

How employers in Wales responded to the Covid-19 pandemic

A summary of approaches to staff wellbeing
by Wales-based companies

Introduction

The Covid-19 virus was first seen in the UK in January 2020. By March, the outbreak was officially declared a pandemic.

Covid-19 has significantly changed the way many live and work in Wales. Nationwide lockdowns saw decades-old routines of workplace travel and socialising quickly replaced by home working and video calls for some, and frontline delivery for others, leaving most employers and employees outside of their comfort zone.

Furlough, redundancies, isolation or the challenge of juggling work roles and responsibilities with childcare and home-schooling placed unique stresses on workers.

Recognising the toll these challenges were taking on their staff, clients and the wider community, many employers across Wales took the initiative and introduced new schemes to help.

In December 2021, the Welsh Government's Healthy Working Wales programme, delivered by Public Health Wales, hosted a virtual Covid-19 commendation event recognising employers' efforts.

The event showcased a range of employers' achievements in adapting and rising to the challenges of a turbulent period. In total, 55 submissions by employers were shared from a range of sectors. There were six award categories covering mental and physical health and wellbeing, best internal and external response to the pandemic, as well as sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion.

This report shares some of the innovative activities and approaches taken by organisations and employers across Wales, as well as the key themes that arose from the entries to the commendation event.





Encouraging and
promoting mental
health and wellbeing

1

Encouraging and promoting mental health and wellbeing

The pandemic quickly took a toll on mental wellbeing across the UK¹. By June 2020, instances of reported depression had doubled from pre-Covid-19 rates, from around one in 10 adults to around one in five. By August 2020, 40 per cent of adults reported coronavirus was affecting their wellbeing.

As organisations adjusted to new ways of working, employers sought to encourage and promote wellbeing and mental health awareness among their workforces.

As employees were no longer able to physically meet each other in the work environment or socialise, there was an opportunity for employers to adopt and create new ways to support their workforces to increase their resilience and reduce feelings of isolation.

Some workplaces organised access to online classes or workshops. At **Neath Port Talbot Council**, employees joined virtual tai chi and mindfulness sessions, as well as wellbeing at work webinars and online courses.

Transport for Wales's newly formed staff wellbeing action group kept colleagues engaged and connected via a monthly online book club, all-company quiz and various exercise and healthy challenges.

While at **Able Futures** – a UK-wide partnership offering advice, information, and support to workers experiencing mental health conditions at no charge to the customer – an online ‘case café’ allowed participants feeling isolated and with poor mental health to engage with peers, including through mindfulness classes and painting sessions.

Finding time to be mindful

In addition to staff quizzes, recreational classes and wellbeing webinars aimed at helping staff during the isolation period, **Gower College Swansea** invested in a year-long subscription to a mindfulness and wellbeing app. **Cardiff University** also funded access to the same app for 1,000 staff.

The app offers guided meditations designed to relieve stress, increase self-esteem and support positive relationships. Some also provide ‘sleepcasts’ that use sound and visualisation to create the ideal conditions for healthy, restful sleep, music and bedtime audio for restful nights, quick workouts and guided cardio for body and mind.

Gower College Swansea additionally ran a bespoke, eight-week online wellbeing course for more than 150 employees focused on their personal, professional and health ambitions.

“The workshops gave staff a sense of camaraderie and community, which had been missing at the start of the pandemic,” said Sarah King, HR Director at Gower College Swansea.

“We also hope regular use of the app will build resilience among our employees.”

“The workshops gave
staff a sense of
camaraderie and
community, which was
missing at the start of
the pandemic.”

Sarah King, HR Director,
Gower College Swansea

¹ 2020: Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Sharing the right information

Accessing the right information at the right time is crucial in challenging circumstances, particularly when addressing mental health and wellbeing.

Some employers took the initiative to develop and collate resources for staff.

Mirus Wales, a national not-for-profit organisation that supports people with a learning disability, autism, mental health conditions, and complex needs, created a website for its staff and volunteers that provided information and resources to help them manage their wellbeing.

It also nominated 'mental health champions', who shared information about wellbeing activities and events. A closed Facebook group allowed home working staff to stay connected and share stories and pictures.

"More than half of our staff joined the Facebook group," said Chris Garlick, Health, Wellbeing and Engagement Manager at Mirus Wales. "People began sharing positive stories from all of the areas we work in, and we used #SpreadHope to encourage more people to join in and fill each other's news feeds with great pictures, stories of success and messages of goodwill."

Global IT and business consulting firm **CGI**, which supports critical parts of national infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, the police and defence and security services, encouraged its employees to use its existing services and access its Member Assistance Programme - a confidential service for staff and their families providing consultation, psychological counselling and support services, such as financial and legal advice.

CGI also launched an internal mental health first aid app, enabling employees quick access to its network of mental health first aiders through their phones.





The power of conversation

The pandemic saw greater effort among some workplaces to normalise conversations about mental health.

Daily wellbeing drop-in sessions at **Bridgend College** enabled students to speak to a wellbeing officer or request an appointment with a counsellor.

The college was aware that suicide rates are three times higher in males than females and construction workers are a particularly vulnerable group² who are prone to the effects of poor mental health. In response to this, college staff delivered tailored mental health presentations to male construction and engineering students.

Childcare facilities across Wales were forced to close during the first national lockdown and many staff were furloughed. To ensure colleagues could support each other through this difficult period, WhatsApp groups were set up by both **Cae'r Ffair** Nursery in Gorslas, Llanelli, and by **Baby Acorns Nursery** in Cardiff.

Cae'r Ffair used WhatsApp to encourage staff engagement in a range of ways including regular video calls (an offer which was available to any staff member in distress), sharing recipes and videos and even creating a fancy dress video montage that they shared with families to cheer up the children they usually care for.



At Baby Acorns Nursery, a three-strong mental wellbeing team was also on hand to support those who needed to talk one-to-one. When they returned to work, Acorns created a staff wellbeing room for mindfulness activities and meditation, featuring a gratitude book and reading resources.

² 2020: Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB

“We used #SpreadHope to encourage more people to join in and fill each other’s news feeds with great pictures, stories of success and messages of goodwill.”

Chris Garlick, Health, Wellbeing and Engagement Manager, Mirus Wales

Protecting the protectors

Protecting the wellbeing and mental health of key workers during the height of the pandemic was challenging as they worked round the clock to respond to emerging needs.

In Neath Port Talbot, the council established an occupational health unit helpline for its employees, including key workers, which provided advice and signposted people to services. Council staff also accessed ‘Wellbeing Through Work’, a free and confidential service already accessible to NHS employees that connects employees experiencing health issues affecting their work with NHS therapists.

BCB International, a manufacturer of life-saving equipment for frontline services, helped create a healthy work environment for busy staff. The business hosted free, twice-weekly yoga classes and created a wellbeing garden, where staff could take a tea break and find peace among the plants.

Prioritising student and staff wellbeing at Bridgend College

Staff and student wellbeing was a strategic priority for Bridgend College even before the pandemic, but as Covid-19 amplified inequities within the community, the college redoubled its efforts to prioritise positive mental and physical health.

Its person-centred approach has been multi-layered and includes the launch of several initiatives benefitting both staff and learners, such as free online yoga for staff and students to help reduce anxiety levels, access to a mindfulness for leaders programme and daily wellbeing drop-in sessions, where students can speak to a wellbeing officer or request an appointment with a counsellor.

To ensure staff felt connected to the college, despite lockdowns and extensive home working, the college invested in their professional development with a deliberate focus on mental health. They accessed wellbeing coaching, suicide and mental health first aid courses and safeguarding conferences.

Conscious that suicide rates are three times higher in males than females, and that many construction workers experience poor mental health³,

the college tailored mental health communications, including presentations, for male construction and engineering students.

The approach appears to have worked. Staff absence levels have decreased from 4.16 per cent in 2018 to 0.5 per cent in October 2020. Student behaviour has also improved, with fewer ‘cause for concern’ notes issued and a 90 per cent completion rate for qualifications and apprenticeships.

The college also achieved ‘Gold status’ in the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index 2019/20, which is awarded to employers who have successfully embedded mental health into their policies and practices, demonstrating a long-term and in-depth commitment to staff mental health.



³ 2020: Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB

A man with a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket, light blue shirt, and dark tie, is riding a bicycle. He is also wearing a black bicycle helmet and has a brown bag slung over his shoulder. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred city street with trees and buildings. The image is partially covered by a large teal and pink graphic on the right side of the page.

Promoting physical wellbeing initiatives

2

Promoting physical wellbeing initiatives

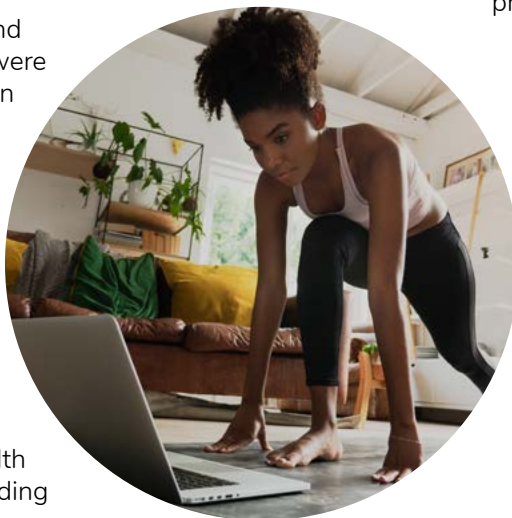
At the height of lockdown, gyms and fitness centres closed and people were only able to leave their homes for an hour of daily exercise, either alone or within their isolation 'bubble'.

While some were able to embrace that hour each day and others joined online fitness classes, for many the sustained lockdown risked a negative impact on their physical health.

People living with obesity reported a deterioration⁴ of their mental health and health-related behaviour, including diet and physical activity.

The pandemic also restricted the physical activity of vulnerable groups, such as those with physical and intellectual disabilities⁵, as poor mental health and a lack of access to specialist facilities, therapies and equipment took their toll.

Recognising a need to support employees' physical health and create a sense of community, some employers introduced initiatives to get their staff moving together.



Stepping up

Walking challenges proved especially popular. In May 2021, to mark National Walking Month, **Cardiff University** set a Step Count Challenge for its staff, aimed at nurturing a sense of community and supporting their physical wellbeing.

"They appreciated having a reason to get up and leave the house, and the opportunity to chat and socialise with team mates."

Paul Wilson, Staff Wellbeing Manager,
Cardiff University

Within six weeks, nearly 500 employees, competing in 98 teams, had walked almost 218 million steps (217,953,368). The total equated to more than 108,976 miles - half the distance to the moon!

And at **CGI International**, an IT and business consultancy firm with offices in Bridgend and Clwyd, 720 staff, also known as 'members', took more than 434 million steps in a three-month challenge aimed at boosting their physical and mental health. Weekly prizes for progress and participation were awarded to encourage engagement before, during and after working hours.

⁴ 2021: Negative impact of the first COVID-19 lockdown upon health-related behaviours and psychological wellbeing in people living with severe and complex obesity in the UK - eClinicalMedicine (thelancet.com)

⁵ 2021: The effects of COVID-19 restrictions on physical activity and mental health of children and young adults with physical and/or intellectual disabilities (nih.gov)

Speaking of the impact the challenge had on staff at Cardiff University, Paul Wilson, Staff Wellbeing Manager, said: “Nearly all of the participants, who provided feedback on the challenge, said taking part had boosted their wellbeing and their activity level had increased during the challenge.”

There were benefits for CGI International as an employer, too, said Donna Kelly, Senior Vice President for CGI in the UK: “When individuals feel valued and encouraged to adopt health and wellbeing practices, this overwhelmingly benefits the business, reducing sickness levels and preventing drops in performance.”

The success of Cardiff University’s initiative led it to organise another Step Count Challenge during autumn 2021 to help combat any adverse impact the onset of winter had on staff mood, sleeping habits or diet.

During 2021, Cardiff University also organised wellbeing workshops, providing insight for staff into topics including stopping smoking, improving diet and sleep, building better habits, and a course on Stoic philosophy, one of the world’s oldest forms of self-care.

“We wanted to provide focused support to staff to protect and improve their wellbeing at a time of great stress and uncertainty,” said Paul Wilson.

“Nearly all
participants said
taking part had boosted
their wellbeing and that
their activity level had
increased during
the challenge.”

Paul Wilson, Staff Wellbeing
Manager, Cardiff University

Taking on physical challenges

During the country’s second lockdown in January 2021, **Nice Pak International**, a wet wipe manufacturer based in Flint, introduced its ‘Team 18’ challenge.

Employees were invited to complete at least 18km of exercise over 18 consecutive days, inspired by data that suggested an average of 18 people lose their lives to suicide each day.

Some walked or ran with loved ones, others cycled and even rowed. All noted the positive impact it had on their mental state.

“It didn’t matter how far we went, really,” said Vicki Alexander, Senior HR Officer at Nice Pak International. “What mattered was doing something other than sitting around worrying about not seeing family and friends. It allowed us to break the cycle. We kept each other going, shared stories and reflected throughout the 18 days.”

Some employers also offered staff access to online fitness classes. CGI organised 12 weeks of live virtual yoga sessions for members, while fitness facilities themselves embraced digital technology to keep their communities moving. **Denbighshire Leisure Ltd** made its online fitness app, Mywellness, free for all in the community to access fitness classes and workouts.

“It allowed us to
break the cycle.
We kept each
other going.”

Vicki Alexander, Senior HR
Officer, Nice Pak
International

When lockdown halted **Flow Fitness at Studio 17**'s accessible and inclusive grounded aerial classes in Whitland, Carmarthenshire, principal owner, Angharad James, took her dance, fitness and wellbeing programme online.

Angharad James, who is also Dance Development Coordinator for Arts Care Gofal Celf, shared pre-recorded fitness classes with the community, encouraging them to report back on their achievements, and ran

inclusive online dance classes, one of which included a special appearance from Strictly Come Dancing professional, Katya Jones.

As lockdown eased, the car park was temporarily converted into a Covid-safe dance floor so classes could resume safely as soon as possible. The community also did a 38-hour fitness challenge, raising more than £4,000 for Children in Need.

"It was important to ensure members could focus on their routine, which they might have been missing," said Swansea-based Angharad James. "Recording their workouts gave them a sense of achievement and goals to look forward to."



Keeping CGI's members moving

Recognising its employees or 'members' lives had changed significantly due to the pandemic, with lockdown restrictions preventing access to gyms and fitness facilities, the global IT and business consultancy, CGI, sought to encourage a positive approach to members' physical health.

The firm, which supports critical parts of national infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, the police, and defence and security services, launched several physical initiatives, including 12 weeks of virtual yoga and a three-month step challenge.

"We recognised employees' lives had changed," said Donna Kelly, Senior Vice President at CGI in the UK. "There was a potential increase in sedentary lifestyles because of working from home, long hours and increased connectivity to work."

More than 600 members attended weekly online yoga sessions guided by an external instructor, with sessions recorded for those unable to attend.

Another 720 members in Wales took part in the firm's 'Step to it' challenge, which invited them to achieve 400 million steps collectively over three months. Weekly prizes for individual accomplishments encouraged friendly competition among staff and internal business units.

A dedicated app allowed participants to track their progress and compare results with peers. For those unable to walk, other activities undertaken could be translated into 'steps' by the app, allowing inclusive participation for all.

Aside from the 434.2 million steps taken by employees during the three months, 579 online friendships were formed via the app's social elements. Conversation between participants was encouraged in the yoga call's chat function and through the 'Step to it' app, where people shared pictures of their outdoor activities.

The firm believes the initiatives strengthened wellbeing in the workplace by making it more accessible to all and encouraging healthy behaviour before, during and after the working day.

"More people engaged in these activities than they had pre-pandemic because each activity ensured that physical capability and time wouldn't be a barrier," said Donna Kelly. "Staff are keen to see these offers and others continue."

CGI

Staff communication and training

3



Staff communication and training

The pandemic highlighted the importance of good internal communication during a crisis.

As the impact of coronavirus evolved, employers needed to share a stream of information on changing regulations and how they affected work or roles.

Organisations across Wales took different approaches to deliver that information.

“We are not a team
because we work together.
We are a team because we
respect, trust and care for
each other.”

Jamie Groves, Managing Director,
Denbighshire Leisure Ltd

Investing in apps

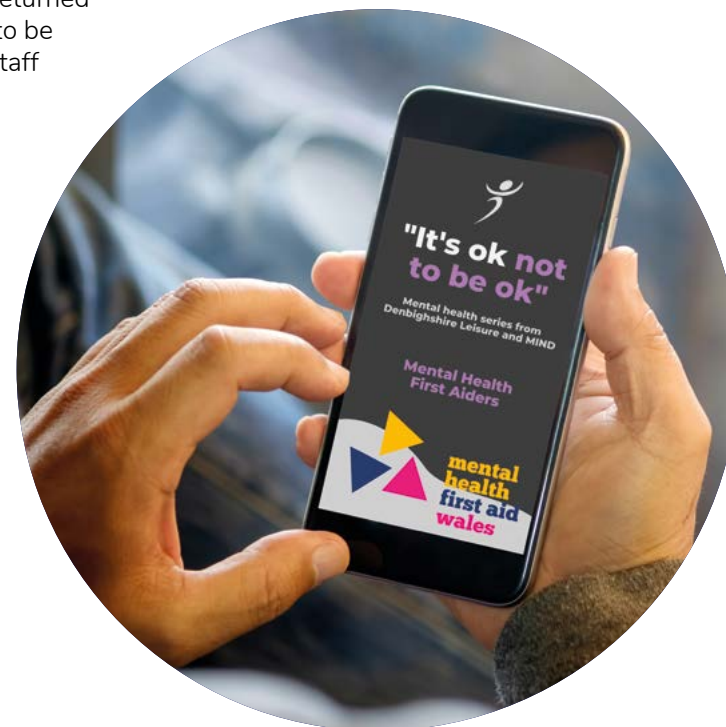
Social distancing and national lockdowns led to an inevitable surge in digital technology use, including apps.

When Covid-19 affected almost every facet of **Denbighshire Leisure Limited's** businesses - which include leisure centres, restaurants, a theatre, and coastal attractions – it invested in an app to maintain communication with its 776 employees, both casual and contracted.

Through it, the firm shared company updates and messages of support and encouragement from senior leaders. It also launched two app-based mental health and wellbeing campaigns. “It’s ok not to be ok” provided mindfulness and mental wellbeing messaging and resources, while #BeKind encouraged staff to be kind to themselves and others.

“Now that many staff have returned to work, the app continues to be a hugely important tool for staff communication,” said Jamie Groves, Managing Director of Denbighshire Leisure Ltd.

“Plans are being developed to extend its use into a hub of information for both new starters and existing staff.”



Creating internal sharing platforms

Before the pandemic, **HM Land Registry** had never offered more than a handful of employees the option of home working. But when Covid-19 arrived, 98 per cent of its workforce suddenly became home-based.

Like many employers across Wales, it quickly developed a proactive internal communication approach, which included a Weekly Information Bulletin featuring a range of support articles on topics such as home-schooling and mental health. Additional pages were added to the organisation's intranet too, with one focused on Covid-19 and another becoming a wellbeing hub that provided mental, physical, financial and family support.

Other organisations expanded their online presence to meet emerging staff needs, with many developing health and wellbeing websites or online 'hubs'.

Neath Port Talbot Council launched a website in April 2020 that included a focus on physical health with links to NHS exercise videos, reputable health websites and nutrition information and resources.

It signposted staff to wellbeing resources, including online cognitive behavioural therapy and stress management courses; working from home guidance; resource packs for those caring for young children; bereavement resources from organisations such as Mind and AtaLoss; information for carers and domestic abuse guidance for line managers.

**"The council's
workforce experienced
change on an
unprecedented scale, both
to the place and nature
of their work."**

Karen Jones, Chief Executive,
Neath Port Talbot Council

The power of conversation

Sometimes, people needed to talk.

Neath Port Talbot Council established a helpline specifically for school-based staff, which signposted them to the right support, offered advice and guidance on the mental health and wellbeing of teaching and learning support staff, and gave them information on how best to support young people experiencing Covid-19-related challenges.

"During the pandemic, the council's workforce experienced change on an unprecedented scale, both to the place and nature of their work," said Karen Jones, Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot Council.

"Many frontline staff maintained service delivery in challenging circumstances, including social care, school-based staff, and those working in our refuse and recycling services. In response, we provided a range of online tools and support services that staff could tap into when they needed extra support.

"We also redesigned our occupational health and psychology support services to ensure access for those who had a higher level of need."

Denbighshire Leisure Ltd introduced a 'buddy' system, encouraging staff to call each other, particularly those living alone.

Providing staff with specialist training

As line managers found themselves supporting staff through the complex practical, physical and psychological impacts of the pandemic, some employers in Wales facilitated professional training to better equip those managers to have those difficult conversations and support people experiencing a mental health emergency.

Bridgend College staff accessed wellbeing coaching, suicide and mental health first aid courses, as well as safeguarding conferences.

ParamedicsRUs, a first aid training provider specialising in tailor-made medical courses, delivered free mental health awareness training online to more than 100 members of the South and West Wales Safety Group. This enhanced local companies' capacity to deal effectively with mental health issues and reduce stigma.

And senior leaders at **Cardiff University**, which ranked fifth in Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for 2021 for good health and wellbeing of students and staff, attended a leading mental health and wellbeing training course as part of a tiered approach to training that it intends to continue. The university has also developed a staff wellbeing strategy and is hoping to become the first UK university to achieve certification against a new international standard for workplace wellbeing: ISO 45003.

"Cardiff University is confident that its focus on wellbeing is producing demonstrable results – both in terms of continued staff productivity in a crisis, and the rich psychological rewards that come from creating good working conditions," said Paul Wilson, Staff Wellbeing Manager at Cardiff University.

New app keeps Denbighshire Leisure Ltd connected during pandemic

Denbighshire Leisure Ltd's businesses span the hospitality, leisure and arts sector, all of which were hit particularly hard by the pandemic.

As many of its outlets temporarily closed during the national lockdowns, and with restrictions heavily impacting how they operated when they reopened, maintaining regular communication with its 776 contracted and 'casual' staff was crucial for the business and their personal wellbeing.

WhatsApp groups were initially established for each team and facility, where messages and updates were relayed and staff could raise concerns or issues.

But by September 2020, when it was clear that the pandemic was not going to be over quickly, the firm invested in 'Our people', an internal communication app for mobile phones. It allowed the company to connect instantly with team members who do not have access to email or a computer.

Each employee has a personalised feed, and employers can share files through it easily as well as signpost to other platforms and run simple staff engagement surveys. There is also a team chat function and the ability to swap shifts through the app.

Staff were encouraged to download it, allowing management to communicate directly with them. Regular business updates were shared, along with messages of support and encouragement.

Denbighshire Leisure also used the app to share its two mental health and wellbeing campaigns. 'It's ok not to be ok' focused on mindfulness, mental wellbeing, mood and food and relaxation, and #BeKind encouraged staff to be kinder to themselves and others.

"Now that many staff have returned to work, Our People continues to be a hugely important tool for staff communication," said Jamie Groves, Managing Director. "Plans are being developed to extend its use, turning it into an information hub for both new starters and existing staff."





Staff engagement,
recognition and support

4

Staff engagement, recognition and support

Showing appreciation for employees' hard work can boost their morale and confidence, which was particularly important given the pandemic's impact on motivation, productivity and health and wellbeing.

In the wake of Covid-19, and with many people working from home, employers across Wales sought new ways to engage with, reward and recognise staff.

Celebrating employees' resilience and successes

Some held appreciation events and gave their employees gifts.

Staff at **Bluestone Resorts Ltd** in Pembrokeshire had experienced periods of furlough followed by extremely busy periods at work as the nation scrambled to enjoy staycations when restrictions were eased.

To show the company's appreciation for its employees' resilience and hard work during such turbulent times, it held a staff appreciation week in September 2021.

Employees received thank you cards, shopping vouchers, cakes and other gifts as a demonstration of the firm's commitment to them and to recognise their contributions to the business.



Building on a Zest for wellbeing

Employers also engaged with staff through wellbeing and health programmes.

South Wales housing provider, **Melin Homes**, based in Pontypool, developed its existing staff wellbeing programme, Zest, which already offered counselling and health benefits, to protect the wellbeing of the company's 240 staff.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, to address the unique challenges the pandemic brought, including isolation, it ran a series of workshops, singing and cookery lessons and exercise classes. Other initiatives included staff gaining access to the Headspace mindfulness app.

Those working on site were given free healthy breakfasts.

"We believe every employer has a responsibility to ensure their staff are looked after mentally and physically. It's the right thing to do."

Fiona Williams, Principal Communications Officer, Melin Homes.

Tailored coaching programmes

Further west, **Gower College Swansea** was keen to maintain the college's sense of community spirit.

It worked with a professional coach to develop tailored online wellbeing workshops over eight weeks for staff. The sessions explored mindset, strategy skills and empowerment.

With professional support, staff considered changes they wanted to make in their lives, whether that was taking up a new hobby, learning a new skill, or spending more time with family, and then developed an action plan to work toward those goals.

More than 150 employees attended, around a fifth of the workforce, and the programme was backed by the college's senior management team and trade union representatives, with staff given the time and flexibility to participate during working hours.

"This was a unique opportunity for staff to have the time to focus on developing themselves, whether that be from a career, health or personal perspective," said Sarah King, HR Director at the college.

"One of the most challenging things about being in lockdown was regaining our community spirit. We wanted staff to feel they belonged at the college and that we cared."

"One of the most challenging things about being in lockdown was regaining our community spirit."

Sarah King, HR Director, Gower College Swansea

Recognising working parents

Supporting staff with families through the pandemic was a focus for **CGI**, an IT and business consultancy working across the private and public sector.

It launched an internal communication campaign called #InThisTogether during the 2020 lockdown, which not only gave staff access to interactive webinars on nutrition, physical activity, mental health and ergonomics but also focused on work-life balance and ways working parents could keep their children occupied during lockdowns.

There were live, weekly mindfulness sessions and resources on each topic, and CGI created a platform for staff to crowdsource their tips on what was working for them. Senior leaders contributed videos, staff participated in podcasts, there were virtual 'love your lunch' events, photo-sharing contests, and even a sunflower growing competition.

The firm also delivered a 20-week science, technology, engineering and maths programme, complete with family education pack.

"Health and wellbeing have always been a priority at CGI, but this pandemic experience has only focused us on it more," said Donna Kelly, Senior Vice President at CGI. "We remain committed to a supportive culture that encourages our workforce to take responsibility for their health and wellbeing, with advice, assistance and engaging initiatives."

"Health and wellbeing have always been a priority at CGI, but this pandemic experience has only focused us on it more."

Donna Kelly, Senior Vice President, CGI in the UK

Pontypool housing provider's zest for staff wellbeing

South Wales housing provider, **Melin Homes**, based in Pontypool, has been integrating staff wellbeing into its culture for more than a decade through its Zest programme.

Zest, which launched in 2011 with support from board members and colleagues, offers counselling and health benefits to protect the wellbeing of the company's 240 staff.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Melin Homes adapted and built on Zest's offering to ensure it could continue to support staff and address the unique challenges the pandemic brought them, including feelings of isolation.

It ran craft and nutrition workshops, singing and cookery lessons and exercise classes. The staff received menopause support and were given free access to the Headspace mindfulness app.

Those who were working on site were given free healthy breakfasts and managers increased their one-to-one sessions with staff to ensure they felt supported.

The company also introduced a staff recognition scheme encouraging colleagues to say thank you to each

other. Staff could request the company make a charitable donation, plant a tree, or gift a box of chocolates in their name.

"Zest has become a significant part of everyone's working life at Melin Homes," said Fiona Williams, Principal Communications Officer at Melin Homes. "Our staff have become more active, stopped smoking, eaten more healthily, become less stressed and have had fun doing a wide range of activities, while learning about their health and wellbeing. It has improved staff engagement and satisfaction levels.

"We believe every employer has a responsibility to ensure their staff are looked after both mentally and physically. It is the right thing to do."





Digital communications

5

Digital communications

With social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines in place to help stem the spread of Covid-19, organisations sought new ways to remain socially connected with colleagues, clients and the community. Often, workplaces turned to digital communication.

Wellbeing websites and hubs

Many developed internal websites with health and wellbeing resources, signposting colleagues to trusted support organisations.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) is a special health authority within NHS Wales that provides leadership and programme management to the NHS Health and Wellbeing Network as part of its role. The network has expert membership from across the health boards and trusts in NHS Wales, including clinical psychologists, heads of occupational health and employee wellbeing services, as well as representation from the Welsh Government and Social Care Wales.

Recognising the impact the pandemic would have on the wellbeing of the healthcare workforce, HEIW and the Network created a bilingual online resource hub, signposting users to health and wellbeing support and information.

In addition to self-help guides, resources included information and contact details for support services such as Health for Health Professionals, cognitive behaviour therapy site Silvercloud, and a dedicated Samaritans helpline.

The site was viewed more than 34,000 times in its first month and the Network continues to update it with evidence-based, high-quality resources on general health and wellbeing as well as Covid-19.

Claire Smith, HEIW Head of Wellbeing at Work, said: “The health and wellbeing of colleagues is extremely important. It is vital they have quick and easy access to support whenever they need it. The hub provides this, along with assurance that the information and resources available are of a high-quality, and that there are people ready and able to help them.

“It remains available to NHS Wales staff alongside the resources and support provided by their occupational health and employee wellbeing teams.”



A crafty solution

Some employers went online to support their community during lockdowns.

In North Wales, **Denbighshire Leisure Ltd's** facilities were forced to close and reopen more than once during the pandemic. It manages and operates more than 14 businesses in North Wales, including a craft centre and community-focused team working with schools, vulnerable adults, families and carers.

The firm's community arts programmes provide opportunities to participate in the arts regardless of experience, age or background.

Conscious of the impact its absence may have on vulnerable populations in the community, it developed an online art hub offering arts, games and craft ideas, including an intergenerational creative wellbeing activity kit created predominantly for people living with dementia, their families and carers. The kit included drawing, tracing, colouring, collage, papercraft and salt dough activities.

The community arts team also launched a YouTube channel where it shared crafting activities that people could follow at home.

There were also online exercise videos and fitness classes that people of varying abilities could follow, and a 'rainbow challenge', which provided daily fitness challenges online that the community could complete at home.

"It became clear that customers still required some form of the help and support they were used to from our company."

Jamie Groves, Managing
Director, Denbighshire
Leisure Ltd

"It became clear customers still required some form of the help and support they were used to from our company," said Jamie Groves, Managing Director, Denbighshire Leisure Ltd.

"We could see how essential this support became to many people and worked hard to adapt our services and make them accessible to as many people as possible."



Making digital communication accessible

While digital communication approaches kept many connected, access to the appropriate technology and knowledge of how to use it risked isolating others, including the estimated 15,600 people in Wales with diagnosed learning difficulties.

For many people with learning difficulties, keeping in touch with family and friends was difficult as they lacked the technology needed to keep in touch with them or the knowledge of how to use it. They were also vulnerable to online crimes, which rose during the pandemic.

Innovate Trust, a Cardiff-based charity that supports people with learning disabilities to live independently, sought to address such difficulties by developing an app called 'Insight'.

Free to download by the charity's members and the wider learning disability community in Wales, it gave individuals a safe space to get in touch with each other, sharing experiences and photographs. Family members could also reach them through it.

Its 1,448 members could access more than 80 live activities and events each week along with pre-recorded sessions, regular news updates and in-person opportunities via the app. The activities ranged from Welsh lessons to music therapy, enabling members to make new friends and feel supported during a difficult time.

"We have witnessed a change of thinking within the social care sector that has opened doors and allowed us to offer our activities to a wider audience."

Nick French, CEO, The Innovate Trust

Innovative app keeps people with learning disabilities connected

With research⁶ suggesting people with a learning disability were more vulnerable to Covid-19 than those without, many stayed at home during the pandemic for their safety and were apprehensive about going out when lockdown rules eased.

To enable individuals to keep in touch with family and friends safely, the Cardiff-based charity, Innovate Trust, developed its 'Insight' app.

It is free to download by the charity's members and the wider learning disability community in Wales. Innovate Trust gifted devices to those who needed them, along with the necessary training and ongoing support required to ensure they could use the app effectively.

It allowed members to communicate in a more accessible, friendly digital space, providing opportunities to learn and expand skills while sharing experiences and becoming part of a wider community.

Innovate Trust worked with other organisations and freelance artists to develop more than 3,000 activities and events to share via the app, ensuring people kept fit and active while at home. These included yoga, learning Welsh

through song, a quiz club, street dance, church, gardening, sing-alongs, tai chi, sing and sign sessions, cooking lessons, arts and craft, fitness lessons and music therapy sessions.

An 'ideas' section allowed users to make suggestions about activities or sessions they may find interesting or helpful, while a private area of the app enabled family members to connect and communicate with their loved ones directly.

More than 1,448 members across Wales have used Insight since it was launched, including people who had previously found it difficult to attend events because of a medical condition or lack of confidence.

Lisa French, Participation Manager, said: "The people we support have broadened their social networks, made new friends and relationships, joining a like-minded and supportive community during the most difficult of times."

**Innovate
Trust**

⁶ 2021: Eight in 10 deaths of people with a learning disability are COVID related as inequality soars | Mencap

A person wearing blue gloves is holding a circular teal sign. The sign has the text "PLEASE PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING" in white capital letters at the top. Below the text are two white footprints, each with a small white heel patch. The background is a light-colored wooden floor. A yellow measuring tape is visible on the left side of the floor. A red curved shape is at the bottom of the image.

PLEASE PRACTICE
SOCIAL DISTANCING

**Heightening infection,
prevention and control
(ipc) measures**

6

Heightening infection, prevention and control (ipc) measures

The safety of employees and any other people visiting the physical workplace has been a high priority for businesses throughout the pandemic.

All employers introduced measures to protect their staff and to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

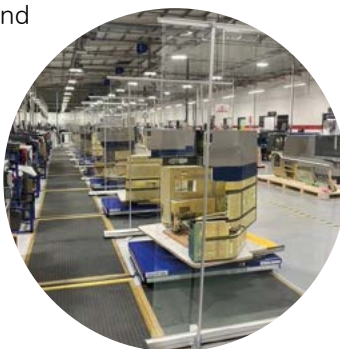
Walk this way

Physical barriers and one-way systems were introduced in many workspaces to abide social distancing requirements and reduce infection risks.

At television production company, **Cwmni Da**, in Caernarfon, a one-way system was introduced for the few roles that needed to be administered on site, with people adhering to the two-metre distancing rule and wearing masks. Other areas of its workplace, including the kitchen, were cordoned off because distancing would not have been possible.

It produced a programme called 'Ffit' within these restrictions, using just three crew members and a presenter, and ensuring the producer and director worked in separate areas of the building.

Commercial aircraft suites and seats manufacturer, **Safran Seats**, in Torfaen, implemented similar one-way systems at its facility, and was one of many workplaces that used screens at workstations as an additional protective measure.



"On one shift there were three groups that stayed separate from each other to limit infection risk."

Janey Howell, Legal Director, BCB International

Movement around **BCB International's** facility in Cardiff was heavily restricted as its 50 staff were producing life-saving PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and hand sanitisers for frontline workers, including the NHS.

The workforce was split into two teams working alternate shifts, one between 6am and 12pm and the other between 12.15pm to 6.15pm, with a new cleaning regime implemented twice a day between those shifts.

"The idea behind the split was if one team did test positive and needed to self-isolate, then the other team could run full-time until isolation was ended," said Janey Howell, Legal Director at BCB International. "We stopped movement around the office so, even on one shift, there were three groups that stayed separate from each other to limit infection risk."



Tests, checks and restricted visits

Temperature checks were common at most workplaces.

At BCB International, workers had their temperature taken before each shift, and temperature machines were installed at each entrance of Safran Seats' premises to facilitate daily temperature checks for their employees.

Regular lateral flow tests were also required from most employees as they became more readily available, though the frequency with which they were required differed.

When Cwmni Da re-started filming of its key production, 'Rybish', it needed to create a protective bubble for its actors. Measures included paying for private hotel accommodation, providing regular PCR testing and mandatory daily temperature checks and lateral flow tests for crew members on set. As restrictions lifted, and staff were able to return to work on site, a booking system was introduced to ensure social distancing requirements were upheld. No filming days were missed as a result of these measures.



**"Our primary aim
was to ensure our team
stays safe."**

Janey Howell, Legal Director,
BCB International

At **Tata Steel UK** in Port Talbot, a large drive-through testing facility was established for its 4,000 staff and contractors. A team of 40 staff delivered the testing, helping identify cases of Covid-19 and protecting the workforce.

Hand sanitisers and cleaning stations were also present at workplaces for staff to use.

Throughout Wales, the majority of external visitors to workplaces were restricted unless essential, including at BCB International, where staff receiving delivery drivers would dress in full PPE and hazmat suits.

“Our primary aim was to ensure our team stays safe,” said Janey Howell, Legal Director of BCB International. “While some of our measures haven’t been liked, they have all been appreciated by the team as they are protecting themselves. The clearest indicator of this initiative’s success is that not once have we had a Covid-19 outbreak in the office.”

“In 18 months, there were two positive cases in our team of 75, and both were caught before they infected anyone else. In such an incredibly trying time, everyone pulled together to follow the rules.”

“We take pride that we’re not only doing a good job of protecting our business operationally and our employees’ welfare but are also having an impact on our local communities.”

Dean Magill, Head of Central Operations, Tata Steel UK

Tata Steel’s on-site testing facility saves thousands of working hours

When a pandemic was declared, Tata Steel UK in Port Talbot quickly established a drive-through testing facility for its 4,000 staff and contractors on-site to keep the business running.

Within four weeks, a 7,000 square-metre drive-through facility was designed and launched, run by up to 40 staff who were recruited and trained, including traffic controllers, testing stewards, process technicians and analysts.

The firm’s aim was to test up to 800 employees each day. These numbers attracted attention from national government bodies, which developed a close sharing and learning relationship with Tata Steel UK.

Over a period of 11 months, the site administered 25,000 tests, each taking around 30 minutes from swab to result. Testing detected 118 asymptomatic cases during that period. At the time, each positive case risked infecting another five people, so the firm’s testing regime prevented nearly 600 people from catching the virus.

Between December 2020 and February 2021, an effort to quantify the benefits of the testing site to the business found it prevented 12,800 hours of isolation and saved more than £370,000 in overtime costs.

The testing site’s benefits to employee safety and operational risk and running costs led the firm to roll out similar sites at Llanwern Works, in Newport, and Trostre Works, in Llanelli. The company also successfully set up a pilot distribution hub for home test kits, which was rolled out at four other Tata Steel UK sites.

“We take pride that we’re not only doing a good job of protecting our business operationally and our employees’ welfare but are also having an impact on our local communities,” said Dean Magill, Head of Central Operations.





Introducing covid policies

7

Introducing covid policies

When the pandemic struck the UK, many businesses developed new policies to ensure a safe day-to-day working environment.

At **Bluestone Resorts Limited**, where staff experienced periods of furlough followed by extremely busy periods as restrictions eased and families sought 'staycations', staff adopted a mantra of 'feel safe, stay safe'.

The firm assembled a Covid critical incident response team to devise business strategies that prioritised the health and welfare of staff and guests.

Covid secure risk assessments and monitors were introduced to protect them. Staff received online safety briefings before returning to work and 'toolbox talks' were shared about safe working practices.

A weekly safety questionnaire enabled employees to report anything making them feel unsafe or voice concerns about their work.

Some employers also introduced new Covid-19 payment policies to support colleagues during such unprecedented times.

Denbighshire Leisure Ltd continued to pay contracted staff as normal during lockdowns and some casual staff were paid based on the number of regular hours worked over the previous months.

A range of policies were also introduced to support those with caring responsibilities, including those home-schooling children alongside their work.

PerkinElmer, a manufacturing facility in Llantrisant, implemented a Covid-19 policy granting those employees ineligible for sick pay or unable to work from home up to 10 days' full pay at their manager's discretion when they needed time off to assist dependents or help with childcare.

Qualifications Wales, based in Newport, relaxed its core working hours of 10am to 3pm to help staff balance work and life commitments during the lockdown. As some staff struggled to meet their contracted hours due to caring commitments, the organisation offered 'top-up flexi time' of up to eight hours a week, where contracted hours were unachievable.

At **Neath Port Talbot College** during the height of the pandemic, when teaching was online only, staff were given the flexibility to host morning, afternoon or twilight sessions at times that enabled them to better fulfil their caring responsibilities.

"The college has since developed an agile working policy that will allow staff to continue working from home where their role permits in future," said Eleanor Glew, Vice Principal of Operational Services at the college.

Aware of the childcare challenges facing many of its staff members, **Bluestone Resort Ltd** in Pembrokeshire introduced an onsite holiday club, where the children were supervised by qualified members of staff and had access to activities and play sessions during the day.



“The college has developed an agile working policy that will allow staff to continue working from home where their role permits in future.”

Eleanor Glew, Vice Principal of
Operational Services, Neath Port
Talbot College

“Safety has been our absolute priority throughout the crisis, and we can all be proud of the robust arrangements we have in place.”

Lynne Mills, Criminal Courts
Manager, HMCTS Wales

Keeping justice going in a pandemic

Some workplace settings required unique policy and process changes.

Guided by government advice, the courts and justice system continued to function during the pandemic, but significant changes were needed to keep everyone safe.

HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), responsible for the administration of courts and tribunals in Wales and England, carried out weekly risk assessments and monitored staff who were shielding and working from home so that they could receive appropriate support.

During the lockdown period, judges were hearing cases remotely using video conferencing technology, known as Cloud Video Platform (CVP) software. HMCTS set up teams to support people using the software at virtual hearings.

Wales embraced this technology and was the first area to have all centres open and operational for jury trials. Tribunals in Wales led on the rollout of the CVP in employment tribunals and immigration and asylum chamber tribunals, creating guidance to be used throughout the UK.⁷

Wales Employment Tribunal introduced CVP Test Clinics five days a week, twice a day, which gave users the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the platform and gain confidence in it. This approach was later identified as cross-

jurisdictional best practice. Staff rolled out new case management and quickly created training videos that could be shared across Wales and England.

The Cardiff Social Security and Child Support Tribunal process centre was the only region to maintain hearings, while other centres cancelled them. Staff proactively created processes where none existed to administer appeals.

“Safety has been our absolute priority throughout the crisis, and we can all be proud of the robust arrangements we have in place,” said Lynne Mills, HMCTS Wales Criminal Courts Manager. “We can also be proud of the support we’ve offered each other as colleagues and friends everywhere, every day.”



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

⁷ 2021: <https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2021/05/how-welsh-courts-have-coped-with-pandemic-backlog/> Accessed 25 March 2022



Community support

8

Community support

The Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the most vulnerable in society, such as the economically disadvantaged and the elderly.

Communities across Wales demonstrated resilience and remained determined to provide vital support to those who needed it most.

In addition to supporting employees, many organisations provided care within their local communities, with some employers actively striving to be there for those who needed help the most.

Ensuring no-one went hungry

The Trussell Trust reported an 'immediate and sustained surge in need across food banks⁸ when the pandemic struck the UK. In April 2020, there was an 89 per cent increase in the number of emergency food parcels given out compared with the same month in 2019.

Food parcel and delivery services were established in communities across the country as some households struggled to access food and support networks.

Age Connects Torfaen received calls for help from those in the community who had been asked to self-isolate, but did not have access to food and support networks. In response to supporting their community access food, Age Connects Torfaen created a meal delivery service, delivered shopping and prescriptions. More than 100 food parcels were being delivered each week.



"Being hungry or not eating well was not something we wanted to add to the mix."

Emma Wootten,
Development Manager,
Age Connects Torfaen

"We had to act quickly because there was a real concern that we had people in our community who were especially vulnerable to Covid-19 because of their age and because most of them had underlying health issues...being hungry or not eating well was not something we wanted to add to the mix," said Emma Wootten, Development Manager, Age Connects Torfaen.

In March 2020, **Neath Port Talbot Council** launched its NPT Safe & Well service, mobilising more than 700 volunteers to ensure residents in need could receive food, prescription medicines and help with daily tasks.

Those needing food had the option of a free food box or parcel organised by the council or Welsh Government, depending on their dietary needs and capacity to prepare their food, or else were signposted to local organisations providing paid-for meal delivery services. For example, food deliveries were available for parents of children entitled to free school meals who were unable to receive bank payments.



⁸ 2020: the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf (trusselltrust.org)

Reducing isolation of the most vulnerable

In 2020, research by Age UK⁹ found that staying at home could lead to serious problems for older people's physical and mental health, with some experiencing loss of mobility and balance, an increase in pain from untreated medical conditions; and the psychological impact of living with stress, uncertainty and isolation, which increased loneliness. While some older people used the pandemic as an opportunity to do more exercise and improve their fitness, Age UK's research suggested that many saw their health deteriorate, sometimes drastically, in the face of isolation and experienced fewer opportunities to socialise and be physically active.

Age Connects Torfaen helped to combat isolation through its wellbeing programme by linking elderly or vulnerable individuals with support workers and providing activity packs. Information and activity sessions were delivered via Zoom. Activity sessions included weekly arts, choir, craft and quizzes. Through their different services around 400 people were supported every week.

Free Covid-19 training was provided for carers who were at crisis point due to the extra burden on their caring role. Furthermore, 500 hours of face-to-face respite was provided to vulnerable people living with dementia tailoring to the needs, interests and likes of the older person.

Denbighshire Leisure Ltd was keen to ensure the pandemic didn't prevent its community team from continuing its popular 'Lost in Art' project, which offers people with dementia and their carers opportunities to meet and work on arts and crafts projects. The team began delivering materials to members' doorsteps and emailing links to tutorial videos on the Denbighshire Leisure YouTube channel. They called their members twice weekly, once by landline and again by video call, to support them in their creative practice and check whether additional support was needed.

"The team was determined this popular project would not come to end, as feedback has shown how many members rely heavily on the project," said Jamie Groves, Managing Director, Denbighshire Leisure Ltd.

Your Space (Marches) Ltd in Wrexham works with children who have an autistic spectrum condition and their families. During the pandemic, demand for its outreach service increased. It ran shopping and prescription pick-ups, provided and delivered activity packs for the children, organised garden visits and referred parents experiencing poor mental health to counselling support and some families to foodbanks. A penpals page was set up on Facebook and provided a variety of interactive family-friendly sessions, including crafts, cooking, zumba and keep fit.



⁹ 2020: the-impact-of-covid-19-on-older-people_age-uk.pdf (ageuk.org.uk)

**Communities across Wales
demonstrated resilience and a
huge determination to provide
vital support to those who
needed it most.**

**The Trussell Trust reported an
immediate and sustained surge
in need across food banks when
the pandemic struck.**

Keeping Neath Port Talbot safe and well

In March 2020, as the first UK Covid-19 lockdown came into effect, Neath Port Talbot Council, together with its partner organisations, launched the 'NPT Safe & Well' initiative to support the community's most vulnerable people.

With the help of nearly 700 volunteers, as well as local groups, food, prescription medicine and other essentials were delivered to thousands of residents. Those shielding and self-isolating also received help with daily tasks and the service made more than 2,000 welfare calls.

All of the NPT Safe & Well volunteers received training as part of setting up the service and those in contact with vulnerable people were appropriately vetted.

To prevent people slipping through the net, a communications campaign ran across radio and social media. The council delivered leaflets to every house in their area encouraging those on the Welsh Government's shielding list to get in touch. Local councillors and officers also identified people needing assistance, such as those self-isolating without support, young carers, parents of children entitled to free school meals who couldn't receive BACs payments and carers of people shielding and self-isolating.

Food support ranged from Welsh Government food boxes to council food parcels and a paid-for meal delivery service, depending on dietary needs and personal circumstances.

The programme also helped vulnerable groups with daily living tasks, such as posting letters and topping up energy meters. Those feeling isolated were connected with community organisations' befriending services.

More than 300 local businesses also signed up to promote their goods and services on NPTBuyLocal, a website the council launched in September 2020. Paper copies were shared with residents who were offline, and in-house mapping services meant the council could link people with local support and identify gaps.

"NPT Safe & Well's community partnership is well-placed to develop a sustainable service with greater emphasis on helping people to help themselves and connect to support that already exists in their communities," said Karen Jones, Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot Council.





Protecting the Community

9

Protecting the Community

At the start of the pandemic, the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitiser saw existing manufacturers develop innovative approaches to meet demand. Some Welsh companies also adjusted their production lines to help the national effort to produce PPE and safeguard frontline workers.

Milford Haven-based **Simon Safety & Lifting Centre Ltd**, a supplier of head-to-toe PPE, provided PPE and high-hazard workwear to critically important organisations, such as the Welsh Government, NHS Wales and local authorities, to keep them going during the pandemic.

The small, 23-staff business had a critical, long-standing relationships with suppliers in Asia together with in-house manufacturing capabilities and, as talk of a global pandemic gathered pace, the firm provided key strategic advice to Wales's decision-makers. The company had significant stocks available to support clients at the height of the pandemic.

The company also developed and manufactured new products to fill gaps, including its line of hand sanitiser and three-layer reusable face masks.



“We adapted quickly to dramatically changing circumstances to provide the PPE and hygiene supplies our NHS and local authorities relied on.”

Simon Ashton, Managing Director, Simon Safety & Lifting Centre Ltd

“During these exceptional times our employees have repeatedly stepped up in the face of challenges,” said Simon Ashton, Managing Director, Simon Safety & Lifting Centre Ltd.

“We adapted quickly to dramatically changing circumstances to provide the personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies that our NHS and local authorities have relied on in their tireless efforts throughout this crisis.”

Hexigone Inhibitors Ltd in Port Talbot, which usually manufactures chromate-free corrosion inhibitors, also turned its attention to producing hospital-grade hand sanitiser.

As a chemical manufacturer, it quickly adapted its existing skills and resources, sourcing the main ingredient – isopropanol – through a relationship between the UK Government's innovation agency, Innovate UK, and pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline. Recognising the toll Covid-19 was taking on mental health in Wales, and on the economic situation of the country's most vulnerable households, the company donated the profits from the hand sanitiser to Mental Health UK and local food banks.



The company also sourced more than 1,600 face masks for hospitals and care homes.

BCB International helped protect the protectors by converting its machinery at its Llanelli factory to produce much-needed hand sanitiser, as well as masks and other PPE. It donated some of that PPE and sanitiser to smaller groups of key workers, including agencies providing meals to the homeless or support to the elderly. Another 25,000 face masks and 10,000 face shields were sent to medical staff in Yemen.



Travelling safer

Evolving government guidance aimed at protecting the community from Covid-19 saw restrictions on transport in Wales ease and tighten at various points.

Transport For Wales continually modified its guidance and delivered accompanying communication campaigns, such as 'Travel Safer', including on social media, to share key safety measures and support Welsh Government and transport industry aims to 'Keep Wales Safe'.

It introduced one-way and queuing systems to manage passenger flows and retain social distancing measures. Extensive signage on transport and at stations was used to keep people safe on trains and buses, and cleaning regimes were stepped up, particularly at frequently used touchpoints.

Supporting Wales's passengers to travel safer

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on transport services in Wales and their passengers. As public awareness of the virus and its growing impact was felt across the country, reductions in its use followed.

Following declaration of a pandemic and the implementation of national lockdowns, restrictions and safety measures were applied aimed at reducing the virus's spread in the community.

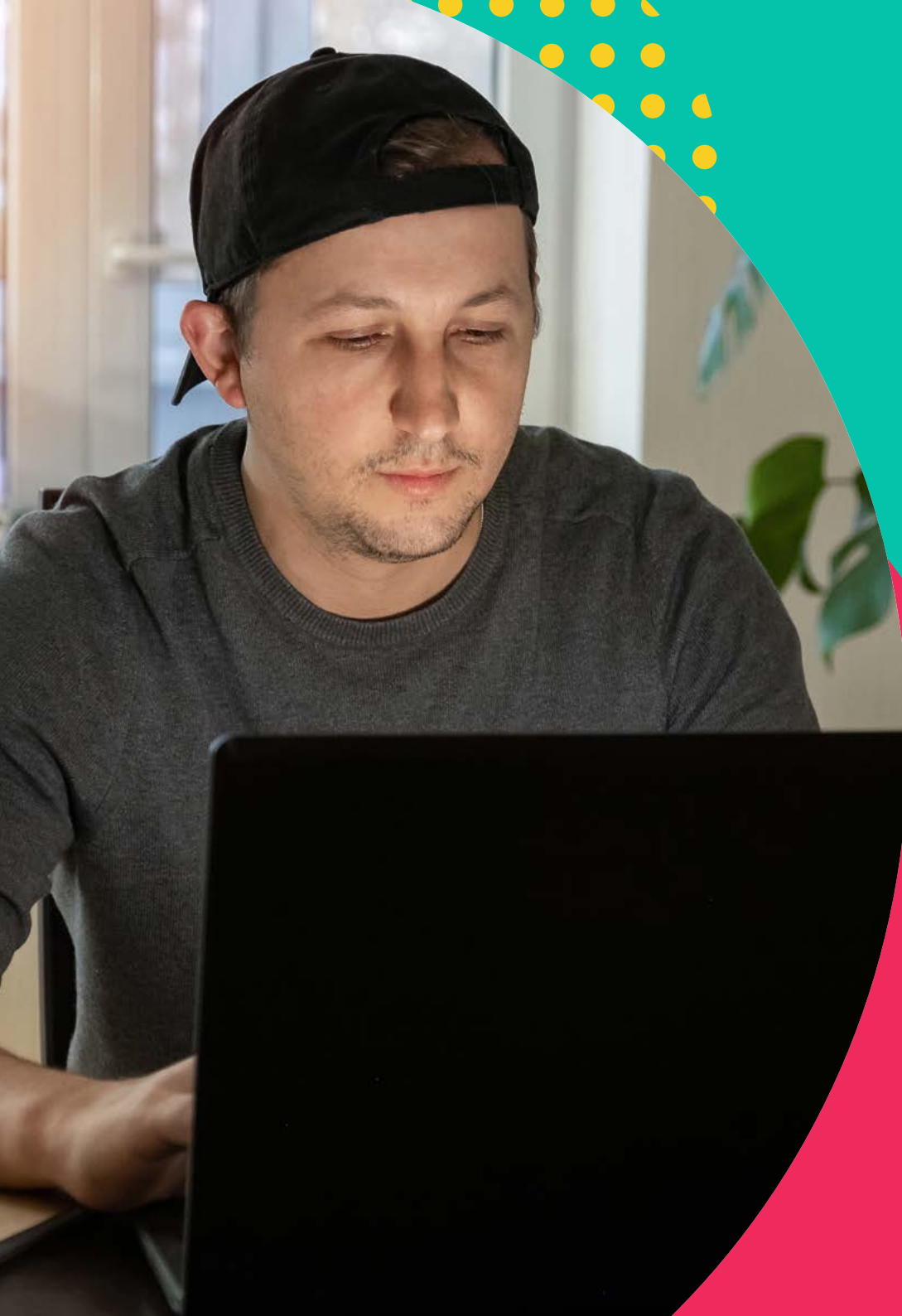
In line with Welsh Government guidance, Transport For Wales ran a reduced rail service from March 2020, prioritising key workers, giving NHS workers free travel, and sharing 'essential travel only' guidance for customers that was reiterated through social media and web channels.

When those restrictions eased in August 2020, the firm adapted its guidance. Services were bolstered and queuing and one-way systems were introduced to support social distancing. Signs reminding people of the changing rules, including to wear a face cover and pay by contactless where possible, were placed across trains and stations. Cleaning regimes were stepped up, particularly around key touch points.

The firm worked with Traveline Cymru to support the bus industry and ensure consistent messaging, and with British Transport Police to ensure regulations were followed and passengers felt safe and secure.

In summer 2020, as travel restrictions began to ease, Transport For Wales launched a bilingual, accessible and inclusive 'Travel Safer' campaign to encourage passengers to help 'keep Wales safe'. The campaign used social media and an accompanying video outlining how the firm was keeping customers safe and what passengers were required to do to protect themselves and others. Further guidance was included for passengers with disabilities and an extensive 'frequently asked questions' feature was made available online.





Reaching out to the
community

10

Reaching out to the community

As many started to feel the employment and educational pressures associated with the pandemic, organisations and businesses sought to help those worst affected.

Supporting people seeking work

Groundwork North Wales is a non-profit organisation that supports people facing multiple challenges and provides accredited employability training courses for people with limited employment prospects.

When social distancing restrictions prevented face-to-face training sessions, the organisation moved its courses online, determined to ensure learners would not be additionally disadvantaged – particularly those who had become unemployed or had to change careers because of the pandemic.

Adopting a Covid-compliant blended learning approach, it offered a full suite of accredited courses, including health and safety, mental health first aid, confidence building, food safety and suites of employability courses, along with interview skills training and CV workshops.



The approach proved a success and the organisation will continue offering online courses beyond the pandemic.

As one of Carmarthenshire's largest employers, **Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB)** sought to support its community through the pandemic by raising awareness of employment, training, volunteer and work experience opportunities.

It ran a bilingual communications campaign online, with the support of local authorities and third sector community organisations, to promote employment opportunities, including apprenticeship pathways in healthcare, engineering and corporate governance.

The health board invested in traineeships for post-secondary education leavers and made it easier for people to apply for volunteer and employment opportunities through social media.

"We have a corporate and social responsibility to those who live within our community and use our services to give something back in the form of opportunity," said Sally Owen, Head of Recruitment and Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Hywel Dda University Health Board.

"We have a corporate and social responsibility to those who live within our community and use our services to give something back in the form of opportunity"

Sally Owen, Head of Recruitment and Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Hywel Dda University Health Board

Engaging with schools remotely

Community engagement activities required a rethink during the pandemic as organisations were no longer able to visit homes, organise community events or attend local shows to reach people.

In contributing to communities' resilience, **Welsh Water** worked remotely to help people struggling with their bills, provided water-saving devices, supported local community projects and offered school pupils fun lessons.

For example, as the organisation was unable to attend schools, it welcomed children to its education centres and held treatment work open days, Welsh Water introduced online education provision for more than 5,800 school children.



Recruitment campaign helps Hywel Dda University Health Board help its community

Conscious of the impact the pandemic would have on those adversely affected by deprivation in Carmarthenshire, and keen to attract and retain staff at such a challenging time, Hywel Dda University Health Board embarked on a recruitment campaign.

#HelpUsHelpOurCommunity sought to widen access to employment, work experience and volunteer opportunities within the health board for those from deprived or marginalised communities.

To increase and retain workforce supply, the health board invested in apprenticeship pathways, including in healthcare, patient experience, engineering, workforce development, digital services and corporate governance.

It sought to recruit, train and retain existing local employees keen to gain professional qualifications, particularly supporting those with protected characteristics. Those who were already employed on temporary contracts to support the Covid-19 response were given the first opportunity to apply for permanent employment resulting in 200 temporary staff securing permanent jobs.

The campaign, which included social media posts and advertisements, gave equal weight to Welsh and English. All literature and advertisements were bilingual, and the health board launched a bilingual skills policy in 2021, encouraging staff to embrace the Welsh culture and language in the hope it would support 'local jobs for local people'.

The campaign improved employment opportunities for the community, reducing the health board's gender pay gap and increasing the number of Welsh-speaking employees as well as the number of registered nurses and apprentices. More people engaged with Hywel Dda UHB's social media channels and it was involved in more partnerships across the area.

"Knowing members of our local community responded to our campaigns and the positive outcomes and actions is pleasing not only for us as a local employer but for our community and its members' mental health and wellbeing," said Sally Owen, Head of Recruitment and Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Hywel Dda University Health Board.





Making sustainable
changes

11

Making sustainable changes

In 2019, Wales declared a climate emergency. It has since committed to becoming net zero by 2050.

Climate change, pollution and the environment are among the British public's biggest concerns, ranking higher than the pandemic, Brexit and the NHS in a 2021 poll¹⁰.

As we strive for a more prosperous, equal and greener country, businesses, community groups, schools and individuals across Wales are taking action to reduce their carbon footprint. Despite the uncertainty brought by the pandemic, many persisted in improving their environmental impact.

Educating learners on sustainability

Bridgend College is committed to reducing its impact on the environment at the local and global level. Throughout the pandemic the college continued to implement its Sustainable Development Strategy 2021-2040.

Its renewable electricity supply became carbon neutral in April 2021. Solar panels on its new STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, maths) academy and buildings will provide more energy than it needs to buy.

Bridgend College has already exceeded its 25 per cent carbon dioxide reduction target, which it had originally aimed to achieve by 2025. Contributing to this achievement is the installation of 11 electric vehicle charging points with ambitions to roll out spaces for 200 electric cars by 2032.

To address the ecological challenges and address the biodiversity loss in the local community, the college is leading a partnership to plant at least 60,000 trees locally by the end of 2025, and it had planted more than 18,000 by the end of 2021 as part of a collaborative project. Since 2019, learners have installed a large wildlife pond and conservation area, and a wildlife corridor.

The college has identified 'action for sustainability' as a core skill and is committed to ensuring students will gain the knowledge they need to make informed choices about climate action and sustainability before their course ends.

"Coupled with climate literacy and sustainability training and resources for all staff, as well as our current person-centred leadership programme for managers, this will act as a force for tackling climate and sustainability across the organisation," said Chris Long, Head of Health, Safety and Sustainability, Bridgend College.

**"These initiatives will act
as a force for tackling
climate and sustainability
across the organisation."**

Chris Long, Head of Health,
Safety and Sustainability,
Bridgend College

¹⁰ 2021: Ipsos Issues Index: November 2021 | Ipsos

Manufacturing environmental change

BCB International, which produced life-saving PPE and hand sanitiser during the Covid-19 pandemic, achieved its ISO 14001:2015 certification during the pandemic, the International Standard for environmental management systems. Achieving this certification helps businesses and other organisations reduce their environmental impact.

The firm has made its products more sustainable, replacing plastic packaging with recyclable cardboard, recycling everything possible and placing multiple recycling points on site. It has embarked on several green space initiatives, including tree planting to offset its carbon emissions and creating a wellbeing garden for employees.

BCB International has sustainably refurbished its factory and plans to install solar panels and underfloor heat exchangers to help reduce its carbon footprint.

The company has created a sustainable and eco-friendly solid fuel from vegetable waste, called FireDragon, which it manufactures in Llanelli and Cardiff before exporting.

“As a company, we have been very conscious of climate change during the last 10 years and have been looking to help improve biodiversity,” said Janey Howell, Legal Director, BCB International.

“BCB International is committed to future sustainability in our working practices, product innovations and day-to-day lives.”

“We are
committed to future
sustainability in our
working practices,
product innovations, and
day-to-day lives.”

Janey Howell, Legal Director,
BCB International

Bridgend College's journey to net zero

Bridgend College aims to become an Eco-College: a centre of excellence and strong leader in sustainable development performance, integrating sustainable development into all functions of the organisation at all levels.

Its climate emergency strategy commits to ensuring it produces no carbon emissions through its direct and indirect emissions created by owned sources by 2040, a deadline that may be moved forward to 2030 pending a review. Owned sources include college-owned buildings and vehicles, or emissions created by its consumption of purchased electricity.

It has made a commitment to all indirect emissions from not owned sources, such as employee travel, waste generated and its investments and franchises.

The college has achieved zero carbon for electricity and has exceeded its target of a 25 per cent reduction in carbon emissions several years ahead of schedule. It has added 11 electrical vehicle charging points to the STEAM Academy parking area with plans for 200 such spaces by 2032.

Bridgend College has a sustainable procurement strategy and ethical finance and investment strategy and

is identifying curriculum-based changes for a low carbon economy.

Efforts to reduce biodiversity loss in the community include learners' installation of a wildlife pond and conservation area, as well as a wildlife corridor and tree planting scheme, with plans to develop a woodland on its Pencoed campus.

Learners will leave the college with the knowledge needed to make informed choices about climate action as 'action for sustainability' is one of nine core skills it supports students to develop.

“Coupled with climate literacy and sustainability training and resources for all staff, and our current person-centred leadership programme for managers, this will act as a force for tackling climate and sustainability across the organisation,” said Chris Long, Head of Health, Safety and Sustainability at Bridgend College.





Equality, diversity
and inclusion

12

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The pandemic highlighted and, in many cases, intensified social inequalities locally, nationally and globally.

The sectors worst hit by Covid-19 restrictions, such as hospitality and retail, included high proportions of ethnic minorities, women, migrants and the so-called 'low-skilled'. Generational gaps widened as older people were more vulnerable to the effects of the virus, but younger people bore the brunt of the financial fallout.



Gender-neutral
language was
applied to GISDA's
staff handbook and
its policies.

People with disabilities were found to have, on average, poorer mental wellbeing and felt more lonely and isolated than those without¹¹. The loss of safe and supportive spaces and peer groups for LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexual identities) communities negatively affected their mental health, wellbeing and safety¹². And the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities experienced by BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) groups in Wales and the UK as the virus had a disproportionate impact on their lives¹³.

In Wales, some employers strived to be more equal and fairer during the pandemic.

GISDA is a charity that provides intensive support and opportunities to vulnerable young people in Gwynedd between 16 and 25 years old. GISDA support its young people to move from dependency to independent living and provide access to employment, training and education opportunities. GISDA acknowledges the importance of developing a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace, so has been working to develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scheme over the last year to build and improve on what was already in place. All staff received equality, diversity and inclusion training as well as LGBTQ+ awareness training, to enhance their understanding and ensure they can appropriately support the HR and operational functions of the charity, their colleagues and service users, as needed.

¹¹ 2020: Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

¹² 2021: The pandemic's impact on UK's LGBTQ+ communities - UKRI

¹³ 2020: An Avoidable Crisis (lawrencereview.co.uk)

Gender-neutral language was applied to GISDA's staff handbook and its policies, and the organisation worked with Chwarae Teg to ensure its recruitment processes were free from prejudice. Recruitment changes included updates to recruitment packs to include gender-neutral language; guaranteed interviews for service users and former service users of GISDA, applicants from BAME backgrounds and all disabled people who meet essential job criteria; and support to applicants to ensure they do not miss out on any opportunity because of any disadvantage.

A new dignity at work policy was launched to ensure a positive work environment free from bullying, harassment and unfair management practices, with staff receiving training on the policy and line managers learning how to deal with cases of unfair treatment.

Line managers were encouraged to take a flexible approach to supervising colleagues.

"Some staff responded better to supervision sessions when going for a walk rather than at a desk," said Elizabeth George, Head of Business, GISDA. "A member of staff with an autistic spectrum condition needed support and adjustments to a working pattern that allowed them to cope with work duties."

The organisation also planned to develop equality, diversity and inclusion policies on neurodiversity, LGBTQ+ awareness, carers and menopause support.

"As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we will review and consult in detail on GISDA's working arrangements and look at the lessons learned over the past year and a half," said Elizabeth George.

"We also plan to review GISDA's strategy and put equality, diversity and inclusion at the forefront of GISDA's strategic goals, services and projects."

A College of Sanctuary

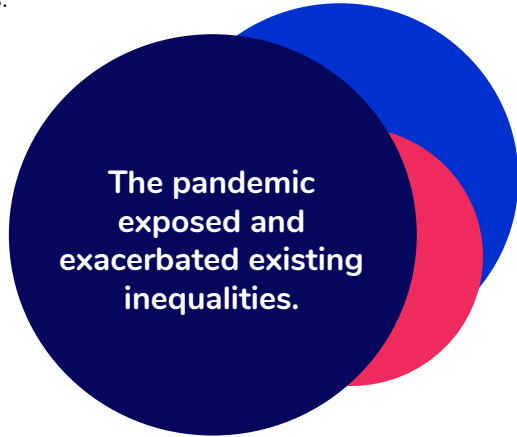
To promote conversation and raise awareness about important issues facing people in the local community, some organisations focused communication on key external calendar dates.

Gower College Swansea improved its participation in key dates, awareness-raising days, and events that reflect its diverse community, including Black History Month, Pride Week, LGBTQ+ History Month, Refugee Week and Ramadan.

The college promoted awareness of these moments through its social media and internal communication channels, including its staff intranet. Virtual workshops for staff and students during Black History Month were led by Show Racism the Red Card, the UK educational charity. The events sought to debunk myths, offer advice and guidance to positively challenge inflammatory language and behaviour and provided an open forum for questions.

In 2021, the college became the first College of Sanctuary in Wales, an award recognising it had gone "above and beyond to support refugees and people seeking asylum".

A working group was established to support learners with lived experience of the asylum system and promoted their access to education in Swansea, developing partnerships with relevant non-profit organisations.



The pandemic
exposed and
exacerbated existing
inequalities.

Every term, staff met to discuss its equality and diversity objectives and suggest ways to better champion equality, with the college library team proposing badges introducing pronouns to raise awareness and demonstrate support to non-binary staff and students.

To measure the success of its equality initiatives and their impact on staff and learners' confidence to disclose personal information, the college organised a mid-year survey in 2021.

"It revealed a 50 per cent increase in the number of people at the college identifying as LGBTQ+, suggesting an increase in staff confidence following our concerted efforts at promoting Pride Week and activities surrounding it," said Paul Vincent, Equality and Diversity Officer, Gower College Swansea.

"Becoming a College of Sanctuary demonstrated our commitment to providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment to all cultures."

**"Becoming a College of
Sanctuary demonstrated our
commitment to providing a safe,
welcoming and inclusive
environment to all cultures."**

Paul Vincent, Equality and Diversity
Officer, Gower College Swansea

Supporting refugees and asylum-seekers in Swansea

In 2021, Gower College Swansea became the first College of Sanctuary in Wales, an award recognising the college had gone 'above and beyond' to support refugees and people seeking asylum.

Becoming a College of Sanctuary means good practice is recognised and celebrated, and other institutions are encouraged to provide more inclusive education and support.

The college established a working group to support learners with lived experience of the asylum system and promoted their access to education in Swansea. To do that, the college partnered with organisations such as Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Wales, which supports black and minority ethnic young people, families and individuals, including refugees and asylum-seekers living in Wales, and City of Sanctuary, thereby building a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

Every term, staff met to discuss the college's equality and diversity objectives and suggest ways to better champion equality, with the college library team proposing badges introducing pronouns to raise awareness and demonstrate support to non-binary staff and students.

To measure the success of its equality initiatives and their impact on staff and learners' confidence to disclose personal information, the college organised a mid-year survey in 2021.

"Being awarded 'College of Sanctuary' status went some way to demonstrate to staff and learners our commitment to providing a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment to all cultures," said Mark Jones, Principal of Gower College Swansea.





Cymru Iach ar Waith
Healthy Working Wales



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

Healthy Working Wales is a free programme for employers that:

- Supports the development of work environments that promote good health and wellbeing
- Helps promote good sickness absence management and a supportive return to work
- Provides expert advice, tools and resources, podcasts, case studies, training and workshops
- Recognises good employer practice through an awards scheme



www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home



Workplacehealth@wales.nhs.uk



[@Healthywork_HWW](https://twitter.com/Healthywork_HWW)



[@HealthyWorkingWales](https://facebook.com/HealthyWorkingWales)



[@Healthy Working Wales](https://linkedin.com/company/HealthyWorkingWales)