

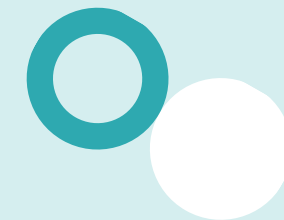
# An evaluation of workplace health and wellbeing support in Walsall small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)



## Overview and key findings

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# About the evaluation



# Background to PHIRST

- Eight Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams (PHIRSTs) based at universities in Wales, Scotland and England.
- Funded by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).
- Local government organisations submit proposals to NIHR for initiatives to be evaluated - if successful, they are paired with a PHIRST to co-produce the evaluation.
- The PHIRST based at University of Hertfordshire is called 'PHIRST Connect'.

More info: <https://phirst.nihr.ac.uk/>

# About the evaluation: how it came about

- A range of workplace health and wellbeing support was available to Walsall SMEs through Walsall Council and its partners.
- This included a dedicated Workplace Health Programme for SMEs, with team members offering direct support for SMEs (commissioned by the Council and delivered by a third sector organisation).
- Encouraging Walsall SMEs' engagement with support had proved challenging, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In 2021, Walsall Council submitted a proposal to the NIHR PHIRST programme and was paired with PHIRST Connect.

# About the evaluation: aims

1) Explore the extent and nature of local SME engagement with available workplace health and wellbeing support, particularly the WHP, and barriers and facilitators to that engagement.

2) Investigate SME workforce perceptions and experiences of employer-provided services to support workforce health and wellbeing.

We also sought to explore barriers and facilitators to

- a) implementation of workplace wellbeing support for SME employees;
- b) employee uptake of employer-provided support.

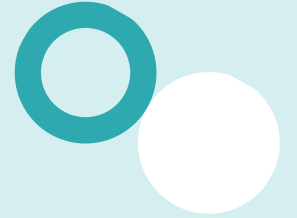
# About the evaluation: additional details

- Focused on SMEs with between 10 and 249 employees (no 'micro' organisations).
- Took place between January 2022 and April 2023.

# About the evaluation: how it was done

Mixed-method evaluation - four data collection methods (four 'workstreams').

- **Workstream 1:** Focus groups with (nine) stakeholders involved in encouraging SME engagement with workplace health/wellbeing service/support. (x3)
- **Workstream 2:** Survey of Walsall based SMEs with 10-249 employees. (103 completed surveys)
- **Workstream 3:** Interviews with SMEs. (x8)
- **Workstream 4:** Interviews with SME employees. (x8)



# Findings and key messages



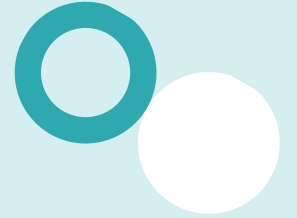


# Findings and key messages: Overview

- Broad range of findings – presentation provides a summary of some main findings.
- More detailed findings (including briefing document, recommendations, and key findings by workstream) available from:

<https://phirst.nihr.ac.uk/evaluations/an-evaluation-of-workplace-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-walsall-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-smes/>

# Findings and key messages: SME engagement with workplace health and wellbeing support



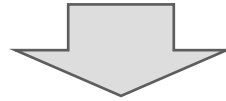
# Findings: SME engagement with workplace health and wellbeing support

- ‘Attitude to workplace health and wellbeing: 10 items scale - average (mean) scores suggest **positive** ‘attitude to workplace health and wellbeing.
- Survey findings and qualitative data analysis suggest that one of the biggest barriers to engagement was knowledge/awareness of the support on offer.
- Survey: 75% of SMEs stated that in the past 12 months, they had not made use of any of the four main types of free support offered.
- Most common reason for not accessing: *“Because we were not aware that support existed”*.

- Workplace Health Programme
- (West Midlands) workplace health and wellbeing accreditation scheme
- Health Assessments/ NHS Health Checks
- Wellbeing workshops (range of topics)

# SME engagement with workplace health and wellbeing support

Survey findings and qualitative data analysis suggest that one of the biggest barriers to engagement was knowledge/awareness of the support on offer



a) Existence of support

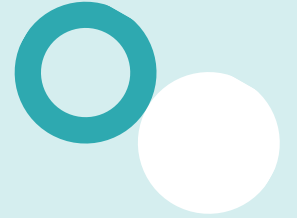
b) What support involves and might entail



- Clarity/accessibility of messaging and communications from council and other partners
- Need for varied and multi-pronged approach to publicity
- SME perception of organisational burden
- SME fear of negative consequences of engagement
- Importance of trusted relationships between SMEs and those delivering support

# SME engagement with workplace health and wellbeing support

- Explored engagement with support by SME characteristics (e.g., sector, size of organisation, time trading)
- The only SME characteristic that was consistently associated with use of the four sources of support was the size of the organisation; larger SMEs (50 or more employees) were more likely to have taken advantage of all four types of support.



# Findings and key messages: SME provision of support and uptake by employees



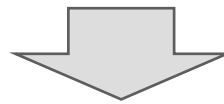
# Findings: SME provision of support

- Workplace health and wellbeing practice/support offered for staff - some statistically significant differences identified (e.g., based on the size of organisation, whether there was a person or department with specific responsibility for promoting staff health and wellbeing; and whether or not there was a recognised trade union).
- More detail available on the PHIRST website.

# SME provision of support and uptake by employees

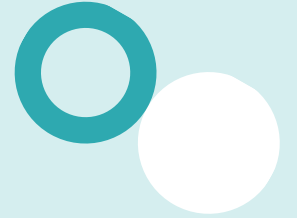
Findings suggest that key barriers to SME provision of support and employee uptake include:

- Limited awareness of staff wellbeing needs (SME provision)
- Practical and logistical issues (SME provision & uptake)
- Reactive rather than proactive perspectives (SME provision & uptake)



- Typically, 'positive' attitude towards workplace health and wellbeing but not necessarily translated into practice.
- Informality of employee needs assessments.
- Employers and employees' 'reactive' rather than proactive approach to workplace health and wellbeing.
- Employee reluctance to disclose support needs.





# In summary - implications

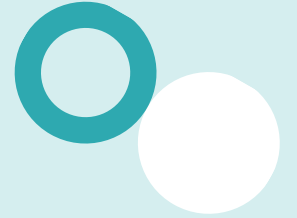


# Implications for public health

- We highlighted three 'levels' of engagement important in achieving longer term workplace health and wellbeing objectives: 1) SME engagement with the workplace health and wellbeing support offer; 2) SME provision of support for employees; and 3) employee uptake of employer-provided support. Simultaneously addressing barriers to all three levels might be the most effective approach.
- Ensuring that SMEs are knowledgeable about the support and resources available to them is important, as is their level of understanding of what engaging with and implementing support is likely to entail.
- Guidance and support for SMEs on assessing the workplace health and wellbeing needs of their employees is important – this might be achieved in various ways.
- Tailoring of provision is important – e.g., for different sectors/sizes of SME.

# Implications for public health

- ‘Light-touch’ approaches and options are useful – can help to combat the perception that workplace health and wellbeing provision will be onerous.
- Appreciate that what you communicate might be interpreted and understood in very different ways by SMEs with different characteristics.
- Placing specific focus on supporting workplace health and wellbeing within SMEs that are relatively small in terms of numbers of employees, and are more likely to be limited in terms of resources, may be useful.



# Project outputs



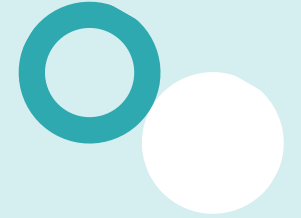
# Project outputs

- Ten recommendations.
- A range of infographics.

- Outputs available at:

<https://phirst.nihr.ac.uk/evaluations/an-evaluation-of-workplace-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-walsall-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-smes/>

- Academic journal article/s to follow (due to be submitted in summer 2024)



# Thank you for listening.



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