Physical Activity at the Workplace: Literature review and best practice case studies

Sport Unit
Directorate-General for Education & Culture
Overview

• Research undertaken between September-November 2017 by Ecorys
• Action under the Tartu Call for Healthy Lifestyles (September 2017)
• Presentation outline:
  ➢ Background
  ➢ Aims and methodology
  ➢ Findings of the literature review
  ➢ Case studies
Background

- Benefits of regular PA - health, society and economy
- Health risks linked to sedentary behaviour in office environments
- Increasing policy focus on workplace-based health promotion
- Council Recommendation HEPA
- EWoS – workplace one of multiple settings
Research aims

• A review of the literature regarding the effectiveness of workplace physical activity interventions
• Identify best practices with regard to interventions designed to promote physical activity in the workplace
• Identify examples of different physical activity corporate challenges and lessons on how to implement them
Methodology

• Rapid and systematic review of the literature
  - Coverage: Europe and international
  - Over 50 relevant articles identified
  - Systematic reviews (multiple/single); specific studies

• Best practice research
  - Rapid review (key word searches; various languages; literature review)
  - Selected from 120 interventions identified
Types of interventions

• Method of engagement:
  - Challenges / competitions
  - Counselling / information and advice
  - Group sessions
  - Environmental changes
  - Multi-component

• Type of physical activity:
  - reduced sitting; walking; exercise; running etc

• Campaigns/programmes to engage companies
General findings

- Many studies show positive outcomes especially direct physical activity
- Less focus on overall effects (moderate and vigorous PA)
- Mixed evidence on reduced sitting
- Less attention to health inequality groups (although results are positive)
- Difficulty of comparing across intervention types
Findings on intervention types (1)

• Walking initiatives:
  - Consistent and strong evidence
  - Positive results for less active groups
  - Advantages: accessible for all & can take place at work

• Counselling/information and advice:
  - Strong to moderate evidence
  - Wide variety of tools and activities
  - Attribution difficult as usually part of wider intervention
Findings on intervention types (2)

- **Active travel:**
  - Positive benefits for walking not yet cycling
  - Scope to develop fiscal incentives

- **Stair walking:**
  - Mixed evidence on effectiveness; further research required

- **Group led social exercise:**
  - Strong evidence on longer-term impacts
  - One study showed positive effects over five year period
Findings on intervention types (3)

- Environmental changes:
  - Positive effects when combined with behavioural component

- Multi-component:
  - Strong evidence of positive benefits
  - Difficult to compare alternative ‘bundles’
  - Effective approach: combining information and advice with participation opportunities
Case studies (1)

• IHR’s ‘Active@Work’ programme (Ireland)
  ➢ National level intervention
  ➢ Walking challenge, step challenge and Active@Work Award
  ➢ IHR provides continued support

• Eugesta’s Whole Company Approach (Lithuania)
  ➢ Company level intervention
  ➢ Environmental changes and varied activities
  ➢ Health and wellbeing is embedded in company culture
Case studies (2)

• Deutsche Telekom’s Active Workplace (Germany)
  ➢ Company level intervention
  ➢ Environmental changes and education
  ➢ Desk bikes are integrated into employees’ work lives

• Mahou-San Miguel’s Physical Activity programme
  ➢ Company level intervention
  ➢ Environmental changes, activities and gym membership
  ➢ Physical activity is engrained in company policy
Challenges (1)

• Step Count Challenges
  ➢ Evidence that walking interventions are effective
  ➢ Vic–Central University of Catalonia’s ‘Walk@Work Spain’

• Active Commuting Challenges
  ➢ Cycle to work challenges are most popular
  ➢ Bicycle Victoria’s ‘Ride to Work Day’ (Australia)

• Stair Climbing Challenges
  ➢ Simple to implement, not as popular on their own
  ➢ Diabetes Fund’s ‘Take the Stairs Week’ (the Netherlands)
Challenges (2)

- Multi-Company Physical Activity Competitions
  - Companies compete to be the most or one of the most physically active workplace
  - The European Commissions’ #BeActive Award

- Multi-Company Physical Activity Awards/Certificates
  - Given to all companies that achieve certain criteria
  - Sports for All’s physical activity campaign (Estonia)
Key findings / lessons

- Positive (and growing) evidence on outcomes for workplace interventions
- Multi-component (guidance and opportunities) most effective
- Less active: light intensity; within the workplace
- Value of national/regional level programmes (esp for small businesses)
- Best practice: strong management buy-in; dedicated resources; embedded approaches