

alcohol and the workplace



background

the scale of the problem

Workplaces are often reflective of what is happening in wider society. In Scotland levels of alcohol consumption and harm are at historically high levels with a quarter of men and just under a fifth of women (18%) categorised as hazardous or harmful drinkers.¹ Evidence also shows that those in employment are more likely to drink than those who are unemployed or economically inactive.²

It is estimated that alcohol cost the Scottish economy £865 million in 2007. This cost comprises unemployment, premature death (before the age of retirement), absenteeism and presenteeism (where people are at work but there is reduced activity and productivity).³

Another study⁴ found that:

- One third of employees admitted having been to work with a hangover
- 15% reported having been drunk at work
- 1 in 10 reported hangovers at work once a month;
1 in 20 once per week
- 77% of employers who were interviewed for the study identified alcohol as a major threat to employee well-being and a factor encouraging sickness absence.

These figures show that alcohol can and does have a significant impact in the workplace and therefore action to reduce the negative effect is essential.

what are the some of the impacts of problem drinking in the workplace?

There are a range of impacts which can result from problem drinking including:

- Loss of productivity
- Poor decision-making / errors of judgement
- Inconsistency or poor quality work
- Mistakes
- Accidents and injuries
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism (where someone comes to work but is unable to perform at full capacity)
- Damage to customer relations / company/organisational image

Over and above these impacts, dependent on the business of the company/organisation and the person's specific role, there could be serious health and safety concerns – for example if the person is a driver.

A person's drinking can also affect the stress levels, performance and job satisfaction of colleagues.

what can be done to reduce alcohol harm in the workplace?



at society level

To increase the effectiveness of any workplace interventions it is critical that alcohol consumption and associated harm in wider society is reduced.

There is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the best way to reduce consumption across the population is to take action to increase price, reduce availability and restrict marketing of alcohol.⁵

Action at this level will support and strengthen the effectiveness of any workplace interventions that are implemented.

in the workplace

Increasingly workplaces are looking to take action on a number of levels to reduce alcohol-related harm and create healthier and more productive workforces and working environments. There are a broad range of interventions which can be carried out within the workplace to address alcohol issues. Each workplace will be different and therefore the approaches used will vary. However there are some key interventions that are effective and recommended for all workplaces:



- **Workplace alcohol policy**

One of the best ways to address alcohol issues within the workplace is to have an alcohol policy which covers the entire workforce. This policy should clearly state the company/organisation's position around alcohol (and sometimes drugs) within the workplace. Many companies and organisations choose to have an alcohol-free workplace. The alcohol policy will clearly outline the rights and responsibilities in terms of dealing with alcohol-related problems in the workplace should they arise. The policy will also outline what support will be offered and in what circumstances disciplinary action would be taken.

- **Alcohol awareness sessions**

When developing or revising a workplace alcohol policy it is important to keep all staff informed of the process for this, including what the proposed/revised policy will cover and when this will be implemented. To support this, it can be useful to have an alcohol awareness session for staff which helps build understanding about why this is needed and the benefits to the workforce.

- **Training for managers/supervisors**

To ensure the meaningful and consistent implementation of the alcohol policy, it is critical that all managers and supervisors have knowledge and confidence to handle any issues which arise. Training on the key elements of the policy and how to conduct workplace interviews if required can be vital to ensuring the policy is used effectively.

further support to develop interventions

Alcohol Focus Scotland was a partner in a 3 year pan-European study, the European Workplace and Alcohol (EWA) project, which aimed to identify the most effective interventions to use to reduce alcohol harm within the workplace. As part of this study, AFS supported four Scottish workplaces to implement and evaluate a range of workplace alcohol interventions.

The organisations involved conducted a baseline questionnaire with all staff which helped give an accurate picture of alcohol awareness and flagged up any issues within the workforce. The workplaces reported that conducting and analysing these questionnaires at the beginning of the process was particularly helpful as it allowed the interventions to be designed in a way that best suited their particular workforce.

The pilot organisations also stressed the benefits of having external advice from an alcohol agency when developing and delivering their interventions. They reported that this support gave them access to expert advice on the topic, as well as providing a range of tips, information and tools to help develop the interventions in a way that best suited their workplace.



key findings from the European Workplace and Alcohol project

- Workplace alcohol policies have strong support from employees and introducing them can change corporate culture, procedures and practices in relation to alcohol.
- Alcohol-related interventions in the workplace can raise awareness about alcohol-related harm, reduce risky drinking and grow support for workplace policies.
- Organisations with alcohol policies are more likely to secure health and workplace benefits from interventions than those that do not have a policy in place – in particular by reducing drinking levels amongst risky drinkers.

For further information on all of these interventions, the European project and to download a sample workplace alcohol policy, please visit the Alcohol Focus Scotland website.



for more information

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking call Drinkline on 0800 7 314 314 (8am-11pm, 7 days a week).

If you are worried about someone you care about misusing alcohol call Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs on 08080 10 10 11 (Mon-Fri 9am-11pm, Sat/Sun 5pm-11pm).

Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives
Tel: 0800 019 2211 www.healthyworkinglives.com

Alcohol Focus Scotland
Tel: 0141 572 6700
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references

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3. York Health Economics Consortium (2010), Societal Cost of Alcohol Misuse in Scotland for 2007; Scottish Government, Edinburgh; <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/29122804/0>
4. Aviva (May 2012) UK employees admit that regular drinking affects their jobs; <http://www.aviva.com/media/news/item/uk-employees-admit-that-regular-drinking-affects-their-jobs-4048/>
5. WHO Regional Office for Europe (2009) Evidence for the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to reduce alcohol-related harm.