

A smiling woman with long dark hair wearing a yellow top, with a hand on her shoulder holding a pen.

# Social Wellbeing Report for Employers



# Wellbeing – The wider context

**We're hearing more and more within the HR community about social wellbeing. It is rapidly taking its place as one of the five pillars of wellbeing, alongside physical, mental, financial and environmental. However, it's a recent term and often one that causes confusion about what it actually means.**

In the workplace, social wellbeing generally refers to the extent to which an employee feels a sense of belonging at work. From relationships with colleagues, to alignment with company values, social wellbeing is about feeling valued as a person, colleague and employee.

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**To succeed in building engagement, a wellbeing programme must support staff at every stage of life.”**



## Why is social wellbeing so important?

It may be easy to think of social wellbeing as a 'nice to have' rather than an essential part of your employee offer. But taking steps to foster a sense of belonging is vital for ensuring high levels of engagement and in turn, greater productivity. Employees are much more likely to work at their best when they feel supported within a company that values them.

It is widely accepted that increased employee engagement boosts productivity. Social wellbeing is a key element in creating a workplace where people feel truly included and are therefore willing to go the extra mile. Workers feel more positive towards an employer whose values accord with their own, thereby strengthening your employer brand and trust.

However, implementing initiatives like a recognition programme as a one-off will have a limited effect on productivity. For social wellbeing to succeed, it needs to form part of a holistic strategy which supports all aspects of employees' physical, mental, financial and emotional wellbeing.

## Brave new world

The world of work is changing. Technology allows us more choice than ever before about where, how and when we work - as seen in the rise of remote and flexible working, the gig economy, the increase in the number of working caregivers and the hot desking trend. However, these changes can leave employees feeling lonely and disconnected from the meaning of their work. We shouldn't lose sight of the value of genuine human connection, whether within the company itself or the world it inhabits.

Loneliness in society is on the rise, especially in young people, with over nine million adults saying they are often or always lonely<sup>1</sup>. Social isolation can engender poorer mental and physical health, which in turn harms productivity in the long-term. We spend so much time with the people we work with, more so than our family or friends. So it's vital that employees feel part of a community of colleagues, which offers support both personal and professional.

In an increasingly virtual world, it's getting harder for employees to form these meaningful relationships. Therefore employers wanting to ensure a connected and harmonious organisation will need to think about how they can continue to promote social wellbeing within these new parameters.

1. Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Final Report, (2017) p.6. Accessed at [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb\\_dec17\\_jocox\\_commission\\_finalreport.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf)



# Why should employers invest in social wellbeing?

**You may already have a package of policies and benefits in place to help your employees, from private healthcare to group income protection, but don't underestimate the importance of social wellbeing. It's the invisible thread which links your existing benefits offer with workplace culture and business purpose, all of which adds up to one simple aim: to make employees feel, and therefore perform better at work by connecting with colleagues and the organisation on a personal level.**

## Feels good to do good

Social wellbeing can refer to an employee's social connections within a business, such as their relationships with peers, managers, and leadership. But the term also includes areas with an external focus, regarding company values and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

We know that employees place importance not just on how well they perform day-to-day, but on how their work is making the world a better place. For example, for those working in care homes, the social value of their role is obvious, but other employees may appreciate the experience of doing good through CSR initiatives.

By linking their employer to shared social values, employees can build a deeper connection with their work and its relevance to the wider world. It's no longer 'just a job' when a role delivers personal as well as professional value.

## Invest in happiness

We all know that happier employees result in happier customers: happier employees also equal higher productivity, and improved retention – all leading to a more successful and efficient business.

Each area of employee wellbeing affects each area of the employee experience in its own way, and social wellbeing

is no exception. An employee who feels valued by their organisation will be more driven and conscientious, as they want to prove their worth and maintain that feeling of being valued. An employee with positive co-worker relationships will be happier at work, thus providing better customer experiences. And an employee who feels like they belong will be more loyal, and ergo stay at the business for longer.

## Adapt or perish

Changing work patterns mean that employers need to examine how they communicate with their workforce, and in turn, how employees form and maintain working relationships. Are existing structures still fit for purpose? Can you harness technology to make sure people stay connected?

Furthermore, when it comes to social responsibility, employees increasingly expect organisations to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk. Forward-thinking employers are leaning into social wellbeing to demonstrate what their corporate values mean to the people on the ground. They recognise that fostering social connection should be a core aim of any wellbeing strategy – it's the glue that keeps it all together.



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Happier employees result in happier customers: happier employees also equal higher productivity, and improved retention.”



## How to make social wellbeing work for your business

**So what can employers do to help? In short, you need to show your people that you care. Creating a culture that prioritises social interactions and inclusiveness is much more effective than implementing one-off benefits with no long-term value.**

There is a lot to look at when reviewing your social wellbeing strategy, and it is important that you look at the individual needs of your business, as what is important to some employees may be less of a priority to others.

For example, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may be high on the list for some people as they want to work for a business that is actively doing good, through volunteering in the community or charitable giving. Others may prioritise working for a business that is highly sociable with regular employee activities and strong team bonds.



**The key is to understand the unique needs of your workforce and introduce relevant policies and benefits. Once you know what makes your employees tick, you can start offering them what they need.”**

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Start by assessing their needs – what are your employees lacking, or struggling with? Perhaps your sector demands lots of travel and remote work, or maybe you require staff to work long hours and night shifts. How can you ensure these things don't negatively affect social wellbeing?

You should also consider what your organisation already does well. You may have a great CSR initiative that gets people out volunteering, building relationships with teammates and giving back to the local community. Or maybe you offer generous holiday allowances, or have flexible working and parental leave policies so employees can bring their whole selves to work.

Promote these existing elements, ask your employees what they like about them. Analyse what your employees are struggling with, where you're already helping them, and how you can build on that success to help in other ways.

# Action points

## So how can employers help? Here are some areas to consider as part of your social wellbeing strategy.

### Reward and recognition

Recognition is a good place to start – we all like the warm glow of being thanked for a job well done. Peer-to-peer recognition has been shown to be especially effective in boosting engagement. When employees recognise each other's efforts and receive recognition themselves, their sense of purpose and commitment to work improves.

A culture of recognition helps employees to form strong social connections at work; making them happier and healthier, which has a positive impact on their experience at work. As workforces are increasingly remote, it has never been more important to make employees feel like they belong, and are recognised by (and thus more connected to) their colleagues and the wider business.

### Company events

Organising in-house social events gives employees the chance to strengthen their relationships with colleagues. They may be used to getting together in teams or departments, but mixing up individuals across the whole company will allow new connections to form. A friendly competition like a treasure hunt provides a fun experience of working together to achieve a shared goal – useful for future collaboration. These events can be delivered in person or virtually, depending on what's appropriate for your workforce.

### Awards

These can be everything from cash prizes to a virtual pat on the back. Simple yet effective, awards recognise achievements like exemplifying company values or delivering exceptional customer service. By singling an employee out for praise, they feel like their efforts haven't gone unnoticed and are likely to keep up the good work.

Likewise, long service awards offer employees the chance to be rewarded for their loyalty to your organisation, increasing retention and employee advocacy.



### Social events

Introducing social wellbeing policies gives your employees the opportunity to support and interact more with each other. That can happen in many ways, from setting up lunchtime running clubs, choir groups or yoga sessions, to team nights out or tea breaks where staff can stop for a chat.

It's all too easy for employees working from home to forget to take breaks and to work late into the evenings, which could lead to depression and burnout. Leaders need to encourage regular breaks, and perhaps introduce virtual coffee breaks and lunches, in which colleagues can enjoy non-work-based interaction over a sandwich.

### Employee forum

Having a place for employees to be heard is particularly important to larger employers, where employees may find it difficult communicating their queries or concerns. Providing a social platform, such as an in-house employee forum, can enable employees from all areas of the business to communicate with each other and help each other out. This can help bring employees closer together and can be efficient for employers as colleagues can assist with issues rather than this responsibility lying solely with, for example, the HR manager, who may not have the same experience to fully empathise or provide the most relevant advice.

### Volunteering

Social wellbeing sits side-by-side with mental wellbeing, and there is an undoubted wellbeing boost that comes simply through the act of 'doing good'. Companies which provide opportunities for their staff to volunteer will generate goodwill both on a personal level – "I did something good today" – and a corporate one – "I feel good about working for this company."

A starting point could be using your benefits platform to communicate great CSR work you're already doing. Detail out how the company manages charitable giving, volunteering in the community or other CSR initiatives. Make sure to highlight why these causes in particular have been chosen – do they link with corporate values? Finally, include details on how employees can get involved, and a link to sign up for the next initiative.

### Links to mental wellbeing

Social and mental wellbeing are closely linked, so use this to your advantage. By spending time together socially, employees will pick up when colleagues do not seem like their usual selves – consider having an informal referral scheme in place which signposts mental wellbeing resources to employees who may be in need of help.



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