

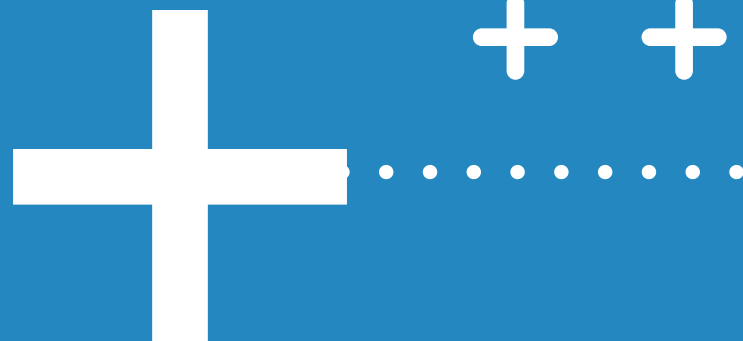
VOLTEdge
Because People Matter

in conjunction with
Enterprise Ireland

Emerging through Covid-19:

Employee Health and Well-being

July 2021



Employee Health and Well-being

Enabling and promoting good employee health and well-being to create a positive working environment where individuals and organisations can thrive can be a real source of competitive advantage. There is significant research to support the view that employees who are physically well and healthy are likely to be more engaged at work. Research also shows that health and well-being should not be treated as an ‘add-on’ or ‘nice-to-have’ activity. When companies place employee well-being at the centre of their business model and view it as the vital source of value creation, the dividends can be significant.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought concerns about employee health and well-being to the forefront of businesses. The pandemic, along with the changing nature of work, the workforce and the workplace, is making the focus on individual well-being even more critical to broader organisational health and sustainability.

The **CIPD Wellbeing Pyramid** shows that to truly achieve a healthy workplace an employer needs to ensure that its culture, leadership and people management are the bedrock on which to build a fully integrated well-being approach.

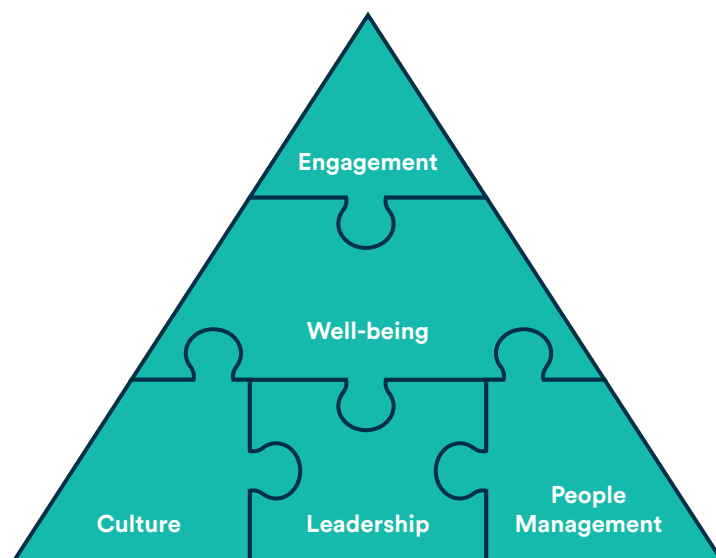


Figure 1: CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) Wellbeing Pyramid

Employee well-being strategy

While Covid-19 brings potentially serious physical health consequences for many employees, there are also equally challenging mental health implications, such as anxiety, stress, fear and uncertainty. Those returning to work or continuing to work remotely may be experiencing anxiety about the ongoing risk of infection, changes to their jobs or the workplace, juggling family or childcare responsibilities, struggling with ongoing isolation from family (particularly employees from overseas) and experiencing financial and relationship pressures. Others may have experienced the serious illness or death of a relative or friend during the pandemic.

As an employer, you should ensure that your company has a holistic framework in place to support people's physical and mental health, and offer sources of assistance such as counselling, an employee assistance programme and occupational health services (OHS) where possible. You should ensure that line managers in particular have the ongoing guidance needed to support their teams, so they can have sensitive conversations with individuals and know where to signpost help where needed.

Mental health issues have a significant impact on employee well-being, are a major cause of long-term absence from work and can have a significant impact on employee productivity. Mental health issues will affect one in four employees at some point in their working lives. Employers have a crucial role to play in supporting their employees' mental health. As a leader, you play an important role in developing and implementing a holistic employee well-being strategy that supports both physical and mental well-being in the workplace.

It is important to remember that all approaches to well-being should treat people as individuals with varying needs who require tailored support.

A holistic well-being policy should:

- ✓ Set out a clear commitment to nurturing a working environment that promotes employee health and well-being
- ✓ Be championed by senior management
- ✓ Clearly outline the responsibilities of crucial stakeholders for example, senior management, HR and employees
- ✓ Set out the available advice, supports and training to enhance employee well-being
- ✓ Incorporate the process and metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of all well-being initiatives
- ✓ Be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant and up to date



Employee well-being and supports



How can I support and enhance employee well-being?

There are many ways in which employers can support and enhance employee well-being in the workplace

- Check in regularly with employees – ideally face-to-face or online with cameras on
- Create an environment where employees are comfortable discussing mental health at work
- Look for possible early signs and symptoms of poor mental health, for example, a change in an employee's usual behaviour, increased absence, poor performance or tiredness
- Confront unhealthy working habits
- Ensure managers are trained to understand the importance of supporting and enhancing employee well-being and can raise concerns sensitively with employees
- Proactively review workloads and discuss the distribution of work with employees, therefore providing an opportunity for them to raise any concerns
- Actively promote work/life balance
- Adjust working hours, if required – and, if possible, offer flexible working arrangements
- Know when, where and how to signpost to expert support services
- Promote well-being initiatives and organise regular well-being sessions
- Provide frequent information and updates on available supports
- Provide access to an employee assistance programme or occupational health service
- Act as a role model and lead by example
- Review your own management/leadership style
- Be mindful of employees who continue to work remotely as signs of stress can be more difficult to identify in these employees

Consult with employees and encourage feedback

- Encourage your employees to talk to you if they feel work pressure is putting them or anyone else at risk of ill health
- Invite employees to suggest ways in which their work might be organised to alleviate any stress
- Ask employees to inform you if they are suffering from a medical condition that appears to be long term and is affecting their ability to carry out day to day tasks, including memory and learning
- Be open to discussing any reasonable adjustments that could be made to assist them in performing their job

What external supports can I tap into?

There are a wide range of supports available to promote and encourage well-being both outside and inside the workplace:

Work Positive is a free state and stakeholder supported psychosocial risk management process that helps organisations identify ways to improve employee well-being.

The Government's Keep Well campaign is aimed at showing people of all ages how we can mind our own physical and mental health and well-being by adding healthy and helpful habits to our daily and weekly routines. It provides guidelines, information, and tips on things that will help us keep well through the coming months.

A range of supports and advice is also available from the Health and Safety Authority on work-related stress.

Vaccination roll-out and returning to the office

With the Covid-19 phased vaccination programme well underway, it looks like the latter half of 2021 will see a return to a somewhat normal life, and with it, a possible return to the workplace.

What do I need to do now?

Employers should start to consider what impact the vaccine roll-out will have on employees' return to the workplace. As employers have been reminded repeatedly during the pandemic, they have an obligation to provide a safe place of work for their employees and the vaccine roll-out is likely to present both opportunities and challenges in the provision of that safe place of work.

The revised Work Safely Protocol incorporates updated advice on the Public Health measures required to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. It provides guidance on ventilation and vaccinations as part of the range of measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 as well as information on how to approach the use of antigen testing in the workplace. It is important for all employers to read the Protocol as it reflects the most up-to-date public health advice for the workplace.

It is likely that many health measures and obligations on employers will remain with us for some time. Here are some tips to help you plan and prepare:

- ✓ Review and update your **Risk Assessment** in light of the availability of vaccines and consider whether additional measures are required to control and minimise the risks for employees who do not want to receive a vaccine, such as continued compliance with social distancing guidelines and use of face coverings. (See appendix – Risk Assessment Template or use Besmart.ie – a free online tool to guide you through the process).
- ✓ Your **Risk Assessment** may need to incorporate workplace health and safety measures where some employees have had the vaccine and others have not.
- ✓ Monitor government and public health guidance on how to manage a safe return to the workplace and update your policies and procedures accordingly.

- ✓ Provide regular and clear communications to employees on any updated health and safety measures.
- ✓ Consider whether you intend to allow employees to continue to work remotely, to allow employees to return to the workplace when this is possible, or to provide for a hybrid of remote and office work. We recommend that employers set out a clear policy on remote working guidelines and expectations well in advance of any potential return to the workplace. See the Remote and Blended Working guide for more details on this topic.

It is important to note that while an employer can strongly encourage their employees to receive the vaccine, they cannot mandate that their employees receive it.

Diversity and inclusion

While Covid-19 has put a heavy focus on the health and well-being of employees, it may have resulted in the de-prioritisation and slowing down of other initiatives such as diversity and inclusion (D&I) programmes. A diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial for businesses that want to attract and retain top talent. According to [Forbes' Innovation Through Diversity report](#), companies with above-average diversity produced a greater proportion of revenue from innovation (45% of total) than organisations with below average diversity (26%).

However, research by McKinsey (2020) found that while workers across all demographic groups experienced challenges during the pandemic related to mental health, work-life balance, workplace health and safety, a missing sense of connectivity and belonging with colleagues, and concerns about job opportunities, underrepresented employee groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ employees, people of colour, and working parents, have experienced the most challenges during this time.

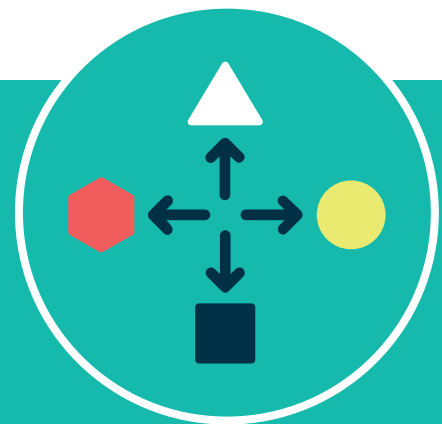
How do I build Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the workplace?

Diversity and Inclusion strategy

- ✓ Develop (or update and strengthen) your D&I strategy to ensure it takes account of the evolving workforce and workplace
- ✓ Champion this by leadership/management

Work/life balance

- ✓ Support work/life balance – increase flexibility where work is performed
- ✓ Ensure work is evenly and fairly distributed



Remote/blended working policies

- ✓ Give all employees (where possible) the opportunity for flexible work
- ✓ Provide equal access to career development, mentoring and support
- ✓ Consider that a virtual-only work model may exclude many employees from your business for example, more junior, lower paid employees may not have additional space to work from home

Communications

- ✓ Use communications tools that take account of diverse circumstances, for example, some employees may not always want their camera on if working from their bedroom
- ✓ Try rotating meeting hosts so that everyone gets a chance to talk. Quieter employees can often get overlooked during virtual team meetings
- ✓ Try different communication tools for different meetings – some meetings may mandate cameras on while others may use phone calls or direct messaging
- ✓ Consider the timing of company and team meetings to accommodate employees in different time zones or those with caring responsibilities

Recruitment

- ✓ Broaden your hiring remit – look beyond your regular sources of talent
- ✓ Regularly test and review your hiring tools, processes and technology as they can inadvertently contain bias against specific characteristics including race, gender and socioeconomic background

Well-being initiatives

- ✓ Ensure well-being initiatives are inclusive and accommodate the needs of diverse employees to take account of physical ability, mental health, chronic illness, religion, family demands and language
- ✓ Understand the link between D&I and well-being – employees who feel included are more likely to experience greater well-being. Equally employees with high-levels of well-being are more likely to be inclusive of others

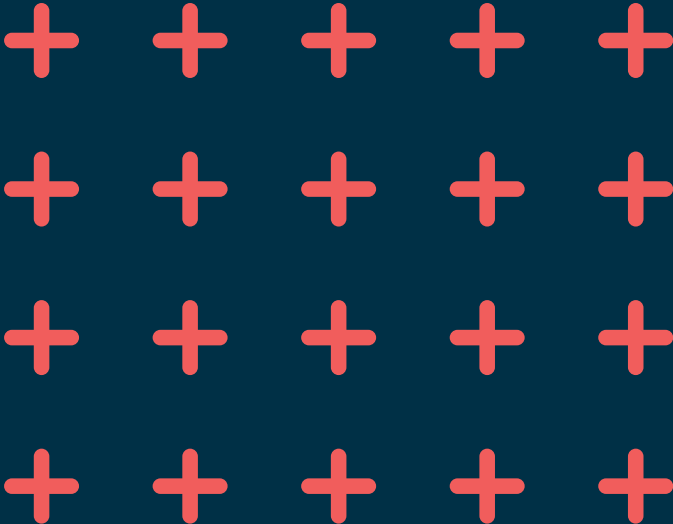
D&I calendar

- ✓ Raise awareness and create a sense of inclusion by planning and publishing a D&I calendar to highlight important dates for underrepresented groups, for example, LGBTQ+ events, Mental Health Week, International Women's Day, national holidays for overseas employees

Summary

Employee health and well-being should form a core element of your return to the workplace strategy. Whether you operate a fully remote, hybrid or on-site approach it is important to ensure that employee physical and mental health remains a priority. A holistic employee well-being strategy supporting employee physical and mental health will be a core enabler of employee engagement and your company's performance. To achieve a healthy work environment, you need to ensure that your company culture, leadership and people management are the bedrock on which you build a fully integrated well-being approach.

- Consult with managers and employees around your return to the workplace to ensure that their views are listened to and incorporated in your decision-making process. This will help alleviate stress for those who may have concerns about returning
- Offer a range of employee well-being supports to help employees navigate their return to the workplace, considering that many will be apprehensive about their return
- Review existing health and well-being supports to ensure they remain appropriate within a remote, hybrid or on-site environment, and make changes if necessary
- Continuously evaluate ways that you can create a supportive and positive employee well-being culture in your company
- A diverse and inclusive workforce is business critical, so it is important to ensure that well-being and any return to the workplace policies support and promote diversity and inclusion



Appendix

Risk Assesment Template

This is a draft copy of a generic Risk Assessment for dealing with the current Covid-19 situation in the workplace. It is not likely to cover all scenarios and each employer should consider their own unique circumstances and business. For some sectors, such as that for health care workers, the assessment may look quite different although many of the principles would still be relevant.

Company Name:	Carried out by:
Date carried out:	Date of next review:

What are the risks/hazards?	Who might be impacted?	Controls required	Additional Controls	By who	By When	Done
Spread of Covid-19 virus	Staff, contractors, visitors, cleaners & anybody else who comes into physical contact with your business	List here all the measures you need to put in place e.g. handwashing procedures, cleaning procedures, social distancing procedures etc.	List here any additional measures e.g. daily checks, reminders, communication plans, frequency etc.	Assign owners	Assign timelines	



About Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. We work in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales in global markets. In this way, we support sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment.

About Voltege

Voltege Management Ltd is a leading Irish HR and Management Consultancy. Voltege's ethos is to effectively partner with and deliver support and advice to clients to meet the needs of their business. Voltege supports scaling start-ups, entrepreneurs, SMEs and undertakes larger organisation design and complex projects with major corporates.

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