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The network's mission is to build partnerships to promote and protect public health and well-being, and develop capacity and capability in the public sector.

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The principal purpose of the Observatory is the analysis, synthesis and interpretation of health relevant information for those who make or influence policies affecting public health, whether they be in the public, private or voluntary sectors.

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Top tips for healthier workplaces

An executive summary

Janet Ubido, Lyn Winters,
Matthew Ashton and Alex Scott-Samuel

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and Liverpool Public Health Observatory
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ChaMPs Public Health Network
St Catherine's Hospital, 2nd Floor, Admin block,
Church Road, Birkenhead, CH42 0LQ

Tel: 0151 488 7778 Fax: 0151 488 7735 Web: www.champs-for-health.net

Working together towards a healthier Cheshire and Merseyside

Lead commissioners:

Janet Atherton, Director of Public Health, Sefton

Fiona Johnstone, Director of Health Strategy, Halton and St Helens

Thank you to the following people for their contribution to the report (titles at November 2007):

Tony Ellis, Communications Manager, ChaMPs Public Health Network

Steve Akinson, TravelWise Officer, Mersey travel

Justin Baddeley, Compliance and Prevention Officer, Environmental Health and Consumer Protection, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Jamie Bowen, Senior General Catering Manager, Burtons Foods, Wirral

Michelle Buckingham, Senior Account Manager, Staley Peters (now known as USP Creators), Liverpool

Carol Cörvers, Health Improvement Services Manager, Health and Wellbeing Team, Wirral PCT

Jacky Crowley, Deputy Director, Health @ Work, Liverpool

Michael Erwin, Senior Manager, Corporate Communications – International, CareerBuilder.com

Barry Fairhurst, Operations Support Manager, Pilkington UK Ltd, St.Helens

Keith Gorman, Programme Manager, Health @ Work, Liverpool

Peter Hughes, Personnel Manager, Merseytravel

Robin Ireland, Chief Executive, Heart of Mersey

Alison Jackson, Business Information Advisor, St.Helens Chamber of Commerce

Jenny Lees, Travel Plan Co-ordinator, Cheshire County Council

Vicky Mills, Smokefree Northwest Administrator, Regional Tobacco Policy Team, Manchester

Maresa Malloy, Policy Manager, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce

Paula Parle, Health and Physical Activity Development Officer, Halton Borough Council

Jan Peters, Managing Director, Staley Peters (now known as USP Creators), Liverpool

Graham Pollard, Travel Plan Officer, University of Liverpool

Maureen Quinn, TravelWise Officer, Merseytravel

Emma Reed, Private Secretary to Dr Fiona Adshead, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health

Thomas Robinson, National Health and Safety Manager, Halliwells LLP

Libby Sedgley, Regional Workplace Health Manager, ENWORKS, Manchester

Cathy Sherlock, Occupational Health Adviser, National Britannia

Sue Smethurst, SUPPORT to Stop Smoking, Wallasey

Phil Spick, Travel Plan Manager, Littlewoods Shop Direct Group, Speke

Mark Taylor, Security Technical Support Manager, Bentley Motors Limited, Crewe

Kath Tierney, Senior Travel Planner, Richard Armitage Transport Consultancy Limited, Hyde

Gemma Weston, Food and Health Officer, Heart of Mersey

Authors

Janet Ubido, Researcher, LPHO
j.ubido@liverpool.ac.uk

Lyn Winters, Researcher, LPHO
l.y.winters@liverpool.ac.uk

Matthew Ashton, Public Health Development Specialist, Knowsley PCT
matthew.ashton@knowsley.nhs.uk

Alex Scott-Samuel, Director, LPHO
alexss@liverpool.ac.uk

Top tips for healthier workplaces

It is a truism that prevention is everyone's business, and businesses are no exception to being the source of good health and also the possible creators of poor health.

There are very obvious benefits to business from having a physically and mentally healthy workforce, and obvious benefits to the regional economy, and to regional levels of health.

The creation of good health is a shared ambition across the North West region, and this guide provides the evidence and advice for action on health through the work place.



Dr Ruth Hussey OBE
North West Director of Public Health



Evelyn Asante-Mensah OBE
*Head of Equality and Diversity
North West Regional Development Agency*



Read the full report at
www.nwph.net/champs/publications

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About this guide

This is an executive summary of *Top tips for healthier workplaces*. It was commissioned by the ChaMPs Federation of Directors of Public Health from Liverpool Public Health Observatory. It is based on evidence collected up to November 2007.

Top tips for healthier workplaces is the third in a series of Top tips documents aimed at promoting public health in a range of settings.

The first was *Top tips for healthier hospitals*, published in November 2006, and the second was *Top tips for health in local authorities*, published in January 2008.

The executive summary and full report of each of the three publications can be found on the ChaMPs website at www.nwph.net/champs/Publications and also on the Liverpool Public Health Observatory website at www.liv.ac.uk/PublicHealth/obs. Alternatively, printed copies can be obtained by contacting Francesca Bailey at the Observatory on 0151 794 5570.



In producing *Top tips for healthier workplaces*, our aim is to enable businesses within Cheshire and Merseyside to focus on the actions they can take to promote the health of their existing and prospective employees.

Top tips is linked closely to the Choosing Health White Paper¹, drawing together evidence, national policy and targets for each Choosing Health priority area.

Examples of good practice can be found in the full report, along with further details and examples of the impact and benefits of the interventions given for each area. Quantification of costs and benefits is more difficult as evidence is not always available at a local level; however, where it exists it has been included.

Creating a supportive working environment can have many benefits to both employees and employers. It has a direct effect on reducing sickness absence and improving workplace relations leading to a loyal, well-motivated productive workforce, reducing stress and promoting happiness, recruitment and retention.²

Businesses in Cheshire and Merseyside have the potential to make a substantial impact, given the size and diversity of their workforce.



Diana Forrest
Director of Public Health, Knowsley, and chair, ChaMPs Directors of Public Health



Leigh Griffin
Chief executive, Sefton PCT, and co-chair, ChaMPs steering group



Steve Maddox
Chief Executive, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and co-chair, ChaMPs steering group

1. Department of Health. Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier. London: The Stationery Office; 2004.
2. Faculty of Public Health and Faculty of Occupational Medicine. Creating a healthy workplace: a guide for occupational safety and health professionals and employers. London: Faculty of Public Health; 2006.

1. Promoting equality in the workplace

Inequality in health refers to an unacceptable gap in health status or in access to positive influences on health. Employment can be a positive influence but inequalities in the labour market and discrimination in the workplace can have the opposite effect.

Fair treatment and valuing diversity in the workplace is both a moral and legal duty. It is also a business imperative. Fairness in the workplace is important for maintaining health, which leads to increased employee motivation, cooperation and reduced absenteeism.



Promoting equality and diversity

- Develop an equal opportunities policy, covering recruitment, promotion and training.
 - Set an action plan, with targets, so all staff have a clear idea of what can be achieved and by when.
 - Provide training for all employees, including managers, to ensure they understand the importance of equal opportunities and valuing diversity.
 - Review recruitment, selection, promotion and training procedures regularly to ensure they reflect your equal opportunities policy.
 - Draw up clear and justifiable job criteria which are demonstrably objective and job-related.
 - Offer pre-employment training, where appropriate, to prepare potential job applicants for selection tests and interviews.
 - Consider your organisation's image: for example, in job advertisements include a statement such as 'We welcome applications from women, ethnic minorities, disabled and older people'.
 - Develop links with local community groups, organisations and schools, in order to reach a wider pool of potential applicants.
- Seek advice and support from Jobcentre Plus on equal opportunities and employing people with disabilities and from overseas.
 - Understand your legal responsibilities to both employees and applicants regarding promoting equality and diversity.
 - Ensure all new recruits have an induction that makes it clear you value the diverse culture in your company; team them up with a buddy or mentor.
 - Support staff who are single earners, to help them progress in work through career advice and skills development.
 - Conduct regular discussions with individuals to identify their needs and take reasonable action to meet them.
 - Ensure that job training and promotion is open to all.
 - Create and promote policies and actions to prevent bullying and harassment (see *Mental health and wellbeing section*).
 - Review and update grievance (complaints), disciplinary and sickness absence management procedures to ensure they are fair, effective and non-discriminatory.
 - Collect and analyse data about employees, such as training, promotions, grievances, disciplinary action, sickness absence by

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- gender, race/nationality, religion/faith, disability and age.
- Improve skills in the workforce, particularly basic numeracy and literacy, through the services of 'Train to Gain'.

Employing disabled people

- During recruitment, ask applicants whether they require any reasonable adjustments in order to attend an interview if they have a disability.
 - Ensure all staff involved in recruitment understand their responsibilities under the law.
 - Seek specialist support for recruiting disabled people, from Jobcentre Plus or disability employment advisers.
 - Consider providing special equipment and assistance to help people with disabilities.
 - Follow the former Disability Rights Commission's top tips for small employers. <http://tinyurl.com/4mnuxy>
- In person specifications ask for essential skills, knowledge and experience; they can be more important than specific qualifications.

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"Fair treatment of staff by management is related to increased employee motivation and cooperation and reduced sickness absence"

Promoting equality in the workplace

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“Employers who concentrate on candidates' abilities, rather than their disability or health condition, increase their available talent pool and benefit from improved recruitment practices”

Age and the workplace

- Check there are no hidden age barriers in your selection and promotion processes:
 - aim to place advertisements in publications read by a range of age groups
 - avoid specifying age and using terms which imply a particular age group, such as ‘mature’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘highly experienced’ or ‘recent graduate’
 - be clear about which skills and abilities are actually required for the post and which are merely desirable or reflect the personal preferences of the selector
 - consider the hidden messages in any of your promotional literature, particularly the pictures
 - if specific about qualifications, ensure the reason for requesting them can be justified and make it clear that equivalent or similar level alternative qualifications will be considered, thus not disadvantaging different age groups
 - if graduates are specified, make it clear you are interested in the qualification, not the age of the applicant
 - use application forms that don't ask a person's age; using forms also

makes recruitment and comparing candidates easier

- base short lists on skills and ability alone; have them independently assessed against bias
- focus on the applicants' competence at interview and ensure all interviewers have received training in the skills required, including equal opportunities and diversity.
- Comply with retirement related duties:
 - implement a default retirement age of 65
 - give written notice of impending retirement
 - consider an employee's request to work beyond retirement age.
- Ensure redundancy procedures are based on business needs rather than age.

Race and cultural issues

- Encourage and train managers to get the best out of people from different backgrounds.
- Give managers the tools to promote and demonstrate a climate of respect in the workplace by setting clear standards of behaviour for all staff, customers and clients and taking prompt action to deal with any instance of racism or prejudice.
- Provide information about the different religions and

cultures reflected in the workforce and among customers.

- Ask people from ethnic minorities what they think about working for you - through regular management conversations with members of your team, staff surveys, exit interviews and focus groups in the community.
- Understand the needs both of new recruits and existing employees, which may require adjustments in the workplace, such as the observance of specific habits or rituals by faith groups.
- Consider positive action training to help employees from ethnic minorities apply for jobs in areas in which they are under-represented.
- Follow the Commission for Racial Equality's *Statutory code of practice on racial equality in employment*.

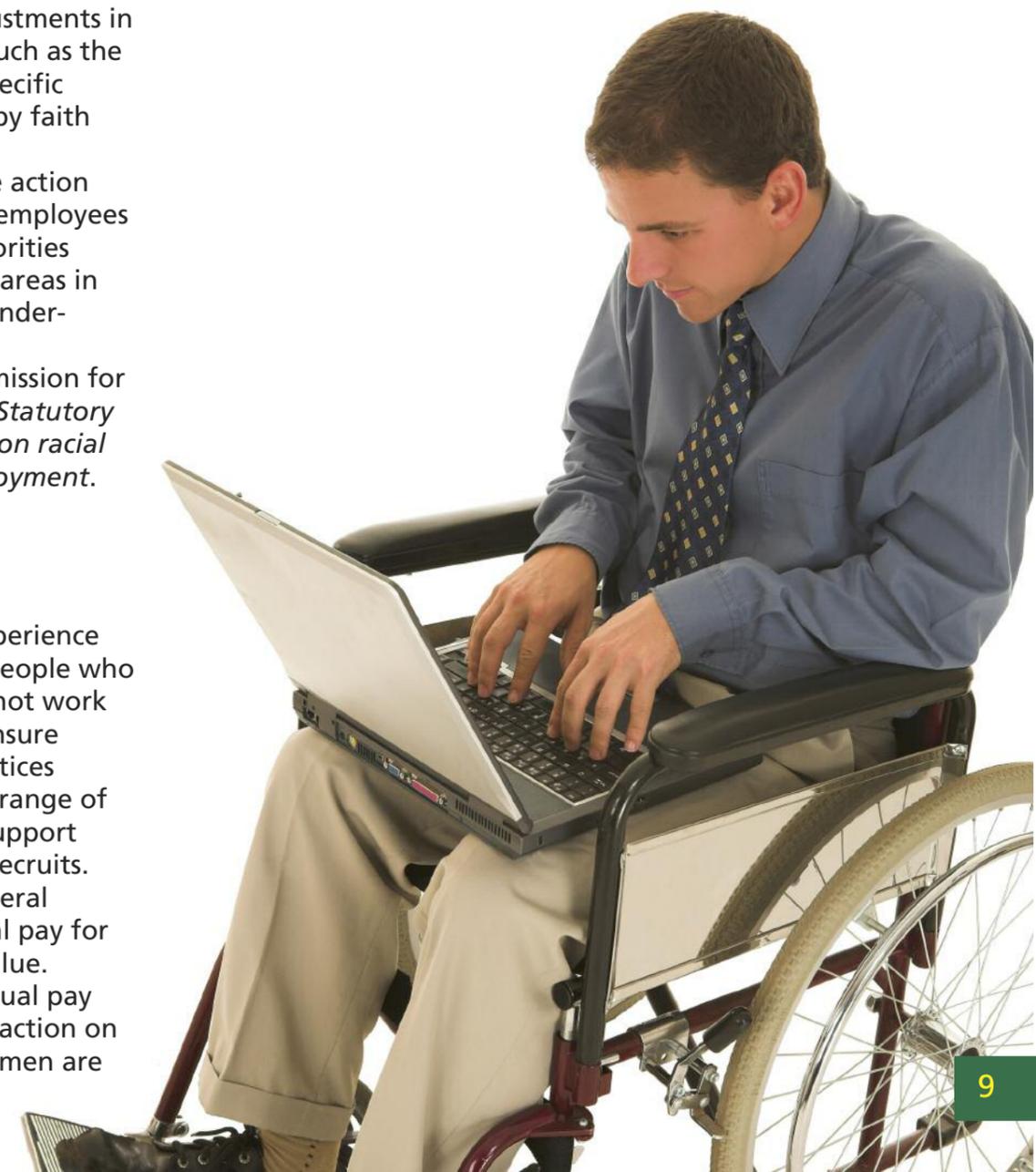
Avoid gender inequalities

- Provide work experience placements for people who traditionally do not work in your sector; ensure recruitment practices attract a diverse range of applicants and support non-traditional recruits.
- Commit to a general principle of equal pay for work of equal value.
- Undertake an equal pay review and take action on the results; if women are

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paid less than men, unrest will damage business productivity.

- Strengthen the link between skills acquisition and pay.
- Use job evaluation techniques and pay systems without in-built bias against women, their skills and family.
- Consider flexible working, career breaks and providing childcare facilities.



2. Tackling obesity: creating opportunities for healthy eating

Workplaces are an ideal setting in which to promote healthy eating as more than half the population spend up to 60% of their waking hours at work and have at least one meal there.

Set up a healthier workplace food policy

- To inform the policy, undertake a company health check as set out by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion. This reviews company policies and activities around health topics.

“Providing healthy food options in the workplace can significantly increase fruit intake and reduce consumption of fried foods”

Ensure management involvement

- Enthusiastic support and involvement is required from senior management to ensure a co-ordinated approach involving health and safety managers, occupational health staff, employers' organisations, chambers of commerce, unions and staff representatives and health professionals working with businesses.

Ensure employee involvement

- Involve employees in identifying workplace food needs and addressing viable solutions.

Joint action

- To ensure a co-ordinated approach to improving nutrition and health in your workplace, team up with your local authority, strategic health authority, primary care trust (PCT) and relevant private and voluntary sector organisations.

Improve access to healthy food and drinks

- Make healthy choices continuously available at all food outlets for staff and visitors, including staff restaurants and vending machines.
- Encourage initiatives such as 'fruit on desks'.
- Ensure easy access to free drinking water.
- Encourage workers who bring in their own food to pack healthy lunches and snacks.
- Provide good kitchen facilities and eating areas for employees, wherever possible.

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Actively promote a healthy diet

- Introduce tailored educational and promotional programmes to improve the provision and take-up of healthy food; for example:
 - heavy promotion and advertising at point of purchase
 - pricing incentives such as lower priced healthy food and drinks.
- Promote the '5-a-day' message.
- Offer health checks for staff:
 - enlisting help from your local PCT where necessary
 - encouraging workers to monitor their weight and diet
 - providing ongoing support to enable healthy lifestyle changes.

Ensure local procurement

- Wherever possible, ensure food in staff food outlets is procured locally and encourage the use of seasonal produce.

“By 2010, one in four people will not be able to fit into a standard office chair, if obesity continues to rise at its current rate”



3. Tackling obesity: creating opportunities for physical activity

“Physical inactivity costs up to £6.4 billion each year in lost productivity and sickness absence”

A regularly active, fitter workforce will be more productive, take less sickness absence and reduce your long-term sick pay costs.

Various measures can be taken to provide opportunities for employees to be more physically active. For many, the minimum recommended daily physical activity levels could be achieved simply through active travel to and from work, such as walking or cycling.

Healthy travel plan

- Work with employees to identify barriers to physical activity, ideally using audits and health impact assessments. Carry out a company health check.
- Draw up and implement a healthy travel plan with policies to encourage walking and cycling and restrict workplace parking.

Information on physical activity opportunities

- Provide targeted information about travel choices, health benefits and recreational opportunities.

Incentive schemes and promotional campaigns

- Actively promote physical activity through incentive schemes and other programmes, encouraging workers to move around as much as possible.
- Pay a cycle mileage rate of at least 20p per mile.
- Set up a ‘Cycle to Work’ scheme.

Changes to the physical environment

- Provide showering facilities and cycle shelters.
- Make stairs more attractive, with clear signposts and attractive décor to encourage use.
- Get involved with local authorities and related bodies to develop planning applications for safe cycle and pedestrian routes to work and workplace access to public transport.

Physical activity programmes

- Provide physical activity programmes such as lunch time walks and designated ‘exercise hours’ at work.

Health checks

- Work with your local PCT to offer health checks which address physical activity and provide ongoing support.



4. Improving mental health and well-being

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“One in five workers report feeling extremely stressed at work and nearly three in every 10 employees will have a mental health problem in any one year”

Organisational changes are more effective at lessening work based factors that adversely affect mental health than individually focused interventions. They may also have more lasting effects. Staff well-being benefits from involvement in identifying and addressing such work based factors.

Policy at work

- Develop an effective response to bullying and harassment.
- Establish an employee well-being strategy or similar initiative to help improve the physical and mental health of the workforce.
- Use company policy to state and reinforce a commitment to equality of opportunities for those with mental health problems.
- Develop a human resource policy to respond to domestic violence.
- Prevent problems by eliminating or minimising stress at source, for example by:
 - allowing more flexible working arrangements
 - conducting a stress audit to identify sources of stress
 - assessing job demands and increasing job control and decision making latitude
 - redressing an effort/reward imbalance

by asking staff to identify the types of benefits or recognition they would value.

- Follow the six principles to reduce stigma:
 - make employees aware of steps they can take to preserve and maintain their own and others' mental well-being
 - promote a culture of respect and dignity for everyone, ensuring that staff are trained to recognise and be sensitive to mental distress or disability in others, be they workplace colleagues or customers
 - encourage awareness of mental health issues, so that employees notice the danger signs and understand the importance of seeking help early
 - demonstrate that no-one is refused employment on the grounds of mental illness or disability
 - make reasonable adjustments to the work environment, enabling people with mental health problems to continue working
 - take positive steps to ensure that people with mental health problems are not disadvantaged in relation to the availability of goods and services.

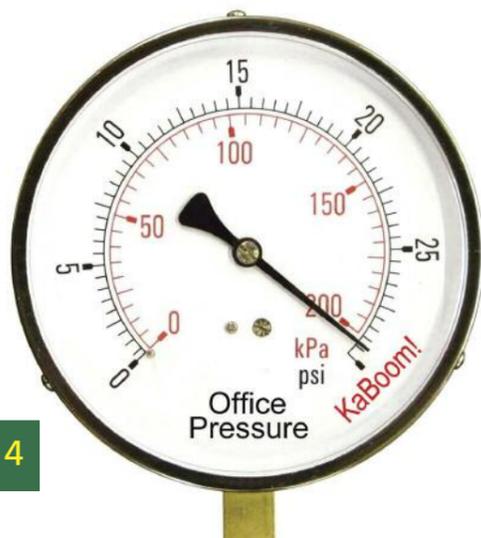
Culture

- Develop a culture in which staff are valued; consult and listen to staff.
- Improve two way communications and staff involvement.

Information and support

- Increase social support by making available clear, consistent information and enhancing support from line managers.
- Offer assistance, advice and support to staff experiencing mental health problems at work and for those returning to work.
- Enhance team working.
- Assist individuals who are experiencing the effects of stress, through early intervention and support.
- Introduce stress education and stress management courses.

“Mental health problems account for the loss of more than 91 million working days each year, half of which are due to anxiety and stress”



5. Dealing with alcohol and drug misuse

Interventions to deal with alcohol and other substance misuse will benefit both employees and employers, improving productivity and work performance.

Set up an alcohol and drug use policy

- All employers need a workplace alcohol and drugs policy to guide managers and staff on alcohol and drug related problems in the workplace. The policy should cover:
 - drinking at the workplace
 - workplace discipline
 - recognition and help for those with alcohol and drug related problems
 - alcohol and drugs education
 - all of the following measures.

Involve staff

- Set up a working party, involving all levels of staff, to look at the issue of alcohol and drugs. If employees are consulted and involved, there is likely to be a good deal of support for the policy.

Analysis

- Analyse information and records held to investigate whether alcohol or drugs are harming the business and what action can be taken.

Information

- Provide employees with information on the damaging effects of alcohol and drugs.

Support

- Provide access to varying levels of support, ranging from brief interventions featuring counselling and advice (enlist the help of your local PCT where necessary) to referral to an alcohol or drugs unit.

Prevention

- Focus on prevention, emphasising that alcohol and drug misuse is defined as a health problem to be dealt with without discrimination, like any other health problem at work.

Training

- Establish guidance and training for supervisors, trade union representatives and selected employees to identify alcohol and drug problems early and refer employees for support.

Buddies

- Introduce 'buddy' schemes in which staff are encouraged to talk about their own or a colleague's drink or drugs problem and family, friends and work colleagues are involved with the individual in a treatment programme.

Screening

- Screening is neither acceptable nor cost-effective in most workplaces. However, it is appropriate in safety-sensitive industries.

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Consider workplace factors

- Address anything at work which may be driving people to drink or drugs; for example, stress, bullying, long hours, working away from home, the availability of alcohol or the work culture.

Community approach

- Help address the issue of alcohol and drugs in the community, and encourage sensible drinking, by participating in joint working with your local authority, community and the health service.

"Workplace alcohol policies can help reduce net weekly drinking among the workforce by 13% to 34%"

"Hangovers alone have been estimated to cost industry between £53 million and £108 million annually"



6. Workplace interventions to stop smoking

“One company has seen a significant increase in productivity following the introduction of a no smoking policy”

The workplace has significant potential as a setting through which large groups of people can be reached and encouraged to stop smoking. Employers can play an important role in encouraging and supporting smoking cessation by employees who smoke.

Information

- Contact your local stop smoking service and ask for help in providing information about their support.
- Make that information widely available in the workplace.
- Inform staff about the types of help available to them, including how, when and where it can be accessed.
- Ask staff if there is any other information or support you can offer in the workplace.

Support

- Offer support to help employees who want to give up smoking; for example:
 - consider allowing employees to attend stop smoking services during working hours without loss of pay
 - be responsive to individual needs and preferences
 - if there is sufficient demand, ask your local stop smoking service to offer help on your

premises, maybe an on-site stop smoking group

- work with other local businesses to see if there is an opportunity to share smoking cessation support.

- Work with your staff and their representatives to develop a stop smoking policy:
 - make the stop smoking policy part of an overall smokefree workplace policy
 - consider whether staff should be allowed time off for smoking breaks during working hours
 - consider offering staff training to provide stop smoking advice.
- Make use of the following local support and internet services to help employees stop smoking:
 - As part of their *Working Well Programme*, Knowsley council has a dedicated stop smoking service for individuals working in the borough to access free stop smoking services and support. Contact: 0151 443 4723 or email smokefree@knowsley.gov.uk
 - Fag Ends, the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation stop smoking team, runs weekly drop in sessions in central, north and south Liverpool and Knowsley, and can visit workplaces; contact: 0800 195 2131 or <http://www.roycastle.org>

- NHS booklets, posters and translated leaflets available from the NHS Smoking Helpline 0800 169 0169 or www.givingupsmoking.co.uk

Protecting staff from secondhand smoke in the community

- Provide advice to staff on smoke free issues and ways to minimise their risk of exposure to secondhand smoke; for example, requesting use of rooms which have been smokefree for a minimum of 30 minutes prior to their visit. http://www.heartofmersey.org.uk/smokefree/?page_id=175

Smoking breaks and their implications

- To minimise potential drawbacks associated with smoking breaks at work, establish clear rules or guidelines; for example:
 - specifying whether smoking breaks are permitted in addition to official lunch and tea breaks
 - if smoking breaks are permitted, specify how many, when they may or may not be taken and the maximum length of each break
 - if smoking breaks are permitted, enable all staff to take breaks at the same time, maybe as coffee breaks

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- if, despite guidelines, some employees take excessive smoking breaks, it may be necessary to re-emphasise the company's rules on taking breaks from work and, if necessary, deal with the employees under the company's normal disciplinary procedures.

“Smokefree laws do not damage profits. No independent, peer reviewed study has ever found a significant downturn in business from going smokefree”

Staff working in institutions

- To help protect staff working in institutions such as prisons and long-stay adult residential care homes, consider ways in which smoking could be restricted in communal areas.

