Centre of Labour Studies provides Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety

A healthy worker is a productive worker

Luke Fiorini

How is occupational health and safety regulated at an international level? To what degree do Maltese bus drivers suffer from stress? How do companies manage occupational health and safety? Do physical education teachers practice sun-protective behaviour?

These and many other questions were answered during a seminar entitled Enhancing Occupational Health and Safety through Research, organised by the University's Centre for Labour Studies at the Grand Hotel Excelsior, Floriana.

So just what does occupational health and safety (OHS) entail?

It is a discipline with a vast scope and involves many specialised fields, all of which aim to improve the physical, mental and social well-being of those affected by work activities.

The relevance of this discipline becomes obvious when you consider the amount of time you spend at work, and while many organisations often undertake OHS measures for legal reasons, moral and financial reasons are equally important.

Unfortunately, OHS measures are frequently viewed as a cost, burdened upon a company struggling to stay afloat within the current financial environment.

This, however, could not be further from the truth. Well-implemented measures not only prevent litigation, but reduce medical costs and turnover while boosting worker productivity.

Regrettably, stories of occupational injuries or even deaths continue to feature regularly in the local media, indicating that more can and needs to be done.

It is due to the importance of this discipline and the increasing demand for individuals competent in OHS that the Centre for Labour Studies has been providing a part-time afternoon Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety since 1997.

"Research is both the basis and driving force behind the evolution of OHS"

The course helps individuals to embark on a career in OHS, while also catering for other professionals, such as managers or HR personnel who wish to become more competent in this growing area.

As is common practice in most professions, research is both the basis and driving force behind the evolution of OHS. It was thus a fitting topic for the centre's latest seminar, where a selection of research projects was presented by this year’s graduates of the Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety.

Among them was a study by Maria Stella Cannataci entitled Sun Awareness and Sun Protective Behaviour of PE Teachers in Malta, which was awarded a prize for best research project by General Workers’ Union president Victor Carachi.

The Centre of Labour Studies also hosted Hazel Harvey, director of membership for the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), who delivered a presentation on professional development.

With over 40,000 members worldwide, the IOSH is the world’s largest health and safety professional membership organisation. It seeks to uphold competence in the profession, while enhancing the development of standards and research.

Ms Harvey was thus well-positioned to urge the audience to continually strive for greater competence in their profession while also promoting the virtues of research.

The old adage "a healthy worker is a productive worker" has never held truer, and it is through occupational health and safety research along with the sharing and utilisation of such findings that this may be realised.

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