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E-BOOK

Putting the 'Personal' into PPE

A practical guide to implementing inclusive PPE in the workplace

By Dr Debbie Janson PhD, MEng, CEng, FIMechE
University of Bath

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Note on acronyms:

EHS = Environment, Health and Safety

HSE = Health and Safety Executive

PPE = Personal Protective Equipment

RPE = Respiratory Protective Equipment

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Foreword

I am delighted to contribute a few introductory words to this guide, which not only highlights the importance of appropriate and properly fitting personal protective equipment but also proposes practical ways to improve the provision of it, which is long overdue.

When I decided to highlight the issue during my Presidency of the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) in 2023/2024 it was against a history of good intentions but slow progress over some 30 years. So, it is tremendous to see the impetus that has grown over the past 18 months, bringing together people from different sectors and building collaboration amongst institutions, manufacturers, academia and the technical media – and in particular the commitment by SHP with its Inclusive PPE campaign and this guide.

I was asked a while back how I managed to keep campaigning fresh and my answer was 'Hard facts and a sense of humour.' Both these elements have been in abundance in the workshops, events and media coverage on the importance of properly fitting PPE, combining the rigour of research such as that done by Dr Debbie Janson of the University of Bath, the author of this guide, with comments such as, "I need to look professional on site, not like a clown in my hand me downs."

On a serious note, everybody should be provided with the equipment that keeps them safe and efficient, as workers, as visitors, as clients. As Stephanie Eynon of the BSI, partner with CIOB on its own PPEthatfits campaign, commented: "It's time to sort this out now – I don't want to wait another 20 years before something happens."

I believe that change is driven by individuals, and this has been demonstrated by the commitment and engagement of many, with particular thanks to construction champions Katherine Evans of Bold as Brass, Katy Robinson of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Sophie Lydia Perkins of AtkinsRealis, Katie Kelleher of the Construction Plant hire Association and my colleagues at CIOB.

Inclusive PPE isn't just a challenge for the construction industry however – engineering, hospitality, healthcare, emergency services and sport face similar issues. Similarly inclusive PPE is not simply an issue for women, but also people for whom standard PPE isn't compatible with body shape and size, religious headwear or other clothing for example.

This informative and practical guide provides guidance both for employers, including questionnaires and sources of information and also for employees, including suggestions on how to raise concerns and make requests. A timely resource to help bring about change, providing safety, comfort and efficiency for the diverse workforce of today.

Sandi Rhys Jones OBE – November 2024

Sandi Rhys Jones OBE

> ***Inclusive PPE is not simply an issue for women, but also people for whom standard PPE isn't compatible with body shape and size, religious headwear or other clothing for example.***

Introduction

PPE is often known as "the last line of defence" – the items that protect workers when risks have been removed as far as possible. But can PPE itself introduce additional risks or unintentionally cause harm?

Historically, PPE has been designed around the average Western (white) male body and face shape [2]. This means that much of it is unlikely to fit a significant proportion of the population now wearing it. At the start of the 20th century, PPE was worn almost exclusively by men, and was designed as such. As times have moved on, we have seen more technology included within PPE, but its fit hasn't matched our increasingly diverse workforce.

Females are clearly at a particular disadvantage, but also, so are a large number of males who do not fit this typical white male mould. This problem is not unique to PPE. Many products around us also suffer the same fate. Consider power tools – often too big and cumbersome for smaller hands, or crash test dummies – historically based on male anthropometrics.

Appropriately fitting PPE is not only about physical fit. The impacts of poor fitting PPE are extensive and often unconsidered. Research has shown that PPE can actually hinder people in their work, and ironically, create more risks for the wearer than it saves.

Here are some examples:

1. Climbing into vehicles or up a ladder with the crotch sitting too low
2. Welding with oversized gloves where the fingers are too long to accurately grip
3. Ill-fitting hi-vis vests catching on equipment or moving vehicles
4. A hard hat or helmet slipping off during use
5. Not being able to safely access the controls in a forklift truck because the sleeves on a hi-vis coat are so long that they interfere

There are also emotional and psychological impacts that are often hidden but significantly affect the wearer. All of these impacts will be discussed in the sections that follow.

This e-book is designed for those involved in the PPE sourcing process, whether you are an end-user, line managing an end-user, procuring PPE, are the budget holder, or have some other related role. The information contained within this e-book aims to:

- Help understand why providing appropriately fitting and inclusive PPE is so important
- Disclose the many considerations when sourcing PPE for your workforce
- Provide tips to help develop your own inclusive PPE strategy
- Give pointers for how and where to find inclusive PPE

There is also a practical "Toolkit" where you can download document templates to help facilitate change, develop your inclusive PPE strategy and support ongoing processes.

Why is inclusive PPE so important?

Providing PPE that suits an individual is vital in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender, size, race, or other characteristics, are adequately protected in their work environments.

If inappropriate or ill-fitting PPE is provided, there are many impacts. And while the physical problems associated with this might be obvious, others are not. The different impacts can be classified as:

- Physical
- Behavioural
- Emotional
- Role-related

Physical impacts

The physical impacts of inappropriate PPE are often those that get spoken about the most. If end-users report problems with their PPE, the physical side is usually the first thing that comes to light. For example, shoes or work boots rubbing, causing blisters or pain, or hard hats or goggles digging in because they're too tight, or falling off because they're too loose. Some find that the physical impacts arise years later, after many years of poorly fitting PPE, e.g. back pain due to long-term wearing of gait-altering safety footwear.

Behavioural impacts

Behavioural impacts are more subtle. The end-users themselves might not even notice they are altering their behaviour to accommodate ill-fitting or inappropriate PPE as it becomes the norm. These changes might even seem like 'common sense'. Such behaviours include:

- Wearing extra socks
- Carrying plasters
- Carrying an extra bag because pockets in PPE are too small
- Drinking less (to avoid toilets because PPE is tricky to take on or off)
- Sewing up or adjusting PPE to make it fit better
- Moving reflective strips to ensure they are visible
- Taking PPE on and off more frequently than peers

Emotional impacts

The emotional impacts of having to wear inappropriate PPE are usually hidden. They are internal for the person affected but research has uncovered that these are significant and include:

- Feelings of not fitting in, feeling different, feeling singled out
- Not wanting to be a problem-maker or to cause a fuss by complaining about PPE, or being a burden by causing extra effort to get it right
- Lack of feeling valued or respected in comparison to peers
- Not feeling capable of doing their job, or professional
- Feelings of reduced morale

These impacts can often be the most damaging. They can seriously affect mental health and wellbeing.

> ***It then feels like I'm making more hassle for purchasing because I'm like, well, if I was ordering this online, I would order three different sizes so I could try them on and send back the ones that don't fit. But then for them that's more paperwork and it's more conversations with goods in to get them to send them back and get them collected.***

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Role-related impacts

The impacts of PPE on a person's job can relate to or be a result of any or all of the above categories. Reported impacts include:

- Authority is reduced – wearing ill-fitting PPE means that some people are not taken seriously
- Colleagues laugh at PPE
- Productivity is reduced
- Some parts of the role might not be achievable
- Tasks are changed to accommodate my PPE
- PPE makes the role more dangerous

All of these impacts, combined, can make life challenging for those experiencing them. In addition, if the PPE wearers are in an under-represented group, this further heightens any feelings of isolation and can significantly reduce their sense of belonging.

How does this affect your organisation?

All of the aforementioned points have an impact on your business, directly or indirectly. Research has shown that a poor or inappropriate PPE offering can contribute to:

- Reduced safety
- Reduced wellbeing
- Reduced feelings of inclusivity
- Reduced productivity
- Increased staff turnover

And of course, overall, this directly affects costs and profitability – a business's bottom line.

> ***It does affect your morale because you almost feel like a second-class citizen – that your safety isn't as important, that you'll just have to make do. And that's not right.***

> ***I was finding I couldn't actually physically lift my leg high enough to get onto the bottom step of the dumper, which was ridiculous.***

> ***There was an inch of spare glove at the end of each finger, and I just couldn't pick anything up safely because the ends of the fingers would just bend.***

Considerations for inclusive PPE

There are many things to consider when sourcing and specifying PPE, some obvious and some not so obvious. Let's take a look at the physical, human, and diversity based aspects that you might need to think about.

Physical requirements

Role

This is often the most obvious consideration and well catered for in the workplace. Clearly a person working on a building site will require different PPE to someone working in a processing plant. Role-based PPE requirements are known and adhered to by those specifying and sourcing PPE.

Environment

Environmental conditions need to be accounted for. For example, are the users operating in hot, cold, dry, damp, toxic, below ground, at height environments? PPE needs to be appropriate for these physical operating climates.

Frequency of changing/ duration of use

Some roles do not require PPE to be worn at all times. For example, an office worker who interacts with the factory floor, or sometimes visits site, will only put on PPE when needed. Similarly, workers might remove hard hats, goggles, harness, etc. when they are not needed (in line with risk assessments). In these scenarios, the logistics of changing of PPE needs to be considered. Users with PPE that takes too long to take on and off, especially when only needed for short periods, are likely to find shortcuts, or not use at all.

Travelling and mobility

Do your PPE users need to travel in their PPE? Does it create any mobility restrictions? For example, if they wear a bulky hi-vis coat, are they still able to do a shoulder check for blind spots when driving? Are they safe to drive whilst wearing safety footwear? Are there hygiene issues when travelling between different parts of a site? For example, wearing safety footwear between the yard and factory floor could introduce mud and contaminants, potentially inducing slip hazards or other issues.

Storage and changing areas

If we want PPE to be inclusive, we must consider the logistics around PPE storage and changing areas too.

Is there sufficient space to safely store PPE for individuals? Quite often, for example, hi-vis vests might be stored in a communal hanging space, and individuals simply "grab and go". This may seem effective, but often results in some individuals not receiving PPE that is suitable, as users instinctively select a larger fit than they need, leaving those at the end of the queue with little to choose from. And what about visitors? Many organisations have a small visitors' store cupboard which limits the amount of PPE that can be held, and as such, only facilitates a limited (and non-inclusive) range.

Also, consider the location of your PPE storage. Do users need to walk through an area that requires PPE before they reach where it is stored? Do you have separate areas for different genders? Are female workers expected to change in an area that is sub-standard compared

> ***If I don't take my own PPE, still quite often if you go out to a site and they're like, yeah, we've got visitors PPE, you get there and it's only for men.***

to male colleagues, or even the toilets? Is there sufficient space for storage of personal items (this will likely need to be greater for females than males – another example of equity not equality).

Human requirements

Body shape/hair

It is well publicised that historically, the vast majority of PPE was designed around the white western male physique. It is therefore widely known that women's PPE has been lacking, but that offerings are continuing to improve at a fast rate. But there are other issues beyond sex that need to be considered. Not every male will fit the typical mould. Asian men have smaller heads than a typical while male, for example[3] and foot shapes are also different between ethnicities[4].

In essence, every person is different and a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate when it comes to maintaining a person's safety. Unisex PPE is overwhelmingly designed around a male physique and ultimately, is just men's PPE - finding PPE that fits the person is more important than any gender or sex label assigned to it.

Looking at hair and hairstyles, this can present different issues between genders, or for some ethnicities, religions and cultures. A "beard ban" may feel like a simple way of addressing the need for a sound fit and seal for Respiratory Protective Equipment, but introducing this could violate the *2010 Equality Act*[5] as it would directly discriminate against those who have facial hair for religious reasons.

Many individuals with black or afro-textured hair face difficulties when wearing hard hats or other PPE. Hairstyles like braids, dreads, locs, and afros, which may be culturally significant and sometimes essential for hair health, can be hard to accommodate under standard PPE, leading to discomfort and, in some cases, safety risks due to poor fit.

Time of life

As we age, our body shape changes, and we may have more medical conditions, or experience pain and discomfort differently. What used to be our brand and size of PPE might no longer fit appropriately, or might begin to cause discomfort. This can be particularly problematic for wearers of safety footwear.

Disability

PPE needs to protect people with disabilities, and to the same standard as their colleagues. This might mean that you need to provide specialist or modified PPE. For example, adjusting fastenings for those with mobility impairments, limb differences, or dexterity challenges to ensure PPE can be taken on and off without compromising safety, or taking steps to ensure that PPE does not obstruct wheelchair movement.

It is important that all workers, regardless of disability, can perform their jobs safely and comfortably.

Perimenopause and menopause

During the perimenopause and menopause phases of women's lives, they experience significant physiological and psychological changes. Hot flushes, increased sweating, skin sensitivity, and changes in body shape can all affect how PPE is experienced. Providing PPE that is breathable, moisture-wicking, lightweight, and adjustable allows for better comfort levels and functionality. You may wish to consider customisable options to ensure that individual needs are addressed, ensuring that menopausal women can work safely

> ***"I'm sure I'm not the only woman that gets up in the morning and goes, 'what am I doing today? Am I going to need to put a hard hat on? Oh, I'll have to do my hair differently.'***

and comfortably without added stress or discomfort.

Periods

Female PPE wearers might experience challenges during their periods. Worries about leakage, where and when toilet stops will be, where they can store or wash their sanitary products are just some of the considerations for many women. Consider PPE with modesty panels, but also consider that some will not wish to have this for fear of drawing even more attention to their menstrual patterns.

Pregnancy

During pregnancy, women clearly experience significant physical changes that can affect the fit, comfort, and safety of PPE for both themselves and their baby. Adjustability is key to accommodating changes in body shape, and not forgetting about the potential for swollen feet too.

Ensuring PPE does not place pressure on sensitive areas, and providing enhanced protection against chemical or environmental exposures, is essential. Flexible PPE options that can adapt throughout the pregnancy ensure that women can continue to work safely and comfortably, while maintaining their wellbeing.

Gender norms

When considering sex and gender in relation to PPE, it's important to recognise that standard sizing is typically based on biological characteristics rather than gender identity, which can lead to significant fit and comfort issues. For example, a transgender man, assigned female at birth, may face similar challenges with PPE as cisgender women, as the equipment or clothing may not account for their specific body shape or size. Inclusive PPE must account for all workers, regardless of their gender identity, ensuring they have access to comfortable and effective protective equipment that meets their needs.

Medical conditions

Everyone is different. Medical conditions can range from bunions to heart conditions, and some medical conditions require greater consideration during the PPE selection process. For example, those with bunions might need to try a range of different safety footwear before they find a pair that are tolerable, never mind comfortable. Skin conditions may prevent, for example, a tight-fitting mask or other respiratory protective equipment (RPE) being worn, and other solutions may need to be found.

Diversity

There are lots of different elements to diversity. Often when we think of diversity, we consider a balance of men and women, or skin colours. However, there is much more to diversity, and this also can affect our PPE provision.

Religious/cultural norms

Our religion or culture may require us to dress in a certain way and we need to ensure we can still afford the diverse workforce equitable levels of safety. For example, Sikh men wearing their hair in turbans are often not required to wear head protection as it is deemed that protection is afforded by their turbans.

Those that wear a hijab also face challenges. PPE is required to be worn over hijabs, but this can prove tricky, for example with hard hats that might slip across the fabric.

Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent PPE wearers can be impacted in a range of ways and

there is no fixed response – everyone is different. For example, some users are irritated by the feel of certain fabrics or fasteners, some by PPE touching their skin at certain points (e.g. sleeves being too long), others do not like the feel or noise of fabrics, or by having their ears covered.

Understanding how PPE affects individuals is key in your organisation – everybody experiences their PPE differently.

Ability

We have to recognise that some people are more capable of completing certain tasks than others, even within the same role. It's human nature! PPE can affect this ability differently. For example, for people that already struggle with intricate manual tasks, asking them to wear gloves which happen to be oversize may impede them more than other, capable workers, exacerbating their disadvantage.

Generation

Over recent years, different generational groups have started being refered to as follows:

- Silent Generation (born 1928-1945)
- Boomers (born 1946-1964)*
- Gen X (1965-1980)*
- Millennials (1981-1996)* (also known as Gen Y)
- Gen Z (1997-2012)*
- Gen Alpha (2013-2025)*

*exact date range varies by source

It is important to recognise there are emotional and behavioural differences between these generations, and this can impact greatly on PPE. For example, Gen X and Boomers might have a more traditional view of PPE provision, Millennials and Gen Z might be more focused on comfort and ergonomics.

The legalities

Current legislation is quite clear; the *Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations (Amendment) (HSE 2022)* state that: PPE will not satisfy the requirement that it is 'suitable' unless:

- It is appropriate for the risks and the conditions at the place of work;
- It takes account of ergonomic requirements and the state of health of the person who may wear it;
- It is capable of fitting the wearer correctly (if necessary after adjustments within the design range);
- So far as is reasonably practicable, it is effective to prevent or adequately control the risk, without increasing overall risk;
- It complies with community directives applicable to the item (i.e. CE marked).

However, with so many companies not providing their employees with appropriate PPE, is seems that it might only be a matter of time before we see litigation where accidents happen directly or indirectly as a result.

Work is ongoing to tighten up standards with the latest parliamentary debate having taken place in March 2024. The BSI are also working on Gender specific guidance for sourcing and buying PPE and keep an eye on SHP's Inclusive PPE campaign for latest industry updates.

Barriers

When it comes to providing inclusive PPE, there are many barriers. Unfortunately, for many, this approach will feel very idealistic. Some organisations are not willing or not able to meet the PPE needs of their employees. Or may not understand the need to do so.

These barriers have been categorised as follows:

- Resource constraints
- Process limitations
- Under-estimating needs
- Clash of values or priorities

Resource constraints

Resource issues are one of the key barriers to developing and implementing an inclusive PPE strategy. There is little time in the business as usual to think about making changes, for example inviting in PPE manufacturers for employees to have a trying on session, nor is there time to implement new processes, train employees, review what's working, etc..

Inclusive practice around PPE takes a team. It is not down to one individual, be that a single procurement team member, or the EHS team. Ideally you could commit a cross-functional team to the initiative, including those from procurement, EHS, leadership, and most importantly, a diverse range of end-users. But this takes resource, and will inevitably take resource away from other parts of the business.

There is a common perception that inclusive PPE will cost more than your current offerings. That can be true (but also not), but it's the through-life cost of the PPE that needs to be considered. Returning PPE three times over will likely cost the business significantly more than the PPE itself! While this may be the case as new suppliers are sought and appropriate PPE is secured, longer term, it will certainly save process resource.

Process limitations

Processes are key in any business. Consider what your PPE sourcing and procurement process looks like. How does it relate to individual users? And how are you ensuring that needs are met?

It is commonly reported that organisations have to have a longstanding agreement with a dependable PPE distributor. PPE is bought for individual new hires, and in bulk for replacements, with nearest fit being the route to matching sizes with users. There is little scope for adjustment in this process, and whilst some users may not be wholly satisfied, there may also not be a process in place to follow up, send back or replace ill-fitting PPE, leaving employees uncomfortable and potentially experiencing some of the issues outlined earlier.

Additionally, responsibility for PPE can become fragmented. An EHS manager may oversee safety, a line manager may handle onboarding and the day-to-day, and someone entirely different – often with separate oversight – may be responsible for PPE purchasing. With such divided lines of accountability, when PPE doesn't work for an individual, who advocates for them? A lack of clear ownership can leave workers without proper support in resolving fit or comfort issues.

Underestimating needs

Some organisations feel that they have addressed the inclusive PPE gap because they provide their female workforce with female-fit PPE. While this is an admirable and significant step towards inclusive PPE practice, there is, as you will have read above, a lot more to it.

Many end-users do not feel comfortable raising issues with their PPE, for a variety of reasons, which means that those responsible would never know about the issues. So getting feedback from your workforce is vital. However, some do not recognise they even have issues – safety footwear is meant to be uncomfortable, right? No. It doesn't have to be that way. Comfort and safety can go hand in hand.

For some organisations, providing PPE can become a tick-box exercise, where the focus is on offering the latest products from a catalogue rather than addressing the actual needs of the workforce. True PPE provision goes beyond simply handing out equipment and clothing. It requires a thoughtful approach that ensures the right fit, comfort, and functionality for each individual, alongside a system that encourages open feedback and continuous improvement. Inclusive PPE isn't just about offering more options; it's about creating a process that prioritises the real-world experiences of all workers, ensuring that their safety and wellbeing are genuinely met.

Clash of values or priorities

Unfortunately, many organisations still fail to recognise the importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce, and as a result, providing inclusive PPE is often not a priority. Some question the need for such initiatives, arguing that we cannot, and should not, try to cater for everyone, or even that under-represented groups are getting special treatment. For example, why should a Sikh colleague be allowed to maintain their facial hair, but a non-Sikh is not – provoking debate around personal freedom versus cultural and religious needs.

Some believe that once most of the workforce is catered for, that's sufficient. But the evidence shows otherwise. A diverse workforce brings significant benefits, and ensuring all employees feel safe – both physically and psychologically – is crucial to their wellbeing, and ultimately, their retention.

Even those who do value diversity may find themselves prioritising other business needs. With limited resources and competing demands, it's easy for inclusive PPE to slip down the list. However, investing in inclusive PPE is more than just a compliance measure, or a "nice to have" – it's an investment in people. When workers feel that their safety and comfort are genuinely prioritised, it fosters loyalty, increases productivity, and contributes to a positive workplace culture. Inclusive PPE should not be seen as an afterthought or luxury, but as an essential part of creating an environment where everyone can thrive.

Strategy

How do you go about getting to a place where your organisation offers inclusive PPE? The strategy you choose to undertake will depend upon your organisation. Here are some steps that you might wish to include. Please refer to the Business Case Guidance in the Toolkit for more detail.

- Establish a clear vision and objectives for your project
- Build Leadership buy-in and align with organisational values
- Conduct a workforce needs assessment
- Sourcing and trials of inclusive PPE
- Develop and deliver training
- Monitor and review effectiveness
- Communication success and maintain momentum

Role specific guidance

What can you do in your role to help promote inclusive PPE? This will of course depend upon your responsibilities within your workplace. Let's explore what this might look like for different roles within an organisation (you might occupy more than one).

In reality, for inclusive PPE provision to be successful, (*see Figure 1 below*), it's essential that each of these roles fully engages with and supports the process and initiative, along with full backing from those in leadership positions - see image below..

Figure 1. Examples of types of roles involved with PPE

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Are you responsible for the PPE budget?

Firstly – congratulations! You are in the optimum position to influence how your organisation moves forward with their inclusive PPE provision. Money talks.

Let's consider first your levels of responsibility:

Allocating the PPE budget ensuring a balance between cost-efficiency and worker safety. It's essential to keep the safety of workers as a priority while considering the budget constraints. Does PPE have a separate budget or is it part of the overall Health and Safety budget? Do you have a budget per person? Or per item? How do you decide this, and what happens if individuals needs something outside of the standard offering?

Evaluating long-term value of PPE investments (sometimes called the through-life cost). Durable, well-designed PPE may come with a higher up-front cost but will reduce replacement frequency over the longer-term and lower maintenance needs.

Monitoring ongoing PPE-related expenses, including length of replacement cycles, potential maintenance costs, or cost of customisation or specialised items for certain roles or workers.

Coordinating with other departments, including procurement, Health and Safety, HR, and line managers to ensure the budget aligns with broader company objectives and is meeting the needs of individuals.

What else can you do?

Invest in quality PPE: Cheaper alternatives can lead to higher costs over time due to increased wear and tear, a higher likelihood of failure, and possible worker dissatisfaction, which can lower productivity. Focus on the cost-benefit analysis, where paying more upfront for higher-quality PPE reduces long-term costs related to accidents or frequent replacements.

Be an ally for under-represented groups and individuals: Standard PPE often fails to accommodate diverse body types. Investing in inclusive PPE, for example gender-specific or custom-fitted PPE will deliver many benefits as outlined earlier.

Consider the cost of non-compliance: If PPE does not fit properly or is uncomfortable, workers may not wear it correctly, which could lead to serious safety violations and expensive penalties. Factor in compliance as a cost-saving measure in the long run.

Collaborate: Work with procurement and H&S to ensure the budget covers not just the minimal legal requirements but also supports innovations and inclusivity in worker safety and comfort.

Be proactive: You may wish to initiative an Inclusive PPE Project with a team of colleagues, to address your organisation's approach to providing inclusive PPE. Take a look at the Business case guidance in this e-book for ideas.

Are you responsible for procuring PPE?

Whether you work in procurement, or you're in another role that has the responsibility for sourcing and buying PPE, you are in a pivotal position with significant responsibilities:

Ensuring compliance with legal standards and safety certifications is vital. You need to have confidence that the clothing and equipment you buy meets health and safety

regulations. This includes ensuring PPE is fit for the specific tasks and hazards that workers face.

Ensuring inclusivity and diversity in PPE options, such as offering PPE for different sizes, genders, cultures and designs to accommodate varying anthropometrics and specific needs is also essential. This is especially important to reduce discomfort and increase compliance among workers, but also for all of the other significant reasons outline earlier.

Negotiating with suppliers to ensure you are getting the best balance of quality, cost, and customisation options to meet your organisation's objectives. Maintaining good relationships with your suppliers is important so that you can be made aware of the latest developments and innovations, while also achieving the best value for your business. You may need to visit suppliers more frequently, and visit more of them in order to establish what is available, and build those relationships. Tell them about your issues and requirements, otherwise you may only be offered the same products that you've always been offered, and not the full range available.

Staying up-to-date on new developments in PPE technology. Ensure that you are offering the latest advancements in materials, design, and comfort that could benefit the workforce.

Involving end-users in your sourcing process so that you can better understand their needs and ensure PPE choices reflect the realities of their day-to-day work.

What else can you do?

Understand the needs of the workforce: PPE that is not designed with workers in mind can lead to safety risks and non-compliance. Engage with workers to get feedback on their experiences and ensure your choices meet their needs. You can run regular surveys to get feedback, as well as providing a mechanism for wearers to provide ad-hoc feedback (see Toolkit).

Supplier relationship management: Build strong partnerships with suppliers (current, and potential) that offer flexibility and are responsive to changing workplace needs. Seek out suppliers who can offer tailored solutions rather than one-size-fits-all range of products. Avoid suppliers that don't recognise the importance of inclusive PPE or are dismissive about the significance of its impact.

Use external help: If budget allows, you may wish to utilise an external consultant to help you source an improved PPE offering. They may be able to visit your company, bring in manufacturers and facilitate a "trying on" session for your workforce.

Track performance and supplier feedback: After purchasing, make sure you are gathering feedback from the end-users on the performance of the PPE (making sure this is about fit, comfort and feel, as well as level of protection). This helps in refining future purchasing decisions and encourages continuous improvement.

Consider customisable options where needed: PPE that fits well leads to better protection and comfort. Custom-fitted or modular PPE is becoming increasingly available, and allows workers to adjust the fit and function to suit their specific roles, increasing overall compliance and safety.

You may wish to **initiative a project** with a team of colleagues, to address your organisation's approach to providing inclusive PPE. Take a look at the Business case guidance for some ideas.

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Do you line manage those wearing PPE?

If you are the line manager of people wearing PPE, you may have varying levels of responsibility in this area, and these may include:

Ensuring PPE is worn or used through supervising workers and observing that PPE is worn consistently and in the right manner. This includes making sure workers know how to put on, take off, wear, adjust, and maintain their equipment, while staying compliant with safety regulations.

Address PPE-related issues such as discomfort, poor fit, or problems with functionality. Know what steps to take if those you are managing are experiencing problems with their PPE.

Undertake and facilitate ongoing training on the proper use, maintenance, and care of PPE. This ensures that workers understand why PPE is necessary and are skilled in using it properly.

Listen to worker feedback regarding PPE to make informed decisions about improvements or changes that may be necessary. Know where to escalate if necessary.

What else can you do?

Create an open feedback loop: Workers may hesitate to speak up if their PPE is uncomfortable or not fitting properly. Regularly check-in with them to ask about any issues with their PPE, and make it clear that their feedback is valued.

Prioritise fit and comfort: PPE is only effective if it is worn correctly. If workers are experiencing discomfort due to poor fit or design, they may adjust or remove the PPE, which can lead to safety risks. Be vigilant but also sensitive in addressing these concerns and offering solutions.

Get to the bottom of non-compliance: Why are some not wearing their PPE? Is it due to inappropriate fit? Does it hamper them in their job or make them less safe? Or some other reason. Non-compliance will not reduce unless the underlying cause is addressed.

Provide proper training: Even if workers are experienced, refresher training on the correct use of PPE is critical for safety, but also, reading this ebook might provide a deeper understanding of wider PPE-related issues.

Fight their corner: If workers are not being provided appropriately fitting PPE, support them in following your organisations processes, and help to get the right PPE for them.

Support community involvement: If members of your team want to be part of a wider EDI related or inclusive PPE working group, give them the time and space to do so. It's great that they want to get involved and this should be encouraged.

Notice unhelpful behaviours and comments: This goes without saying, but if you particularly notice any PPE-related comments, these need to be addressed.

Are you responsible for the Health and Safety of those wearing PPE?

You may have ultimate responsibility for your workplace's Health and Safety (and maybe Wellbeing). However you might not have line management responsibility for those wearing PPE, nor might you have budgetary control, both of which can present some challenges. As such, your responsibilities may include:

Develop and implement safety policies that include clear guidelines for PPE use, ensuring alignment with national and industry regulations.

Your role may be to ensure compliance with all safety standards.

Conduct risk assessments to identify workplace hazards and determine the appropriate type and level of PPE needed for various tasks.

Monitor compliance and investigate safety incidents, ensuring that PPE policies are being followed and adjusting the policies as needed based on new risks or regulations.

Coordinate with others in your organisation, including line managers and those that wear PPE to ensure PPE is used correctly and that it fits the specific safety needs of the job and the person.

Stay updated on new PPE technologies and best practices, ensuring that the organisation is adopting the latest advancements in worker protection.

Anything else?

Prioritise inclusivity in safety policies: Make sure that the PPE policies you create are inclusive of all workers.

Perform regular audits: PPE compliance should be regularly reviewed to ensure the equipment is being used properly and remains in good condition. Be vigilant in checking for any changes in job tasks or environments that may require new or different PPE.

Offer ongoing training on safety protocols: Workers and managers alike should be regularly trained on the importance of PPE, how to use it, and how to report issues.

Track and respond to incidents involving PPE: When an incident occurs, investigate whether the PPE was appropriate for the task, was worn correctly, or if there were issues with its fit or usability. This information can inform policy changes or PPE improvements.

Develop your own knowledge: Understand what inclusivity is in the workplace and how PPE can impact on people's mental as well as physical safety and wellbeing and support others in their understanding too.

Do you wear PPE?

As someone who wears PPE, only you can decide if it's comfortable, fits, and enables you to do your job safely and effectively. As an employee, you will likely have some level of responsibility associated with your PPE, such as:

Wearing PPE correctly at all times, following the training provided and adhering to safety guidelines. Proper use is critical to ensuring your protection from workplace hazards.

Reporting issues promptly such as discomfort, poor fit, or malfunctioning PPE. These issues can compromise your safety and the effectiveness of the equipment. Try to notice, does your PPE *actually* fit you? If, for example, you had to spend a weekend in your PPE, would that be a comfortable thing to do? Many people accept that their PPE doesn't fit, or causes them discomfort, because that's the way it's always been. So next time you put on your PPE, do check in with yourself and notice what is working well, and what isn't.

If it *doesn't* fit you appropriately, what options do you have? Realistically, depending on your organisation, you might have to wait until you are next due to have your PPE replaced, but you can always initiate that process early, especially if you need to highlight that a change is needed.

Put it in writing (usually via email) to your line manager (and the person responsible for your PPE policy if that's not the same person). If

you believe your PPE doesn't fit or is inappropriate because you are in an under-represented group in your organisation, you may wish to also include your Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (or equivalent) representative. You can find some sample text to help you raise this issue in the toolkit.

Maintain and store your PPE properly, ensuring it remains in good condition and ready for use. This includes cleaning, inspecting for damage, and reporting when replacements are needed.

Participate in safety training to ensure you are up-to-date on the correct use, maintenance, and requirements for PPE.

What else can you do?

Take responsibility for your safety: Wearing PPE properly is your first line of defence against hazards. Make sure you understand how to use it correctly, and never skip wearing it due to discomfort or inconvenience.

Speak up about fit and comfort issues: Poorly fitting PPE can cause discomfort or reduce your ability to perform your job safely. Don't hesitate to report issues to your supervisor. Your feedback is essential for improving the quality of PPE provided.

Send it back! For end-users, the main advice is to send it back if it's wrong. Report the issues, both within your organisation and to the supplier (or representative).

Share good news: Please do share when you do find good PPE! You could even tag in SHP to increase the reach of your findings.

Inspect your PPE regularly: Before each use, check that your PPE is in good condition and free from damage. If anything is wrong, report it immediately to get a replacement.

Be proactive in learning: Stay informed about the proper use and care of PPE. Regular training or refresher courses are important, especially as new PPE technology becomes available.

Become an ally for others: If you notice workmates or colleagues struggling with their PPE, assist them with changing too. Be proactive – support any PPE related initiatives within your organisation. Even if your PPE fits!

Leadership stance

Leadership support is crucial to the success of any inclusivity related initiative. In particular, providing inclusive PPE aligns well with company values; ensuring workers have access to safe, inclusive, and comfortable PPE demonstrates the company's commitment to employee wellbeing and diversity. In turn, we reduce long-term risks by addressing PPE issues early on, preventing costly injuries, safety violations, while leading to improved worker wellbeing. A successful inclusive PPE policy also serves to enhance company reputation. A company that prioritises worker safety and inclusivity attracts talent, reduces liability, and strengthens its brand as a responsible employer.

Leaders play a crucial role in driving the success of inclusive PPE initiatives. Without leadership support, projects are more likely to fail. Their buy-in goes beyond approving budgets and flashy campaign slogans; it involves actively championing the value of inclusivity and safety for all employees. By prioritising inclusive PPE, leaders signal that everyone's safety matters equally, regardless of role, gender, body type, culture, ethnicity or any other personal characteristics. Leaders should encourage open dialogue, listen to the needs and concerns of diverse workers, work

with all of the relevant personnel and teams, to ensure solutions are identified and implemented effectively. By promoting an environment that values both protection, inclusivity and respect, leaders can help embed inclusivity as a core principle within the organisation's safety practices, and above all, culture.

Availability of inclusive PPE

Over recent years, there have been some great advances in the availability of inclusive PPE. Things have changed, and are continuing to change. For example, you can now get:

- Maternity PPE
- Extra small and small safety gloves
- Safety footwear from size 1 (women) and up to size 16 (men)
- Hi-vis and arc flash clothing for females
- PPE hijabs
- High-vis clothing and accessories for wheelchair users
- Hard hats, safety goggles, visors in a range of sizes
- Fall protection for women's frames
- Menopause PPE

Sustaining momentum

Getting started is one thing, but with any new or improved process, maintaining momentum is key. Here are some tips to help:

- Place review points in your calendar (and those of others).
- Commit to continuous improvement.
- If processes aren't working, make changes! Don't stick with something that isn't providing value.
- Get feedback from all involved, about the PPE itself, the processes, what's better, what's worse? If you have an annual employee survey, this would be a good place to begin measuring.

Working toward more inclusive PPE is a meaningful step in improving safety and wellbeing in the workplace. While the process is likely to involve overcoming some barriers and challenges – such as balancing costs and sourcing appropriate equipment – the positive impact it will have on your team is significant. By ensuring that PPE fits a diverse range of needs, you're not only addressing safety concerns but also showing a commitment to inclusivity and respect for every individual in your workplace.

This initiative is important, and though it may take time to see the full benefits, every small step counts. Whether it's gathering feedback, finding solutions for better fit, or just starting the conversation, each action contributes to creating a more comfortable and safer work environment. Stay focused on the long-term goal, knowing that your efforts will lead to lasting improvements for your team and your organisation.

Guidance – Business case for inclusive PPE project

This document aims to provide guidance and an outline for creating a business case for your Inclusive PPE project. You can use it to help structure your case and arguments as to why your organisation should invest in inclusive PPE, and the steps needed to get there.

Tips:

- Do seek advice from others within your organisation that may have been through the process before.
- If you are intending to present to a Board or a Leadership team, circulate your document in advance.
- Speak to the intended audience and establish if they are expecting your business case to contain any specific information or be in a particular format.
- Have a "critical friend" read the document before you send it off – does it make sense? Have you told the story appropriately?

It is appreciated that every organisation has its own processes, and this document will align with some more than others, but it is hoped that the content will prove helpful for your journey.

1. Executive summary

Provide a brief overview of the business case, summarising the need for an inclusive PPE initiative. Highlight the key drivers and anticipated outcomes.

For example:

"This business case outlines the necessity and plan for implementing an inclusive PPE project. The aim is to improve the safety, wellbeing, and productivity of our workforce by ensuring that all employees, have access to properly fitting and functional protective equipment. Research has shown that inappropriate PPE contributes to reduced safety, lower wellbeing and can hamper productivity. Addressing this issue aligns with our commitment to employee wellbeing, inclusivity, and long-term organisational success." [note – you could put something specific here that aligns with your company values/mission/vision/objectives.]

2. Objectives

Project objectives: (you could create some objectives such as these below)

- Ensure all employees are provided with PPE that fits appropriately and accommodates individual needs.
- Enhance worker safety by reducing the risk of injuries due to ill-fitting or inadequate PPE.
- Foster a more inclusive workplace culture by addressing the specific needs of underrepresented groups and individuals.
- Improve employee satisfaction, morale, and productivity through better support and equipment.
- Reduce staff turnover and absenteeism by addressing discomfort and dissatisfaction related to PPE.

Ideally, you should have some measurable elements for your objectives. For example, you will measure worker satisfaction with PPE at set intervals, or you might wish to achieve a certain level of satisfaction.

3. Success criteria

How would your organisation be able to measure success? Consider what success might look like, and how you would measure it. You may need/wish to put in new processes or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in order to measure this on an ongoing basis, and you may need some historic or baseline date in order to evaluate any improvements.

Some examples of criteria include:

- Achieve measurable improvements in PPE fit and worker satisfaction
- Reduction in safety incidents related to PPE usage
- Increased PPE compliance
- Reduced downtime due to discomfort or ill-fitting equipment

4. Challenges and risks

Outline potential obstacles and challenges that the project may face. It might be worth acknowledging that this project might not yield an easily measurable monetary payback.

Challenges might include:

- Lack of clear monetary payback, as improvements in safety, wellbeing, and inclusivity are harder to quantify.
- Resistance from leadership or stakeholders focused on cost-saving measures over long-term benefits.
- Sourcing diverse PPE that meets both regulatory requirements and inclusivity goals.
- Lack of resource committed (time and money).
- Lack of buy in from those assigned to the team.

Risks might include:

- Delays in project approval if leadership is not fully convinced of the non-monetary benefits.
- Potential disruption during the research and implementation phases as new PPE is tested.
- Difficulty in ensuring that all workforce needs are met, especially in roles with varying PPE requirements.
- Difficulty in meeting expectations of all of the workforce.
- Increased costs due to increased return cycles while new PPE is tested.
- Potential to upset existing suppliers and lose any loyalty discounts.

5. Justification

Though it can be challenging to quantify, evidence shows that inappropriate PPE can lead to tangible and intangible benefits and costs:

Benefits

Increased safety: Ill-fitting PPE can leave workers vulnerable to hazards, leading to injuries, safety incidents, or non-compliance with safety regulations.

Increased wellbeing: Uncomfortable PPE can lead to dissatisfaction, stress, and physical discomfort, contributing to absenteeism and higher healthcare costs.

Increased inclusivity: Providing PPE that does not account for the diverse needs of the workforce can make some workers feel excluded, which can hurt engagement and loyalty.

Increased productivity: Discomfort and poor fit can cause workers to be less focused, take more breaks, or work more slowly.

Reduced staff turnover: Employees who feel that their safety or comfort is compromised by poor PPE are more likely to leave, increasing hiring and training costs.

Monetary costs (of not having inclusive PPE):

- Replacing employees (due to turnover) can cost 33% of their annual salary.
- Safety incidents can lead to insurance claims, compensation payouts, and regulatory fines.
- Downtime due to injuries or discomfort results in lost productivity and output.

Resource requirements

You will need to assemble a project team – or a "Task and Finish Group" – or however your organisation might define this. This should be a cross-functional working team that includes representatives from procurement, H&S/EHS, HR, and diverse workforce members to oversee the project.

Key Resources:

- **Project manager:** Oversee the project's progress and ensure timelines are met.
- **HR support:** To facilitate employee surveys and gather feedback on current PPE and alternatives.
- **Procurement specialist:** To engage with suppliers and source PPE options.
- **Safety Personnel:** To ensure that all new PPE meets safety standards and regulations.
- **PPE wearers:** To ensure that all aspects of the role and personal requirements are considered.

Project phases and timelines

Your project phases can readily follow the "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle. Your timeline should be realistic for your organisation and its processes, culture and speed of working. Only you know how quickly (or slowly!) things can change in your company.

A suggested timeline could be:

Phase 1: Research (Plan)

This phase could include the following steps:

Survey the workforce: Conduct surveys or interviews with employees to gather feedback on the fit, comfort, and usability of their current PPE. Establish your users' needs.

Assess existing PPE: Evaluate the current supply of PPE to identify shortcomings and gaps in fitting different worker needs.

Sample alternatives: Work with suppliers (or find new ones that are willing) to source and test alternative PPE options that better accommodate the diversity of your workforce.

Review processes: Aside from the PPE itself, what processes do you need to have in place to ensure inappropriate PPE issues are tackled (e.g. PPE feedback forms).

Phase 2: Implementation (Do)

Suggested steps include:

Pilot programme: Test the new PPE with a sample group, gathering feedback on comfort, fit, and usability. Also test feedback systems to ensure there are no gaps in data flow.

Rollout plan: Once the pilot is complete, finalise supplier contracts and distribute new PPE across the workforce.

PPE training: Ensure employees are properly trained on how to use the new PPE to maximise compliance and safety.

Process training: Ensure employees are properly trained on how to report inappropriate PPE

Phase 3: Review (Check)

Monitor performance: Regularly review the impact of the new PPE on safety, worker satisfaction, comfort, fit, and productivity.

Conduct follow-up surveys: Gather feedback to ensure the new PPE is effective and fits as intended.

Consider KPIs: Are KPIs an appropriate way to measure the success of your PPE programme.

Supplier engagement: How can you continue to engage with your suppliers to ensure current offerings?

Phase 4: Business as Usual (Act)

Ongoing review: Hold regular reviews of PPE fit and effectiveness part of routine safety audits to ensure the workforce's needs continue to be met.

Supplier engagement: Maintain relationships with PPE suppliers to stay updated on new innovations and improve future offerings.

You should include a Gannt chart to cover your project phases (and beyond if appropriate). You don't have to be a project expert to create this, a simple Excel format, might be sufficient at this stage, but do consider what is expected by your audience.

6. Leadership motivation

Here, you can explain the importance of leadership support for the project and how it aligns with the company's long-term goals.

Leadership support is crucial to the success of any inclusivity related initiative. In particular, this project aligns well with company values; ensuring workers have access to safe, inclusive, and comfortable PPE demonstrates the company's commitment to employee wellbeing and diversity. In turn, we reduce long-term risks by addressing PPE issues early on, preventing costly injuries, safety violations, while leading to improved worker wellbeing. A successful inclusive PPE policy also serves to enhance company reputation. A company that prioritises worker safety and inclusivity attracts talent, reduces liability, and strengthens its brand as a responsible employer.

7. Conclusion

Summarise the key points of the business case, reiterating the benefits of an inclusive PPE project.

For example:

"In conclusion, implementing an inclusive PPE project is not only a matter of 'doing the right thing' for the safety, wellbeing, and inclusivity of our workforce, but also a sound business decision that reduces the risk of safety incidents, turnover, and productivity loss. While the benefits may be difficult to quantify immediately, the long-term gains in employee satisfaction, reduced accidents, and better compliance make this project a critical investment in the company's future success."

Appendices

You could include any supporting materials here, such as:

- Results from preliminary surveys or interviews with employees about current PPE.
- Case studies from other companies that have successfully implemented inclusive PPE.
- A risk assessment showing the potential hazards of inappropriate PPE.

This template can be adapted depending on your specific company's requirements or expectations, ensuring you have a strong case to support an inclusive PPE initiative.

Conclusion

Throughout this practical guide, we've seen that inclusive PPE goes beyond regulatory compliance, it reflects an organisation's commitment to recognising, valuing and protecting every individual. Poorly fitting PPE can leave workers feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, and overlooked. By recognising the diverse needs of employees, we can create safer and more empowering workplaces, and instil a sense of belonging for all.

The journey to inclusive PPE is not a one-time fix but an ongoing effort. It requires collaboration across teams, continual feedback, and a willingness to innovate. More importantly, it reflects a cultural shift where diversity is respected, and every worker feels supported.

A final top five tips to be successful in your inclusive PPE journey:

1. Be open to new suppliers and brands, and new processes
2. Define and measure success
3. Don't forget your visitors
4. Inclusive PPE should be a community effort
5. Leadership buy-in is key

In championing inclusive PPE, you're not just improving safety, you're building a future where protection, equity, and belonging are central to your workplace.

Next steps – Get involved!

Pledge your commitment to providing inclusive PPE.

If your organisation or company is serious about providing appropriate and inclusive PPE, you can sign the SHP Inclusive PPE Charter.

This is a visible acknowledgement that you agree to the following:

- To uphold the value that all workers deserve access to well-fitting PPE to work comfortably, with the understanding that the standard sizing of PPE is not a one-size-fits-all.
- To proactively source suitable and correctly fitting PPE to meet the individual needs of any employees who require it, with the understanding that PPE may need to be sourced from more than one supplier.
- To work with any individual employee that has concerns or issues with the PPE provided to allow us to provide a suitable and well-fitting alternative.
- To provide inclusive PPE for all as part of our dedication to the health, safety and overall wellbeing of our employees.
- To lead by example and share best practice with contractors and suppliers.

In signing the Charter, you join other leading companies who have shown their commitment.

If you're interested in research around PPE or inclusive design, you can contact Debbie directly on d.j.janson@bath.ac.uk if you have any research ideas you'd like to explore.

Toolkit

- New PPE feedback form
- PPE satisfaction survey
- Email text to support raising an issue
- Email templates
- Gap analysis
- Inclusive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Policy

This section includes resources to help you on your journey to an inclusive PPE provision, whether you are an end user, EHS professional or business leader. The resources are intended as a starting point for you, or your organisation and you are free to adapt them as required.

SHP

New PPE feedback form

Please can you provide some feedback on the PPE that you received recently:

Your name:	**Date:**
Item type(s):	
Brand(s):	
Size(s):	
How is the fit:	
Is it comfortable:	
Do you feel safe wearing it:	
Does it stop you doing your job in any way?	
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your PPE? **(please tick or circle below)**	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Please hand/email this form back to [insert name here]. Thank you for your feedback – which will help us improve our PPE offering for all employees.

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Guidance

This template is intended to support you if you wish to survey your workforce about their satisfaction with current PPE provision. You can choose to make this survey anonymous, but having feedback that is specific to individuals will help you target any specific issues they might be facing.

You can add or remove questions or modify the existing questions for your own use.

Depending upon your organisation, you may wish to create this survey online (e.g. using Microsoft Forms), but it is also worth having paper copies for accessibility reasons.

PPE Satisfaction Survey

Purpose:

The purpose of this survey is to gather feedback from employees regarding the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) they use. The survey aims to identify areas where improvements can be made in terms of fit, safety, comfort, and overall usability, ensuring the PPE provided supports employees in performing their job effectively and safely.

Survey Instructions:

[Amend the below depending upon your approach]

The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous, unless you choose to share your name, and your feedback will be used to improve PPE for all employees. Please be as honest and detailed as possible in your answers.

Section 1: General Information about you

[If you are carrying out an anonymous survey, you may wish to make this section more open as otherwise job titles and departments might give away the identity of participants, depending upon the size of your organisation and the different roles and departments available).]

1. What is your job title? (Open-ended)
2. What department do you work in? (Dropdown list of departments)
3. How long have you been using the PPE provided by [Company Name]?**

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5+ years

Section 2: Types of PPE Used & Satisfaction

4. Please indicate which types of PPE you use in your role: [add options here that are appropriate for your company]

- Gloves
- Hard hat/helmet
- Safety glasses/goggles
- Hearing protection
- Respiratory protection (mask, respirator, etc.)
- Safety footwear (boots, shoes)
- High-vis jacket/coat
- High-vis vest
- High-vis trousers
- Safety harness or fall protection
- Flame-resistant clothing
- Other clothing (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

(open comments for additional PPE)

5. For each type of PPE you use, please rate the following aspects from:

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

a) Satisfaction with PPE **fit**?

b) Satisfaction with PPE **comfort**?

c) Satisfaction with how well your PPE allows you to move and perform your tasks without restriction?

Please tell us about any specific problems: (open text)

6. In general, how satisfied are you that your PPE provides the necessary protection for your job?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

Please tell us about any specific problems: (open text)

7. In general, how safe do you feel whilst wearing the PPE?

- Very safe
- Safe
- Neutral
- Unsafe
- Very unsafe
- Not sure

Please tell us about any specific problems: (open text)

8. Is the PPE easy to put on and take off?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neutral
- Difficult
- Very difficult
- Not sure

Please tell us about any specific problems: (open text)

9. How satisfied are you with the durability of the PPE?**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Not sure

Please tell us about any specific problems: (open text)

Section 3: Open-Ended Feedback

10. Have you experienced any issues with the fit of your PPE? (e.g. it takes a few goes to get the fit right, or never managed to get safety footwear that fits, etc.) (open-ended text)
11. Does any of the PPE you use interfere with your ability to perform your job effectively? If so, how? (open-ended text)
12. Have you ever had to modify or alter your PPE to make it fit or work better for you? If so, please explain. (open-ended text)
13. Have you ever bought your own PPE for work? What did you buy? (and if so, did you have to pay for it, or could you claim it back?) (open-ended text)
14. In your opinion, how could the PPE provided be improved to better meet your needs? (This could be needs related to fit, comfort, cultural, role, etc.) (open-ended text)
15. Do you feel that [Company Name] is committed to providing inclusive PPE for all employees, regardless of gender, body type, or other characteristics? Please explain your answer below. (open-ended text)

Section 4: Demographic Information [This could be optional, but is recommended]

16. How do you identify

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify if you are comfortable to do so) (open-ended text)

17. Do you have any disabilities or physical conditions that affect how you wear PPE?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- (If yes, please specify if you are comfortable to do so) (open-ended text)

18. Do you have any religious or cultural needs that affect how you wear PPE?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- (If yes, please specify if you are comfortable to do so) (open-ended text)

Section 5: Final Thoughts

19. Would you be willing to participate in future discussions or focus groups about improving PPE at [company name]?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- If No or Maybe – what is holding you back? (open-ended text)

20. Any additional comments or suggestions regarding PPE? (open-ended text)
21. If you have any specific queries that you would like us to respond to directly, please leave your name and email address below. This will mean that your responses are no longer anonymous, but will enable us to address any issues for you.

Name: (open-ended text)

Email address: (open-ended text)

Thank You Message

Thank you for participating in the PPE Satisfaction Survey. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us ensure that our workplace remains safe, inclusive, and comfortable for everyone.

Email templates for raising a PPE issue

Dear ** Line Manager **,

I am writing to raise an issue with my current PPE, in particular my [insert type of PPE here]. The main problem is that [add problem here, e.g. it's too tight/too loose/the sleeves are too long/the crotch lies too low/etc.] and this means that [I can't do my job safely/it's taking me longer to do my job/I'm constantly getting blisters/my back hurts/etc.].

Please can I request better fitting PPE to improve the situation? I know that brands such as [insert brand name] have created specific PPE for [insert anything relevant here] which I believe might be a better fit for me.

Please can you advise how to go about this within our company processes, or direct me to someone else who can help?

Kind regards,

[your name]

Example 1:

Dear Priya,

I am writing to raise an issue with my current PPE, in particular my safety footwear. The main problem is that they are too loose at the heel and the toe cap is digging in around my toes, and this means that I'm constantly getting blisters and having to alter the way I walk, which is making my back hurts.

Please can I request better fitting PPE to improve the situation? I know that brands such as V12 and Rockfall have created specific safety footwear for women which I believe might be a better fit for me.

Please can you advise how to go about this within our company processes, or direct me to someone else who can help?

Kind regards,

Alisha

Example 2:

Dear Geoff,

I am writing to raise an issue with my current PPE, in particular my Hi-Vis coat. The main problem is that the sleeves are too long this means that I'm struggling to safely use the controls in the forklift truck.

Please can I request better fitting PPE to improve the situation? I know that ARCO offer a range of different brands and I wondered if I could try a few alternatives which might be a better fit for me.

Please can you advise how to go about this within our company processes, or direct me to someone else who can help?

Kind regards,

Adit

SHP

Inclusive PPE gap analysis – guidance

In the excel file, you can find a self-assessment "rubric" which provides a structured (if subjective) way to assess how well an organisation meets inclusivity goals for PPE provision and identify areas for improvement.

It is recommended that you have multiple people complete this self-assessment form as part of a team effort – from those responsible for buying PPE, to budget holders and end users. This will help indicate where any gaps (or perceived gaps) lie in your provision and processes. Feel free to remove or amend questions that are irrelevant for your organisation.

1. Does your organisation [or insert company name] have a written and visible EDI policy
2. Do you believe that your organisation [or insert company name] genuinely value diversity?
3. When was the last review of PPE suppliers?
4. Do you consider the individual worker during the PPE ordering process
5. For new starters, is all branding completed within the same timeframe for all employees?
6. Is there a process for workers to return and replace their PPE?
7. Is there a check in process to understand how PPE is continuing to be appropriate after a given period of time?
8. Do you offer female specific PPE?
9. Do you know what to do if any of your workers wear a Hijab or Turban or have other cultural or religious needs?
10. How do you deal with PPE for visitors?

How to use the Rubric

- Review each question in turn, and the criteria against each point. You don't have to stick to 1, 3 or 5 points, you can make a judgement anywhere from 0-5. The criteria are rather subjective, which is why it is best to make this a team effort. The criteria also might need to be adjusted to be appropriate to your company.
- There is a space on each line for some comments to be made around potential improvements.
- Once you have awarded your company a score for each question, add up the scores to give your current total.
- You can now consider where your inclusive PPE priority areas might lie, which might be dependent upon resource availability and other priorities across your organisation. You can create some SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Time-bound) and make a note of these on the form.
- Set a reminder for a review, with some targets for improved scores, so that you can measure your progress. What would success look like for your organisation?

How to score and interpret the results

Scoring:

- ***Fully Met (5 points):*** The organisation has a robust, inclusive process in place and demonstrates full commitment to addressing the diverse needs of employees in all aspects of PPE provision.
- ***Partially Met (3 points):*** The organisation has taken some steps towards inclusivity in PPE, but there are gaps or inconsistencies in their approach.
- ***Not Met (1 point):*** The organisation has not adequately addressed inclusivity in PPE provision, and significant improvements are needed.

Total Score:

- ***45-50***: The organisation is excelling in inclusive PPE provision, with minor areas for improvement.
- ***30-44:*** The organisation has made progress but needs to address certain gaps to fully meet inclusivity standards.
- ***Below 30:*** The organisation has significant gaps in inclusive PPE provision and needs to prioritise improvements.

SHP

Inclusive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Policy

Purpose:

This policy outlines [Company Name]'s commitment to providing inclusive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that accommodates the diverse needs of our workforce. We recognise that safety and comfort in PPE are crucial for ensuring employees' well-being and productivity, regardless of gender, body type, size, or physical ability.

Scope:

This policy applies to all employees and visitors at all [Company Name] locations. It covers the selection, provision, and use of PPE in alignment with health and safety regulations.

Policy Statement

1. Commitment to Inclusivity:

[Company Name] is dedicated to providing PPE that fits all employees properly, including those who may have been traditionally underserved by standard equipment (e.g., women, individuals with smaller or larger body sizes, neurodivergent employees, or those with medical conditions or disabilities). We believe that everyone has the right to work in a safe environment with equipment that does not disadvantage or endanger them.

2. Needs Assessment:

A thorough assessment of employee needs will be conducted regularly to ensure the PPE provided meets not only the needs of the roles, but also diverse body sizes, shapes, and requirements. This may include:

- Consultation with employees to gather feedback on existing PPE.
- Surveys to identify gaps in PPE provision.
- Consideration of gender, size, ergonomics, and other relevant characteristics.

3. PPE Selection and Sourcing:

[Company Name] will work with suppliers who offer a range of PPE options that account for diverse employee needs. This includes offering multiple sizes, adjustable features (where available), and PPE designed specifically for different gender and anthropometric profiles where applicable.

4. Customisation and Adaptation:

Where appropriate, [Company Name] will provide appropriate PPE solutions to ensure comfort and safety for all workers. This includes ensuring that PPE such as gloves, helmets, safety harnesses, and protective clothing are suitable for individuals with unique body sizes or specific physical needs. Where necessary (and available) this PPE may be customised or adaptable.

5. Fit Testing and Adjustments:

Proper fit testing will be provided for all employees using critical PPE to ensure it meets individual needs. Regular checks will be conducted to ensure that the PPE remains suitable, and employees are encouraged to report any issues related to fit, discomfort or usability.

6. Inclusive PPE Training:

Training on the correct use and care of PPE will be provided to all employees, with additional guidance for those using specialised or adaptive equipment. The training will include awareness of the need for inclusive PPE and instruction on how to request alternatives or report any PPE issues.

7. Employee Feedback and Continuous Improvement:

Employees are encouraged to provide feedback regarding their PPE to ensure continuous improvement. Feedback will be reviewed regularly, and necessary updates or changes will be made to PPE offerings. A dedicated point of contact will be assigned to address any PPE concerns.

8. Equal Access:

No employee will be discriminated against or disadvantaged in terms of access to suitable PPE. All employees, regardless of their physical characteristics or abilities, will be supplied with PPE that enables them to perform their job safely and comfortably.

Compliance and Enforcement

All employees are required to wear PPE as stipulated by health and safety regulations [insert reference your country's regulations here] and company guidelines. Managers and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all employees have access to inclusive PPE and that they adhere to this policy.

Failure to provide or wear appropriate PPE may result in disciplinary action as outlined in [Company Name]'s Health and Safety Policy.

Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually or as necessary to ensure it reflects current best practices, employee feedback, and legislative requirements regarding inclusive PPE.

Effective Date: [Insert Date]

Reviewed By: [Insert Name/Position]

Approved By: [Insert Name/Position]

FAQs

It's impossible for me to make a change to my PPE. My company are rigid and won't change suppliers. What options do I have?

Safety culture varies within organisations and some don't realise the full value of providing appropriately fitting PPE. We would advise firstly having a conversation with the person responsible for procuring PPE, and raising the issues. Share this e-book with them, particularly the section on why appropriately fitting PPE is so important. You may need to escalate, raising your concerns in writing, and if necessary, get your union involved (see related question below).

Which suppliers should I go to?

As an independent publisher, we are unable to provide specific recommendations. However, if you take a look at our content on LinkedIn, we will often share posts from individuals that test and review inclusive PPE.

I have needs because of my religion, what can I do?

In line with the *2010 Equality Act*, your company must not discriminate against you on the basis of your religion. You should be provided the same level of protection as your colleagues, but this may mean that you need modified or specific PPE depending on your specific needs.

My company/line manager refuses to accept that my PPE won't fit, what can I do to escalate this?

You should raise this in writing with your line manager, the person responsible for Health and Safety in your organisation (if different) and any other people that you wish to be involved (e.g. a Human Resources representative, or a Union representative). *The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations (Amendment) [6]* states that PPE is not suitable unless:

- It is appropriate for the risks and the conditions at the place of work.
- It takes account of ergonomic requirements and the state of health of the person who may wear it.
- It is capable of fitting the wearer correctly (if necessary after adjustments within the design range).
- So far as is reasonably practicable, it is effective to prevent or adequately control the risk, without increasing overall risk.
- It complies with community directives applicable to the item (i.e. CE marked).

So, you need to decide which of these is causing the issue for you, and make note of that in your email. Advise what steps you have taken to source PPE within the process available to you. If you have any suggestions for solutions, it may be helpful to include this too. There is an example email template for approaching such situations included in the Toolkit.

My organisation does a great job with PPE – how can I spread the word?

This is great to hear! Please get in touch – we'd love to share your story!

How can I get involved in research around PPE?

We'd love to hear from you. You can contact SHP or Debbie directly on d.j.janson@bath.ac.uk if you have any research ideas you'd like to explore.

References

All quotes in the sidebar on pages 5-8 taken from the study below:

[1] D. J. Janson, V. Dhokia, K. Banks, J. H. D. Rodohan, and B. C. Clift, "PPE: pockets, perceptions and equity–the untold truth of PPE: a reflexive thematic analysis," International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics, 2024, doi: 10.1080/10803548.2024.2404748.

[2] TUC, "Personal protective equipment and women," 2017. [Online]. Available: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/PPEandwomenguidance.pdf

[3] R. Ball, C. Shu, P. Xi, M. Rioux, Y. Luximon, and J. Molenbroek, "A comparison between Chinese and Caucasian head shapes," Appl Ergon, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 832–839, 2010, doi: 10.1016/j.apergo.2010.02.002.

[4] A. Jurca, J. Žabkar, and S. Džeroski, "Analysis of 1.2 million foot scans from North America, Europe and Asia," Nature Publishing Group, vol. 9, no. 19155, 2019, doi: 10.1038/s41598-019-55432-z.

[5] Equality Act. UK Government, 2010.

[6] UK Government, The Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022. 2022.

About the author

Dr Debbie Janson PhD, MEng, CEng, FIMechE - Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor), University of Bath

Debbie's passion for inclusivity, combined with 20 years of hands-on industrial experience, as well as academic teaching in engineering management processes, positions her as one of the leading authorities on the complexities of inclusive PPE and its critical role in creating safer, more inclusive work environments. She holds a Mechanical Engineering Doctorate in Gender and Sex Bias in PPE Provision, and was one of the top 50 women in engineering in 2021 for her work in this area. Her expertise lies in integrating human-centred research, the psychological impact of engineering, and a strong focus around diversity and inclusivity.

This e-book is informed by Debbie's extensive collaborations and research, including work on how inclusive design can drive both safety and well-being in the workplace. Having led discussions and research on product design for under-represented groups, she understands the practical challenges and solutions for ensuring that PPE meets the needs of all workers. Debbie's passion for inclusivity, backed by years of practical experience and academic insight, positions her as one of the leading authorities on the complexities of inclusive PPE and its critical role in creating safer, more inclusive work environments.

Dr Debbie Janson PhD, MEng, CEng, FIMechE
Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor), University of Bath