBU for their employment and on-the-job training, the registered employer must ensure that the PCBU complies with the requirements of the guideline, as far as is reasonably practicable.

Supervisors

A supervisor is in a key position to ensure safe systems of work are being followed; they are both a role model and a coach.

Apprentices look to their supervisor for guidance and assistance in learning how to undertake their job safely and competently and should be encouraged to raise safety concerns.

A supervisor should

- assume apprentices have no prior knowledge of workplace 'norms'
- use clear and simple language
- explain industry terms
- ensure the apprentice understands the instructions
- explain related safe work practices, including Safe Work Method Statements
- lead by example, and
- ensure there are no distractions when teaching an apprentice.



Supervisor to apprentice ratios

A first or second year/stage apprentice must have direct one-on-one supervision.

In determining the level of supervision for third and fourth year/stage apprentices, the apprentice's level of competence in a particular task, the risks associated with the worksite, and the type of work being undertaken needs to be taken into consideration.

Year of apprenticeship	Supervisor to apprentice ratio (maximum)
1 or 2	1:1
3 or 4	Appropriate level of supervision to be determined by the PCBU (must not exceed 1:5)

To exceed the supervision ratio for apprentices, approval must be granted by a delegate of the Training and Skills Commission. A copy of the approval should be readily accessible at the workplace and available for inspection if and as required by SafeWork SA.

Meeting your obligations

PCBUs and workplace supervisors must ensure apprentice training, instruction and most importantly, supervision, is being met according to the WHS Act and the guideline.

A breach of the WHS Act occurs when:

- an action is taken that places a person at risk of injury, illness or death.
- steps are not taken to avoid placing workers at risk.
- there is a failure to comply with regulatory requirements.

Steps to effective supervision

- Explain the task to the apprentice, including safety risks.
- Explain the purpose and why you do it that way.
- Explain all the steps in completing the task, including safety control measures to minimise risk of injury (e.g. machine guarding, personal protective equipment, etc).
- Demonstrate the task.
- Provide the apprentice with opportunity to practice the new skill and observe their progress.
- Provide encouragement and feedback and maintain open communication.
- Openly support a healthy workplace free from threatening behaviours, such as; bullying, violence, intimidation and verbal, physical, racial and sexual abuse.

More information

For more information on supervision of apprentices, visit the Training and Skills Commission at www.tasc.sa.gov.au or call the Traineeships and Apprenticeships Infoline on 1800 673 097

For further information on work health and safety visit the SafeWork SA website at safework.sa.gov.au or call 1300 365 255.

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