

## ACTIVE WORKPLACES

### DAME CAROL BLACK

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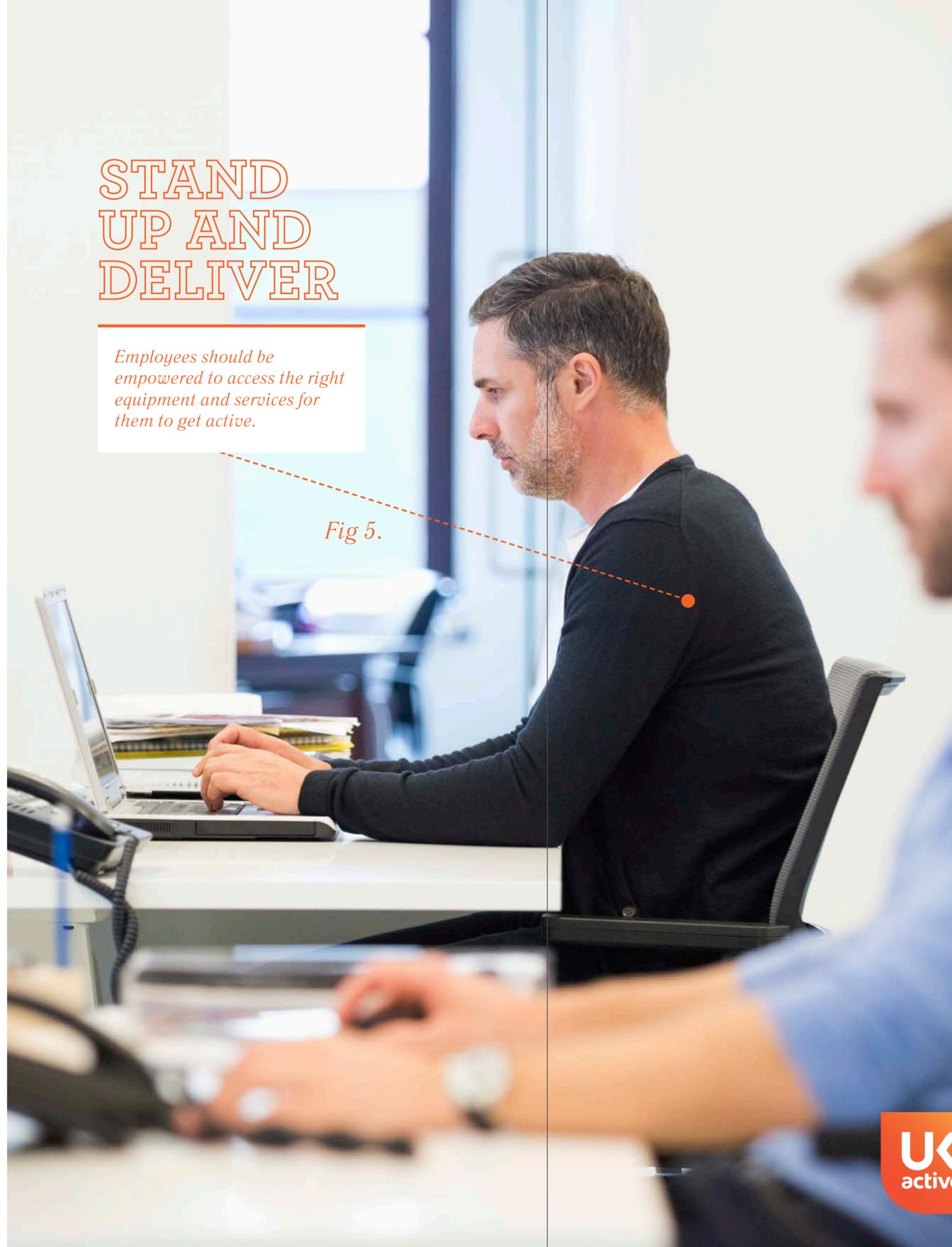
"It is well known that being physically active is good for health – both physical health and mental health. Today many jobs are sedentary, offering very little physical activity. We now know that this is harmful. People who are less active and less fit have a greater risk of developing high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. We must now take seriously the need to restore physical activity into the workplace and to support employers and employees to move more and sit less, to safeguard their health. I therefore welcome *The ukactive Blueprint* and join them in calling for a more active workforce."



# STAND UP AND DELIVER

*Employees should be empowered to access the right equipment and services for them to get active.*

Fig 5.



## INTRODUCTION

Every day, British people spend 60 per cent of their waking hours sitting down – and as much as 75 per cent for people who work in offices.<sup>17</sup> The severe and harmful effects prolonged inactivity – regardless of exercise habits elsewhere – include an increased risk of Type 2 Diabetes, cancer, heart disease and premature death<sup>18 19</sup> – has led to sitting being referred to as 'the new smoking.'

Inactivity is now recognised as an independent risk factor for poor health. This means no amount of exercise can offset the damage done by spending a substantial portion of the day sedentary.<sup>20</sup>

Workplace inactivity is therefore one of the most pressing public health issues and, unless addressed, will place a crippling, unmanageable burden on the NHS.

An inactive workplace not only impacts the public purse: businesses with an inactive workforce lose out hugely. Absenteeism has been joined by the phenomenon of 'presenteeism' (being present at work but unable to be productive) as a top concern of HR professionals and business owners of all sizes.

It is time to fundamentally change Britain's working culture so that the provision of support and inducements to get physically active are as essential to the contract between employer and employee as annual leave.

<sup>17</sup> JP Buckley et al. "The sedentary office: a growing case for change towards better health and productivity. Expert statement commissioned by Public Health England and the Active Working Community Interest Company", British Journal of Sports Medicine, (June 2015).

<sup>18</sup> D Schmid, M.F. Leitzmann, "Television Viewing and Time Spent Sedentary in Relation to Cancer Risk: A Meta-Analysis", Journal of the National Cancer Institute, (2014), Vol.106 No 7.

<sup>19</sup> NHS Choices, "Why sitting too much is bad for your health", (October 2012), < <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2012/10/October/Pages/Having-desk-job-doubles-risk-of-heart-attack.aspx>, [accessed 14/09/15]

<sup>20</sup> A Biswas et al. "Sedentary Time and Its Association With Risk for Disease Incidence, Mortality, and Hospitalization in Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis", Annals of Internal Medicine, (2015), Vol.162 No 2, pp.123 – 132.

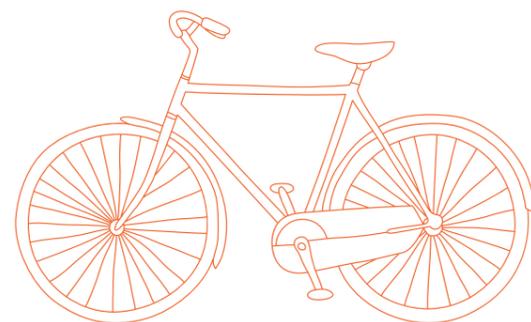


## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**1 Sedentary workplaces must undergo an activity revolution, with a broad, open approach which considers the unique needs of different sizes and types of employers to encourage physical activity at work.**

- >> A partnership should be formed between employers, government and the activity sector to create a framework of incentives, invested in by all, to make it easier for employees to get active.
- >> On the basis that employers are willing to invest in the health of their employees and that the activity sector will match it with a contribution of its own through reduced charges, government should make its own contribution through the use of tax incentives to help employees promote their own workplace health, allowing them the freedom to tailor it towards their individual needs, co-building on the existing approach of the Fit4Work service.
- >> Government should build upon the successful Cycle to Work scheme, which allows employees to loan and purchase bikes tax-free through their employer via a salary sacrifice scheme. It should be expanded to include a much broader range of health accessories and Personalised Activity Plans. As a result of employer contributions and reduced rates from activity providers, these would then be available to purchase at below market-rate, allowing employees the chance to access the right equipment and services, and providing a personalised approach to help them get and stay active.
- >> Potentially branded as a new 'Workout from Work' scheme, the concept could have the same impact as the hugely successful provision of childcare vouchers and lead to a greater emphasis on physical activity promotion as part of a wider employee benefits and rewards programme.

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**2 Building upon recommendations in Public Health England's *Everybody Active, Every Day* framework, government should lead the way in championing employee health and wellbeing and ensure there are multiple opportunities to be active throughout the day, highlighting the numerous benefits which derive from a healthy workforce.**

- >> Every Whitehall department and local authority should publish an employee wellness strategy, building upon best practice examples from the private sector. These should outline specific actions, such as internal incentive schemes; the introduction of new equipment or incorporation of active practices such as walking meetings to improve the health and wellbeing of staff; and set clear, achievable targets in relation to increases in physical activity among the inactive workforce. All strategies should have a focus on inclusivity, with targeted provisions to engage groups who are traditionally the least active – including women, older people and disabled people.
- >> The Department for Work and Pensions should conduct a review and develop a pilot scheme for a community physical activity referral programme for the long-term unemployed; delivery to be supported by large employers and the physical activity sector. This scheme has the potential to reinforce positive habits and capitalise on the link between physical activity and employment.

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### **3** The financial resources and infrastructure needed to implement workplace wellbeing strategies are often prohibitive to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – who are also the least likely to recognise the importance of supporting employee health.<sup>21</sup>

- >> A review should be launched into how existing regulation can improve SME uptake of workplace health schemes and what practical steps can be taken to integrate wellbeing into all businesses regardless of size. This should be part of a new, independent Physical Activity Network and done in conjunction with leading charities, expert stakeholders and businesses of various sizes.
- >> Government should explore various options to ease the financial barriers faced by SMEs, who typically do not have sufficient funds to invest in employee health and wellbeing. Options might include the provision a low-interest loan to all companies who invest in evidence-based workplace physical activity interventions and broader employee health and wellbeing measures, and could include loans to cover adjustments to offices such as the installation of shower facilities and cycle storage areas.

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### **4** Employers have a significant role to play in supporting employee wellness, which has a sizeable impact on employee wellbeing, retention and productivity. Employers should work with government, activity providers and the research community to provide effective employee wellness strategies for businesses of all sizes.

- >> A research programme should be undertaken by a new, independent Physical Activity Network, championed by the Chief Medical Officer, ukactive and a number of the nation's biggest employers. It should be co-funded by industry to establish the best possible practice for internal workplace wellness programmes and initiatives that have the most sizeable impact on productivity, and a series of resources and tools for businesses of all sizes should be produced to aid the development of new workplace wellness initiatives and improve existing ones.
- >> Employers, through the appropriate networks, should partner with the wider physical activity sector to supplement existing programmes with incentive schemes and mutually beneficial partnerships, building upon successful international examples such as the President's Challenge to American corporations, or the Disney partnership with Change4Life in the UK.

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<sup>21</sup> V Young and CBhaumik, "Health and wellbeing at work: a survey of employers", Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 750, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214525/rrep750.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214525/rrep750.pdf), [accessed 31/07/15]