



# The Birchwood Park Workplace Wellbeing Handbook

**An employer's guide to better supporting their staff,  
and improving their sense of wellbeing at work**



**In 2022, employers are still facing multiple challenges; from Brexit and its impact on supply chains, to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on staff resourcing. No sector has escaped from the financial, staffing or logistical issues these have caused.**

But what's most important during these turbulent times and the never-ending need to be 'agile' is the effect it has on your workforce. It is important that they feel minimal negative impact and are fully supported throughout. Having a robust workplace wellbeing strategy has never been more important.

And whilst many think that hospitality and manufacturing have been hit the hardest, it's important not to forget how those that work in an office have also been affected. Office workers have experienced a period of incredible change with significant changes to their working environment time and time again.

Working from home became central to the working week for many, but our research has shown that workers are now ready to get back to a sense of 'normality', with 95% wanting to shift away from solely working from home and the majority (82%) happy to be heading back into the office for at least 2 days a week.

# An introduction to workplace wellbeing

*Written by Martin O'Rourke,  
Commercial Director at Birchwood Park*

**95%**

People want to shift away from solely working from home

**82%**

People are happy to be heading back into the office for at least 2 days a week.



For office based-workers, the office is much more than just a desk, it is an important factor in achieving a great work-life balance. Our research has shown the negative impact homeworking is having on the lives of employees, with increased screen time and longer hours (45%), feeling disconnected from our colleagues (44%), and increased difficulty in switching off at the end of the day (32%) amongst the biggest concerns.

Increased screen time and longer hours

**45%**

Feeling disconnected from our colleagues

**44%**

Increased difficulty in switching off at the end of the day

**32%**

However, it's clear from our findings that many employers may not be aware of these struggles and where they need to step up to better support their staff, with over 50% of workers claiming that the business they work for needs to do more to support workplace wellbeing.

The concept of 'workplace wellbeing' is not an entirely new one, but as we've gone through significant changes in how we work, it's now more essential than ever that employers learn what wellbeing in the workplace truly means – and how to implement a better strategy to better support their staff.

To this end, we've collaborated with Khalil Rener of Rener Wellbeing, to give employers the essential tools they need to thoroughly review, devise, and implement appropriate employee support systems in the workplace.



*Khalil Rener is the founder and director of Rener Wellbeing*

## About Khalil Rener

Khalil Rener is the Founder and Director of Rener Wellbeing, a dedicated workplace wellbeing consultancy. Rener Wellbeing's mission is to help organisations to support their employees by sustainably improving wellbeing using a four-pronged approach focusing on mental health, physical activity, sleep and nutrition.

Rener Wellbeing work with organisations of all sizes across four continents, from start-ups and schools to NGOs, and larger companies. They deliver workplace wellbeing support solutions including bespoke workshops and 1:1 wellbeing support sessions, through to full wellbeing strategy development and ongoing consultancy services.

# What is workplace wellbeing, and why should I care about it?



*Written by Khalil Rener, Founder and Director of Rener Wellbeing*

The phrase ‘workplace wellbeing’ can, in equal measure, solicit eyerolls from cynics who believe it is all a fad or can spark joy in those expecting daily lunchtime meditation sessions and a half price gym membership to the gym they are already a member of.

But the reality is that it’s actually somewhere in between, and far more important than many realise. It doesn’t just mean relaxation techniques and free bowls of fruit, it isn’t only about mental health support, and it’s not a ‘trend’ that will soon be forgotten about either.

The ultimate ‘goal’ of improving the wellbeing of your staff is to ensure they feel fully supported and enabled enough to be able to implement wellbeing practices into their life themselves, in a way that works for them, thus allowing them to be happier, healthier and able to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Many business owners and decision makers can take some convincing that investing in better policies to support the wellbeing of their staff is worth it. But **a business can expect to see, on average, a return of £5 for every £1 spent on sustainable mental wellbeing initiatives<sup>1</sup>**. Whether that’s as a result of greater staff satisfaction and increased staff retention, or a happier and more productive **workforce<sup>2</sup>** – we can comfortably say it’s worth the investment.



In our own experience at Rener Wellbeing we’ve gone on to see businesses **improve their employee health and happiness, reduce presenteeism and see return on investment of up to £250 for every £1 spent<sup>3</sup>**.

If you’re ready to address wellbeing in your own business, read on for our guide on how to implement a successful policy and top tips on making the most of it.

## Links

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Matters: Refreshing the case for investment – Deloitte <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.renerwellbeing.com/shift-8-ltd-case-study>

# Establishing a workplace wellbeing policy in three easy steps.

## Step 1: Open the dialogue

**The first step to establish a wellbeing policy is to communicate. Your team needs to feel supported and it's always a good idea to involve them in what they would want from any new policy.**

It can often be a lack of communication that acts as the main barrier to an effective wellbeing policy.

Your team need to understand that you're taking workplace wellbeing seriously and that you value their input; this helps remove any cynicism that it is merely a tick box exercise and will help you and your staff remain on the same page.



**To start these conversations, follow a three-step approach:**

- Set your cards on the table and explain why you're now looking at improving workplace wellbeing. It may be as a direct result of staff feedback, or in answer to keeping up with key competitors – whatever it is, be honest about it.
- From the outset express the desire to keep discussions structured and relevant to your team's needs – ask your team what they value, and what would best support them at work.
- Reassure your team that this will not be a one-off exercise. If your team see you're committed to longer term improvements you're more likely to achieve their buy in and get the most out of any collaborative discussions.

**Breakdown barriers to wellbeing through communication and collaboration.**



## Step 2: Analyse what you actually need

**After setting out your intention to support your staff, it's time to figure out exactly what your staff need from you – there's no point implementing policies just for the sake of it, or because they 'sound good', it can be costly and end up being wasted! Any new policy needs to be relevant and required by your staff.**

Often the need to introduce improved wellbeing practises is reactionary; a week off to relieve stress after a busy period, staff leaving and announcing new policies to attract new talent. Instead of bursts of support, gain a greater understanding of what your staff need will help you begin to 'fix' any potential issues and allow for a more sustainable approach to change.

This will produce invaluable quantitative data to identify key 'needs trends' amongst your staff, but it's equally as important to gather qualitative data through one-on-one interviews – and this stage can often benefit from involving an outside and/or neutral facilitator.

The needs analysis is the most insightful and actionable stage in establishing your wellbeing policy, and is absolutely worth the investment in time and effort to help deliver a happier, healthier workforce, improve productivity and ultimately delivery ROI.

### Where do you begin?

Start with a survey to establish your staff's attitudes to wellness across seven key support areas.

1. Mental health
2. Physical health
3. Sleep
4. Nutrition
5. Financial wellness
6. Managerial support, and finally
7. Company Culture



**Wellbeing isn't only meditation and mindfulness! It's ensuring your team feel enabled to proactively use the right variety of tools and initiatives to integrate wellbeing into their lives and carry out their jobs in the best possible way, benefitting health and happiness.**

Birchwood Park's research revealed the top areas in which employees wish to be supported in order to improve workplace wellbeing:



1. Flexible working policy, *e.g., Flexitime, implementation of core office-based hours*
2. Allowing remote working or part remote working
3. Adaptations to the working environment for comfort purposes; *e.g., break out areas, quiet areas, standing desks, green space*
4. Greater number of holiday days, and flexibility on holiday allowances
5. Providing greater access to mental health support, *e.g., coaching, one-to-one sessions, talking therapies*
6. Providing greater access to physical health support, *e.g., regular movement time/desk breaks, gym incentives, healthy snacks*
7. An emphasis on creating a positive workplace culture
8. Greater emphasis on at-work socialisation and social events with colleagues
9. Adaptations to the working environment for aesthetic purposes; *e.g., pleasing decoration of the office, greenery being introduced into the office, access to cafes and other communal areas*
10. Comprehensive health insurance



## Step 3: Evaluate your results

**An effective wellbeing policy doesn't end at implementation. Businesses and teams change over time so it's important to continuously evaluate its success and adapt to any new challenges or needs.**

### **How do you understand the effectiveness and success of your wellbeing policy?**

**Set your benchmarks.** Understand your starting point when it comes to aspects such as staff wellbeing, productivity and satisfaction, and where you want to be – without this you can't monitor any improvement!

### **Continuously measure.**

We recommend measuring the effectiveness of your policy by reviewing it twice a year, to understand how your wellbeing policy is improving employee wellbeing and the updates you need to make to see continued improvements. Any more frequently and your needle of change may not shift enough, and any less frequently will not capture the nuances of business changes during each time period.

### **Use your results to improve.**

There's no point in investing time and resource into evaluating your wellbeing policy if you're not going to listen to the results. If something needs to change – follow through.

By regularly evaluating your wellbeing policy formally and informally, you're communicating to your team that their wellbeing remains important and of value to the company. It also keeps staff aware of the support available and sets out your priorities as a business.

This can be particularly valuable in the case of new starters, and we'd recommend a wellbeing survey and outlining of your company policy should form part of the onboarding process.





# How to ensure your wellbeing policy succeeds

It's one thing committing to a wellbeing policy and putting in the work to understand your staff needs, and another making sure it succeeds. Follow our best practise tips to making positive change in your business.



## Tip 1

### Make your wellbeing policy sustainable

Announcing an all-singing, all-dancing wellbeing awareness week/campaign is not going to prove to be successful over any length of time. In a similar vein to setting new year's resolutions to start a fitness drive, adopt a healthier diet and cut bad habits all at once, it's important to focus on how you can improve for the long term, not just for an awareness week.

Instead, take smaller and sustainable steps to introduce new elements of wellbeing support and keep implementing and updating them over a longer period of time.



## Tip 2

### Make sure your staff understand that there is no 'normal'

Establishing what works for an individual is the key to the success of wellbeing support, there's no 'one size fits all' approach to either businesses as a whole or individual needs– and it's important your staff understand this. Taking ten minutes to step away from a desk on a lunchtime walk can be just as beneficial to one person as running a 10k is to another – it's all relative.

It's also vital that businesses recognise and support this individuality too – a fitness challenge is not going to appeal to every member of staff, and can actually serve as an alienating activity for some. Make sure you're providing variety in the initiatives and encouraging staff to recognise what good wellbeing feels like to them.



### Tip 3

## Make sure you're addressing mental health stigmas

Though it's starting to decrease, we can't escape the fact that there is still some residual stigma surrounding accessing mental health support and the way in which mental health needs are addressed. Ensure your team feel supported and understand that it's just as important to treat mental health issues in the same way as physical health issues.

It's also vital to communicate that being mentally healthy isn't just about avoiding things like stress, anxiety and depression, it's being able to recognise triggers both inside and outside of work that have an impact on your mental health and giving yourself the space to address them.



### Tip 4

## Make sure you're taking a holistic approach to wellbeing

It's important to lead by example, and ensure your wellbeing policy isn't just focused on specific areas. Wellbeing is cyclical and it's vital your staff understand how varying aspects are interconnected.

For example, a good night's sleep leads to feeling more well-rested and mentally prepared for the day.

Similarly, help your staff understand how allowing themselves a break to reset and put themselves first isn't letting anyone down – that it is an act of self-care, rather than selfishness, and that it will help them to support others more and to keep doing productive work in the long run.



### Tip 5

## Make sure you're signposting your staff

It's all well and good introducing a new wellbeing policy, but if your staff feel like they can't or don't know how to access the benefits and initiatives on offer it can hinder progress being made.

It's vital your staff know that they have permission to make the most of the benefits available to them; whether that's understanding when they have the permission to work from home, how they can make the most of flexitime, or have the tools to access health insurance benefits and attend workshops, it will help them feel enabled.



# So, what does good look like when it comes to workplace wellbeing?

**In order for a business to succeed in implementing an effective wellbeing strategy, it starts with internal buy in, both top-down and bottom-up.**

Once everyone recognises the importance of ensuring the wellbeing of staff, you're on to a winner – they'll be willing to invest the time and resource into making the required improvements and support others to do the same.

This is something we've seen increase over the past two years, likely as a direct result of the pandemic; those in charge are recognising what makes a difference to them personally and how they can achieve greater work-life balance, and so has re-focused an interest on wellbeing in the workplace and the benefits it can bring.

Another phenomenon we've seen over the past few years is the emergence of more wellbeing-related language, showing a greater awareness of the issues at hand. Renier Wellbeing developed a wellbeing strategy for a group of schools last year and found that staff, and even students, were displaying an increased use of the words 'stress' and 'anxiety' to describe feelings, demonstrating this wider awareness.

It's important to recognise the impact of language in the workplace and allow your staff to express themselves accordingly.

Ultimately, to assess the true success of any workplace wellbeing strategy, ask yourself: "Is everyone aware of our wellbeing policy, and does everybody feel encouraged, enabled and supported to do what they need to do to thrive at work?".

If the answer is 'Yes', then you're well on the way to workplace wellbeing being an intrinsic part of your business, which is the goal – just make sure your foot doesn't slip off the pedal towards making progress.



For further wellbeing strategy support and advice visit:  
[\[insert link to hub\]](#) and [www.renierwellbeing.com](http://www.renierwellbeing.com)



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