



# County Sport Partnership Network Workplace Challenge

## Evaluation Report - Phase 2

Executive Summary

March 2017

## **Authors**

Emma Adams and Hayley Musson

School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, UK

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the project funders (Sport England), project managers (County Sports Partnership Network), project partners and Workplace Challenge participants for their on-going support and involvement in evaluation activities. We would also like to thank Dr Nick Cavill of Cavill Associates for his work in undertaking interview and focus groups and writing up four of the case studies.

## **Suggested citation**

Adams, E.J. and Musson, H. (2017) County Sport Partnership Network Workplace Challenge Phase 2 Evaluation Report. School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.

This report was written by the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health based on work undertaken between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

## Executive Summary

### Background

The County Sport Partnership Network (CSP Network) Workplace Challenge is one of Sport England's Lottery funded 'Get Healthy, Get Active' projects. The overall aim of the programme is to engage inactive people in the Workplace Challenge to increase participation in sport and physical activity and build the evidence base for the role of the workplace in promoting sports participation to improve health. This report outlines the evaluation findings for the third year of the project the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

### Programme outline

The Workplace Challenge is delivered through a partnership between a number of key organisations from the sports, physical activity and health sector in the UK. This includes the County Sports Partnership Network (lead organisation); County Sports Partnerships (delivery partner); Leicester-Shire & Rutland Sport (programme management until June 2015; technology provider); CityDesk Sport (marketing and communication); National Governing Bodies of Sport (key national partner), British Heart Foundation Health at Work (key national partner); and British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health (evaluation lead).

The programme aimed to target workplaces of various sizes and types from small local businesses to large international corporations. Targeted and sector specific marketing and communications activity were aimed at corporate/private sector workplaces, public sector organisations (including local government, education) and voluntary/community sector organisations. Although inactive individuals were the primary target audience, all employees based in participating County Sports Partnership areas were eligible to take part in programme activities.

The Workplace Challenge is based around a website ([www.workplacechallenge.org.uk](http://www.workplacechallenge.org.uk)). The activities delivered as part of the project include online activities such as national activity log challenges and local activity log challenges as well as offline activities including business games, competition programme events and Workplace Challenge Champion training. In addition, CSPs have supported workplaces in developing sport and physical activity opportunities and with signposting and access to other local events and activities.

### Physical activity screening

During registration, participants were asked the single item measure for physical activity which was used to classify participants as being inactive (response 0 or 1 days) or active (2 or more days).

### Evaluation

The Workplace Challenge was evaluated by the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health based in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University. The main aims of the second phase of the evaluation were to:

- assess the effectiveness of the Workplace Challenge in increasing participation in sport and physical activity, and
- assess the effectiveness of the Workplace Challenge in improving business outcomes (e.g. absenteeism, presenteeism, performance, morale at work, job satisfaction, job

involvement and organisational commitment) for organisations and individual employees.

A mixed methods approach was used to evaluate the Workplace Challenge and data were collected using a number of approaches:

1. Analysis of logged activities to understand patterns of participation in inactive employees
2. Surveys to assess the impact of the project on previously inactive and active employees
3. Six case studies with organisations who have taken part in the Workplace Challenge.

### Summary of key findings

#### Recruitment

- 17,407 employees registered on the Workplace Challenge website between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016.
- The total number registered on the website on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 was 54,443 employees from approximately 9,700 workplaces.
- 17,515 (32.2%) participants were classified as being inactive.

#### Participation

- Participants logged 332,614 activities on the Workplace Challenge website (32,683 by inactive participants and 299,931 active participants) and of these, 28% were recorded as being of light intensity, 34.6% as being of moderate intensity and 37.4% being of vigorous intensity.
- The top three most frequently reported activities were walking, running and road cycling for both active and inactive participants, there was then some variation between inactive and active participants in the next most popular activities logged which included: swimming, circuit training, gym (cardio), gym (weights), cycling (stationary), and press ups, pull ups and sit ups.
- Walking was a more popular activity for inactive participants than for active participants representing 29.9% of activities logged for this group.
- During the January/February 2016 national eight week activity log challenge, the mean number of activities logged was lower for inactive participants than for active participants across all weeks and gradually declined throughout the 8 weeks of the national challenge for both groups of participants.

#### Impact on sport and physical activity

- There were significant increases in the proportion of inactive participants taking part in at least 1 x 30 minute session of sport each week between baseline and 3 months (baseline 29.8%; 3 month follow-up 51.6%;  $p < 0.001$ ).
- There were also significant increases in the proportion of inactive participants taking part in at least 1 x 30 minute session of sport each week between baseline and 6 months (baseline 34.2%, 6 month follow-up 47.9%;  $p = 0.041$ ).
- Significant increases in the total time spent doing sport each week between baseline and 3 months were observed in all groups. In addition, significant increases in the total time spent doing sport each week were observed between baseline and 6 and 9 months in the overall and inactive groups.
- In the inactive group and overall, there were significant increases in the proportion of participants meeting physical activity recommendations at all survey time points. For

inactive participants the increase was from 50.2% at baseline to 81.8% at 3 month follow-up.

- Significant increases were also observed in all groups at all survey time points for mean total time spent doing physical activity per week.
- There were significant increases in time spent in each domain of activity (vigorous physical activity, moderate physical activity and walking) between baseline and 3 and 6 months in all groups.
- There were no significant changes in participants' confidence that they could participate in sport at least once a week for 30 minutes between baseline and follow-up.
- Colleague support for participation in sport was low at baseline in all groups (11.0% to 20.0% agreed they received support often or very often). There were significant increases in colleague support for sports participation between baseline and 3, 6 and 9 months in all groups.
- Significant increases in the proportion of participants doing any walking to work were observed after 3 months in active participants and overall. These changes were not maintained at 6 months.
- The proportion of participants doing any cycling to and from work was low particularly in the inactive group. Significant increases were observed between baseline and 3 months in all groups however this was only maintained in the active group and overall at 6 and 9 months.
- Overall, employees reported a significant increase in perceived support from their employer for sport and physical activity after 3 months, however this did not continue in the longer term. Employer provision of opportunities for sport was perceived to improve overall and in the active group between baseline and 3 months but not beyond this. Perceived provision of physical activity opportunities by employers significantly improved at both 3 and 6 months in the active group and overall.

#### *Impact on health and well-being*

- Mental health and well-being scores (assessed using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) significantly improved between baseline and the 3 month follow-up overall and for active participants, but not for inactive participants.

#### *Impact on business indicators*

- There were significant reductions in sickness absenteeism overall and in the active group between baseline and 6 and 9 month follow-ups. At 6 months, the mean number of days absent from work reduced by 0.6 days overall and at 9 months by 1.3 days.
- Reductions in presenteeism were observed at 6 and 9 months in all groups, however none of the changes were statistically significant.
- Job satisfaction was significantly lower in the active groups and overall between baseline and the 3, 6 and 9 month follow-up surveys. Similar reductions in satisfaction were observed for the communication and social environments at work.
- Satisfaction with the social environment at work improved significantly between baseline and the 3 month follow-up in the inactive group only.
- Individual morale was significantly higher between baseline and the 3 month follow-up in the inactive group only.
- Team morale was significantly lower overall and in the inactive and active groups between baseline and 3 months, and overall and for the active groups at 6 and 9 months.

- Between baseline and 3 months, job involvement was significantly lower in the overall and in the active groups.
- There was significantly less organisational commitment overall and in the active group between baseline and 3 months. Similar findings were observed in the active group between baseline and 6 and 9 months.

### Findings from case studies

- Several of the case study organisations had taken up the Workplace Challenge as a way of linking together and complementing other existing initiatives they were involved with. For others the Workplace Challenge formed the umbrella project under which all activities were delivered.
- Links with County Sports Partnerships were well thought of by organisations, with the advice and support available being highly valued.
- The Workplace Challenge was attractive to organisations because of its flexibility and low (no) cost. It appealed because it allowed existing exercisers to monitor and log their activity, but also encouraged new staff to take part and increase their activity levels.
- Within all organisations the importance of strong management support for health promotion and physical activity was highlighted. It was felt by senior management that being involved in the Workplace Challenge was important for the organisations' relationship with its staff, helping employees feel like they are valued and the company cares about them. It was also thought to raise the external profile of the organisation.
- In general all of the organisations had a flexible approach to supporting staff and allowing them to take time out of the working day to be active. However, this was not possible for some staff dependent on their job roles.
- Visibly seeing senior managers taking part in activities helped employees feel they were permitted to take part during their working day.
- Workplace champions/project leads played a vital role in promoting the Challenge and were instrumental in making the programme successful, driving the programme and promoting physical activity within their organisations.
- Challenges identified for delivering the Workplace Challenge included:
  - Project leads being expected to organise and develop Workplace Challenge activities as part of their working day.
  - Having dedicated spaces within the organisation for exercise classes.
  - At one organisation the workforce was so disparate that it was hard to communicate and motivate staff across all sites.
  - After the initial burst of enthusiasm the Workplace Challenge lost momentum and employees commitment tended to wane.
  - The Challenge for many was an individual endeavour, using the challenge to log activities that might well be carried out outside work. One downside of this is the possibility that many of these people were active anyway, and were using the Challenge as a way to log their existing activities.
  - Amongst all the organisations activity logging declined over time, although most people interviewed seemed to continue being active.
  - In some cases, the Workplace Challenge is being promoted on an individual basis rather than at a whole workplace level.

- Employees found the Challenge to be inspirational, but it was noted that this tended to be short-term. Refreshing ideas and further promotion was thought to be needed to help raise the profile of the challenge and maintain engagement.
- The social aspect of many of the activities was noted to be an important factor in their participation by a number of employees.
- Within some organisations it was difficult to identify specific business benefits from the Challenge, often because it was wrapped up with other initiatives. Nevertheless there was a universal feeling that the Workplace Challenge helped to improve company morale and assisted staff in getting to know other colleagues.
- Following the national challenge employees highlighted that they were more aware of colleagues in their organisation from looking at staff points totals on the Workplace Challenge leader boards helping to improve internal networking.
- The national challenge had also been very effective at initiating conversations between staff as it provided a talking point of common interest.
- Employees taking part in focus group discussions reported the Workplace Challenge had impacted upon morale within the organisation, but had a more significant effect on personal morale.
- The Challenge helped some people to get to know others in the organisation helping them to feel more comfortable exercising with them, when previously they would not have felt comfortable exercising in a group or at work.
- The Workplace Challenge initially generated a lot of interest and many staff signed up to the programme, however it was felt this activity died down and more was needed to promote the programme within organisations. It was suggested that having more spotlight events throughout the year to help raise the profile of the challenge to employees would be beneficial.
- Other suggestions for re-energising the programme included additional promotions; better communication through social media; new challenges; more activities; taster days; prizes and discounts; and better interoperability (i.e. FitBit users being able to upload data automatically).
- Overall within all organisations the Workplace Challenge was seen to be a positive way to influence the culture around workplace physical activity.

## Lessons learnt and recommendations

### Project delivery

1. To maximise the number of individuals who participate in the Workplace Challenge and realise the full health and business benefits, whole workplaces need to be recruited and engaged in the project (rather than individual employees). A workplace-wide launch at the start of the project may help to increase awareness of the activities on offer and engage a larger number of employees.
2. For some workplaces, the Workplace Challenge may be part of a wider suite of (or one of many) workplace health and well-being initiatives which are being delivered, in others it may form the umbrella under which other activities are delivered. These different approaches should be acknowledged and considered in future strategic and operational planning for the Workplace Challenge.

3. Workplaces need an enthusiastic champion who can lead the project, motivate people to join in and maintain engagement. In larger workplaces, a network of departmental champions may be needed to facilitate communication about the project and promote participation. To enable effective delivery of the project, champions should be given time in their working day to plan and deliver activities.
4. Support from senior and middle management is critical for enabling the project to be delivered and resourced effectively, along with visible participation from managers in activities to support and encourage employees to participate, particularly during the working day.
5. Workplaces need to support participation in activities by making changes to the workplace environment (e.g. shower and changing facilities and equipment) and implementing suitable policies (flexi-time, opportunities to take breaks away from desks, incentives).
6. Activity challenges need to be refreshed very frequently to maintain momentum. Typically organisations have an initial burst of enthusiasm when the challenge is launched (e.g. coinciding with New Year's resolutions) and then commitment tends to wane, and attendance at sessions and active logging declines. Effort needs to be focussed on new innovative activities and challenges to maintain interest levels.

#### **Recruitment and participation**

7. The Workplace Challenge has been successful in reaching a large number of employees from a wide variety of organisations. However, often only a small number of employees sign up from each workplace. Further work is still needed to recruit whole workplaces in order to maximise the benefits of the Workplace Challenge for employee health and for business (see also point 1).
8. Further work is needed to engage currently under-represented groups in the programme for example males, younger (<30 years) and older (>45 years) employees, those employed in non-sedentary occupations or with lower educational qualifications, and the inactive.
9. Walking, running and road cycling were the most frequently logged activities by both active and inactive participants. Walking using a pedometer was also frequently logged by both active and inactive participants, suggesting pedometers are an effective motivational tool and participants like using them to establish attainable activity goals. It could be beneficial to investigate ways participants can progress from walking to increase the intensity of exercise and to try other activities.
10. One of the challenges is recruiting inactive employees and retaining their engagement over the long term. Further consideration should be given as to how to reach and maintain the involvement of this target group.

#### **Impact**

11. Participation in sport and physical activity increased in inactive individuals and overall. There were some changes in walking to and from work but only in the short-term and in already active participants. Levels of cycling to and from work were low particularly in the inactive participants and increases were only maintained in the active participants and

overall. Promoting walking and cycling as part of the journey to and from work remain potential areas for future promotion and intervention.

12. Colleague support for participation in sport increased. This was also reflected in focus group discussions with employees who noted the positive support and camaraderie that was created amongst employees involved in the challenges. The nature of the activities which are delivered as part of the Workplace Challenge may therefore play an important role in supporting participation.
13. Employees' perceptions of their employers support and opportunities for sport and physical activity increased at 3 months but generally were not maintained. Engaging employers and securing their long-term support for physical activity and sport may be important for supporting employee participation. Further efforts may be needed to understand the most effective way to engage employers in promoting physical activity and sport in the workplace and to maintain their engagement on a longer-term basis.
14. Potential positive effects on mental health and well-being and sickness absence were observed in participants in the Workplace Challenge. However, there were no significant measurable impacts on other business-related indicators such as presenteeism, job satisfaction, team and individual morale, job involvement and organisational commitment. This may reflect the nature of the Workplace Challenge programme which encourages individuals to sign up but does not always engage whole workplaces and instigate organisational change (see also points 1 and 7).
15. In contrast to survey findings, in focus group discussions, employees perceived that the Workplace Challenge did have a positive impact on staff morale and team spirit within organisations, helping to improve company morale. In addition, there was a perception that the Workplace Challenge and associated activities had impacted upon the organisations by helping to improve internal networking and communication. Overall, for some workplaces, the Workplace Challenge was thought to have created a cultural shift in the organisation towards promoting a more active and healthy working day, with potential business benefits from improved staff morale and communication.

## Conclusions

The Workplace Challenge engaged almost 54,500 employees from 9,700 workplaces across 37 County Sports Partnerships in England, including a proportion of 'inactive' participants. Positive changes in sport and physical activity were observed as well as some improvements in mental health and well-being and reductions in absenteeism. Although other changes in business indicators were limited, discussion with managers, project leads and employees suggested there had been perceived changes in team and individual morale, communication and networking, and in overall workplace culture for promoting sport and physical activity and supporting participation during the working day. Recommendations have been made for project delivery, recruitment and participation and for improving the impact of the Workplace Challenge in future taking into account the findings from this evaluation.

