

Bright spots, physical activity investments that work: Workplace Challenge

Emma J Adams,¹ Hayley Musson,¹ Andrew Watson,² Lee Mason²

BACKGROUND

A high proportion of adults in England are insufficiently active.¹ The workplace is an important setting for promoting physical activity with potential to reach a high proportion of adults in employment (74.8%).^{2,3} The 'Workplace Challenge' aims to increase sport and physical activity participation in inactive employees. It is a multi-component programme based around a website/app where employees can track their activity levels and take part in online activity challenges, along with locally organised sports events and competitions, signposting to other local activities and workplace champion training.

KEY PROGRAMME FEATURES

Implementation

The programme is led and managed nationally by the County Sports Partnership Network (CSP Network); and delivered locally by County Sports Partnerships (CSPs), National Governing Bodies for Sport (NGBs) and other local and national partners.

Workplace and employee recruitment

A variety of strategies are used to market the programme to workplaces and employees. CSPs telephone, email and visit workplaces, attend local business network events, publish in business news journals, use social media, publish press releases, and distribute materials and newsletters using local networks and the local CSP website. Many participants are recruited through word of mouth or workplace promotional activities.

Programme components

The programme includes four key components underpinned by selected behaviour

¹National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

²County Sports Partnership Network, Loughborough, Leicestershire, UK

Correspondence to Miss Emma J Adams, National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, UK; e.j.adams@lboro.ac.uk

change techniques⁴ (table 1). Participants can log their activities on the website/app (activity type, duration and intensity), set personal goals and track their progress towards achieving 150 min of moderate-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) each week. Regular national online activity logging challenges are implemented. For example, the 8-week 'active lunch challenge' (January/February 2017) encouraged employees to do an activity during their lunch break. Points were awarded for each activity recorded, and leader boards enabled participants to assess their progress against others, either as individuals or as part of a team. Other shorter challenges are offered locally, for example, a 4-week active travel challenge. CSPs and NGBs organise local events and competitions, for example, table tennis competition,

social summer cricket, rowing taster session, learn to ski session, corporate football tournament. Finally, workplace champions are recruited and trained to enable them to organise activities within their own workplaces, for example, taster sessions, internal walking challenges or interdepartmental sports competitions.

PROGRAMME SUCCESS

Key results from the mixed methods evaluation (2013–2016) are shown in figure 1. Most participants were female (66.5%), aged 35–50 years (40.6%) and 78.7% had sedentary occupations. The most popular activities recorded by inactive participants were walking, road cycling, running, the gym and swimming. At follow-up, 65.0% of inactive participants were taking part in sport and 85.6% were meeting recommended MVPA guidelines. Inactive participants reported being more active (55%), as well as feeling fitter (35.3%) and healthier (37.3%).

Factors influencing success

From interviews and focus groups with delivery partners, workplace representatives and programme participants, several factors were identified which influenced

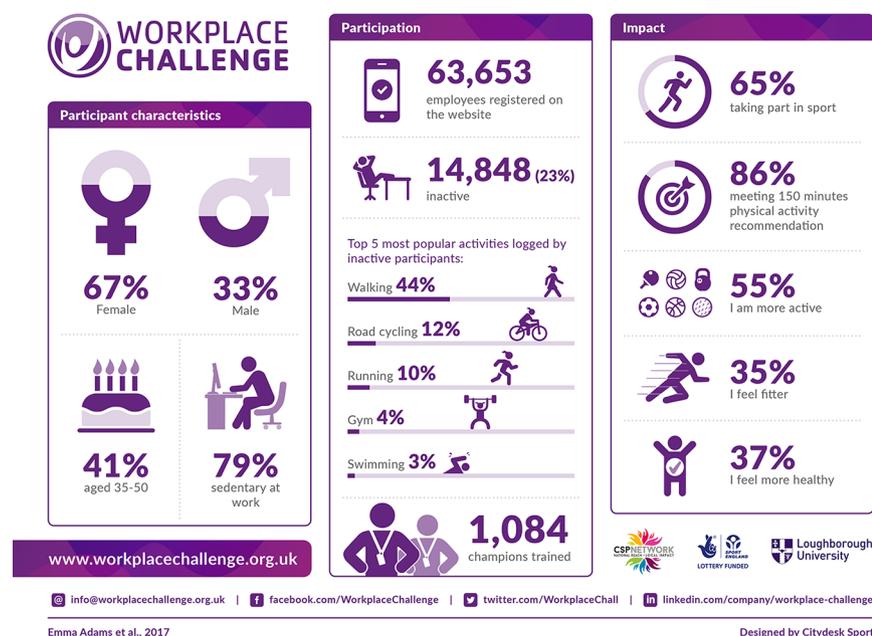
Programme card

- ▶ Country/locality
 - The Workplace Challenge is delivered nationally across England.
- ▶ Target population
 - Inactive employees are the primary target audience for this programme. However, all employees may participate, regardless of activity level and health conditions.
- ▶ What modes/types/domains of physical activity does the programme promote?
 - The programme promotes all domains of physical activity including: everyday activity such as active travel (walking and cycling); active recreation such as dance, and recreational walking and cycling; and all types of sport.
- ▶ Which of the seven best investments the programme addresses?
 - The programme addresses two of the seven best investments: communication and public education; and sport and recreation.
- ▶ What sectors does it involve?
 - The programme involves a wide range of sectors including: sport, public health, education, sustainable transport and economic development; all types of workplace (eg, private, public and voluntary sectors) are eligible to take part.
- ▶ Estimated programme reach
 - Between October 2013 and April 2017, 63 653 employees registered on the Workplace Challenge website from 11 385 workplaces; 14 848 (23.3%) employees were classified as being inactive at baseline.
- ▶ What is special about this programme?
 - The programme has been scaled up, has national leadership with local delivery, and a unique combination of online content (activity tracking tools, challenges, community) with local offline support to help workplaces and employees access local opportunities and develop workplace physical activity and sports provision.
- ▶ Key contacts: Andrew Watson (awatson@cspnetwork.org) and Emma Adams (E.J.Adams@lboro.ac.uk)
- ▶ Programme website: www.workplacechallenge.org.uk

Table 1 Workplace Challenge programme components

Programme component	Description	Delivered by	Delivery method	Frequency	Key behaviour change techniques
Activity log	Employees record their sport, physical activities and active travel.	CSP Network	Website/smartphone app	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prompt goal setting ▶ Prompt intention formation ▶ Provide feedback on performance ▶ Prompt self-monitoring ▶ Prompt review of goals
National activity logging challenges	Interworkplace sporting challenges. Leader boards provide competition element. Prizes/incentives.	CSP Network	Website/smartphone app	2–3 annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prompt goal setting ▶ Peer support ▶ Provide feedback on performance ▶ Provide opportunities for social comparison ▶ Provide general encouragement
Local activities/challenges	Workplaces invited to participate in range of team events/challenges.	CSPs/ National Governing Bodies for Sport	Competitions/events for workplaces in local area	Delivered at regular intervals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide instruction ▶ Prompt practice ▶ Relapse prevention
Champions	Champions identified to receive training and support to make physical activity a sustainable part of their workplace culture.	CSP Network/ British Heart Foundation Health at Work	Face-to-face or online webinar	Delivered at regular intervals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Model/demonstrate behaviour ▶ Plan social support/change ▶ Provide general encouragement

CSP Network, County Sports Partnership Network; CSPs, County Sports Partnerships.

**Figure 1** Workplace Challenge key results.

programme success. The programme is underpinned by overarching principles and structure, but with flexibility to adapt delivery to suit local needs and context; this is an important feature of the programme. The range of activities which can be used to engage employees in sport and physical activity is also important. Support from local organisations, such as NGBs, facilitates the provision of ‘taster’ sessions which are popular with participants, and assists with signposting to local clubs and activities. The programme is attractive to workplaces and employees as it is free and no one is excluded from participating.

Several factors are important for engaging inactive employees. Tailoring

information and activities for different groups, such as providing low level taster sessions and alternative activities, for example, walking football, are main factors. In addition, there is an emphasis on fun, enjoyable and social activities supporting motivation and participation. The flexible nature of involvement, that is, participating in different components of the programme; trying new/different activities; and logging any activity, completed at any time, on the website/app; facilitates engagement. Finally, the competition element of challenges brings colleagues together, builds positive relationships, improves communication and creates good team spirit and morale, which has benefited business.

Lessons learnt for future physical activity programmes

The workplace setting offers potential for promoting sport and physical activity in inactive adults. However, employers need help to understand the benefits of physical activity for the prevention and treatment of ill-health in employees to increase its priority in the workplace. Effort, time and resource are needed to engage workplace leaders and senior/middle managers to maximise communication, reach, employee engagement and support implementation. Partnering with local sports and physical activity providers is critical, along with providing ready to use resources, including marketing tools, for their use. There is a need to consult with target groups before and during the programme to understand their needs and motivations. This will ensure programmes and communications are tailored to meet these needs, thus increasing engagement and participation. The Workplace Challenge approach provides a solution for engaging inactive adults in sport and physical activity.

Twitter Follow Emma Adams at @EmmaJ_Adams and Lee Mason at @LeeMasonCSP.

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