



Creating an Active Workplace

Building movement into the working day to create healthier, happier workplaces.

Greater Manchester
Moving > ^ < v



The joy of creating an active workplace

There are over 1.3 million people in Greater Manchester employed in a diverse range of jobs, working to make the region one of the best places to live in the country.

Considering employees spend 60% of their waking hours working, employers play a crucial role in supporting their health and wellbeing by fostering an active workplace culture.

This toolkit has been designed to provide employers like you with ideas and suggestions to enable more activity within the working day.

Creating an active workplace - wherever they may work - may start with just a few simple changes to daily routines...



Why movement is important in your workplace

Active employees are happier, healthier, and therefore more productive. Supporting the health of your employees can bring numerous business benefits, such as reduced sickness absence, increased loyalty, and better staff retention.

Research indicates that higher levels of physical activity among employees can significantly improve their productivity, by enhancing concentration, reducing stress, boosting mood, and improving overall cognitive function... leading to better decision-making and problem-solving at work.

Essentially, a more active employee is often a more productive employee.⁽¹⁾

A 2019 study showed that the **annual cost to UK business is estimated to be £6.6 billion** from physically inactive workers.⁽²⁾

A separate report states that when you consider absenteeism and presenteeism together, **physically inactive workers lose approximately 4.5 working days a year** compared to those that are physically active.⁽³⁾

Stress, depression or anxiety and musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders accounted for the majority of days lost due to work-related ill health in 2021/22, all conditions that are known to be positively affected by physical activity.

1 Rampisheh Z, Ramezani M, Khalili N, Massahikhaloghi P, Hoveidamanesh S, Darroudi S, SoleimanvandiAzar N, Tayefi B. Physical Activity and Well-being Status among Employees of University of Medical Sciences. Med J Islam Repub Iran. 2022 Aug 27;36:97. doi: 10.47176/mjiri.36.97. PMID: 36408338; PMCID: PMC9587180.

2 The economics of exercise Measuring the business benefit of being physically fit A report for AXA PPP healthcare September 2019

3 The Economic Benefits of a More Physically Active Population, Rand Europe 2019



For your business...



Lower staff turnover



Improved productivity
teamwork and communication



Team unity
builds a stronger team
togetherness



Prevents isolation.
Great way to integrate new
team members



Absenteeism
reduced by
20%



Demonstrates
teamwork
and communication



On average
28%
fewer sick days
taken by active staff

For your employees...



More
energy, better
stress management



Improved
mood & mental
health



Social
opportunities
and chances to
meet new people



Reduced
risk of chronic
illnesses EG. heart
disease, strokes,
diabetes & cancer



Improved
self-confidence &
self-esteem



Reduced
the likelihood of
developing serious
MSK conditions



Improved
sleep



Reduced
the risk of
depression





Embedding physical activity in your workplace

Before you start...

An **active workplace culture** and **leading by example** are two of the best ways to get your employees moving more. No matter how many employees you have, leaders set the tone. Higher management's belief in the message, and consequent behaviors, is always a key factor in individuals feeling they can move freely and not be tied to their desk every working minute.

It's important to think about **language**. Many people are put off by words like 'exercise' and 'sport' and may have negative views stemming from bad experiences or perceptions. **Creating an active workplace isn't about running or sports, it's about moving more.** Walking, standing, stretching, using the stairs etc. are all examples of movement. The term "moving more" is more appropriate, positive and inclusive for most people.

Often, individuals will know what works best for them - so let them choose! Telling people what to do doesn't work. Empower individuals to make adjustments that work for them and encourage them to be part of the process, so it doesn't feel like a 'top down' instruction. Everyone will have their own motivations, but also their own set of barriers. This is why it's important to let each individual follow their own journey and move in a way that they feel is good for them.

Some quick wins...

- ✓ **Give permission** for staff to wear footwear that they can move in #ActiveSoles
- ✓ **Lunchtime fun:** Set up office table tennis or similar activities.
- ✓ **Moving meetings:** Take meetings outside for a walk and talk.
- ✓ **Break time movement:** Encourage movement in breaks by making break rooms active spaces with games.
- ✓ **10-minute blasts:** Allow paid time daily for physical activity.
- ✓ **Stand-up meetings:** Encourage meetings away from chairs and tables, or use standing tables for short meetings.
- ✓ **Themed days:** Schedule regular active days like Moving Monday or Walk and Wheel Wednesdays
- ✓ **Active Champion of the Month:** Celebrate active employees.





Committing to Change

Some things may take longer to implement but make real strides in creating a real Active Workplace culture.

- **Active commutes:** Incentivise cycling or walking/wheeling to work with flexibility or prizes, reimburse employees for “active miles”, ensure there is secure bike parking and useable changing rooms, offer shared company bikes and cycle to work schemes and consider flexible start times for safer bike travel.
- **Workplace policy-** Add health and wellbeing conversations into monthly/annual reviews, Create an Active Workplace policy, require staff to have a wellbeing plan that includes movement.
- **Activity classes:** Offer activity classes based on feedback from employees and what they want and would use. Wellbeing activities could be incorporated into team meetings or team building.
- **Office movement:** Encourage exercises like walking while on the phone or stretches while waiting for printing. Provide a screensaver with seated exercises, movement reminders or stretches.
- **Promote campaigns:** Support initiatives like GM Walking Festival and RED January, and offers local to your place of work



Embedding the change at every level of the organisation

By taking a 'whole workplace approach' and looking at how changes can be made at different levels in the organisation, such as **policy, organisational, cultural, social and to the physical environment**, interventions are more likely to be effective and sustainable over time.

The socio-ecological model (or onion model) below is one way to think about how changes can be made across a whole system within the workplace. Throughout this toolkit, we have provided a range of active workplace interventions that help influence across the different levels within your organisation. We know it is not solely down to an individual to be motivated to move more. We must create the conditions to allow them to do so, and we can do that within the workplace.

The whole workplace approach

Movement is built into the business at every level, moving meetings, walking phone calls, active breaks are the norm and demonstrated by leaders

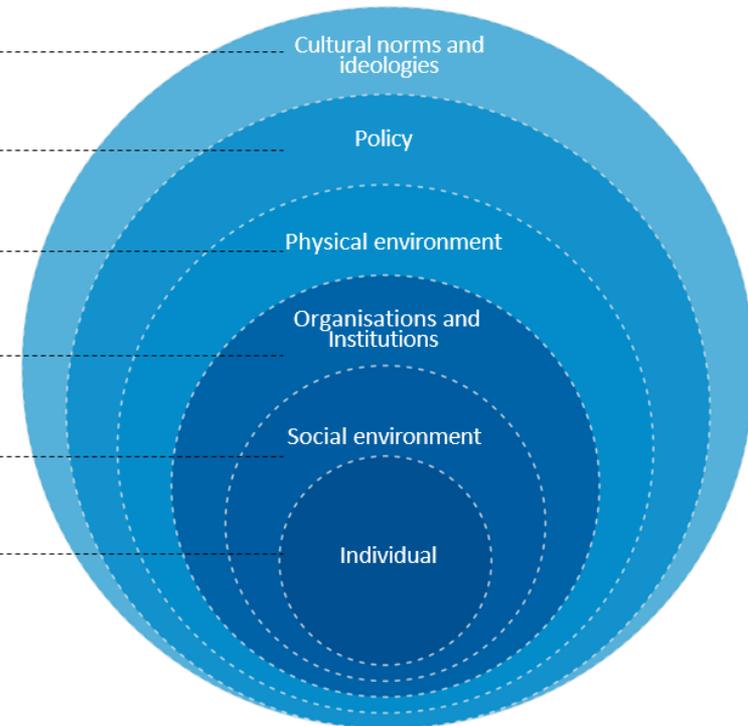
Workplace policy is clear, supportive and visible. Easy to read and understand, discussed frequently

Workplace provides standing desks, walking desks, walking routes, stairs access, bike security, changing rooms

Business provides incentives such as cycling mileage payments, discounted gym memberships, organised staff walks, 45 minutes movement allowance

Movement options are available at breaks and for social occasions as well as within work time. Emphasis is placed on social aspect.

Individual capabilities, motivations, opportunities, knowledge, needs, behaviours, physical and mental health and wellbeing



Evaluation

How do we know it's working?

Providing evidence of success will display the return on investment you've gained, with a healthier, active, and less-absent team.

Measure impact through:

- **Staff surveys:** Assess employee morale and health improvements within the staff survey.
- **Discuss activity levels in one to ones:** let individuals set goals if they want to, review each one to one. Discuss how they feel being active is supporting their work. There is training available to support having these conversations.
- **Productivity:** Track productivity changes related to increased activity.
- **Absenteeism:** Monitor changes in absence rates after implementing activity plans.
- **Share stories:** Use newsletters or Intranet to share success stories of improved employee health, wellbeing and staff morale.
- **Record number of Active Travel incentives** that have been rewarded



Further Support

For further support around creating an active workplace you can contact Julia Skelly at julia@gmmoving.co.uk

There is also a “Active Workplaces” Community of Learning you can join to gain learning, best practice and support. To be added to the mailing list for these events please email Julia as above.



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