


Exemplar physical activity employer

Pilot evaluation – Executive summary

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NHS Health Scotland is a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion and Public Health Development.

1.0 Background

- 1.1. The national physical activity implementation plan 'A More Active Scotland'ⁱ was published in 2014 and set out four outcomes relative to the workplace setting. Three of these outcomes focused on the development of an exemplar physical activity employer model:
 - The Scottish Government will be an exemplary employer in encouraging staff to be more physically active.
 - An identified private sector organisation will be an exemplary employer in encouraging staff to be more physically active.
 - An identified voluntary sector organisation will be an exemplary employer in encouraging staff to be more physically active.
- 1.2. To realise these outcomes a definition of the term 'exemplar employer' was required, followed by a range of processes that would effectively:
 - market and successfully encourage employers to adopt the model
 - support employers to work towards exemplar status
 - measure performance
 - reward successful delivery
 - disseminate effective practice.
- 1.3. In 2014, NHS Health Scotland hosted two workshops that involved public, private and voluntary sector organisations operating up to Healthy Working Lives (HWL) Gold Award level. Staff from NHS Health Scotland's Physical Activity, Human Resources, Public Health Science, Healthy Working Lives and Equality teams also attended these workshops.
- 1.4. In 2015, the EPAE definition criteria and measures were established with agreement reached to pilot these and evaluate the feasibility of future rollout of EPAE. Further background to the development of EPAE can be found in Appendix 2.

2.0 The pilot evaluation

- 2.1. The pilot took place between February and October 2016. Eight employers and three assessors signed up to participate in the EPAE pilot.
- 2.2. The eight pilot sites were selected as it was recognised that most had a pre-existing culture of physical activity and were most likely to meet the criteria. This would allow a focus on the pilot aim. Within the first three months of the pilot, employers were asked to develop an EPAE plan to demonstrate how they would meet the EPAE criteria. Their plan was assessed by one of the three assessors.
- 2.3. After six months, employers were asked to submit evidence against the criteria (shown in Appendix 1) to meet EPAE. During August 2016, the assessors reviewed the evidence to determine whether organisations met the criteria required for EPAE. The assessment results were sent on to the individual within NHS Health Scotland coordinating the pilots in August 2016. Organisations were given their assessment results in October 2016.

3.0 Evaluation aim, design and outcome

- 3.1. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the EPAE award application and assessment process.
- 3.2. The evaluation was designed to understand the process for employers applying for EPAE and assessors conducting EPAE assessments, with the aim of identifying barriers and facilitators to this process.
- 3.3. The intended outcome of the evaluation was to generate evidence to inform any future decisions around the roll-out and refinement of EPAE.
- 3.4. The pilot was not designed to measure the impact of EPAE on employee physical activity levels.

4.0 Methods

- 4.1. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 implementation leads across the eight organisations participating in the EPAE pilots. Three semi-structured interviews were

conducted with the assessors participating in the pilot. The data were analysed and key themes were identified.

5.0 Results

5.1. Participation

Six of the organisations produced EPAE plans and five submitted evidence at the end of the pilot. Therefore, three organisations did not complete the pilot. Reasons for this included certain criteria creating barriers and a lack of resources within their organisation to prioritise EPAE. Emerging themes fell into six categories:

5.1.1. Resources to implement EPAE

5.1.2. Facilitators to EPAE

5.1.3. Barriers to EPAE

5.1.4. The assessment process

5.1.5. Perceived impact of EPAE

5.1.6. Other factors.

5.1.1 Resources to implement EPAE

- a) Implementing EPAE was described by some implementation leads as relatively straightforward and simple process.
- b) The resources required to implement EPAE were described by some implementation leads as largely administrative.
- c) Several of the organisations reported already doing some of the activities required to meet EPAE, which facilitated the implementation process.

5.1.2 Facilitators to EPAE

- a) Seven of the organisations included in the pilot had already received the HWL award and this was described as a facilitator to the EPAE process.
- b) The majority of implementation leads described a pre-existing culture of physical activity within their organisation which facilitated the implementation of EPAE.
- c) Some implementation leads also reported that they already had the physical infrastructure in place to meet EPAE (e.g. showing facilities, bike racks).

5.1.3 Barriers to EPAE

- a) The EPAE registration process was described as a barrier due to technical problems with the Virtual Learning Environment.
- b) Two criteria in particular were described as a barrier (30-minute paid physical activity break per month and the development of an Active Travel Plan). This was largely due to resourcing implications associated with achieving these criteria.
- c) EPAE was perceived as being a lower priority for a few organisations in comparison to other areas of work and contributed to the fact that organisations did not submit evidence as part of the pilot.
- d) The EPAE name was described as a barrier as it was difficult to pronounce and there was no clear meaning associated with the name.

5.1.4 The assessment process

- a) Assessors reported that the assessment process was overly prescriptive, failing to allow assessors to make reasonable judgements about whether an organisation met EPAE.
- b) There was a lack of structure to the overall assessment and assessors reported that the process was unclear. In particular, once assessors completed their assessment it was not clear how the assessment results would be fed back to employers.
- c) The EPAE paperwork created a barrier to the overall assessment process as it was unclear how the guidance, evidence and criteria aligned.
- d) Lack of one-to-one communication between assessors and organisations applying for EPAE was described as a barrier to the process.

5.1.5 Perceived impact of EPAE

- a) The perceived impact of EPAE was mixed, with a few implementation leads suggesting an improvement in staff physical activity and awareness levels and others being unsure of the added value of EPAE.
- b) Effective staff engagement was perceived as key to EPAE impacting on physical activity levels.

5.1.6 Other factors

- a) It was unclear to a few implementation leads whether EPAE and HWL aligned.

- b) EPAE was described as easier to implement across a smaller team and larger organisations described barriers with EPAE, particularly if their organisation sits across multiple sites.

6.0 Conclusion

The findings suggest that further refinement of the EPAE award process is required. Consideration should be given to the types of organisations and employees likely to sign up to EPAE and how EPAE would work for organisations not already exposed to a culture of physical activity.

ⁱ Scottish Government (2014). A More Active Scotland – Building A Legacy from the Commonwealth Games. Available online www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/02/8239
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