

HELPING GREAT BRITAIN WORK WELL STRATEGY AND WORK PROGRAMME ON MSDS (UNITED KINGDOM)

Type of initiative: National strategy and programme

Timeframe: 2016-2021

1 Description of the initiative

1.1 Introduction

The strategy Helping Great Britain Work Well was launched in 2016 and will be in place for 5 years (until 2021). The strategy defines six priority themes, one of which tackles work-related ill health, ranging from cancer and other long-latency diseases, to stress and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Key elements of this theme have included earlier prevention, which is the most cost-effective strategy, and a greater focus on health issues at work.

1.2 Aim of the initiative

The overall aim of the strategy Helping Great Britain Work Well is to improve health in the workplace, while building on the country's highly successful track record on safety. The strategy sets out six priority themes:

- acting together — promoting greater ownership of health and safety in Great Britain;
- tackling ill health — highlighting and tackling the costs of work-related ill health;
- managing risk well — simplifying risk management and helping businesses to grow;
- supporting small employers — giving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) simple advice so that they know what they have to do;
- keeping pace with change — anticipating and tackling new health and safety challenges;
- sharing success — promoting the benefits of Great Britain's world-class health and safety system.

The benefits of the strategy can be realised by all businesses, including SMEs. It seeks to use existing information and tools (of which there are several specifically relating to the assessment and prevention of MSDs) and to share them more widely with the public. One key message is that everyone has a role to play in the system, including employees, employers, trade unions, insurance and legal bodies, the government and regulators. For this reason, the strategy is referred to as a systems strategy. Involving everyone in this manner seeks to develop a sense of ownership and a recognition that everyone has a role to play.

1.3 Organisations involved

This strategy was launched by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Work Programme was developed by HSE Ergonomics Pool. HSE is the independent regulator for work-related health and safety in the UK.

1.4 What was done and how

The strategy was published in January 2016 and in February 2016 it was discussed with key players representing all sectors and organisations with an interest in health and safety. The WorkRight campaign was launched to support the implementation of the Strategy. It works with a variety of partner organisations from a range of sectors to share learning and best practice.

The campaign encourages companies to make their commitment to Helping Great Britain Work Right. A main website (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/strategy/index.htm>) provides information about the strategy and the campaign and how to get involved. There is also a separate website, Work Well Community, which provides more information about commitments. The website includes a message board to post questions and receive answers from HSE. Other interactive features include a LinkedIn group.

A separate section is dedicated to MSDs, featuring a promotional video clip, information on MSDs and examples of solutions to prevent them.

One feature of the strategy is the 'cascading down' of knowledge and expertise, with larger businesses providing support to local small businesses on workplace health and safety.

The strategy is operationalised through HSE's comprehensive Health and Work programme, with three health priority plans. The health priorities include occupational lung disease, work-related stress and MSDs.

HSE launched the Health and Work programme at its first annual conference in September 2017, which was attended by more than 350 participants from across the health and safety system. Attendees made commitments on behalf of their organisations to improve health and safety practices. The conference was promoted and live-streamed on social media, reaching more than a million people. The health priority plan for MSDs summarises the UK's current position in relation to MSDs, sets priorities and expected outcomes, and defines actions to achieve these priorities and outcomes. In addition, sectoral plans were drawn up to define HSE's focus over the next 3-5 years, covering 19 industry sectors and reflecting the three health priorities and the direction set out in the Helping Great Britain Work Well strategy. Employers, trade unions and professional bodies provided input in the development of sectoral plans.

As regards the desired outcomes, the MSDs plan targets:

- significant improvements in preventing and controlling exposure to MSDs, especially in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, logistics and transport, waste and recycling, and health and social care;
- a shift away from manual handling training towards risk elimination/reduction through design;
- research and development to identify new approaches to prevent risks posed by new, flexible ways of working, sedentary work and increased use of screen-based technologies;
- cross-industry learning about 'what works'.

HSE research found little evidence of the effectiveness of manual handling training. The evaluation resulted in recommendations to encourage employers to think about working practices and engineering changes rather than off-the-shelf training and to promote the adaptation of training to the work tasks, equipment and environment that workers encounter in practice.

To achieve the outcomes listed above, interventions, inspection activity and enforcement have been prioritised in those sectors/activities where MSDs pose the greatest risks. According to its annual report 2017-2018, HSE carried out a targeted programme of approximately 20,000 proactive inspections during that period, half of which were part of major campaigns addressing priority issues (including MSDs) in high-risk industries identified in the sectoral plans and in its Health and Work programme. Inspection campaigns in construction, bakeries, and waste and recycling were enhanced through linked information campaigns and by working jointly with industry representatives, in this way generating a greater impact.

During the same reporting period, HSE and the Chartered Institute for Ergonomics and Human Factors jointly sponsored a 'Risk-reduction through design' prize to showcase best practices. Emerging findings from HSE research showed that employers were struggling to find solutions to MSD challenges, so these design ideas were intended to meet a current need. HSE also live-streamed advice for employers on getting the right type of help for their businesses at its MSD Summit in March 2018. This was viewed approximately 1,000 times on the day of the summit and, within a week, around a further 1,000 people had watched the stream. The Health and Work programme is backed by Go Home Healthy, a multi-channel campaign that promotes HSE's commitment to tackling ill health in the workplace. The campaign was also launched at the HSE Annual Conference in September 2017.

The section on MSDs on the Go Home Healthy campaign website features promotional videos with practical examples of solutions; it also includes links to more information on the HSE website, such as statistics, case studies and publications, as well as a link to subscribe to HSE's MSDs e-bulletin.

1.5 What was achieved

As the strategy was launched in 2016 and the work programme in September 2017, it is too early to assess their impact. However, the list of commitments is quite impressive: by November 2017, it had reached more than 100.

The main website hosts a video that has received 16,013 views. The LinkedIn group has 2,062 members.

1.6 Success factors and challenges

The highly interactive and participatory features of the campaigns supporting the implementation of the strategy and work programmes may prove to be a success factor. The national engagement programme, including extensive stakeholder consultations conducted at the time of the launch, may also be a success factor.

1.7 Transferability

Individual ownership of health and safety, including MSD prevention, is a strong theme in the strategy. The transferability of the approach would depend significantly on the extent to which the country's health and safety culture was similar to that of the UK. Any Member State could launch a call for commitments, but individuals and companies might be less willing to respond and join the community.

The involvement of people at all levels — from the shop floor to the boardroom — is another aspect of the initiative that could be transferred to other countries and cultures.

2 Background

Data from the Eurostat Labour Force Survey ad hoc modules show that, in the 5 years from 2007 to 2013, the percentage of workers in the UK reporting some form of MSD decreased markedly, from 50.5 % to 40.5 %. In comparison, the overall trend in the whole of the EU was an increase from 54.2 % to 60.1 % over the same time period.

In the UK, MSDs account for 41 % of all ill health cases and 34 % of all working days lost due to ill health. The total number of working days lost in 2015/16 was 8.8 million, with an average of 16 days per case. Of the 539,000 cases of ill health due to MSDs in 2015/16, 176,000 were new in that year. The overall economic cost to Great Britain, based on the latest available estimates, is just over GBP 2 billion.

Over that period, national legislation has been in place that incorporates into UK law the provisions of two EU occupational safety and health directives that are intended to address some of the major causes of MSDs (Directive 90/269/EEC - manual handling of loads and Directive 90/270/EEC - display screen equipment). This legislation does not go beyond the minimum requirements set out in those directives.

The initiative described here is one of many dating back to the early days of implementation of the provisions of the directive in 1992.

References and resources

1. HSE, Helping Great Britain Work Well — make your commitment: <https://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/connect.ti/commitments/grouphome>
2. HSE, 'Health priority plan: musculoskeletal disorders'. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/strategiesandplans/health-and-work-strategy/musculoskeletal-disorders.pdf>
3. HSE, 'Helping Great Britain Work Well'. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/strategy/index.htm>
4. HSE, 'Helping Great Britain Work Well — commitments'. Available at: <https://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/connect.ti/commitments/view?objectId=54899&exp=e1>
5. Health and Safety Executive. Go Home Healthy website. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gohomehealthy/msd.htm>

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