

Alcohol Focus Scotland and the European Workplace and Alcohol (EWA) Project



background

Alcohol and the workplace

In recent years there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the impact of alcohol in the workplace, ranging from absenteeism and impacts on productivity to accidents and injuries.

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).¹

Increasingly workplaces are looking to take action to reduce alcohol-related harm and create healthier and more productive workforces and working environments.

Alcohol interventions in the workplace

Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) has delivered training and information to range of workplaces throughout Scotland over the last six years in partnership with the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives. This work has built experience and expertise on a range of approaches and interventions which can be used to bring about organisational change to reduce alcohol-related harm.

European Workplace and Alcohol project

In 2011 AFS was invited to be a partner in the European Workplace and Alcohol (EWA) project. This 3 year pan-European research project had the following objectives:

- Raise awareness about alcohol-related harm.
- Bring about organisational and individual change that leads to safer alcohol consumption.
- Reduce longer term alcohol-related absenteeism, presenteeism and injuries.

Europe has the highest and still increasing per person level of alcohol consumption in the world. These levels of consumption have a very negative impact on health and work. It is estimated that each year 138,000 European Union (EU) citizens aged 15-64 years die from alcohol-related ill-health and injury.² Alcohol also has a significant economic, safety and legal implications for workplaces. Lost productivity costs feature as the dominant element in social costs studies arising from the harm done by alcohol, comprising about half of the total social cost of alcohol to the EU. The EWA study was co-financed from the EU Public Health Programme as a response to these social, economic and human costs.

The project involved 13 countries from across Europe and ran from January 2011 to December 2013. The research had three key elements:

- Review of the scientific evidence on the impact of alcohol in the workplace.
- Good practice case studies.
- Workplace pilot interventions.

key findings

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.



recommendations for policy

The EWA project recognised that, in order to increase the effectiveness of alcohol interventions in the workplace, effective alcohol policies to reduce overall alcohol consumption and harm at EU and country level are critical. The importance of pursuing alcohol policies to restrict the affordability, availability and marketing of alcohol was recognised as being central to this. Specifically the project recommended at EU, national and regional level that:

- Public health agendas should include a focus on workplaces as a setting for alcohol-related health promotion and the deployment of comprehensive alcohol policies.
- Alcohol policy should aim to raise awareness about the considerable impact that alcohol can have on safety, performance, productivity and reputation, and promote 'alcohol free' workplaces.

For companies and organisations, EWA recommended the following:

- Adopt a comprehensive, written, workplace alcohol policy.
- Implement health-related alcohol programmes.
- Pro-actively make their workplaces 'alcohol free'.
- Utilise the EWA toolkit.

recommendations and learning from Scotland

Across all Scottish pilots an initial assessment examined the level and type of intervention required. All companies/organisations are different so it is important to ensure that the interventions are tailored to their particular needs.

However, experience from the pilots suggested that there were common themes which could be useful to any workplace considering undertaking alcohol interventions.

- If possible, get some external support from an organisation with expertise in alcohol and workplace issues. This helps confidence, focus and gives access to a range of helpful information and tools.
- Conduct a baseline questionnaire with all employees to get a true picture of perceptions, awareness and understanding of the issue across the workforce.
- Get buy-in from senior management level that the interventions need to engage everyone across the whole organisation/company.
- Develop, update and promote the organisation/company alcohol policy.
- Conduct awareness raising sessions with staff - if possible addressing any issues raised in the baseline questionnaires. These sessions can also be used to talk about the organisation/company alcohol policy.
- Provide alcohol awareness training for managers and supervisors, including support on how to effectively implement the alcohol policy if required.

case study:**Turning Point Scotland**

Turning Point Scotland is one of Scotland's largest social care charities delivering services right across Scotland and employing around 1500 staff.

what has happened as a result of being involved in the EWA project?

“ Turning Point Scotland was really excited being involved in the EWA project. We wanted to review our existing alcohol policy, but we are a big organisation and weren't quite sure the best way to go about it. Being part of the pilot meant we received support from the Alcohol Focus Scotland Coordinator and this really gave us confidence and focus to undertake the process. The AFS Coordinator also provided information and tools such as sample alcohol workplace policies and gave us tips on how to undertake the process.

TPS now have a really robust alcohol policy that has been embedded right across the company. We have also incorporated this policy into our well-being at work programme which this year has a focus on stress. ”

advice for other large employers

“ I wouldn't hesitate to recommend to other employers to implement an alcohol policy in the workplace but what I would recommend is that you bed it in right across the company – from senior management level right the way through. I would also suggest that you maybe seek some external support to do it as that really helped us. ”

Wendy Spencer, Senior Operations Manager, Turning Point Scotland

case study:**Glasgow Wood Recycling**

Glasgow Wood Recycling is a social enterprise and charity established in 2007 which works in creative ways to recycle and reuse reclaimed wood. GWR provide a range of volunteer and training opportunities to local people, as a practical way of tackling poverty and social exclusion.

what has happened as a result of being involved in the EWA project?

“ Glasgow Wood Recycling is a small and fairly new organisation and we are still developing some of our systems and policies. However as we are growing slowly each year we realised that one of the areas we needed to give attention to was alcohol in the workplace and how we could support any workers or volunteers if they had an issue.

Through the project we were provided with lots of information, tools, ideas and suggestions and that ultimately led to us creating an alcohol policy for the organisation. Before this project we didn't have an alcohol policy so that has been really, really valuable for us.

Over and above this, everyone who works here - all volunteers and staff - now have a much greater awareness of the issues around about alcohol. ”

advice for other small employers

“ I think for small organisations it is really useful to get support from someone with expertise on this. This additional support means it's not so much of a drain on the organisation's time and resources. I would also recommend developing an alcohol policy – it is really helpful to have this to refer to for any issues that could come up. It's been great for us and we're really happy that we've got this in place for the future. ”

Peter Lavelle, Manager, Glasgow Wood Recycling

further information and resources

All materials produced as part of the EWA project are available to download from the Alcohol Focus Scotland website. This includes the EWA toolkit, a range of factsheets and a presentation giving information on the Scottish element of the study. There is also a video where two of the Scottish organisations involved speak about the impact the project has had on their workplace.

AFS has a sample alcohol workplace policy also available to download at this page, as well as information on the training which can be provided to workplaces as part of the collaboration with the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives.

for more information

There is a dedicated EWA website: www.eurocare.org/eu_projects/ewa for information about the project and the different countries involved.

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references

1. Scottish Government (2010) The Societal Cost of Alcohol Misuse in Scotland for 2007, York Health Economics Consortium, University of York.
2. Rehm J., Gmel G., Rehm M.X., Scafato E., Shield K.D. What alcohol can do to European societies. In: Anderson P, Braddick F, Reynolds J & Gual A, editors. Alcohol Policy in Europe: Evidence from AMPHORA. 2nd ed. 2013.