

Creating a healthy and engaged workforce

A guide for employers



Sheffield
Hallam University

Introduction

The health and wellbeing of your workforce is fundamental to the achievement of your company's current goals and future ambitions.

Having healthy, stress-free and well-motivated employees could result in better staff retention rates, lower levels of sickness and higher levels of performance by your workers. There are strategies you can undertake as an employer to help ensure the wellbeing of your staff and your business.

In this booklet we hope to show you what you could do to promote a healthy workforce. There is no single process or procedure which will bring this about. A variety of initiatives can be used and employers can choose the best options for their staff and business.

This booklet explores the opportunities open to you, including useful tips and case studies to encourage and inspire you.



Health and wellbeing at work

Health and wellbeing at work helps to ensure that:

‘People are able to work, they are happy and healthy at work and that those with health problems or disabilities can benefit from improved working conditions’

(The Health, Work and Wellbeing Strategy 2005)

Recent government initiatives have highlighted the need for you, as an employer, to adopt a holistic approach to health and wellbeing in order to meet the needs of your workforce, and your business. This includes being

- *proactive* rather than *reactive* to the health issues faced by your employees
- focused on the prevention of injuries and illnesses
- effectively managing an employee’s return to work after a period of absence

There are a range of support initiatives to draw on, all of which will improve the health and wellbeing of your employees.

Employee wellness includes three main areas:

1. Health and safety

Initiatives in this area are driven by government policy and shaped by statutory requirements.

2. Management of ill health

Work in this area includes occupational health, rehabilitation, long-term disability management, return to work schemes and absence management programmes.

3. Prevention and promotion

There are a range of initiatives that support this element, including health promotion activities, work/life balance and time management schemes.

What can affect workplace wellbeing?

- ▶ **the age and profile of your workforce** may be changing and this can influence your employees' health and wellbeing needs
- ▶ **a changing job profile** with, for example, a decrease in manual labour and an increase in office-based work, can alter the types of illnesses and injuries experienced by your staff and require you to address workplace wellness in a different way
- ▶ **the expectations of your employees** may go beyond the traditional 'health and safety' model of occupational health to include a range of health promotion services



Why you should engage in workplace health and wellbeing

In 2008 *Working for a healthier tomorrow*, a government-commissioned review by Dame Carol Black, emphasised the importance of workplace wellness. This placed health, work and wellbeing at the top of the political and business agenda.

The Black review and other reports showed that poor health of the workforce is a cost to employers through both increased absenteeism and lowered job performance and is a concern which can no longer be avoided. The facts below underline the cost of ill health.

- ▶ 30 million working days are lost in the UK because of occupational illness and injury. They cost the economy £30 billion – approximately 3% of the GDP per year. According to the Confederation of British Industry, sickness absence can cost roughly £495 per employee per year, a particularly high cost for small and medium enterprises.
- ▶ estimates suggest that stress and back pain are costly conditions, costing the British economy £3.7 billion and £5 billion per year respectively
- ▶ 63% of employees believe corporate fitness provision enhances staff loyalty

- ▶ fit and/or active individuals are less responsive to psychosocial stressors
- ▶ accidents and injuries are estimated to cost an additional £512 million annually
- ▶ the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that musculoskeletal disorders were responsible for 9.5 million lost working days in 2005/6
- ▶ approximately 13.8 million working days were lost in 2006/7 due to work-related stress, depression and anxiety
- ▶ employees suffering from stress are also more likely to report depression and other psychosomatic complaints. This results in greater need for recovery due to exhaustion and fatigue compared to workers without high levels of work-related stress.

Presenteeism could cost employers two to seven times more than absenteeism.

- ▶ the costs of 'presenteeism', such as reduced performance and productivity due to ill health while at work, are more difficult to measure. While hard data on the costs of presenteeism in the UK is unavailable at this time, preliminary

evidence suggests that presenteeism could cost employers two to seven times more than absenteeism.

- ▶ research shows that smokers cost employers 64 minutes a day in lost productivity
- ▶ the costs of ill health for many employers, given the ageing population and the increase in chronic disease, will only grow and is enough to justify a comprehensive wellness scheme

Smokers cost employers 64 minutes a day in lost productivity

Benefits of a healthy workforce

- improved productivity and performance
- more effective management of absenteeism
- fewer injuries, accidents and claims
- improved staff morale
- employees more receptive to and better able to cope with change
- increased staff retention

Your statutory obligations as an employer – creating a safe and healthy workplace

Implementing health and safety measures does not have to be expensive, time-consuming or complicated. In fact, safer and more efficient working practices often save money and, more importantly, help to reduce injuries and even save lives.

- ▶ know your responsibilities as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work Act and associated legislation
- ▶ be aware of the concerns your employees have about their own health and safety
- ▶ involve your employees in any ideas and developments about health and safety

Be aware of the concerns your employees have about their own health and safety.

- ▶ assess the possible risks to the health and safety of your employees – both physical and psychological – from their work
- ▶ lead by example – employees are more likely to take health and safety seriously if they can see that you, the employer, are serious about these issues
- ▶ consider how you could use current resources such as occupational health services and wellness programmes, which may be delivered in-house or externally contracted to improve the health of your employees

What you can do
to improve and
maintain the health
and wellbeing of
your workforce



Leadership

Positive leadership can shape the culture of a company and organisation. It is critical to engage senior management at the earliest stage and promote active leadership in wellness initiatives.

- ▶ coach senior leadership about their own wellness. Run a focused initiative to raise awareness among senior managers.
- ▶ ask senior management, including the chief executive, to lead employee focus or 'listening' groups on wellness issues
- ▶ create a team of stakeholders from across departments to ensure programme buy-in

Culture

Creating a culture of wellness is integral because it then becomes part of the company's overall mission, shared by its employees.

- ▶ align wellness with business strategy
- ▶ ensure regular board monitoring of wellness programmes
- ▶ produce an annual report on the company's physical health

- ▶ make changes in your office layout to create a more effective or relaxed atmosphere

Importance of communication

Having effective communication channels is key to the success of any change initiative. These could include

- ▶ internet-based communications about wellness initiatives
- ▶ wellness helplines and resources
- ▶ management-led focus groups or 'listening' sessions
- ▶ existing forums, message boards, posters or flyers, and educational sessions



Levels of intervention

There are numerous options available at different levels to help you achieve the goal of a healthy and motivated workforce – but one size does *not* fit all.

Recruitment, retention and rehabilitation

- be aware of your responsibilities as an employer under the new Equality Act 2010
- to manage sickness absence, develop a policy to include accurate data collection and reporting
- maintain contact with employees during their sickness absence, and carry out return-to-work interviews to plan how to support them with their return to work
- offer access to physiotherapy or occupational rehabilitation services

Mental wellbeing and minimising stress

- undertake a risk assessment for work-related stress using the HSE guidance
- make an action plan
- raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues among the rest of the workforce to avoid stigma

Supporting musculoskeletal disorders - such as lower back pain and joint injuries

- implement procedures to ensure prompt reporting of possible musculoskeletal symptoms, early assessment, and discussion and follow-up of assessments. Agree with

employees changes aimed at preventing others being affected.

- where work involves frequent repetitive tasks, consider appropriate rest breaks and rotation of workers between tasks to allow muscles to recover
- be ready to accept people back to work even if they are not totally free from symptoms. In many cases recovery is assisted by activity, including return to work.

Changing behaviour – smoking, alcohol and substance misuse

- find out what help or support is available from your local stop-smoking service and advertise it internally
- ensure that every employee is informed of the smoke-free policy and its implications. Include the policy in all recruitment and induction packs.
- if you have any designated smoking areas, make sure they are effectively screened so that smoke does not adversely affect other employees at work
- establish a policy and code of conduct for alcohol and substance misuse in the workplace, involving employee representatives

- make sure that the policy includes information about the level of support – including counselling or professional help – an employee will receive if alcohol or drug problems are recognised
- provide employees with information on the effects of alcohol and drugs and sources of support

Physical activity

- encourage employees to walk or cycle to work
- involve employees in organising a workplace activity programme to encourage them to be more active both in and outside of working hours
- encourage the use of stairs rather than lifts
- provide information on the benefits of physical activity
- consider negotiating discounted membership of a local gym for employees, and supporting activity or sports programmes in and outside the workplace

Healthy eating

- provide a range of healthy foods and drinks
- identify the healthier options on menus
- provide information on healthy eating and support healthy eating weeks

Provide training opportunities, including

- supporting employees with long-term health conditions
- stress management for the workplace
- supporting the older worker
- making reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- mental health first aid

Other measures

You could be more creative in how you encourage a healthy workforce

- provide free fruit for employees
- stock vending machines with energy-rich ‘brain food’
- arrange regular social outings to create good team spirit, such as quiz nights or bowling
- have motivational messages as screen savers
- organise pilates or yoga classes
- have lunchtime massage sessions
- offer incentives for people to cycle to work, such as a contribution towards the cost of a bike

For employers who want something more formal, you may prefer to sign up for a specific health cash plan.

Involve employees in
organising a workplace activity
programme to encourage
them to be more engaged



Sheffield Hallam's choice of initiatives

At Sheffield Hallam University, we believe that people are an organisation's most valuable asset. We also recognise that there are strong links between good health and happier staff, and enhanced work productivity and effectiveness.

To that end, we have

- implemented a raft of initiatives to appeal to various employee needs and motivations. For example, we offer a contribution to buying a bike to encourage people to cycle to work.
- ensured that fruit and energy foods are available at each of our food outlets for staff and students
- offered reduced membership rates for the University's gym and fitness facilities
- developed SHUWellness

SHUWellness

SHUWellness is a programme for our employees, now in its fifth year, which gives each member of staff an annual health check that we carry out in house. The aim is not just to advise individuals on what areas they need to improve, but to help them bring about a change in behaviour to reach certain goals and then work with them to achieve this.

More than 2,000 members of staff have accessed the programme so far and a recent employee opinion survey found that 97 per cent of staff who attended a SHUWellness session agreed that it is a valuable staff benefit.

In 2009, SHUWellness additionally offered individually tailored one to one behaviour change consultations on health topics ranging from physical activity to support to stop smoking. Typical consultations test employees' cholesterol, blood pressure, lung function and the results are compiled in a written report to support an individual's lifestyle change.

These consultations can lower the risk of employees suffering from illness and disease. For example three quarters of staff who were referred to a Stop Smoking service successfully quit.

Responses from staff show overwhelming support for the service, which has helped them to make positive changes to their lifestyle behaviours.

Responses from staff show overwhelming support for the service, which has helped them to make positive changes to their lifestyle behaviours.



Talk to us

We offer several services at the University that may help you to enhance the wellbeing of your employees.

Contact us to discuss your organisation's health-related challenges.

A balance performance monitor can help identify musculoskeletal disorders in your employees, which are among the most common reasons for workplace absence.



From physiotherapy and occupational therapy, to short courses and consultancy, we can help you to deliver simple initiatives or develop an effective wellbeing strategy.

We've outlined several of our most popular services below to give you an idea of how we could help.

Physiotherapy and occupational therapy

We have a clinic which offers professional physiotherapy and occupational rehabilitation to organisations and their employees. Our expert clinical staff have extensive experience in designing personalised solutions to assess, diagnose and treat a wide range of conditions.

Physical working environment

We can visit your workplace to look at the physical environment from an ergonomic perspective, and suggest any changes that could help your employees work more comfortably and effectively. The services can make a real difference to your costs by getting staff back to work sooner and improving their capacity at work.

Staff health checks

Although as a University we are a large organisation, other companies can do something similar to our SHU Wellness programme on a scale to suit your situation.

We offer a 'train the trainer' service for companies wanting to run their own equivalent service in-house. Here, a member of staff or team within your company is given the skills to deliver your own operation, offering a sustainable and cost effective solution. This would enable you to offer staff health check-ups in-house and give them advice on how to improve their health and wellbeing.

We have worked with local employers such as Rare Creative, B Braun, Pro Sheffield, Lookers Ford and a number of local authorities to improve the wellness of their staff.

We are currently developing a software tool for organisations to use for this purpose which will make it easier for in-house operations to run the more technical elements of a service.

Training and educating staff

'Behaviour change' techniques are increasingly being adopted to encourage healthier lifestyle choices and we have a team of experts in this field who can show you how to harness these ideas to make your workforce healthier.

We provide a range of courses to help staff understand the underpinning theories of behaviour change, essential for creating effective change programmes. These theories have proven successful in a number of drives to change behaviour. A larger scale example is the Government's recent Change4Life campaign which is using these methods to tackle the issue of obesity.

Our experts have also worked closely with a number of employers to create tools and products to motivate their customers and staff to make positive lifestyle choices. These have included an interactive DVD to help people become more physically active and an online learning tool to increase employees' understanding of behaviour change.

