

Creating the healthy workplace

Good Practice Guide

The South East of England is a world class region and its workforce is one of the most effective in Europe. We work more productively than every other region in the UK except London and sustain an economy that is the 20th largest in the world. However, in the face of economic and demographic changes and increasing global competition, we cannot afford to be complacent and employers need to get the best from their resources, including their employees.

The Regional Economic Strategy 2006-2016 addresses the need to improve the productivity of the region's workforce and increase economic activity. One of its key actions is to support businesses and organisations to develop strategies which place physical and mental well-being at the heart of their drive to increase productivity.

A healthy workforce and workplace are key to creating and maintaining a competitive edge.



The cost of doing nothing

- Employers spend nine per cent of their annual pay bill managing the direct and indirect costs of absence (Work Foundation, 2008).
- The number of individuals on Incapacity Benefit has risen from 700,000 in the 1970s to 2.7 million in 2006 (DWP 2006).
- The proportion of individuals on Incapacity Benefit who are suffering from mental health conditions has risen from 25 per cent in the 1990s to 40 per cent in 2006 (DWP 2006).
- The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that stress costs business £3.8 billion a year.

1. Healthy workplaces

Healthy workplaces have lower turnover of staff, less sickness absence and attract the highest quality of job applicants. This means that investments in training are more worthwhile and less management time is spent on dealing with absence - giving enterprises the ability to offer higher quality products and services.

A healthy workplace:

- creates a healthy working environment;
- improves psychological well-being;
- helps people with health problems to remain in work;
- encourages employees to manage their own health.

2. Creating a healthy working environment

A healthy working environment enables employees to work without risk to their physical fitness, psychological well-being, hearing and other senses. There should be the least possible risk of physical strain or injury.

To achieve this employers must appoint competent staff or contractors to prevent health risks caused by work. Effective management means consulting workers about how to improve working conditions and involving safety representatives and the safety committee to oversee the prevention plan that is adopted.

Those involved in risk prevention should be able to show that they have the training and experience needed. They should be able to:

- advise on a suitable programme of prevention;
- set up the programme;
- provide and manage suitably qualified and experienced staff to carry out the work needed;
- monitor the work carried out by staff and respond to their recommendations;
- provide line management and the safety committee with a report on success of the plan and any need for changes.

The number of people reporting back problems caused by work has halved since the Manual Handling Regulations (1992) were introduced.

The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) states that the employer must ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees as far as is reasonably practicable. Yet work-related illness and injury remains relatively common. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) employers must employ competent people to prevent illness and injury caused by work.



Useful links

Health and safety performance indicator - to help small and medium sized businesses assess and improve their health and safety practices - www.businesslink.gov.uk

Leading health and safety at work - leadership actions for directors and board members - guidance, written by directors for directors, offering straightforward practical advice on how to plan, deliver, monitor and review health and safety in the workplace - www.hse.gov.uk/leadership

3. Improving psychological well-being

People report greater psychological well-being when they are:

- involved in the decisions that affect their working lives and consulted and provided with information;
- free of anxiety about aggressive behaviour or threats;
- have fair workloads and work patterns;
- are treated fairly in their terms and conditions of employment;
- have opportunities to advance themselves through training and promotion at work;
- are treated with care by line managers and have the opportunity to support one another.

THE LAW

Managing stress at work is covered by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999). Additional protection can be found in the Working Time Regulations (1998). The HSE has developed a stress toolkit which provides advice and standards for measuring via a form of risk assessment. The HSE's Stress Management Standards set out the questions employers should ask to see if there is an unacceptable level of stress in the workplace and provides model employee questionnaires. Results are benchmarked against acceptable levels under the headings: roles at work, control over work, the demands of work, support at work, relationships and change. Whilst the Standards do not have statutory status, they may be used in evidence in legal proceedings.

Useful link

Stress Management Standards - to help employers as well as employees and their representatives manage the issue and minimise the impact of work-related stress - www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

Job satisfaction is the strongest factor in returning to work for people with chronic back pain (Work Foundation, 2008).

A 23 year study of civil servants by the HSE found that employees under chronic stress in their jobs have a 68 per cent higher risk of developing heart disease.

4. Helping people with health problems to remain in work

Good management of attendance means:

- developing a clear attendance policy which everyone understands and can sign up to;
- keeping in touch with employees on sickness absence;
- getting professional help to assess the needs of employees who are struggling to return to work;
- making sure all employees are treated fairly through good record-keeping systems;
- making reasonable adjustments where employees with a disability require adaptations to their work on a temporary or permanent basis;
- developing a policy/agreement on disability leave;
- taking account of age, disability or work-related illness when reviewing absence levels;
- involving line managers, human resources departments, occupational health personnel and trades union representatives in reviewing the operation of attendance management policies and procedures;
- creating a climate where employees feel confident to discuss health issues with their management, including forms of rehabilitation or phased return to work.



THE LAW

Employees with long-term health problems are likely to be covered by the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (2005). This provides the framework of good practice for finding out if employees have disabilities, assessing how their ability to work may be affected, and looking for ways to modify their duties so that they can continue in work. This may involve occupational health professionals employed by the company, a letter to the worker's GP or using outside services like the Access to Work Team at Jobcentre Plus.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (2006) outlaw direct or indirect age discrimination, for example on health grounds.

Useful links

Line Managers' Resource - a practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace - www.shift.org.uk/employment

Sickness Absence Toolkit - to help managers to manage sickness absence and return to work - www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence

Speedy access to physiotherapy, counselling and advice reduces time-off sick and income loss by employees.

Keeping in contact during periods of sickness absence increases the chance that an employee will return to work.

5. Encouraging employees to manage their own health

Some employers also offer advice to their employees on the effects of lifestyle on their health, e.g. smoking, drinking, diet and exercise. Workplaces can help by providing healthy options if there is an on-site canteen, or providing healthy travel options, e.g. encouraging use of bikes (including the provision of a bicycle loan scheme⁽¹⁾), providing showers and providing safe facilities to dry clothing. Other workplaces provide opportunities to take exercise or relax during the working day or to work flexible hours to make visiting the gym etc, more practical. Obtaining corporate/ discounted membership of local gyms/sports centres can also send a positive message to employees.

⁽¹⁾The 1999 Finance Act introduced a tax exemption which allows employers to provide employees with bicycles and accessories as a tax-free benefit as long as the bicycles are used, at least in part, for journeys made between the employee's home and their place of work (or part of those journeys). Operating via salary sacrifice, payment for the bicycle by the employee is by way of deductions from gross pay. This gives rise to tax and national insurance savings for the employee and national insurance savings for the employer too.


Useful links

Information on bicycle loan schemes can be found at - www.bikeforall.net

Decision making framework - to support line managers and staff returning to work. Working longer and working healthier in the NHS - www.nhsemployers.org

Employers' guide to creating a healthy workplace from occupational health professionals' organisations - www.som.org.uk or www.fph.org.uk

Health and Well-Being Self Check Tool - designed by Investors in People to help employers monitor and improve their approach to keeping their people healthy and well - www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/Standard/Tools



Support for employees who want to take more exercise, e.g. access to a gym at work or fitness programmes can increase employees' fitness and ability to work.

Support at work for people with alcohol and substance abuse problems is essential if they are to overcome them.

The ACAS Model Workplace - provides employers with a yardstick against which to measure the effectiveness of employment relationships and which helps to identify areas for development - www.acas.org.uk

What's Happening with Well-Being at Work? - a report produced by the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) which includes a number of useful case studies - www.cipd.co.uk/researchinsights See also the CIPD website for more general information.

The Good Work Campaign - run by the Work Foundation providing useful guidance on developing a productive workplace - www.theworkfoundation.com/goodwork

Sources of help and advice

ACAS

www.acas.org.uk

Helpline and in-depth guidance 08457 474747

Health & Safety Executive (HSE)

www.hse.gov.uk

Infoline 0845 3450055

Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD)

www.cipd.co.uk

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

www.tuc.org.uk

Email info@tuc.org.uk

Jobcentre Plus

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

The Work Foundation

www.theworkfoundation.com

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

www.eurfound.eu.int

Other sources of information and good advice are available from employer organisations and individual trades unions.

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The Social Dialogue Forum (SDF) of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is a joint regional forum of senior managers from both private and public sectors, representatives of employer organisations, trades unions and a range of organisations with an interest and influence in employment-related issues, including the HSE and ACAS. Reporting to the SEEDA Board, its purpose is to contribute to regional policy from an employment perspective and to identify and disseminate good workforce practice within the region.

This leaflet is one in a series of good practice guides⁽²⁾ produced by the SDF. It is written for both employers and employees (or their representatives) and aims to encourage a shared approach to creating a healthy workplace.

It is not a definitive guide to achieving a healthy workplace. Its purpose is to highlight areas of good practice or legal requirement; help you to ask the right questions and identify the issues; and signpost you to a broad range of more detailed guidance and support.

(2) Previous leaflets cover Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace and Equal Pay. These can be accessed on the SEEDA website - www.seeda.co.uk

Our thanks go to Simon Pickvance for his significant contribution to the writing of this leaflet.

If English is not your first language, we can provide a summarised version of this document in Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Polish and Bengali. The document is also available in large print, Braille, disk and audio cassette.

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