



## **Young people and wellbeing at work What young people know about it, and what companies think.**

Odette Wlodarski, Prevent, December 2009

*As part of a project on young people's health and safety at work being carried out by Prevent, Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, at the request of Assuralia (Belgian Association of the Insurance companies), the institute has conducted two surveys: one among students and the other among companies. The following is a review of the main results from these surveys.*

### **Two surveys**

The first survey was conducted among students in secondary and higher education who had already had some experience of the working world through an internship or holiday job. Its goal was to gather information about students' perceptions of the issues of health and safety at work. The second survey focused on companies who had taken on young graduates or interns in the course of the last five years. The goal was to examine companies' views of young people's knowledge in this area and their receptiveness to prevention messages.

### **Mainstreaming**

Integrating health and safety in education is a key element in the development of a proper prevention culture, in other words one in which health and safety form an integral part of the decision-making process. In order to achieve such an objective, it is vital for all workers to have developed a risk prevention culture at an early stage. Education and awareness-raising for children and young adults are therefore necessary. School obviously has an important role to play. More generally, though, this transformation is brought about by others with whom the young person comes into contact (teachers, parents, professionals at companies) and above all by the young person him- or herself.

### **First survey: "Young people: safe at work?"**

The first survey was conducted from December 2008 to June 2009. A total of 2,630 young people, mainly students in secondary education in the Flemish and French Communities, replied to the questionnaire. Most of them were between 16 and 18 years old. Over 40% of the respondents were in vocational education.

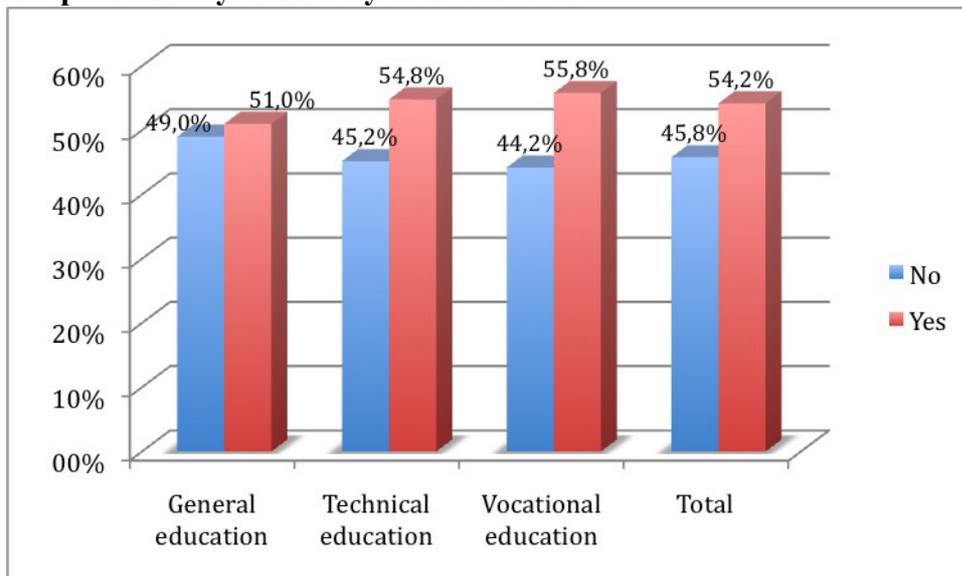
### ***Personal experience***

Nearly 70% of the young people in vocational education knew someone in their immediate circle of acquaintances who had had an accident at work or health problems associated with work. The proportion was 67% for students in technical education and nearly 50% for students in general education. Students in vocational education were also most likely to state (nearly 40% of them) that they had been exposed to risks during an internship or holiday job. Among students in technical education, the proportion was still 30%. Among those in general education, it was only around 15%. A large majority stated that they had never had a work accident or health problems during a period of work experience (82%). There was no discernible difference on this point between the different education types. Where there were health complaints, they mainly related to backaches, broken bones and cuts.

### ***Knowledge of the risks***

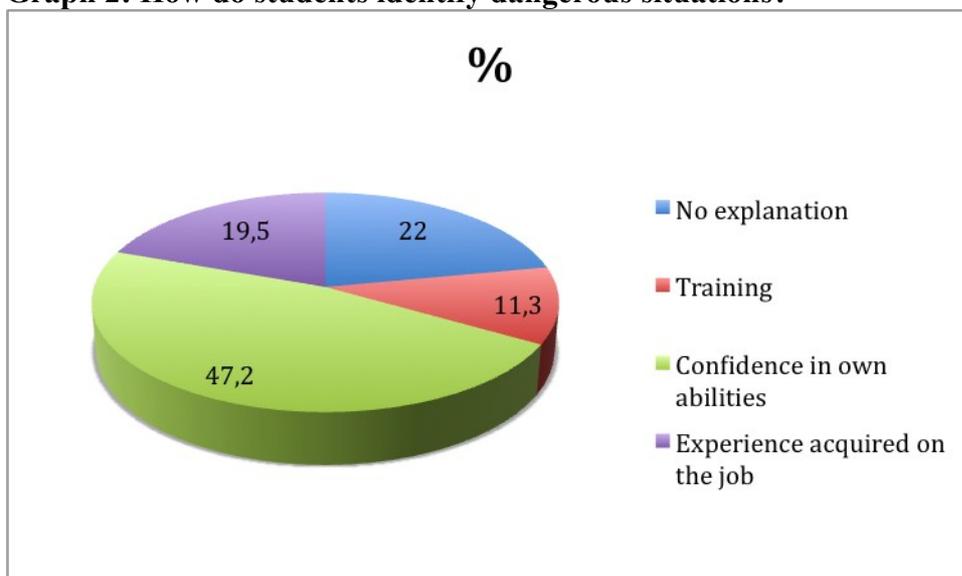
When asked about their ability to identify risk situations, slightly over half the young people considered that they were perfectly able to do so. Although students from vocational education were slightly more likely to answer in the affirmative here, the differences of proportion between the education types were not very marked (see graph 1).

**Graph 1: Ability to identify risk situations**



Among those students who stated that they were able to identify dangerous situations, 22% did not explain how they had acquired this ability (see graph 2). Moreover, barely 11% made clear reference to courses they had attended. Slightly over 19% stated that they had acquired this ability thanks to experience "on the job". But the majority of those who explained their answer in some way claimed that they were simply confident in their own ability (nearly 60% of those who explained their answer).

**Graph 2: How do students identify dangerous situations?**



### ***Information***

Among young people who had attended a company internship, 77% stated that they had received information about health and safety in connection with the internship. In most cases, the information had been passed on orally. This had been done by the employer, the internship supervisor in the company, the teacher coordinating the internship or, to a lesser extent, colleagues.

### **Second survey: "Companies and young workers"**

The second survey conducted by Prevent was sent to companies. It examined their views of young people's knowledge and attitudes with regard to health and safety at work. A total of 288 companies replied to the questionnaire. The analysis related to young people under the age of 25, some of whom were students and others of whom were young graduates who did not yet have much experience. Practically 20% of the companies which took part in the survey were industrial companies. The construction sector and public services were also well represented, with proportions of 11% and 10% respectively. The vast majority of companies which responded were fairly sizeable (66% employed over 100 workers).

### ***Evaluation of young workers' knowledge***

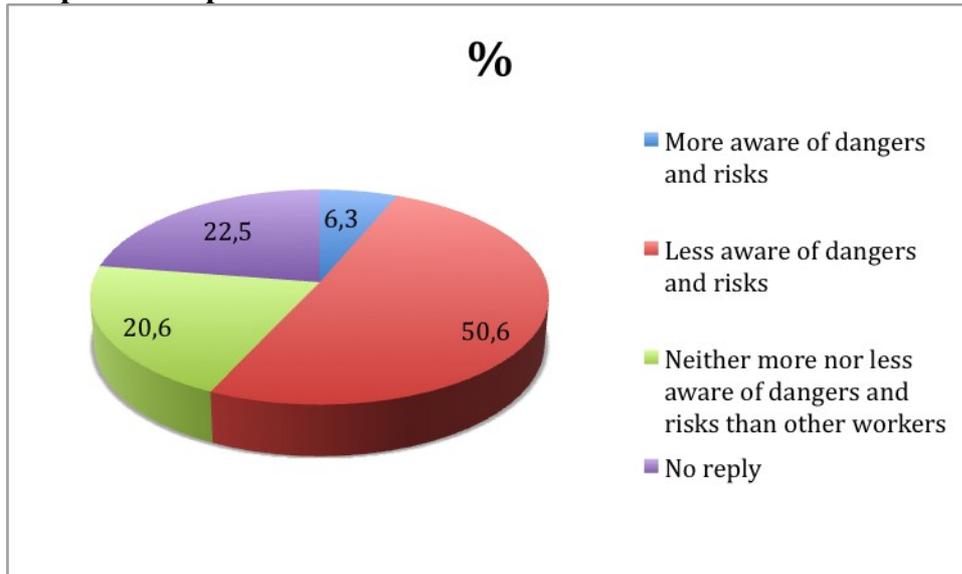
Overall, 66% of the companies which took part in the survey believed that young workers' knowledge was limited. 10% regarded their knowledge as adequate, while just over 12% believed that young people had no knowledge of how to work safely.

If the results are examined in the light of education type attended by the young person, the survey shows that workers from vocational education obtain the worst scores, followed by those from technical education. Obviously, the requirements to which they are subject are more significant, as they are often performing the highest-risk tasks. However, 30% of companies specified that young people sometimes spontaneously report dangers and indicated that young workers sometimes find out about what preventive measures should be taken. 68% of them also thought that young people displayed some degree of interest in the information or training provided about working safely. By contrast, just under 20% thought they had no interest at all.

### ***Attitudes***

Over 60% of the companies indicated that they had already observed risky attitudes in their young workers. More generally, half the companies thought that young people were less aware of risks than other workers (see graph 3). However, a quarter of the respondents believed that they were at least as aware of risks as other workers in the company. According to many respondents, young people think that nothing can happen to them, because they are less experienced and too confident in their abilities. But others said that after a "safety induction", they were more inclined to put their new knowledge into practice. They were more curious and more "flexible" regarding new instructions.

**Graph 3: Comparison with other workers**



***Training and awareness-raising***

A clear majority of companies (80%) mentioned that initial training did not do enough to ensure that young people were aware of the risks at work and how to prevent them. However, few respondents acknowledged that education and awareness-raising should start from a very young age (just 27% thought that primary education had a role to play here). A relatively low percentage also thought that education in these areas should take place in certain types of education or at certain educational levels. Parents' role was only seen as important by a third of respondents.

Generally speaking, companies recognised that they too have a role to play in this area. However, only just over half (54% of companies) clearly stated that they had performed an analysis of the risks to which their young workers were exposed, and that they had taken any measures required and informed the people concerned. In connection with the admission of interns, no more than 40% had performed a risk analysis.

**Graph 4: Views on the role of the different actors in training and awareness-raising for young people**

