

## [Workplace Wellbeing in the United Kingdom](#)

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Employee health and wellbeing is a hot topic for employers. “Employee Engagement” is finally more than just a buzz-phrase. Health & Wellbeing Strategy and Employee Engagement falls under one of these departments in corporations; Human Resources, Facilities, or Occupational Health. Having distinguished where it sits, the focus is influenced by different regions and varying budgets. Corporations have different rates with different budgets and so have developed levels of emphasis. The importance of wellbeing within companies is changing as the years go by. Change is constant and all around us in every way. People’s lives are busy. Employers are accepting this and reframing wellbeing. It is wonderful to see how many companies are feeling a bit left behind if they are not offering wellbeing of some type. There are two extremes for what is offered: from subsidized onsite gyms with aerobic studio, swimming pool, sauna, squash court(s), dentist, doctor, nurse, physiotherapy, osteopathy, holistic treatments, beauty treatments and hairdressers to just offering occasional desk massages (possibly where the employee pays) or a ‘Cycle to Work’ scheme. Across the spectrum, there are numerous options depending once again on budget. However, the importance is to get the ‘buy in’ from the decision maker who holds the purse strings and a lot of time if that person feels wellness is a personal priority.

The government initiatives continue to evolve. “Health, Work & Wellbeing” is a cross-departmental government program to improve the health and wellbeing of working age people. The goal is working for a healthier tomorrow and improving the working population general health. Ultimately, prevention is better than cure.

Other government initiatives are Change4Life (National Health Service, or NHS) which promotes the family changes to lead better lifestyles. It works with national partners, including commercial brands, and government departments to reach more people and spread the word. These brands talk in different ways to help and influence people's behavior. Workplace Challenge is a national program from County Sports Partnership Network funded by Sport England (government led) which aims to engage workplaces into greater levels of sport and physical activity. The program tracks what you do via a website. They also provide different scheduled events that you and your colleagues can participate in such as netball, volleyball, football (soccer), table tennis (ping pong) and business games (20 teams from counties across the UK gather together for an evening of multi-sports including dodgeball, softball, and volleyball) which was inspired by the 2012 Olympic Games.

The Barclays Cycle hire scheme started in 2010 and is a public bicycle hire scheme in London. In April, Santander will be the new sponsor for the next 5 years. The scheme's bicycles are popularly known as "Boris Bikes," after Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London when the scheme was launched. Now, "Boris Bikes" are being introduced across cities in the UK.

CitiBike mirrors the London scheme and launched in 2013 in New York with Citibank as the sponsor. New York's and London's schemes have a few things in common: both are sponsored by a major banking group, both operate on a similar system (users purchase access keys to release cycles from docking stations and can buy access on a 24-hour, seven-day or annual basis) and both attracted a mixture of support and hostility when they were proposed. Change tends to bring resistance even when the initiative is a positive initiative on many different levels, health, wellbeing, environment etc.

Something to think about: Did you know bike-share began in Europe in 1965? As of June 2014, public bike sharing systems were available on five continents, including 712 cities, operating approximately 806,200 bicycles at 37,500 stations.

The “Cycle to Work” scheme is growing throughout UK companies. The government introduced the scheme as a tax exemption initiative in 1999 to promote healthier journeys to work and to reduce environmental pollution. Environmental initiatives and reducing carbon footprint is of high importance for the government and corporations. Employers can help employees purchase cycles and cyclists' safety equipment to employees as a tax-free benefit.

The congestion charge for London was introduced in 2003 to reduce traffic congestion, and to raise investment funds for London's transport system. This policy encourages people to use public transport whilst helping the environment and getting people more active by thinking about cycling, running or walking.

The variety of choice for employers is wide. It is up to the corporations to get ‘buy in’ from top management and to ensure there is a Wellbeing strategy in place. Once this is done then it needs continual review to help it evolve and allow employee voices to be heard through.

We are not machines and need workplace wellbeing. Encouraging engagement is the key to success and ultimately a happier, healthier workplace. This is vital for personal wellbeing, central for organizational success and vital for growth.

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*to the employees. With almost 20 years of experience, many leading PTF, she has learnt what works and what does not. Her energy drives her tireless quest to improve her clients' health and fitness. Chris has given PTF clients the confidence to harness her skills to lead Facilities and Service Provider workshops as well as formulate and promote client Wellbeing Strategies.*