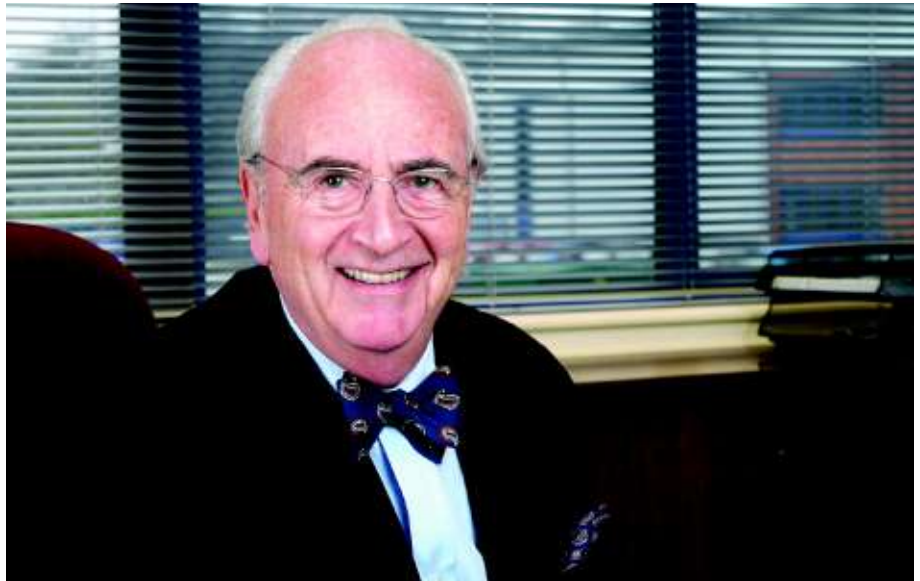


Lord Young's review

There is a small but growing chorus of concern that Lord Young of Graffam's government-ordered review into health and safety may fail to draw attention to the key thing that has allowed "elf 'n' safety" myths to flourish — the lack of a voluntary accreditation framework for practitioners.

Catherine Burrell, journalist



Lord Young: His review will "reintroduce an element of common sense" to health and safety rules.

The review

Lord Young's terms of reference are to "investigate and report back to the Prime Minister on the rise of the compensation culture over the last decade coupled with the current low standing that health and safety legislation now enjoys and to suggest solutions".

In a letter inviting "the views of key organisations", the peer, who was trade and industry secretary under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, said: "Health and safety regulation is essential in many industries but may well have been applied too generally and have become an unnecessary burden on firms, community organisations and public services.

"I hope my review will reintroduce an element of common sense and focus the regulation where it is most needed."

The pitch

In an interview with the BBC, Lord Young said a "compensation culture" had been allowed to grow up over the course of the previous Labour Government and suggested

no-win no-fee referral agencies helped increase "the number of people being sued".

In another interview with *The Times*, Lord Young said emergency service workers should be exempted from health and safety laws. Police and paramedics were "paid for doing a job that involves risk" and legislation and regulation should not be "an excuse for inaction".

The realities

Lord Young's public comments echo earlier statements made by now Prime Minister David Cameron. In a speech in December last year Cameron said he had asked Lord Young, 79, "to lead an extensive review on this subject for the Conservative Party". In the same speech, Cameron conceded there was no growth in personal injury claims.

"The term 'compensation culture' is a toxic one in our country – and it is not entirely fair," Cameron said in December.

"Personal injury claims have actually remained largely static since the turn of the century. What is more the problem is the

perception we have allowed to develop in Britain today, behind every accident there is someone who is personally culpable."

Dispelling the myths

One teacher at a school banned the playing of conkers without pupils wearing goggles. The requirement had not been externally imposed by the regulator but voluntarily adopted by the teacher as a publicity stunt. This, and stories like it, have fed the perceptions and misconceptions about an increasingly risk-averse and compensation-seeking culture.

Since 2007, the HSE has been running its myth of the month campaign, hitting back at some of the ridiculous decisions wrongly blamed on health and safety.

In a letter to Lord Young following the review announcement last month, HSE chairman Judith Hackitt wrote: "We in the HSE have been saying for some time that health and safety is being used by too many as a convenient excuse to hide behind."

Fewer civil servants taking sick leave lead to a

Working days lost due to illness dropped to their lowest levels since 1987 last year, reflecting a "prevention rather than cure" shift in managerial thinking.

According to the latest CBI/Pfizer Absence and Workplace Health Survey, the average UK worker took 6.4 days off due to sickness in 2009, compared with 6.7 days in 2007, the



Duvet days: Workers are taking far fewer.

last year surveyed. An improvement in the public sector rate from an average of nine days per employee in 2007 to 8.3 contributed to the overall reductions.

Private sector absence rates averaged 5.8 days per worker last year.

From the survey of private sector companies and public sector organisations questioned