

## About POOSH

Professional Organisations in Occupational Safety and Health (POOSH) brings together a wide variety of bodies whose aim is to improve health and safety in the workplace.

POOSH's objectives are to:

- exchange views, knowledge and information on matters of interest to members
- offer comments on consultative documents and national strategies for health and safety
- discuss and develop common initiatives and policies for consideration by the UK government and the EU
- promote professional standards and competence among health and safety practitioners, including appropriate qualifications and continuing professional development schemes.

### Professional Organisations in Occupational Safety and Health

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# POOSH

professional organisations  
in occupational safety and health

## Choosing a competent health and/or safety professional

A guide for small and medium-sized businesses

## Selecting a competent health and/or safety professional

Selecting people to work for your organisation is always difficult, even for tasks that you're knowledgeable about. So it can be particularly hard to choose a suitable health and safety professional to meet your company's needs.

We've put this guide together to highlight the key points you need to consider.

The law requires every employer to have access to a 'competent person' when managing health and safety, and defines a competent person as having "sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities". In other words, they should be able to give good health and safety advice within their field of experience.

## What to look for

As well as meeting the legal requirements, you need to make sure you choose the right person for your business. Consider four key areas:

### Recognised qualifications

Studying and passing exams for a qualification is important for creating the baseline of knowledge from which professionals can build up their practical experience of health and safety.

There's a wide variety of qualifications in health and safety. They range from basic awareness courses which end with a short test, to degree- or masters-level programmes. There are also vocational qualifications, which emphasise the practical side.

Some health and safety qualifications cover specific topics, for example food safety, construction or risk management.

To compare different qualifications, have a look at the National Qualifications Database at [www.openquals.org.uk](http://www.openquals.org.uk).

### Practical experience

Every sector of industry has different health and safety needs, so it's vital that you choose a health and safety professional who has practical experience in and knowledge of your industry. If, say, you run a warehouse storing tyres, a health and safety practitioner who has worked in a furniture warehouse could give you sound advice. On the other hand, if you store chilled meats you would need someone with experience in food safety and hygiene.

### Current practice

Competent health and safety professionals will ensure they stay informed about changes in legislation, HSE guidance and industry standards and best practice. If they don't have a reliable way of keeping up to date, they may unwittingly offer poor advice.

Professional bodies (such as POOSH member organisations) keep their members informed of these types of change. Many professional bodies also provide discussion forums for their members, who can debate questions confidentially with other experienced practitioners from the same field.

### Membership of a professional body

Membership of a professional body is an important consideration when choosing the right health and safety practitioner. The areas of expertise covered by a professional body will give you some pointers towards what your candidates' specialisms are.

Professional bodies set criteria that their members must meet to qualify for different grades of membership, and they keep their members up to date with changes in best practice, legislation and codes of ethics. Some organisations also keep a register of members' interests and expertise in specific areas.

Professional bodies are happy to talk to you and explain their membership qualifications, entry criteria and the areas of health and safety that they cover.

Get further guidance from the following POOSH member organisations:

### Association of Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners (UK)



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### British Occupational Hygiene Society



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[www.bohs.org](http://www.bohs.org)

### Chartered Institute of Environmental Health



t +44 (0)20 7928 6006  
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info@cieh.org  
[www.cieh.org](http://www.cieh.org)

### The Ergonomics Society



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### Faculty of Occupational Medicine



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### Institution of Occupational Safety and Health



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### Royal Society for the Promotion of Health



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### Safety and Reliability Society



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