



County Sport Partnership Network Workplace Challenge Summary Evaluation Report

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This is a summary version of the Workplace Challenge evaluation report; a full version of the Workplace Challenge evaluation report is available from the authors upon request.

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1. Introduction

A high proportion of adults in England do not do enough physical activity to meet current guidelines and benefit their health (Department of Health, 2011; Craig and Mindell, 2013). New approaches are sought which effectively engage inactive people and help increase their levels of physical activity. There is currently limited evidence as to how to engage inactive people in sport as a means of increasing participation in physical activity (Cavill *et al.*, 2012). To address this gap in the evidence, Sport England invested in a programme of Lottery funded 'Get Healthy, Get Active' research projects which aimed to target inactive population groups and encourage them to participate in sport once a week for at least 30 minutes. The County Sport Partnership Network Workplace Challenge was one of these projects.

Evidence suggests the workplace is an ideal setting in which to promote physical activity to adults. A high proportion (73.6%) of the adult population aged 16-64 are in employment (Office for National Statistics, 2015) and spend around 60% of their waking hours in the workplace (Peersman *et al.*, 1998). In addition, a high proportion of the population are now employed in sedentary occupations. A number of national policy reports have highlighted the significance of the workplace in promoting better health and well-being (Black, 2008, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2008, Public Health England, 2014a, Public Health England, 2014b) and it has been stated that *"Increasing employee's physical activity levels may help reduce some illnesses and conditions that are important causes of sickness absence, resulting in improved productivity and reduced costs for employers"* (NICE, 2008, p.12).

It has been reported that sickness absence costs the UK economy over £14 billion a year (CBI, 2013). In, addition, a recent survey has suggested the average level of absenteeism in the UK is now 6.9 days per employee with a median cost of absence per employee of £554 (CIPD, 2015). The most common causes of long-term absence reported were acute medical conditions, stress, musculoskeletal injuries, mental ill health and back pain. In addition, one third of organisations reported an increase in presenteeism (people coming to work ill) in the last 12 months. This was more likely to have increased in organisations where *"long working hours are seen to be the norm and where operational demands take precedence over employee well-being"* (CIPD, 2015). Only half of respondents to the survey reported that they take employee well-being into consideration in business decisions, that employee well-being is on senior leaders' agendas and that line managers are bought into the importance of well-being suggesting the workplace is still under-utilised as a setting for promoting physical activity and health.

The health benefits of being physically active have been well reported (Department of Health, 2011). Physical activity has the potential to address a number of the most common causes of absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace however more organisations need to include employee health and well-being, including promoting physical activity, into their business agenda. Few workplace-wide physical activity programmes have specifically targeted the inactive, or attempted to further understand the role the workplace and employers can play in promoting and increasing physical activity and sports participation. The CSP Network Workplace Challenge aimed to address both of these issues and to create a cross sector approach to the development of workplace sport and physical activity.

1.1 Programme aims and objectives

The overall aim of the programme was 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.

Objectives

The main objectives were:

1. To develop a comprehensive package of interventions that can be used in workplaces to increase physical activity and sports participation in the inactive (the Workplace Challenge).
2. Use the County Sport Partnership Network to deliver the Workplace Challenge in a wide variety of workplaces across England to increase participation in sport and physical activity in inactive employees.
3. Evaluate the project to assess the effectiveness of the programme on increasing physical activity and sports participation in the inactive and to understand the facilitators and barriers associated with using the workplace to engage the inactive in sport and physical activity.

1.2 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); 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 are 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). 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.

1.3 Evaluation

The Workplace Challenge was evaluated by the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health based in the National Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine at Loughborough University in accordance with the Standard Evaluation Framework for Physical Activity Interventions (Cavill *et al.*, 2012). The main aim of the evaluation was to learn about how the workplace can be used to engage the inactive in sport and physical activity, and to assess the effectiveness of a workplace physical activity programme aimed at increasing participation in physical activity and sport in inactive employees. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. Understand the role of the workplace in providing opportunities for the inactive to be active
2. Understand how inactive employees can be engaged in sport and physical activity through the workplace
3. Identify the needs and interests of inactive employees in relation to sport and physical activity opportunities in the workplace
4. Understand the experiences of those involved in delivering the programme including key partners, CSP Workplace Leads and Workplace Challenge Champions
5. Identify patterns of participation and understand which activities are the most popular for inactive employees when promoting physical activity and sport through the workplace
6. Understand participant's experiences of the project (both inactive and active employees)
7. Assess the impact of the project on participation in sport and overall physical activity levels in inactive and active employees
8. Understand the potential benefits to businesses (reduced absenteeism, increased staff morale etc.) of providing opportunities in the workplace for inactive employees to be active.

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

1. Interviews with inactive employees
2. Survey with participants who have a remit for health promotion in their workplace
3. Evaluation of training provided to the County Sports Partnerships Workplace leads
4. Survey with County Sports Partnerships Workplace leads
5. Surveys with Workplace Challenge Champions
6. Qualitative interviews and focus groups with project partners, CSPs, Workplace Challenge Champions and participants
7. Analysis of logged activities to understand patterns of participation in inactive employees
8. Focus groups and case studies with project participants to assess project experiences
9. Surveys to assess the impact of the project on previously inactive and active employees.

The single item measure for physical activity (Milton *et al.*, 2011) was used to classify participants as being inactive (response 0 or 1 days) or active (2 or more days).

A detailed description of evaluation methodology is available in the full Workplace Challenge evaluation report.

2. Summary of key findings

2.1 Recruitment

Between 1st October 2013 and 30th September 2015, 37,359 employees from approximately 7,000 workplaces registered on the Workplace Challenge website (16,122 in year 1 and 21,237 in year 2). Overall, 64.3% of registered employees were female, 41.7% were aged 30-44 and most participants were of white ethnic origin (96.4%). A high proportion of participants were educated to degree level (69.2%) and many participants were employed full-time (80.9%) and in a sedentary occupation (92.0%). Of those who responded to the physical activity screening question (n=37,310), 30.7% of participants were classified as being inactive (27.1% in year 1; 33.4% in year 2).

2.2 Project activities

Four national activity log challenges took place during the project period: January-February 2014; July-August 2014; January-February 2015 and September 2015. At the local level, a number of business games (n=18) and competitions (n=151) were delivered by County Sports Partnerships (CSPs). CSPs also provided local activity log challenges, delivered or arranged taster activity sessions, worked with NGBs to provide a local offer and provided low intensity activities to promote opportunities for inactive participants to get involved. Participants were also signposted to other local sport and activity opportunities through the Workplace Challenge website and communications from CSPs. During the programme, 562 Workplace Challenge Champions were trained.

2.3 Experiences of delivering the programme

Perspectives of national partners

National partners raised a number of issues related to the importance of: leadership; involvement of national partners for providing programme direction; a flexible approach; establishing and maintaining communications with partners, Champions and participants; gaining feedback from those working operationally at local level; engaging the right people from CSPs and in local partner organisations and ensuring sufficient resources are available for engaging partners, building relationships at national and local level and developing new services.

The online and offline offers were both important in providing a comprehensive package of opportunities to engage employees in sport and physical activity. However, engaging the inactive remains a challenge and further work may be needed to understand how to reach this target group. Strategic targeting of the inactive was thought to be important and tailoring information for target groups essential. Different activities need to be provided to attract the inactive and bespoke products may be needed to maintain interest.

Workplace Challenge Champions were thought to be vital for recruiting and engaging inactive participants and important for the long-term sustainability of activities. It was also thought important to raise their profile and visibility with organisations.

A number of successes were mentioned by the key partners including: engagement of a large number of CSPs (36 out of a total of 45); Workplace Challenge Champion training; software development taking into account participants' feedback; local investment by CSPs to develop capacity to deliver the project; the project itself helping to secure additional funding locally with the evaluation providing additional credibility; and organisational buy-in to the project.

Perspectives of CSP Workplace Leads

The majority of CSPs approached a mixture of organisations they had previously worked with as well as new organisations to take part in the Workplace Challenge. One-on-one interaction with organisations, directly visiting workplaces and providing information on how to sign up to the programme, were thought to be the most successful approaches to recruitment along with sending e-mails to organisations and holding specific events.

Most CSPs delivered local online activity log challenges in addition to the national challenges along with inter-workplace competitions. Fewer CSPs delivered sports competitions for individual organisations or business games, provided sports or activity taster sessions at workplaces or developed activities at or for workplaces. Signposting participants to local activities, local events and local clubs was also an important part of the offline offer. Developing the offline activities component of the Workplace Challenge was thought to be important for helping to sustain participation and provide opportunities to do sport or physical activity linked to participant's workplaces.

The main challenges CSPs faced in conducting their role in the Workplace Challenge included lack of time to effectively plan and promote the programme, lack of staff resource and difficulty engaging the inactive. Delivering a competition programme was also challenging due to capacity of the CSP. Additional challenges were related to recruitment (recruiting employees and organisations, gaining senior management support in workplaces and finding the right contact with an organisation); delivery (trained CSP staff leaving, lack of NGB support); CSP staff capacity to engage and deliver the programme; and the national activity log challenge (engaging employees post challenge, incentives to log activity).

The main successes were related to engagement (recruitment of high numbers of employees, engaging new organisations with the CSP, promotion for the CSP); delivery (providing a range of taster opportunities, partnership working to enhance the offer, increasing the number of competitions delivered); partnerships (local councils endorsing the programme, developing a network of local contacts in local businesses, maintaining relationship with public health and leveraging funding to support the programme); competition programme (helped to develop network and rapport with local organisations, inter-company tournaments were well attended); and the Champion training (recruiting inactive individuals to Champion training).

To engage the inactive, CSPs used a number of approaches including spot prizes, low level activity taster sessions and lower intensity sports and activities such as dog walking. Activities had a focus on the social aspects of participation to promote fun and enjoyment. Press releases and business publications have targeted the inactive. Barriers to engaging the inactive included: identifying the inactive (as no-one likes to admit they are not active), specific

planning and targeting to engage inactive populations, perception of the project (aimed at the active, the need to log lots of activities, competitive element) and finding suitable activities.

A number of factors were identified to ensure sustainability of the Workplace Challenge including: support from the national team, NGBs, and local organisations; increasing the number of local partners including public health teams; gaining local recognition and embedding the project in other areas of work, evidence to demonstrate the programme engages the inactive and changes behaviour; CSP staff time and capacity to deliver, a longer lead in time for marketing; securing local investment and funding, maintaining income generation and options for the commercial sector to buy bespoke webpages; understanding how to keep the target audience engaged all year round.

Perspectives of Workplace Challenge Champions

The Workplace Challenge Champion training was well received and following the training many attendees reported they felt confident in using the Workplace Challenge website and in increasing participation in sport and physical activity in their workplaces. Champions indicated they would like additional training to effectively develop sport and physical activity in their workplaces e.g. more training on sports courses such as run leader training, National Governing Body courses and instructor training.

The main barriers for Champions were lack of time, lack of resources, lack of interest or low motivation of colleagues and catering for a wide range of interests and needs. Some Champions reported barriers to communicating activities due to organisational administrative processes and approvals which were required and working at large sites or across large organisations with multiple sites. The workplace culture of 'having to be at your desk' was also cited as a barrier to promoting sport and physical activity in the workplace.

2.4 Participation

In year 1 (October 2013-September 2014), inactive participants logged 62,266 activities and active participants logged 398,777 activities on the Workplace Challenge website. Walking, running and road cycling were the most popular activities logged by both active and inactive participants during year one of the programme. Swimming, circuit training, gym (cardio), gym (weights), cycling (stationary), press ups, pull ups and sit ups, all appeared in the top ten activities for both inactive and active participants.

During the national eight week activity log challenge (January-February 2014) inactive participants logged 27,664 activities and active participants logged 223,602 activities on the Workplace Challenge website. Again, walking, running and road cycling were the most popular activities logged by both active and inactive participants.

During the Commonwealth Games national activity log challenge, 26,227 activities were logged equating to 26,655.3 hours of activity. Participants reported a higher proportion of vigorous intensity activities during this period compared to moderate or light activities.

In year 2 (October 2014-September 2015), inactive participants logged 83,383 activities and active participants logged 535,065 activities on the Workplace Challenge website. Walking, running and

road cycling were the most popular activities logged by both active and inactive participants during year two of the programme. Swimming, circuit training, gym (cardio), gym (weights), cycling (stationary), press ups, pull ups and sit ups, all appeared in the top ten activities for both inactive and active participants. In addition, for inactive participants, gardening was also popular (this was added as an activity which could be logged on the website in year 2 of the project).

During the national eight week activity log challenge (January-February 2015) inactive participants logged 42,273 activities and active participants logged 245,361 activities on the Workplace Challenge website. Again, walking, running and road cycling were the most popular activities logged by both active and inactive participants.

During the “September Shake Up” Challenge, which took place between 1st and 30th September 2015, 63,090 activities were logged equating to 64,056.7 hours of activity. Around a third of activities logged were of light, moderate and vigorous activities each week during the challenge.

In addition to national activity log challenges, participation in local activity log challenges was popular. Fewer participants took part in business games, workplace sports competitions or other sports/activities organised through the workplace. Overall, 195 teams (1,237 participants) took part in business games and 966 teams (4,812 participants) in competitions.

2.5 Participant experiences

In both years 1 and 2 around three quarters of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the national eight week activity log challenge. There were mixed views about the competitive nature of the challenge with some finding it ‘off putting’ and ‘demotivating’. Others liked this element of the challenge and thought it was effective in promoting activity particularly where several employees were taking part from the same workplace.

Within workplaces the focus tended to be on online activities with very little offline provision of activities through the programme. Most employers did not provide activities during the national eight week activity log challenge and where activities were provided these were sports or activity taster sessions.

Participants reported they would have liked information about the national 8 week challenge earlier and that more information was needed, particularly about local activities taking place. Some felt more appropriate activities for inactive participants were needed. Suggestions for improvements to the national eight week activity log challenge included having more competitions, more information on incentives and prizes, better prizes and running the challenge for longer. Other suggestions related to support and promotion within workplaces, having a team challenge, more encouragement for the less active and a weekly reminder to log activities. Increasing the reach of media promotion and having different types of promotional activities were most frequently reported suggestions for improving advertising.

The activity log challenge was perceived to be successful in encouraging employees to begin thinking about being more active, increasing awareness of how much activity participants were doing by logging activities and providing motivation to take part in new activities.

In year 1, overall, over a third of participants perceived that they were more active since taking part in the challenge. Around a third also felt that they were fitter and healthier. Inactive participants more frequently reported losing weight, feeling less stressed and trying new sports compared to active participants.

In year 2, almost half of participants perceived that they were more active 6 and 9 months after the national activity log challenge. Some participants also reported feeling fitter, more healthy and perceived they had lost weight.

Participants perceived the project had a positive impact on communication within their workplace and had encouraged new relationships to be formed between colleagues that previously didn't know each other. The social aspect was important for motivation and participation.

2.6 Impact on sport and physical activity

Sport

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 several time points in year one and year two. Statistically significant increases in sports participation were observed between baseline and 3 months overall and in the inactive group however there was little change in the active group. In the inactive group, significant increases in sports participation were sustained after 6 months in years 1 and 2. After 9 months the proportion of inactive participants doing at least one session of 30 minutes of sport each week was still higher than at baseline however the increase was only statistically significant in year 2 (Table 1).

Table 1 Proportion reporting 1 x 30 minute session of sport per week

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value
YEAR 1									
Inactive	36.2	62.6	<.001	36.3	57.8	<.001	35.7	46.4	NS
Active	81.5	80.7	NS	82.4	80.1	NS	82.5	77.5	<.05
Overall	75.5	78.3	<.001	76.2	77.1	NS	76.5	73.6	NS
YEAR 2									
Inactive	43.2	65.0	<.001	34.0	64.6	<.001	44.2	69.8	<.001
Active	80.6	80.4	NS	82.3	82.3	NS	83.4	82.8	NS
Overall	73.7	77.6	0.001	74.7	79.5	<.01	77.4	80.8	NS

NS= Non significant

There were significant increases in the total time spent doing sport each week between baseline and 3 months in all groups as well as significant increases in the total time spent doing sport each week between baseline and 6 and 9 months in the overall and inactive groups.

There was little change in participants reporting being confident they could participate in sport at least once a week for 30 minutes between baseline and follow-up overall and in the active group. Increases in confidence were observed in the inactive group however none of the changes were statistically significant.

Colleague support for participation in sport was generally low at baseline in all groups with only around one fifth of participants in the active and overall groups agreeing support was given 'often' or 'very often'. In years 1 and 2 of the Workplace Challenge there were significant increases in colleague support for sports participation between baseline and 3 months in all groups.

Physical activity

In the inactive group and overall, there were significant increases in the proportion of participants meeting physical activity recommendations of 150 minutes moderate or higher intensity physical activity per week (Department of Health, 2011) at all survey time points. For inactive participants in year 1 the increase was from 61.3% at baseline to 87.7% at 3 month follow-up. In year 2 the increase was from 56.3% at baseline to 85.6% at 3 month follow-up (Table 2).

Table 2 Proportion meeting physical activity guidelines*

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value
YEAR 1									
Inactive	61.3	87.7	<.001	54.9	85.3	<.001	60.7	78.6	<.05
Active	94.4	96.8	.001	94.9	96.6	NS	94.8	97.9	<.05
Overall	90.0	95.6	<.001	89.5	95.1	<.001	90.4	95.4	<.001
YEAR 2									
Inactive	56.3	85.6	<.001	57.6	90.6	<.001	54.2	86.0	<.001
Active	94.4	95.8	NS	95.2	97.2	<.05	95.7	95.2	NS
Overall	87.3	93.9	<.001	89.2	96.2	<.001	89.4	93.8	.01

*defined as at least 150 minutes moderate intensity physical activity per week (Department of Health, 2011)

NS= Non significant

The proportion of respondents who correctly reported the physical activity guideline of 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week was low, particularly in the inactive group. There were small but statistically significant increases in the proportion of respondents who correctly reported the guidelines after 3 and 6 months overall and for active participants but there were no significant changes for the inactive group. Overall, knowledge of the physical activity recommendations remained poor.

Active travel to work

Table 3 shows the proportion of participants doing any walking or cycling to or from work. Significant increases in the proportion of participants doing any walking to work were observed after 3 months in inactive participants and overall in year 1, and in active participants and overall in year 2. These positive changes were generally not maintained in the longer-term.

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 in year 1 however, in year 2, a significant increase was observed for the inactive group only.

Table 3 Proportion of participants doing any walking or cycling to/from work

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value	%	%	p-value
WALKING									
YEAR 1									
Inactive	19.6	25.1	.015	18.6	24.5	NS	17.9	16.1	NS
Active	22.7	23.9	NS	24.3	23.6	NS	25.1	19.3	.002
Overall	22.3	24.1	.022	23.6	23.7	NS	24.1	18.9	.002
YEAR 2									
Inactive	23.4	24.8	NS	21.1	27.2	NS	22.1	20.9	NS
Active	23.7	26.0	.012	23.2	25.6	NS	24.8	23.7	NS
Overall	23.6	25.8	.010	22.8	25.8	.017	24.4	23.3	NS
CYCLING									
YEAR 1									
Inactive	5.5	8.9	.008	7.8	10.8	NS	3.6	5.4	NS
Active	16.2	18.6	<.001	19.1	24.2	<.001	21.1	30.5	<.001
Overall	14.8	17.3	<.001	17.6	22.4	<.001	18.9	27.3	<.001
YEAR 2									
Inactive	5.6	9.9	.002	10.9	16.3	.039	3.5	9.3	NS
Active	16.9	16.8	NS	18.7	20.2	NS	20.4	22.1	NS
Overall	14.8	15.5	NS	17.5	19.6	.040	17.8	20.1	NS

NS= Non significant

2.7 Impact on health and well-being indicators

Active participants had a lower mean BMI than inactive participants at all survey time points. However, no statistically significant changes were observed in BMI of participants between baseline and follow-up. This was potentially due to a limitation of the self-report nature of the BMI measure used. It is likely that respondents recalled their height and weight from memory rather than taking an accurate measure for each follow up survey.

Mental health and well-being scores (assessed using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) significantly improved between baseline and the 3 and 6 month follow-up overall and for inactive and active participants (Table 4). This data was only gathered in year 2.

Table 4 Mean score for mental health and well-being

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean	
	score	score		score	score		score	score	
	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value
Inactive	24.02 ±9.99	25.33 ±6.76	<.01	22.61 ±13.16	24.96 ±4.66	<.05	24.40 ±10.55	25.48 ±4.92	NS
Active	24.89 ±7.67	25.44 ±7.71	<.001	25.11 ±6.28	25.95 ±6.18	<.001	25.06 ±7.18	25.21 ±6.20	NS
Overall	24.73 ±8.15	25.42 ±7.54	<.001	24.71 ±7.81	25.79 ±5.98	<.001	24.96 ±7.79	25.25 ±6.02	NS

Higher score = better mental well-being; NS= Non significant

2.8 Impact on business indicators

Absenteeism and presenteeism data were collected in year two of the Workplace Challenge.

Absenteeism

There were significant reductions in sickness absenteeism overall between baseline and 3, 6 and 9 month follow-ups. At 6 and 9 months, the mean number of days absent from work reduced by 0.6 days overall (Table 5).

Table 5 Mean days absent from work in the last 3 months due to illness

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean	
	days	days		days	days		days	days	
	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value	(±SD)	(±SD)	p-value
Inactive	1.1 ±4.0	0.9 ±2.7	NS	0.8 ±2.7	0.5 ±1.2	NS	0.8 ±1.4	0.4 ±1.1	NS
Active	1.0 ±3.9	0.7 ±1.9	NS	1.3 ±4.8	0.6 ±2.7	<.001	1.3 ±5.2	0.7 ±3.1	<.001
Overall	1.0 ±3.9	0.8 ±2.0	.03	1.2 ±4.5	0.6 ±2.5	<.001	1.2 ±4.8	0.6 ±2.9	<.001

NS= Non significant

Presenteeism

Significant reductions in presenteeism were observed in nearly all groups between baseline and 3, 6 and 9 month follow up in year 2. The greatest reductions were observed between baseline and 6 months with respondents reporting on average between 1.4 and 1.7 days less presenteeism at follow-up (Table 6).

Table 6 Mean days attended work when sick or not feeling well (presenteeism)

	Baseline	3 Month		Baseline	6 Month		Baseline	9 Month	
	Mean days (\pm SD)	Mean days (\pm SD)	p-value	Mean days (\pm SD)	Mean days (\pm SD)	p-value	Mean days (\pm SD)	Mean days (\pm SD)	p-value
Inactive	4.4 \pm 9.1	3.2 \pm 5.6	NS	4.0 \pm 9.1	2.3 \pm 5.7	.002	3.4 \pm 7.6	2.5 \pm 6.8	.027
Active	3.1 \pm 6.9	2.5 \pm 4.7	.028	3.4 \pm 8.0	2.0 \pm 5.1	.028	3.0 \pm 6.8	2.1 \pm 5.6	<.001
Overall	3.3 \pm 7.4	2.6 \pm 4.9	.009	3.5 \pm 8.2	2.1 \pm 5.2	<.001	3.1 \pm 6.9	2.2 \pm 5.8	<.001

3. Lessons learnt and recommendations

Key learning from the evaluation of the Workplace Challenge along with recommendations are outlined below:

1. Employers have a role to play in supporting inactive individuals to overcome frequently reported barriers to taking part in sport and physical activity, including lack of time and specific work-related barriers relating to policies and organisational culture. Creating opportunities to be active during the working day along with providing a supportive environment (facilities and equipment) and implementing suitable policies (flexi-time, opportunities to take breaks away from desks, incentives) may help facilitate participation in physical activity and sport leading to improvements in employee health and business benefits. For this to be effective, whole organisations need to be recruited and engaged in the programme (rather than individual employees) and support provided to help increase the priority placed on sport, physical activity and health at the organisational level and to influence senior management to facilitate a shift in organisational culture and policy.
2. The national Workplace Challenge programme covers most areas of England through delivery at local level by County Sports Partnerships and has the potential to provide support to many employers to help them promote sports and physical activity to their employees and to provide opportunities for participation. Further investment in marketing is needed to raise the profile of the programme at national level and increase awareness of the programme to engage more employers. Engaging some large national employers and Government departments may also help to raise the programme's profile. If this is successful, increased capacity and resource may also be required at local level to support the engagement of additional employers.

3. Leadership at national level is vital for the delivery of these types of programmes with support from national partners and input from those working operationally at the local level. Capacity and time is needed to engage partners in the programme and to build relationships. These partnerships are important for increasing programme capacity, offering additional services, identifying additional funding and may help other organisations to meet their delivery targets. Developing capacity at the local operational level is also essential to ensure the programme can be developed and delivered effectively and all aspects of the programme can be implemented.
4. Implementing a written communication strategy with clearly outlined roles and responsibilities for project partners and those represented on national steering committees is important for the timely dissemination of information in projects working at this scale. It is important to maintain communication with all partners and other stakeholders e.g. Workplace Challenge Champions and to provide opportunities for sharing learning.
5. During the programme, a number of changes were made to the Workplace Challenge website and to delivery of other aspects of the programme based on feedback from stakeholders at all levels. Maintaining flexibility and adapting the programme is important to meet the national and local needs of those delivering the programme and participants however, this should be balanced with maintaining a clear focus for the programme with a systematic, evidence-based and strategic approach to development in order to maintain the programme's unique selling point.
6. Workplace Challenge Champions play an important role at the workplace level in delivering the project and in sustaining involvement however they face a number of challenges including the time commitment to undertake their role alongside their everyday job. Support will be needed to raise their profile and visibility, and to embed their role into organisations in order to maintain their involvement. Communicating across large organisations is also a challenge, especially when there is only one Champion, and will require further support at senior management level to facilitate dissemination of information to ensure it reaches all employees. Developing a network of Champions, or departmental contacts for sport and physical activity, across large organisations may help to build capacity for communication and delivery of activities.
7. Developing a marketing strategy with clear target audiences, relevant messages and linked to topical reports and events was thought to be effective in engaging employees in the programme. Providing marketing and communication templates, as well as other promotional materials, for use by local delivery partners is important given limited capacity at local level to develop these resources. The resources should be flexible to allow for local adaptation and tailoring.
8. The Workplace Challenge was successful in reaching a large number of employees from a wide variety of organisations however often only a small number of employees signed up from each workplace. More work is needed to recruit workplaces at the organisational level in order to maximise the benefits of the Workplace Challenge for employee health

and for business. Senior management buy-in is needed and a commitment to support employee participation in sport and physical activity and improve employee health as part of the business agenda. In addition, 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. Recruiting and retaining inactive employees and keeping them engaged over the long term remains a challenge. Inactive employees indicated they would like opportunities to be active at work but they prefer low intensity activities which fit with individual circumstances and preferences. A range of activities need to be provided to meet their needs. The competitive elements of the Workplace Challenge may not be attractive to this target group and alternative approaches may need to be used. An emphasis on the social and fun aspects of participation, and providing rewards for changing behaviour, rather than competition and leader boards may be more appealing and a bespoke product may need to be developed to support this target group.
10. Walking, running and road cycling were the most frequently logged activities for all participants in all of the challenges and throughout the year. Walking represented a much higher proportion of activities logged for inactive participants reflecting a preference for lower intensity, non-competitive activities. Walking may be a 'first step' towards becoming active for those who have not participated in sport or activity for some time and further work may be needed to explore how to transition these participants from walking into other activities.
11. The online and offline components of the Workplace Challenge were important for engaging participants and sustaining their involvement. Ongoing communication of opportunities for participation in the programme outside of national activity logging challenge periods, either online or offline, was critical to sustain participant engagement. Many CSPs offered activities in the local area or signposted participants to other activities that were taking place, however fewer activities were offered by workplaces themselves. Increasing opportunities in workplaces and during work time may facilitate participation.
12. There was mixed success in engaging National Governing Bodies for Sport in the programme. Developing partnerships with NGBs and other sports and physical activity organisations who could provide a workplace sport or physical activity offer may help to support employers in providing opportunities for their employees to be active either during or outside of work. This may also help NGBs and other organisations to meet their own objectives for delivery and participation.
13. The Workplace Challenge was effective in increasing participation in sport and physical activity in inactive individuals and overall. Colleague support for participation in sport also increased after the national eight week activity log challenge. Knowledge of the physical activity guidelines remained low. There were some changes in walking and cycling to and from work but only in the short-term. Increasing knowledge of the physical activity

guidelines and promoting walking and cycling as part of the journey to and from work could be areas for future promotion and intervention.

14. Potentially long term positive effects on mental health and well-being, sickness absence and presenteeism were observed in participants in the Workplace Challenge. In addition, participants perceived there to be increased morale and improvements in communication due to new relationships being formed with colleagues. These will be investigated further in phase 2 of the programme (2016-2017).
15. For future sustainability, it will be necessary to attract new investment in the Workplace Challenge at both the national and local levels. It may be important to link with other sectors for the whom the physical activity and health agenda may be of relevance e.g. transport, environment, development and planning in order to raise awareness, build capacity, attract investment and increase engagement with the programme.

4. Evaluation strengths and limitations

A pragmatic evaluation of the Workplace Challenge was undertaken using a mixed methods approach and following the Standard Evaluation Framework for Physical Activity Interventions. A large number of participants completed the baseline survey when registering on the Workplace Challenge website enabling us to provide the characteristics of a high proportion of those taking part. We were also able to match baseline data with data provided in follow-up surveys strengthening the findings of the evaluation.

Due to financial constraints, the evaluation did not include any comparison or control participants or workplaces. Therefore it is not possible to solely attribute the changes observed in sports participation, physical activity, health outcomes or business indicators to the Workplace Challenge. Response rates to follow-up surveys were also low, particularly for inactive individuals, therefore findings should be interpreted with caution.

5. Conclusions

The Workplace Challenge successfully engaged a large number of employees across 36 County Sports Partnerships in England including a proportion of 'inactive' participants. A number of online activities were delivered including national and local activity logging challenges, complemented by offline challenges including competition events and business games. Positive changes in sport and physical activity were observed as well as improvements in mental health and well-being and reductions in absenteeism and presenteeism. Learning from different stakeholders and participants in relation to project delivery identified a number of areas for improvement and highlighted important aspects for delivering these types of programmes.

Employers have a role to play in promoting sport and physical activity to their employees and providing an organisational culture that supports participation. This will help to overcome some of the frequently mentioned barriers to participation in sport and physical activity and improve the health and well-being of the workforce which will potentially benefit business. This report presents evidence that the Workplace Challenge programme may help to support employers in promoting a more active, healthy, and better motivated workforce.

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