

HEALTH ACTION CAMPAIGN

because **prevention** is better than cure



HEALTH AT WORK EMPLOYERS' GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

We have researched Health at Work across the public, private and not for profit sectors, both before and during COVID-19, including reviewing reports from business organisations, employers, health charities, government departments, management consultancies and think tanks, as well as published academic research and media coverage. We have also reviewed case studies across employment sectors, including advertising, the armed forces, the automobile industry, education, financial services, the hospitality industry, local government, manufacturing, media, the NHS, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications and transport. And we have spent time listening to and talking with employers and employees.

This report summarises the points we anticipate employers will find most useful.

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Michael Baber
Director
Health Action Campaign



HEALTH AT WORK – THE BUSINESS CASE

Maintaining health at work during the COVID-19 pandemic was often business critical. However, the importance of health for business performance was clear even before COVID and will continue to be so in the years ahead.

For example, in 2019 (the year before COVID) the insurer Vitality reports ill-health related absence and presenteeism cost British businesses and the economy an estimated £91.9 billion.

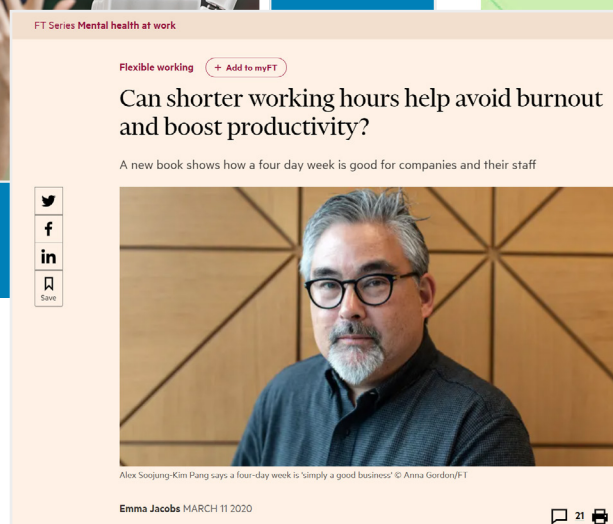
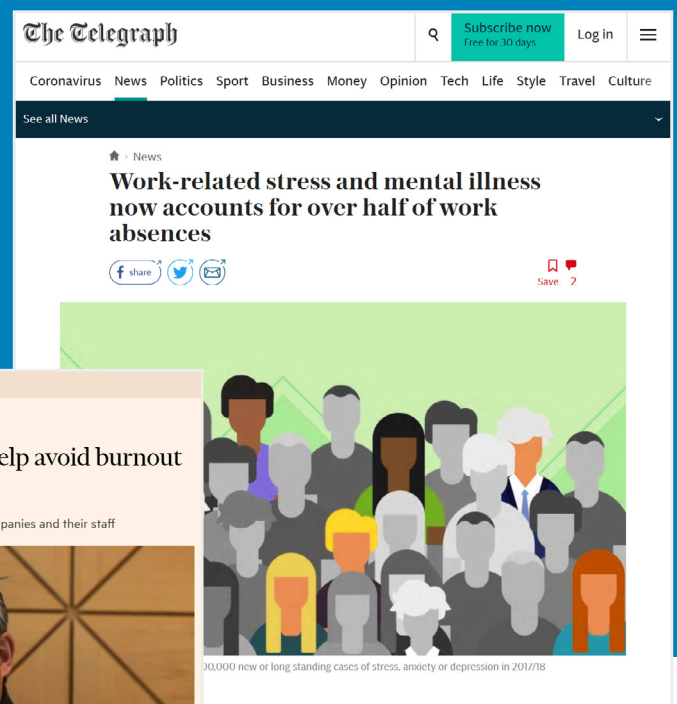
The business case is clear. Would you like to see:

- Fewer staff off sick?
- Lower staff turnover?
- Higher productivity?

These are some of the benefits claimed for Health at Work programmes. Probably the easiest to measure is annual sickness levels. Across the public, private and voluntary sectors, a range of organisations that have adopted health and wellness initiatives have seen sickness levels fall e.g.

- BT saw a 30% reduction in mental-health related illness.
- Kent County Council saved £2 million through reduced sickness levels and reported higher staff morale and performance.
- Shroders saw a 32% decrease in the risk of participants developing a common mental health problem

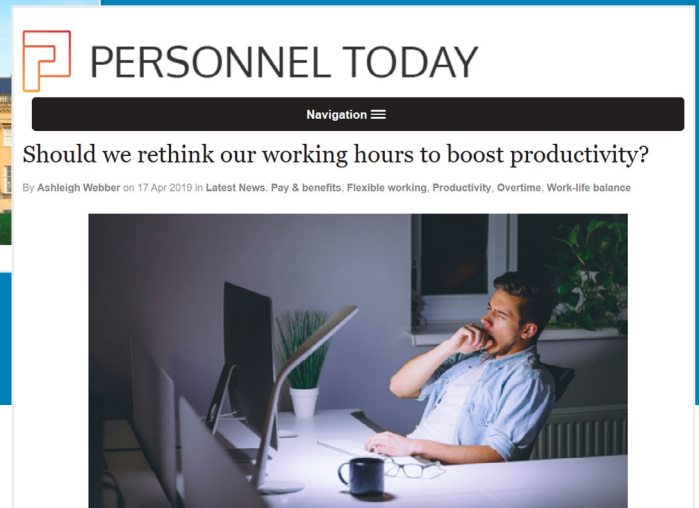
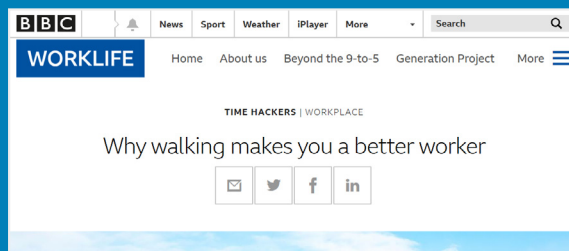
Consider too the costs of NOT taking action. In their 2020 report Mental health and employers, Deloitte calculates the cost of poor mental health for employers as now being up to £45 billion. This may help explain why their latest Return on Investment analysis shows that on average employers obtain a return of £5 for every £1 invested on interventions to tackle mental health issues.



“ The evidence shows that people who achieve good standards of well-being at work are likely to be more creative, more loyal, more productive, and provide better customer satisfaction than individuals with poor standards of well-being at work.

Well-being at work: a review of the literature (nef consulting)

As with any organisational change, it isn't just what you do but how you do it that makes a difference. In this guide we'll therefore be looking at both the what and the how.



WHERE ARE YOU STARTING FROM?



What are you already doing to encourage Health and Wellbeing at Work? Here are some questions, to help you see how far you are down the road and where some further action might be needed.

No	Question	Yes/No
	1. We have a Health at Work Policy and this includes mental health	
	2. We have Health/Wellbeing Champions	
	3. We arrange regular staff wellbeing surveys – and act on the findings	
	4. We help employees manage factors that may influence health –including workload, the work environment, communication, working relationships, hours worked and working patterns	
	5. We undertake health risk assessments for all employees, including what is needed to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal problems and if there has been a move to remote working	
	6. We provide a Smoke Free environment	
	7. We ensure lighting and temperature can easily be controlled by employees	
	8. We encourage employees to contribute to Health at Work initiatives, including taking their suggestions on board	
	9. We encourage and support employees wishing to take part in physical activity (for instance through cycle to work schemes, gym membership discounts, sports teams etc.)	
	10. We suggest practical ways employees can avoid spending all day in sedentary activities, including working at computer screens	
	11. We identify and address the common causes of chronic stress and work-related mental health issues	
	12. We encourage employees to be open about mental health and support them if issues arise	
	13. We ensure all employees have clearly defined roles and clear expectations about what the role involves	



No	Question	Yes/No
14.	We provide clear, achievable routes for career development	
15.	We provide a forum where employees can raise job or work concerns	
16.	We ensure line managers offer the employees they are managing regular meetings to discuss work-related issues	
17.	We regularly measure job satisfaction across the organisation and take action where issues are identified	
18.	We offer flexible working where feasible	
19.	We actively encourage work-life balance, rather than a long hours culture	
20.	We are aware of the health implications of night shifts/working through the night and are taking action to minimise adverse health effects	
21.	We arrange training for HR staff on mental health issues	
22.	We invite dieticians or reputable weight management organisations to talk to employees about healthy eating	
23.	We provide Return to Work interviews following sickness absence, where appropriate putting reasonable adjustments in place.	
24.	We arrange external Health checks for employees at least once every 3 years	
25.	We provide access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), an Occupational Health service or a counselling service	

How much you can afford to do will, of course, depend on your circumstances as an employer. However, many of these initiatives require little budget commitment. If they reduce sickness absence and staff turnover, while increasing staff engagement and productivity, then they are likely to prove a sound investment.

MANAGING THE MAJOR HEALTH RISKS AS AN EMPLOYER

Stress and Mental Health

This is an increasing concern for employers. If you are expecting a lot from your staff, think how you can reduce stress and avoid triggering mental health problems - by enhancing the control employees have over their work and by the support, security and development opportunities you provide. Some practical management options are:

- A Mental Health policy, developed in consultation with staff, that sets out what you will do to reduce the risk of stress and mental illness, and support those experiencing stress or mental health conditions. *Workable* have a useful Mental Health Policy template to help get you started - <https://resources.workable.com/mental-health-policy-template>
- Mental Health Champions, Mental Health First Aid training and support where access to specialist Mental Health support is needed.
- Training your managers and supervisors, especially to enhance their people management skills - so they are better placed to avoid problems arising and to deal with them more effectively if they do arise.
- A Special Leave policy which includes providing leave for family emergencies.

You may also find these resources helpful:

- Business in the Community (BIC) - Mental Health Toolkit for Employers
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) - Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach
- ISO 45003 - The first global standard giving practical guidance on managing psychological health at work.

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)

27% of all work days lost due to ill health in 2019/20 were attributed to MSDs - pain or injury which impacts the joints, bones and muscles, as well as back problems. Common risk factors include repetitive strain, sitting or standing in awkward positions and heavy lifting. So consider:

- Ergonomic assessment for all employees to ensure working conditions support healthy staff posture and highlight the need to regularly move around - including for the increasing number of staff working from home.
- Encouraging physical activity during the working day, providing alternative keyboards/adjustable chairs/standing desks, and regular screen breaks.

Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs

17 million sick leave days each year are attributed to alcohol, while smokers claim more sick days than non-smokers each year and take more breaks during the working day. To reduce the risks to you as an employer and to your employees:

- Become a completely Smoke Free workplace i.e. don't provide designated outdoor smoking areas. Instead, provide support for those who want to quit smoking e.g. information on self-help, individual counselling, group smoking cessation groups and free or subsidised nicotine replacement therapies.
- Train managers to recognise the signs of alcohol and illegal or prescription drug addiction, and provide them with the skills and the knowledge of referral pathways to manage these instances.

Women's Health

Women are likely to be affected at some stage by a health issue related to their gender, be that endometriosis, infertility, pregnancy, miscarriage or menopause. These can have both physical and psychological implications. So:

Promote a culture where reasonable adjustments are made to help women suffering with health issues at work e.g. simple interventions may make women experiencing pregnancy or menopause feel more comfortable, such as adjusting the office temperature, improving ventilation or allowing them to wear comfortable clothing

- Adopt sickness absence policies which recognise women's health issues and ensure women are not disciplined for taking health-related time off work.
- Involve women in the decision-making processes and discussions around a company policy on women's health.

Men's Health

There are also health issues where men are more likely to be at risk, including prostate cancer. It may help to share information on the main risk factors, so male employees can seek medical advice if they are in a high risk group and also consider lifestyle changes to reduce the risk -

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/prostate-cancer/risks-causes>

Men are also less likely to go their GP to seek help for mental or physical health problems. This increases the risk of late diagnosis and more serious illness. Encouraging male employees in particular to seek medical advice and facilitating doctors' appointments may save time and money in the long run.



QUALITY OF WORK AND ITS EFFECT ON HEALTH

The best starting point for a healthy workforce is an environment your employees enjoy working in, with roles designed to get the best out of them, so they can succeed and be satisfied in their work. This can, in turn, boost productivity – an important factor in business success.

The Institute of Employment Research has identified six high level indicators of quality:

- Wages
- Employment quality
- Education and training
- Working conditions
- Work life balance
- Consultative participation and collective representation.

How well would you say you are providing these quality of work indicators?



“ While having employment is itself vital to people’s health and well-being, the quality of people’s work is also a major factor in helping people to stay healthy and happy.

The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices 2017

Tips for creating a healthy workplace

Three factors that have a particularly strong influence on wellbeing are **job control**, **management and social support**, and a **culture that promotes healthy working**. Initiatives focusing on these factors are likely to achieve the biggest returns on improving employee wellbeing.

Job control

- Provide a safe and comfortable workplace e.g. suitable equipment, lighting and noise control
- Clearly define roles, aim for variety, and avoid repetitive duties
- Involve employees in planning their workload, training and development
- Offer clear and achievable routes for career development and promotion

Management and social support

- Develop, document, and involve employees in supervision and appraisal processes
- Provide networking opportunities for employees from across the organisation
- Develop and promote policies to challenge any form of discrimination
- Provide a forum for employees to express any concerns about working practices

Culture of healthy working

- Provide opportunities and technology for flexible working
- Encourage boundaries and balance between work-life and home-life
- Encourage employees to be open about any health issues or concerns

Addressing these issues can help prevent common causes of employee illness. Prevention is not only better than cure, but often cheaper too.

HEALTH AT WORK IN A CHANGING WORLD

Brexit, COVID-19 and a Fourth Industrial Revolution are just three of the changes your organisation may have been having to manage, alongside a range of more local or sector-specific changes. These changes may place your organisation's very survival at risk.

This means it's important to consider how health at work fits into this changing landscape. A greater focus on health at work may help you build a more resilient organisation, better placed to both guard against emerging challenges and take advantage of new opportunities.



Transitioning through change

The COVID-19 pandemic is an example. While some people may have been able to make a return to more 'normal' working following vaccination, others have been less fortunate, for example due to long COVID, 'burn out' as a frontline worker, mental health problems surfacing during COVID, financial problems due to COVID, and delayed diagnosis and treatment of non-COVID conditions.

As this example shows, whatever major change your organisation has been going through, as you come out of the other side you may need to plan a transition period for those most affected.



Remote Working

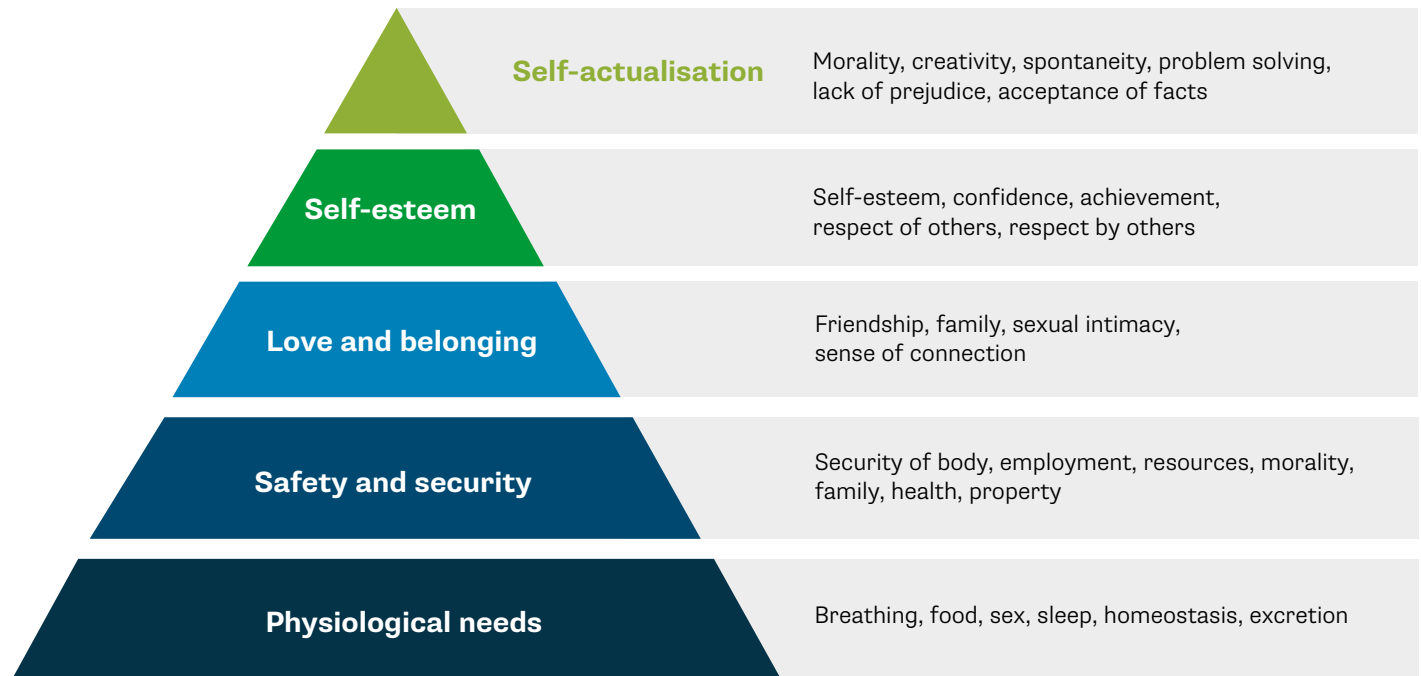
Remote working became more common during COVID and is likely to continue to varying degrees in the years ahead, as there are advantages for both organisations and the people who work for them. However, to avoid possible health risks to employees, arrange a risk assessment and also:

- Ensure people regularly doing 'office work' from home have appropriate office furniture and an external PC keyboard and mouse, to avoid musculoskeletal problems.
- Don't rely purely on how well people appear in online meetings, as they may, for instance, be able to hide dangerous levels of stress more easily online than when they are alongside others in the workplace.
- Explore ways of providing a social dimension every month while working from home, recognising that social isolation can be as harmful for health as smoking or diabetes. Long term it can increase the risk of post-traumatic stress, depression, general psychological distress and avoidant behaviours. This may be a particular issue for people who are single and those who live alone.
- Remember that young people and new employees may be most adversely affected by remote working, as it limits the informal advice, mentoring and support, the non-verbal cues about the workplace culture, and the bonding with colleagues which being in a workplace will usually have provided for established staff.
- Consider what to do where remote working means remote not just from the place of work but also remote from clients, customers or patients with whom there was previously face to face interaction. This lack of face-to-face contact may change the role significantly and reduce job satisfaction over time.
- Consider how to balance different working preferences, fairness and productivity, as working remotely may suit some people better than others and may sometimes cause resentment among people who can't work from home.



Human Nature

A useful starting point here is that the world may be changing but human nature tends not to. For example, the psychologist Abraham Maslow identified a range of human motivational needs in his iconic hierarchy of needs:



Action you take in the following areas is likely to enhance motivation and support mental and physical health:

- A living wage – so people can afford to feed themselves and their families, without having to rely on food banks, and can ensure they have a decent roof over the heads.
- Job security – so people can concentrate on their work, instead of worrying about their future.
- Actively engaging with staff, including remote and gig economy workers – to encourage their commitment to their work and the organisation.
- Recognise what people achieve – to build and support their self-esteem.
- Provide opportunities for people to grow and develop and achieve more of their potential.

Leadership

An important contribution you can make as a leader in your organisation is to help your people understand, make sense of, contribute to and own the changes the organisation is going through and the reasons for this. Consistency is also important here. If your first instinct is to preserve management posts while laying off lower paid staff, or if you have a range of health at work initiatives but then make staff redundant in a way seen as unfair or unfeeling this is unlikely to engender confidence and commitment or to contribute to health at work.

CASE STUDIES

Digital Outlook Communications

This London-based digital marketing and creative agency wanted to ensure the intense, long hours culture of its industry didn't become a barrier to employee health and wellbeing. An initial survey gathered employees' feedback on their wellbeing and the perceived quality of leadership and management.

A wellbeing team, supported by senior management, was then established to gather suggestions for, and implement, initiatives. These included: the introduction of flexible working; promotion of the employee benefits system; revamping the agency's charging system to enable employees to reduce working hours while still meeting financial targets; a mentoring and development scheme; improving the ergonomic working environment; and establishing health and wellbeing as a key performance indicator for all senior managers.

Health and wellbeing survey scores improved 11%, better than all other small media companies surveyed that year. Sickness absence rates fell 95% – down from 4 days per person to 0.22 days per person two years' later. Staff turnover reduced from 34% to 9% in just one year, resulting in savings in recruitment, training and induction costs.

GlaxoSmithKline

This global healthcare company has an employee health management (EHM) team. This provides a holistic approach to managing the overall health of employees, covering mental health, musculoskeletal health, material handling and attendance management. The team includes health and resilience project leaders, whose role is to design and implement healthcare programmes.

One example is the participatory workplace ergonomics programme. Local ergonomic improvement teams were established at each site, made up of employees representing different functions. This included engineers, office support staff and onsite EHM and health and safety professionals. Team members are given basic ergonomics training, a toolkit and access to a dedicated ergonomics website to provide support. The teams meet regularly to discuss issues that have been identified by employees and consider solutions. Complex issues are often referred to a UK steering group. Solutions are shared across the business, so that others can learn from them.

The programme has resulted in over 100 improvements and workplace injuries have fallen by 40 per cent.

South Liverpool Homes

This housing association manages around 3,700 homes. 'Every Person Positive' is part of its 2022 strategy – aiming to help employees become more resilient, fitter, maintain good health and improve their overall well-being. The range of initiatives includes:

- Giving all employees an annual well-being payment to be spent as they wish within well-being criteria. This responded specifically to feedback that different people have different needs at different stages in their lives.
- Providing juicers, soup makers and ingredients, so employees can make and share healthy lunches. One positive unintended outcome is a greater sense of teamwork and camaraderie.
- Annual health checks, a bike-to-work scheme, corporate membership at a local gym, and annual flu jabs protecting colleagues through the winter.

The chief executive, head of HR and staff forum representatives acted as champions for the project. Forums, mini surveys, drop-in sessions and team meetings were used to 'test' ideas and opinions about potential offers. It was key that the whole business 'owned' the focus on well-being and people could easily give their views on the programme content.

A year on from 'Every Person Positive' launching, sickness absence had fallen by 54% and customer satisfaction had increased by 90%.

The next stage was to focus is on personal development, including offering mentoring opportunities, secondments to other parts of the business, and the opportunity to work on multi-disciplinary project teams.

FAQs

How do I start a Health at Work programme?

1. What are you doing already to encourage Health at Work – and where are the gaps? You can get a free Health Report on your organisation if you join Vitality's 'Britain's Healthiest Workplace' scheme <https://www.vitality.co.uk/business/healthiest-workplace/participate/>. This includes benchmarking information and practical suggestions to improve Health at Work.
2. Decide if you want to tackle the causes of ill-health at work or the symptoms – or both. Take stress-related illness. Do you want to identify and tackle the root causes of stress in your organisation – or are you content to focus on managing the symptoms, for instance by stress management initiatives? In a 2018 REBA survey, 72.8% of employees responding said a high-pressured work environment is the biggest threat to staff wellbeing, so this is a relevant question.
3. Take advantage of the range of free information available from charities like MIND – <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/> – and arrange Mental Health First Aiders. The government is investing £15 million to support MHFA training from 2018 – 2021.
4. Pilot projects and aiming for 'quick wins' in areas employees have flagged up as important can help you identify what works best and provide potential in-house Health Champions for when you want to go further.

How much will it cost to start a Health at Work initiative?

That's very much up to you, with a range of options often available, from simple to more comprehensive. For example:

- To encourage cycling to work you could provide bike racks and lockers (low cost) and/or showers and a tax exempt cycle to work loan scheme https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11305/cycle-to-work-guidance.pdf (higher cost)
- A basic employee assistance programme, providing confidential, outsourced phone-based information, support and counselling to staff with personal or work-related issues might cost less than £10 per employee per year – or up to £50 per employee for a comprehensive plan including face to face counselling.

How can I ensure my employees are engaged and take part?

It helps if staff 'own' or feel part of Health at Work initiatives. Start by finding out which health at work issues your staff are most concerned about and then take action to address these issues first. Involving staff in drafting a Health at Work policy is another option.

Those who most need help with Health at Work may not be the first to seek it. When a London hospital introduced a health programme for its staff it found only 10% of participants were from the lowest pay bands. As a result, the hospital took time to talk with and listen to its lower paid staff and used what it found to develop a programme that many more people participated in.

If you're looking to introduce changes, it sometimes helps to adapt existing procedures instead of adding to information overload by introducing new ones. As an example, if you were looking to encourage more team working, you could amend your existing appraisal system to include a section for managers to report on, and provide evidence for, what they have been doing to encourage team work.

How can I measure the success of the programme?

Which indicators are most appropriate for your organisation – like a reduction in sickness absence, an improvement in staff morale, improved staff well-being or an increase in productivity? Measure them before and after you start your programme.

To ensure the results are reasonably reliable:

- Allow at least six months and preferably longer, to see if any improvements are permanent, and if this is more than just a Hawthorne effect (i.e. behaviour improving simply because someone is paying attention to people).
- Check if any other significant changes have taken place that would affect employees (like new managers or changes in the organisation's fortunes) that might also have influenced health at work.

You can also seek external accreditation, against identified criteria, for example through the Workplace Wellbeing Charter <https://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk/>

What are the benefits of starting a health/wellness programme for my business?

Research reported by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health indicates that companies who provide good support services for their employees benefit from:

- better employee engagement
- improved productivity
- less sickness absence.

What are our responsibilities as an employer?

You already have a responsibility for Health & Safety at work, in particular through the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and Working Time Regulations 1998. This responsibility includes a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/> If you have an Employee Assistance Programme it can help your defence against an employee's stress claims in an Employment Tribunal, alongside any other initiatives you have taken.

If you are too small an employer to have an HR Department to advise on employment law, then ACAS provides free support and advice for small businesses – <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5902>

Who is in best placed to manage health at work schemes?

You can outsource Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).

In-house it helps to have a specific person to manage your health at work scheme (probably in HR) – supported by a Health at Work Champion at Board and/or Executive Team level and then Health at Work Champions at different sites or in different departments.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

Accrediting Bodies for Health and Wellbeing at Work

- Corporate Health Standard (Wales)
- Healthy Working Lives Award (Scotland)
- IIP We invest in wellbeing
- London Healthy Workplace Award
- Workplace Wellbeing Charter

Employee Assistance Programmes

Some of the larger EAP providers in the UK, who are also registered members of the EAP Association, are:

- AXA PPP Healthcare
- Bupa Health & Wellbeing
- Care First
- CiC
- ComPsych
- Health Assured
- Insight Healthcare (Concern Group)
- The Validium Group
- Workplace Options

Health Charities

Some health charities have developed expertise in supporting physical or mental health. These include:

- British Heart Foundation (Health at Work) – <https://www.bhf.org.uk/how-you-can-help/health-at-work>
- Health@Work – <http://www.healthatworkcentre.org.uk/>
- Mental Health First Aid England – <https://mhfaengland.org/>
- MIND – <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/>
- Samaritans – <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/workplace/>

Sector specific

Check if any support is available that is specific to your sector/area – like:

- City Mental Health Alliance – <http://citymha.org.uk/>
- Education Support – <https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/>
- Mates in Mind (construction industry) – <https://www.britsafe.org/campaigns-policy/mates-in-mind/>
- Healthy Universities Network – <https://healthyuniversities.ac.uk/>
- Our NHS People – <https://people.nhs.uk/>
- Pilot Light (mental health within the hospitality industry) – <https://www.pilotlightcampaign.com/histo>

Useful reports and examples

Source	Description
Well-being at work: a review of the literature (nef consulting)	<p>This cites 201 sources of evidence, providing a helpful and reasonably recent overview.</p> <p>Section 5 contains case studies including from <i>Sunday Times</i> Top 100 companies.</p>
TfL 5 year Health and Wellbeing Programme	<p>An example of an organization-wide Health and Wellbeing programme.</p> <p>Appendix A provides a useful checklist to help identify whether an intervention will work, which can help employers ensure successful implementation.</p>
Growing the health and well-being agenda: From first steps to full potential. (CIPD)	<p>Considers the business case for Health at Work, the five domains of Health and Wellbeing, an extended case study of Health at Work in an organization, and proposals for what is needed to take the Health at Work agenda forward.</p>
Burnout Britain, overwork in an age of unemployment (Compass)	<p>This report considers how COVID-19 has exacerbated existing trends that were driving up mental distress among workers – and may raise questions for you as an employer.</p>
Europe's Best Workplaces 2020 (Great Place to Work)	<p>Responses from 830,000+ employees across Europe identify an open culture, trust, diversity and communication as key ingredients.</p>
The Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum)	<p>Developments identified include the impact of digitalisation and automation, skills gaps and the need for human capital investment – but also the risk of rising levels of inequality.</p>
A Blueprint for Good Work (RSA)	<p>This identifies five Good Work principles – security, wellbeing, growth, freedom and subjective nurture – as well as a blueprint social contract for good work.</p>



CONTACT

Health Action Campaign
Dalton House
60 Windsor Avenue
London
SW19 2RR

www.healthactioncampaign.org.uk

info@healthactioncampaign.org.uk

Design by Ilona Szczepanczyk
www.ilonaszczepanczyk.com

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**HEALTH
ACTION
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because prevention is better than cure