Wellness in work: The economic arguments for investing in the health and wellbeing of the workforce in Wales
Wellness in work report

The Wellness in work report presents the economic arguments for investing in the health and wellbeing of the workforce in Wales.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) has a goal of Wales having an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

Through discussion with Public Health Wales, we focussed our attention on:

1. A diverse and inclusive workforce in Wales;
2. Valuing employees and keeping healthy for a cost-effective workforce;
3. Worklessness and returning to work.
Rates of employment and unemployment in Wales

- 1.5 million people in employment in Wales (NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, 2018).
- 14.3% of the employed are self-employed (StatsWales, 2018).
- 67.2% of older people aged between 50 and 64 are in employment (Department for Work and Pensions, 2015).

72%  
80.5%
Sickness absence rates in Wales are higher than the UK average.

Keeping people healthy and in work prevents loss of productivity and benefits the Welsh economy. Dealing with preventable health issues, unhealthy behaviours and reducing the risk of injuries will decrease premature mortality and keep many working people who want to work in employment for longer.

Sickness absence rates in 2017: 2.7% (Wales) 1.9% (UK)
The NHS is a major employer in Wales

Physical inactivity results in sickness absence costing the Welsh economy £134 million per year. Promoting physical activity in workplaces can increase physical participation at a cost of £4.11 per person (NHS Wales, 2016).

It can be cost-effective to target at risk workers in order to reduce sickness absence, for example, by offering influenza vaccination to people working in health and social care sectors (Public Health Wales, 2018).

Yoga interventions can be cost-effective in terms of reducing absenteeism due to musculoskeletal disorders which accounts for 25% of sickness absence in the NHS in Wales. For every £1 spent on yoga there is an estimated £10.17 societal benefit generated largely due to increased productivity at work (Public Health England, 2017).
From good quality employment to unemployment

Good quality employment:
- Skills and training
- Co-production
- Work-life balance
- Productivity
- Economic Inclusion
- Autonomy
- Sustainable contracts
- Fair pay / higher wages

Wellness in Work:

Unemployment:
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Adverse environment/treatment
- Low wages
- Skills shortages
- No guaranteed hours contracts
- Deprivation
- Shift work / long hours
Unemployment is linked to:

- A 20-25% increased risk of death in the decade following job loss (e.g. due to the increased risk of heart disease, stroke and suicide) (Clark, 2003, NHS Wales, 2016).

- Increased financial hardship

- Increased mental health problems
Worklessness and returning to work

Moving a person from unemployment into sustainable employment in Wales benefits the local economy by £10k per year and benefits society by £24k per year.

Unhealthy behaviours costs the Welsh Government millions of pounds a year

Unhealthy behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse can have a wide ranging impact on employment including increasing the risk of unemployment and absences from work.


Smoking breaks (in addition to standard rest breaks) cost £2K each year for a full-time employee (CEBR, 2014).

Gambling costs the Welsh Government between £2 million and £8 million in terms of lost tax revenue due to sickness absence, presenteeism and unemployment (Thorley et al., 2016).
Workplace mental health interventions can offer a positive return on investment: up to £9 generated for every £1 spent (Kigozi et al, 2017; Farmer and Stevenson, 2017; Deloitte UK, 2017).
Supporting all employees to thrive in work

Support for all employees to thrive

Targeted support for those who are struggling

Tailored support for those who are ill and possibly off work

Primary prevention interventions such as organisation wide, culture change or awareness raising.

Secondary / tertiary prevention interventions tailored for employees at risk or off sick such as evidence-based psychological therapy.

Source: Thriving at work framework (adapted from Farmer and Stevenson, 2017).
A diverse and inclusive workforce can boost the Welsh economy

In Wales 45.8% of people with disabilities are in employment. The Welsh Government National Strategy supports people with disabilities to remain in work, return to work or enter work as soon as possible.

Young people have diverse needs. Interventions to prevent young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) can save £522 million to the economy.

Older people in employment can feel valued, keep well, earn more money, and contribute more tax to the Government.
Women make a huge contribution to the economy of Wales through working and through unpaid caring.

1 in 20

Women complete more than fifty hours or more of unpaid care work each week. The economic value of unpaid care by women in Wales is £3.8 billion of the £8.6 billion per year for all unpaid carers.
Taxation and Spending through the life course

- In the UK, most adults pay taxes throughout their working years.

- This figure shows taxation and spending through the life course and highlights the fact that taxes paid peaks at around 46 years of age and then drops to a lower level from then on.

- It is at this point also that government spending starts to increase with age.

Per capita United Kingdom taxation and spending through the life course – the working years. Source: Office for Budget Responsibility (2018)
For more information:

Infographic summary and full version of the report “Wellness in work: The economic arguments for investing in the health and wellbeing of the workforce in Wales” is available to download at: http://cheme.bangor.ac.uk/reportspublications.php.en

See full report for references.

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