



ESB - ENERGY FOR LIVING

1. Case metadata

▪ **Country of origin:**

Ireland

▪ **Year of publication by agency:**

2012

▪ **Sector:**

▪ **Keywords:**

- Case studies (24401C),
- Good practice (24361C)
- Health and safety policy (04361D)
- Workplace health promotion (22881C)
- Exercise and physical activity (22961D)
- Health monitoring and screening (22971D)
- Healthy eating (22981D)
- Health promotion programs (23001D)
- Healthy life-style (23041D)
- Mental health promotion (23046D)
- Well-being (23076D)
- Ageing and older workers (54281D)

▪ **Abstract**

Issue

The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) is Ireland's leading electricity utility, encompassing of generation trading, supply and network activities. ESB supplies over 50% of Ireland's electricity customers. Historically the staff recruited to ESB tended to stay with the organisation for life. Currently, ESB employs around 6,700 employees. The average employee age is currently 43.2 years, with over 4,000 staff aged 40 years or over. This demographic brings with it specific health issues.

Action

Recognising the specific needs of their aging workforce, ESB undertook a review of its health and wellbeing programmes. The review found that whilst ESB had many good policies and supports in place for health and wellbeing, it lacked an overarching framework including a Group health and wellbeing policy, an integrated, company-wide structure and improved reporting systems. Absenteeism cost were not monitored and when the review was carried out it also found that despite the cost of absenteeism being a significant loss for the company, this was generally not considered the main reason for improving the health and well-being of staff. In order to address the recommendations identified in the review, ESB implemented a number of initiatives. These included:

- Health promotion responsibilities for each business unit;
- The appointment of 'local health and wellbeing co-ordinators';



- 'Work Positive' organisational stress risk assessment;
- 'Healthy Mind' workshops.

These and other programmes supported the existing activities of Health Services, Equality and Diversity programmes, an internal Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), medical pre-employment examinations, ill-health case management, health screening services and the Health and Safety Working group.

Results

As a result ESB's direct cost of unscheduled absenteeism has gone down from 9.8 million Euros in 2008 to 8.5 million Euros in 2010. ESB had originally set an absenteeism improvement target for 2011 of a 15% reduction from the 2008 outcome. The 2010 staff absenteeism rate was 2.8% or 7.22 days unscheduled absenteeism per full time equivalent staff member. As this has already exceeded the 2011 target, a revised 2011 target of 5% reduction on 2010 outcome has been set.

Note: (1) direct cost includes only the salary of the individual who is absent; (2) unscheduled absenteeism includes certified and uncertified sickness, occupational injuries, third party injuries and absence without leave; the most significant proportion of these is sickness absence.

2. Organisations involved

Electricity Supply Board – ESB Group

3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

Company Overview

The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) is Ireland's leading electricity utility encompassing generation trading, supply and network activities. It supplies electricity to over 50% of Ireland's customers and has investments, operation contracts and consultancy activities in over 25 countries.

The Irish Government established ESB in 1927 under the Electricity Supply Act to manage Ireland's electricity supply. ESB is one of the largest companies in Ireland and currently employs approximately 6,700 people.

Those recruited to ESB in the past tended to stay with the company for life. While that model is now changing, with younger staff entering the company on shorter-term contracts, the average age of staff in ESB is 43.2 years. There are over 4,000 staff aged 40 years or over. This higher age profile for the workforce brings its own health issues. The frequency of sickness absences increases with age with an almost proportional relationship in each age category (Health & Safety Executive, 2002). Recognising this, age factors influence the content of many of the health and wellbeing programmes.

ESB is composed of:

ESB Networks: owns and maintains the transmission and distribution assets, operates and develops the distribution system and is the meter reading system operator.

ESB Energy International: operates a portfolio of thermal power stations in Ireland and internationally, along with holdings in hydro, wind and other renewables. ESB International (ESBI), a business within ESB Energy International, provides utility and related engineering consultancy services globally including power-generation joint ventures, renewable development and computing consultancy.



ESB Services and Electric Ireland: the Services business provides Facilities management, human resources (HR), Payroll and IT services to ESB Businesses. ESB Health Services and the Employee Assistance Programme functions are part of the services organisation. Electric Ireland is the supply arm of the business in Ireland. It also provides energy services to customers.

Workplace Health Promotion Overview

Historic emphasis on safety and injury reduction: ESB has developed safety as a core value within the company. As the national electricity utility, it leads the safety effort in relation to safe use of electricity at work and in the home. This driving ambition extended to all aspects of safety management, leading to the adoption of a company-wide, executive-lead commitment to zero injuries. However, as safety performance improved, it became apparent that ill-health absences significantly exceeded those from injuries.

Early recognition of health and well-being: ESB has been promoting health at work since the 1960s with the establishment of its occupational health unit. This was augmented shortly after with the creation of an in-house employee assistance programme (EAP). In 1991, an equality and diversity office was put in place.

Health and wellbeing review: In 2005, the Executive Director with responsibility for HR initiated a formal review of health and wellbeing in ESB. The review was conducted by HR, staff representatives, as well as safety and health specialists from across ESB businesses. They found that ESB had many good policies and supports in place for health and wellbeing but lacked an overarching framework including a Group health and wellbeing policy, an integrated, company-wide structure and better reporting systems. Existing structures, policies and systems were appropriate to manage employees, safety, equality and diversity as well as physical and psychological health but there was a need to improve coordination. The review also found that a possible reduction in costs of absenteeism could constitute an additional incentive to take action and improve employees' health.

Recommendations included developing:

- A Group policy on health and wellbeing;
- A management role to lead and coordinate all aspects of health and wellbeing;
- Additional occupational health and wellbeing policies (stress, obesity, and substance misuse).

Putting in place:

- Appropriate structures (health and wellbeing managers and co-ordinators);
- Appropriate health and wellbeing programmes (e.g. Energy for Living);
- An appropriate document management system;
- A uniform absenteeism management programme.

And ensuring:

- Appropriate recording of attendance.

3.2. Aims

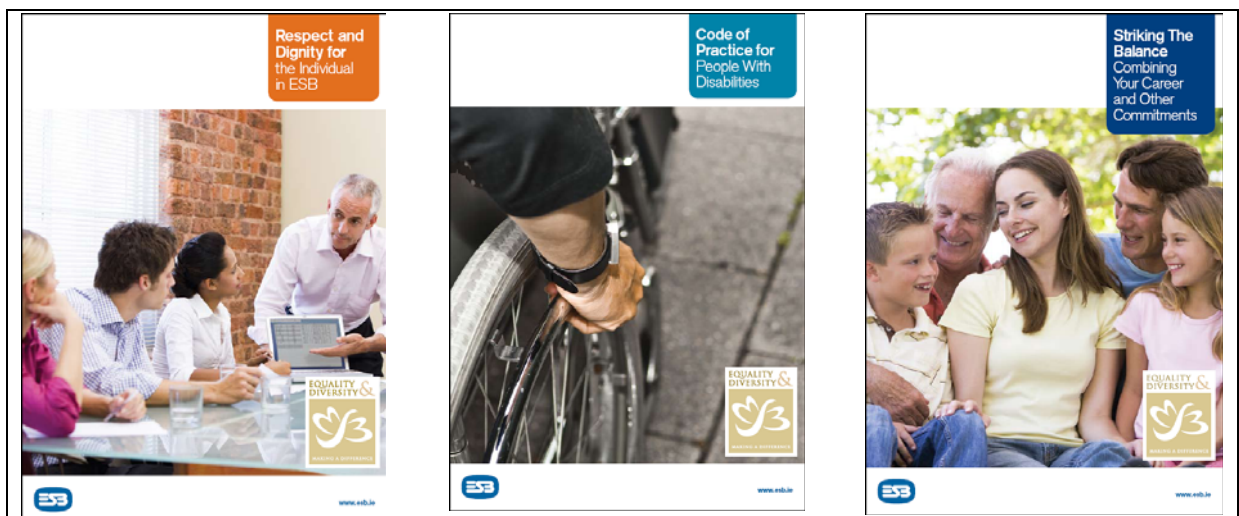
The aim of ESB's programme was the implementation of the recommendations of the formal review of health and wellbeing focusing on improved employee health and wellbeing outcomes. The general idea behind this was to constantly improve employees' health and wellbeing and to promote health within a company where more than two-thirds of the staff are aged over 40 and are likely to stay with ESB until their retirement.

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Equal Opportunities

The Equality and Diversity Office has developed a range of policies and programmes on respect and dignity, disabilities and work-life balance (Fig. 2). A dedicated access officer leads the disability traineeship programme. Each year ESB participates in a disability traineeship programme which gives people with a disability the opportunity to work in ESB and develop their skills.

Figure 2: A range of policies and guidelines on dignity, respect and work-life balance are available from the Equality and Diversity Office



Employee Assistance Programmes

ESB has an established EAP structure with seven full-time EAP personnel situated throughout Ireland. The broad range of confidential services they provide to staff and their families, include financial management advice, addictions management, stress control, relationships management, retirement preparation, bereavement counselling, health promotion and advice, and onward referrals to other confidential services. The EAP service in ESB has received much positive feedback from both employees and external commentators.

Health Promotion

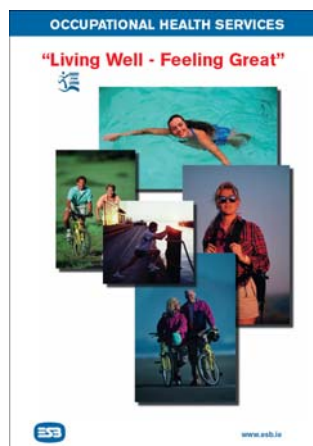
ESB Health Services provide pre-employment medicals, ill-health case management, health screening services and health and wellbeing promotions throughout ESB. Health screening services focus on the principal diseases in the general Irish population that affect those with the age profile of ESB. This screening has led to testing for blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol and triglycerides and an annual bowel cancer screening programme to all staff over 40 years of age. This is in response to bowel cancer being one of the most prevalent cancers in people over 50 in Ireland.

ESB Health Services have also proactively addressed workplace health through the 'Living Well - Feeling Great' (Fig. 3) nationwide campaign. The programme was developed over time through running a number of pilot events and then a formal launch. This approach where employees were actively involved in developing the programme, ensured that the measures were specific to their needs.

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The objective of the programme was to encourage employees to make healthier lifestyle choices in terms of how they spend their time and what they eat.

Figure 3: Cover page of 'Living Well - Feeling Great' Programme booklet that was provided to staff as part of the campaign



Ninety-minute interactive sessions and discussions were delivered to groups of employees. A range of information on diet and exercise is included in the programme, consisting of the following topics:

- Benefits of different exercise types and the impact these have on health, incorporating practical demonstrations;
- Advice on warming up / cooling down / stretching exercises;
- Practical tips on getting active;
- Information on balanced diet and foods to ensure healthy weight and lifestyle;
- Examples of what a good lunch should consist of;
- Guidelines as to what the ideal body weight should be.

The group sessions also provided opportunities for individuals to discuss personal and local lifestyle choices.

Smoking Cessation

Each year health services promote smoking cessation programmes with the availability of discounted nicotine patches and loans of self-help books to interested staff. In 2008, a subsidised quit smoking programme was organised and delivered at some locations to smoking staff. The success rate was seventy per cent partly because of the group support in each location.

Psychosocial Risks

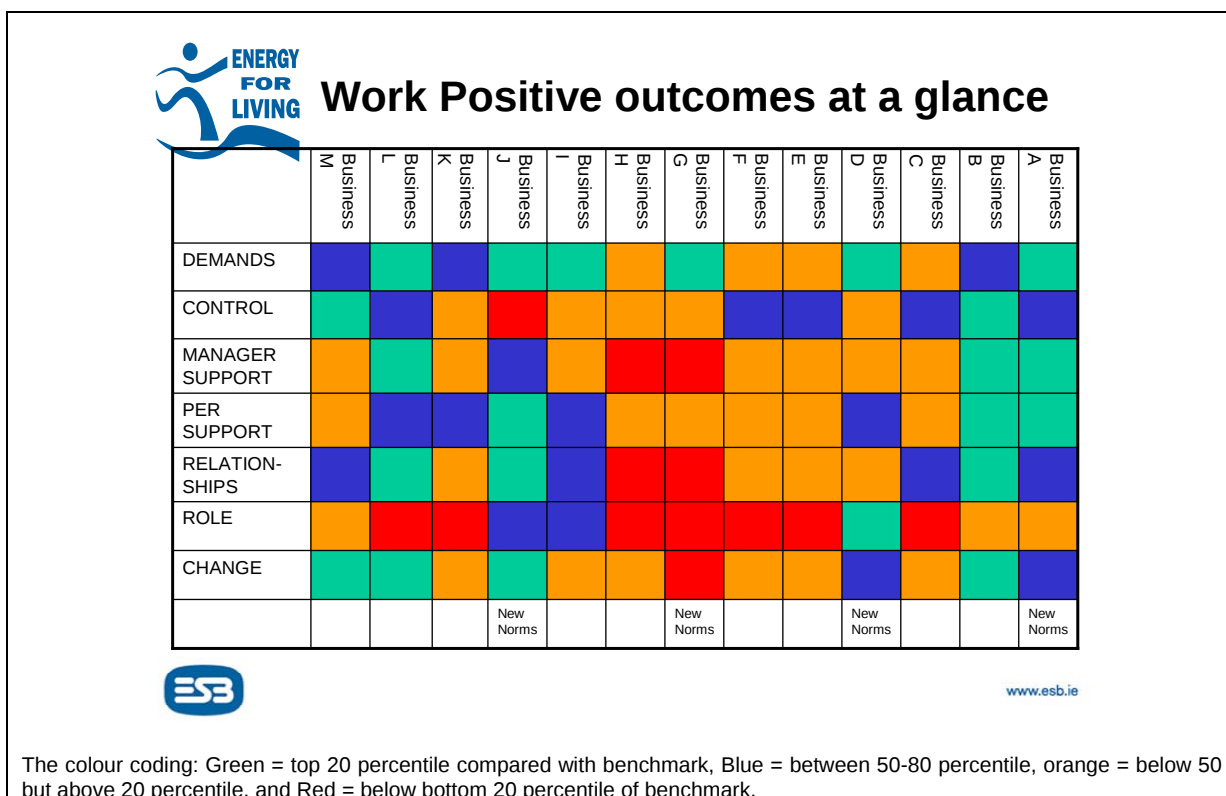
ESB recognises that stress is a significant cause of ill-health and incapacity both at work and in life generally. To address this, the following programmes have been implemented to date:

1. **'Work Positive' organisational stress risk assessment:** This Health and Safety Authority promoted assessment was undertaken during 2010. This survey-based assessment is founded on the 'Health and Safety Executive (UK) Management Standards for Stress'. The main causes of stress at work are high demands on the individual, low control over their work, a lack of support from peers and managers, strained relationships, unclear roles, and lack of understanding of change (Fig. 4).

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Implementation of this in some business areas involved a joint staff/ management steering group. This assisted the employee buy-in to the programme. The survey in ESB established that there were potential stressors within various work groups. The 'Work Positive' programme includes developing an action plan to address each significant stressor identified. It is intended to conduct the 'Work Positive' survey at regular intervals, to test the effectiveness of past interventions and determine if there are any emerging potential stressors.

Figure 4: Table showing comparisons of results for each of the businesses in ESB who had completed 'Work Positive' surveys up to 2010



2. 'Healthy Mind' Workshops: Workshops on managing personal stress were offered to all staff in 2009. These ninety-minute workshops provided participants with an insight into the typical causes of stress and responses to stress depending on an individual's personality type and his/her general health. As with the 'Living Well – Feeling Great' programme, the initiative was piloted extensively throughout the organisation with representatives of staff, managers and other key influencers. The programme covered the following topics:

- Wheel of Life – the importance of balance in one's life;
- Healthy Mind Action Plan - setting personal goals to help achieve a healthier mind;
- Known life factors which cause tension - knowing the typical high pressure events and the fact that an accumulation of many of these can lead to stress, is the first step for trying to avoid such events and accompanying circumstances;
- Understanding one's personality – knowledge is power so knowing one's personality traits can help understanding on balance or excesses;
- Managing stressors:



- STOP Technique – Step back, Think, Organise yourself, and Proceed;
- Yes No Test – setting boundaries and being assertive when needed;
- Importance of Sleep:
 - Causes of excessive tiredness and sleep prevention;
 - Practical advice on how to sleep well.

3. 'Talk it out, Let it out, Sort it out': Depression / suicide awareness packs were distributed to all staff homes during March 2011. This initiative was a response to the increase in deaths by suicide generally in the population.

ESB has also drafted a policy on stress and associated managers' guidelines for dealing with stress. These were finalised and communicated during 2011.

Planning

Annual health and wellbeing improvement plans are devised through workshops held with the Health and Safety Working Group, Health Services, EAPs and Equality and Diversity Officers and Health and wellbeing coordinators.

The 2011 plan was developed in September 2010 and focuses on 12 monthly themes:

- January – stop smoking;
- February – back care;
- March – mental health;
- April – bowel health;
- May – respiratory health;
- June – alcohol awareness;
- July – skin care;
- August – diet and exercise;
- September – heart health;
- October – cold and flu prevention;
- November – health check awareness; and
- December – advice and support.

All staff received a desktop calendar highlighting these monthly themes. These themes are supported with poster campaigns and localised promotions.

Engagement and motivation of staff

Staff are involved in the development of the health and wellbeing programme through their health and wellbeing co-ordinators and by being asked to participate in pilot programmes.

Proactive incentives to involve staff include time off work to participate in programmes, subsidised costs of programmes for staff and sometimes their families, and line manager encouragement.



Corporate and local initiatives are advertised through a number of communication channels which include:

- Topic included in monthly/ bi-monthly staff briefing;
- Poster campaigns on notice boards (mostly applies to business areas where staff do not have daily use of computers);
- E-mail notifications, meeting requests and reminders and intranet news items;
- Articles published in the ESB staff magazine EM;
- Online calendar of health and wellbeing (for health and wellbeing coordinators and managers);
- Desktop health and wellbeing calendar 2011 with monthly health promotion themes;
- SMS text messaging.

Participation in programmes is made easy by providing the programme at the work location. The cardio-vascular health screening programme is offered to all staff every three years. This is provided in the work location to suit the work schedules of both shift and day staff. Where sufficient numbers express an interest the annual flu vaccination programme is provided at the work location. This is free to staff who avail of it at work. Otherwise, a refund is provided to staff who attend their local general practitioner to have the vaccination.

Nicotine patches are subsidised for staff who are trying to quit smoking.

An online fitness programme is available to staff who cannot physically avail themselves of the facilities offered at the ESB sports facilities based in Dublin.

During the European Safety Week, daily baskets of fresh fruit are made available to staff to encourage regular intake of fruit. Some parts of the business provide free fruit in their break areas continuously.

ESB facilities are made available to staff groups who run Pilates and Weight Watchers classes during lunch times at work.

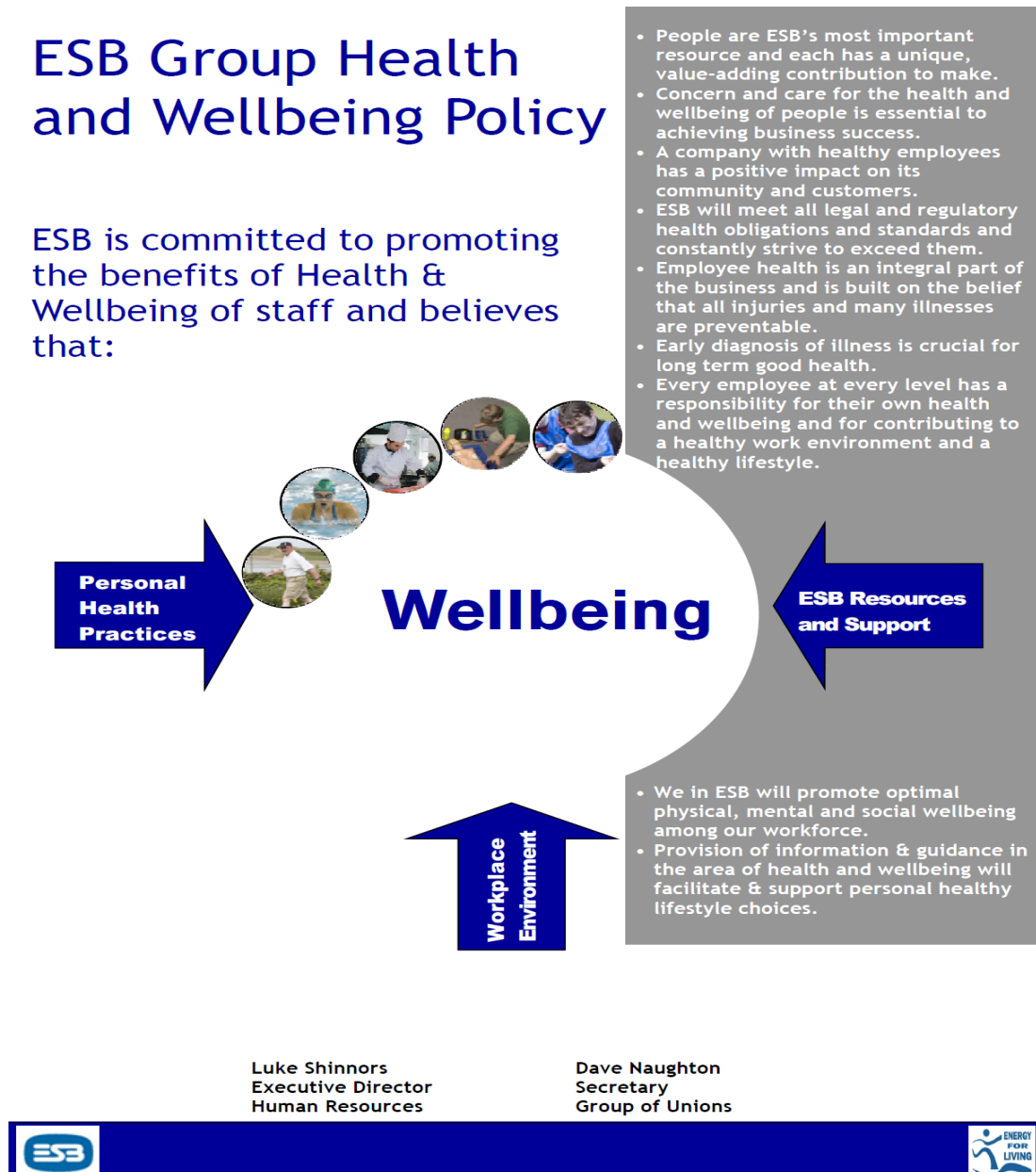
The Chief Executive Health and Safety Committee are conducting a review of how best to recognise the contribution of individuals who volunteer their time and efforts towards progressing the safety, health and wellbeing of their colleagues in ESB.

3.4. *What was achieved?*

ESB's approach to health and wellbeing has been developed and expanded over time. It is now formalised and currently features three key elements namely 'ESB Resources and Support', 'Workplace Environment' and 'Personal Health Practices' (Fig.5). All programmes are designed to address these three elements.

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Figure 5: ESB Group Health and Wellbeing Policy



A senior manager position with responsibility to drive health and well-being improvement is being maintained within ESB. Also, each business has in place clear health and wellbeing management and support structures.

A specific policy on stress has been drafted along with managers' guidelines. These will be finalised in 2012.

A policy to address obesity was prepared, but when reviewed by business stakeholders this issue was considered too sensitive and likely to label individuals and, consequently, cause offence to anyone who was over-weight. Instead programmes such as 'Living Well - Feeling Great', referred to above and 'Balanced Choices', the provision of a range of healthy option lunch menus in ESB's 13

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staff canteens and an associated awareness-raising programme were implemented. Health services also provide online advice on healthy eating, an online Body Mass Index (BMI) calculator and local health and wellbeing co-ordinators have organised 'Weight Watchers' programmes at some locations.

The Employee Assistance Programme officers developed a substance misuse guidance document. It provides both managers and staff with practical advice on how to recognise and manage both alcohol and drug misuse. They also facilitate training for line managers in dealing with staff who have addictions.

Health and Wellbeing programmes have been put in place each year. They are developed to address specific needs which are identified from ill-health statistics (both certified medical causes and results of health screening), and general population health epidemiology. The planning forums for these programmes also afford health and wellbeing coordinators the opportunity to network and exchange ideas on how they engage staff in their locations. One such forum took place in 2008 where the Health and Safety Authority health promotion strategy was explored and how it might be incorporated into ESB plans. The issue of personal choice and responsibility in relation to health and wellbeing was also promoted.

Since 2006 the following programmes were developed and delivered throughout ESB:

- Living Well-Feeling Great – addressing obesity and cardiovascular concerns;
- Back care – focused on musculoskeletal disorder prevention and treatment;
- Healthy Mind – empowering individuals to identify and manage stress in their lives;
- Work Positive – identifies potential stressors at work and helps reduce them;
- Personal Fitness Programme – ESB Sports umbrella organisation developed an online interactive programme for people who could not avail themselves to the company's sports facility, which is based in Dublin;
- Attendance Policy – a supportive programme to assist the rehabilitation and reintegration of staff who are unwell, back to work.

In recognition of the fact that most people do not wish to be away from work with any sickness, ESB developed a supportive attendance policy and guidance. The main tenet of the programme is that when persons report that they are unwell, their line manager is required to contact them and provide support, maintaining contact throughout their illness where appropriate. When they return to work their line manager welcomes them back, provides an update on work developments during the absence, and determines if there are any special provisions required to smooth the reintegration to work. The significant change with this policy initiative is that everyone in the organisation can and should expect to interact directly with their manager while they are absent and likewise when they return to work.

A new attendance recording and reporting programme was implemented during 2007. This provided for a more thorough recording of attendance and absences including reasons for unscheduled absences. This in turn provides more informed reporting so that health and wellbeing programmes can be targeted to address any emerging concerns.

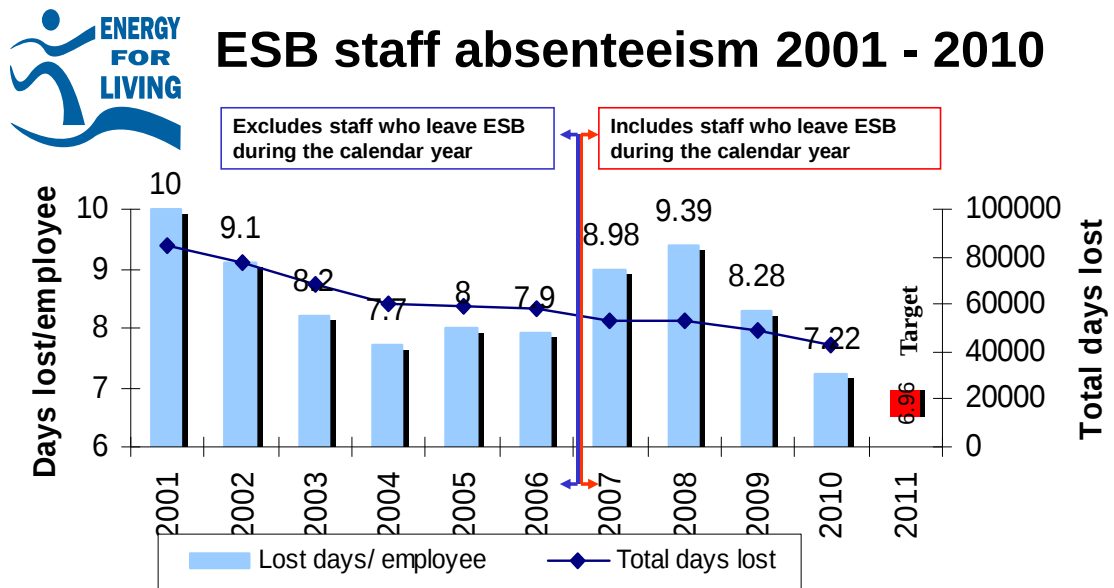
Staff attendance at work is perhaps the most indicative health and wellbeing metric. ESB has set an absenteeism improvement target for 2011 of a 15% reduction from the 2008 outcome. The 2009 outcome of 8.28 days unscheduled absenteeism¹ per FTE employee (FTE – Full Time Equivalent = 5990 employees in 2010) represented a 12% reduction on 2008 performance. The 2010 staff absenteeism rate was 2.8% or 7.22 days unscheduled absenteeism. This 24% reduction in absenteeism over two years exceeded the performance improvement objective of 15% over three years so a revised target for 2011 was set. The revised unscheduled absenteeism reduction target for

¹ Unscheduled absenteeism includes certified and uncertified sickness, occupational injuries, third party injuries and absence without leave. The most significant proportion of these is sickness absence.

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2011 of 6.5 days is a 5% reduction on the 2010 outcome (Fig. 6). When benchmarked externally, the figures compare favourably within the EU but are not as good as the USA or Asia-Pacific regions. The average days absence per employee for these regions is as follows: EU 9.7; UK 10; US 5.5; Asia-Pacific 4.5 (Price Water House Cooper, 2011).

Figure 6: Graph showing both the total number of days lost due to unscheduled absenteeism and the average number of days lost per FTE employee



Direct cost of absenteeism*:
2008 €9.8m; 2009 €9.5m; 2010 €8.4m



*Direct cost includes only the salary of the individual who is absent

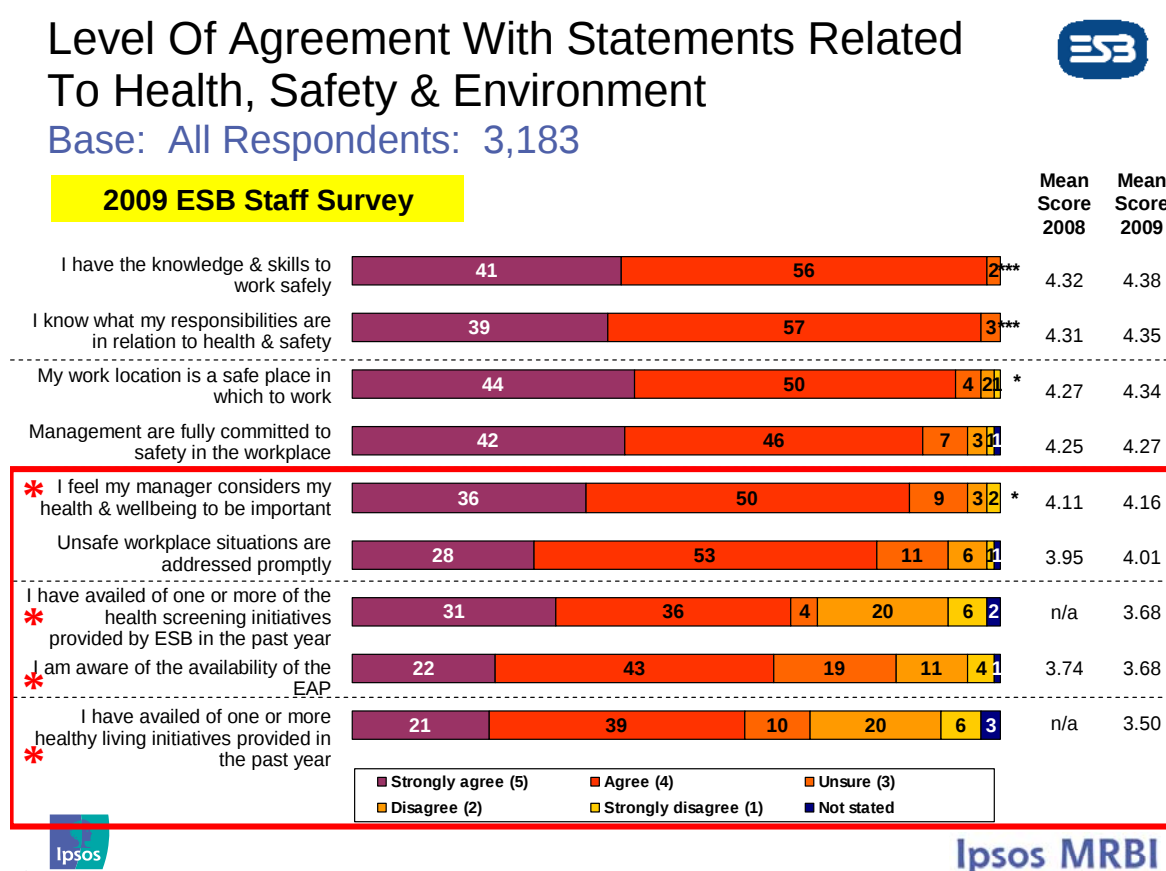
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Since 2007, absence reporting includes all staff who were employed for any part of the calendar year whereas previously anyone who left the company during the year was excluded from the results. Hence, the apparent level of absenteeism increased in 2007. The direct cost of absenteeism only includes the salaries paid to staff who were on unscheduled absenteeism.

Staff surveys are also used to check the effectiveness of various programmes and interventions (Fig. 7). The chart shows the staff opinion on Safety, Health and Wellbeing in ESB at the time of the last staff survey in 2009. It demonstrates the improved staff engagement in health and wellbeing programmes.

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Figure 7: ESB staff opinion survey results for whole group in relation to safety and health



Key: The results for health and wellbeing are inside the red outline. All responses showed an improvement on the 2008 outcomes except for 'Awareness of the availability of the EAP', which was slightly reduced. A subsequent briefing programme raised the profile of the EAP service to staff.

3.5. Success factors

ESB recognises that in order to succeed in any business area, sufficient resources must be dedicated to it. The Review of Health and Wellbeing in 2005 identified the need for dedicated resources for health and wellbeing including the appointment of a senior manager with responsibility for development and delivery of the programme. This appointment has been made and is being maintained. In addition, the functional safety managers in each business division have also included health and wellbeing in their titles and roles. These roles work closely with the existing Health Services and EAP personnel in the development and roll-out of health and wellbeing promotion programmes. Progress on implementation of annual health and wellbeing programmes is discussed at the monthly Executive Director Team safety meetings and at Board Health Safety and Environment committee meetings at regular intervals. The programme has been most successful in business areas where a local champion has driven delivery through local promotion, planning and scheduling with the support of the relevant line manager.



3.6. Further information

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3.7. Transferability

While designed to address the needs of a particular company having a somewhat older workforce, the principles and programmes developed have general application.

4. References, resources:

Health and Safety Executive. (2002) Occupational ill health age statistics: Information sheet (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/2002/agefact.htm>)
Price Waterhouse Cooper (2011) p.26.
http://download.pwc.com/ie/pubs/2011_hourglass_23_making_the_most_of_your_people.pdf
ESB website - www.esb.ie