

Health and Wellbeing in the Remote Working Space

With Level 3 restrictions now in place for the entire country the majority of workers are working from home unless it is essential to attend the workplace. The cyclical nature of the current health crisis can't be underestimated, and employers must continue to adapt their Health and Wellbeing strategies to ensure continued engagement from staff and foster a workplace environment and culture which values employee health for its contribution to work.

In order to promote and implement a health and wellbeing strategy an employer must first decide upon objectives relevant to the work environment and the current challenges and balance these with the values and culture of the organisation. Such objectives should aim to:

- Reduce the frequency and occurrence of work-related illness;
- Improve the health and well-being of the workforce;
- Support the implementation of initiatives that enhance the health and wellbeing of all employees;
- Monitor relevant human resource metrics to continuously review and adapt the changing health and wellbeing priorities of an organisation;

Once objectives have been set the development of a strategy should focus on the outputs and the outcomes. The most effective means of achieving the desired outcome is through a combination of policies, programmes and champions of the strategic initiatives. The principles of prevention and promotion should be driven by leadership with an unequivocal commitment to not only lead by example but to go a step further and invest time and energy into all strategic initiatives.

Steps in the development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy

- Gain buy-in from management through the establishment of a committee tasked to develop and implement initiatives;
- Determine the health and wellbeing needs of staff through an engagement survey;
- Prioritise, plan and implement programmes in response to employee wellbeing needs;
- Identify evaluation methods to determine effectiveness of programmes;
- Incorporate plans/ initiatives with any relevant policies to copper fasten commitment to the health and wellbeing strategy;
- Develop communication and contingency plans that can operate within each level of the governments Resilience and Recovery Plan.

Tips in realising Preventative Measures

- Understand duties and obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005;
- Assess all risks in the remote working space through implementation of Ergonomic and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments;

- Ensure policies such as absent management, sick leave, remote working, health and safety, work-life balance, are updated;
- Make provision for digital platforms that will encourage two-way communication;
- Consistently implement engagement surveys that will take the pulse of the workforce.

Tips in realising Promotional Measures

- Focus on the culture and policies within the organisation so that both their development and delivery are health enhancing;
- Deliver interventions that raise awareness about health and wellbeing issues;
- Implement initiatives that develop personal and professional skills to motivate change and create resilience;
- Champion the combined effort of both the employer and employees in implementing and supporting measures that can maintain and improve an individual's health and wellbeing;
- Communicate regularly with all employees through formal and informal virtual meet ups;
- Provide a mentorship programme to focus on learning and development;
- Implement informal social interaction between team members.

Facilitated through a Health and Wellbeing strategy the provision of policies and initiatives will demonstrate a clear and overarching commitment to employees' work-life balance, stress management and health and safety. This proactive approach from prevention to promotion will be a driver of employee engagement levels and a more attractive employer value proposition, one which invests time, energy and money to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of all employees. Added to that is a means of measuring the outputs and using these metrics to continuously review, realign and reintegrate any strategy to fit the challenges and successes of an organisation.

Disclaimer – The information in this section is provided for reference purposes only to assist Employers with the government protocols and guidance and must be read in that context and should not be used for or interpreted as a legal definition of any of the information provided. Some of the information provided is per information published on the government websites at www.gov.ie, www.hsa.ie. Professional advice should always be sought before making any such decisions.

For further information or advice, please contact the designated HR & Employment Helpdesk at thewheelhrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie or via telephone on (01) 5394661 Monday – Friday 9.00am- 5.00pm