How to set up a Workplace Physical Activity Programme
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Background & Introduction

Rationale

Physical activity is an extremely important strategy to improve health and well-being. The World Health Organisation stated in 2003 that physical activity “interacts positively with strategies to improve diet, discourage the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, helps reduce violence, enhances functional capacity and promotes social interaction and integration”. (WHO, 2003) Despite the strong evidence of the health benefits of being physically active the 2007 Slan study showed us that only 41% of Irish people took part in moderate or strenuous physical activity for at least 20 minutes three or more times per week. This pattern has not significantly changed over the past ten years. (National Physical Activity Guidelines). The most frequent response in the slan survey question for reason why they were not physically active was “no time”. (Slan 2007)

The National Guidelines for Physical Activity for Ireland highlight the strong evidence base for the health benefits of physical activity. These include

- Better cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness
- Less weight gain
- More weight loss – combined with eating fewer calories
- Better weight management after weight loss
- Lower risk of early death
- Lower risk of stroke
- Lower risk of coronary heart disease
- Lower risk of high blood pressure
- Lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- Lower risk of colon and breast cancer
- Fewer falls
- Reduced levels of depression
- Better cognitive function in older adults.

The workplace is an environment where Irish adults spend a significant amount of their times. Modern work patterns also tend to lead to inactivity i.e. sitting at a desk, using email / phone. (PAHA) Lets make Scotland Active: A strategy for Physical Activity make the point that “workplaces are an ideal setting to reach a large section of the adult population and more specifically its is noted that “pressure of work” is one of the most common barriers to increasing physical activity with time being scarce the convenience of being active at work can be very attractive”. (2003)

The PAHA cite the following benefits of a physically active workforce
- Less illness and quicker recovery time from illness
- Lower work absence
- Lower staff turnover
- More productive workforce
- Fewer work injuries
- Higher work satisfaction levels

This report also concludes that workplace programmes are more likely to be successful and participants most likely to adhere to physical activity levels if a workplace physical activity programme is based on the needs of the participants, is supervised, enjoyable, socially oriented and is frequent and embedded in daily routines.

One of the key messages from the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Ireland is that people are most likely to respond to messages that promote social support or suggest ways to fit physical activity into daily life.

In September 2009 Mayo Sports Partnership, Health Promotion Services, HSE West & GMIT Castlebar developed a pilot physical activity programme for staff in five workplaces in Castlebar. The target group for the programme were five organisations who were members of the Mayo Sports Partnership Board – HSE, Mayo County Council, GMIT, Mayo VEC and Western Care. These five workplaces are also located close to each other in Castlebar town.

In March 2009 Mayo Sports Partnership and Health Promotion Services, HSE, Mayo facilitated a meeting to develop this pilot project. Representatives from each of the five workplaces attended. It was decided to develop a pilot project in September 2009. This project has successfully run since then.

**The Aim of the Fit4work Programme is**
To offer a range of physical activity opportunities for staff close to their place of work, at times convenient to their working hours.

This guide outlines the steps taken to develop this programme, which can be replicated in other workplaces to develop a similar programme.
How to get Started

Management Support
To ensure the success of any programme it is important to secure management support for the programme. Management have a role in promoting the project and facilitating the use of facilities for the programme such as rooms, showers etc. Management support for the Fit4work programme was secured from the outset.

Establish a Steering Committee
A sustainable workplace physical activity programme needs to be managed by a steering committee who share the responsibility for the project rather than by only one person. The steering group should have representatives from the workplace(s) involved e.g. members of social committee, staff with a remit for health and wellbeing and other interested parties. A member of the Sports Partnership or Health Promotion Department may be invited to attend some meetings to help develop the programme. It is important that the steering committee are locally based so they can communicate any last changes to the programme to staff e.g. change of venue, session cancelled etc.

Decide on Target Group
Deciding on the target group for your programme depends on the number of staff you have in your workplace and the size of the venues and facilities on offer to you. Having a large target group means you can offer a greater variety of classes which is key to the success of the programme. If you have a small number of staff it is a good idea to involve some neighbouring workplaces to join your programme. In the Castlebar Fit4work programme it was decided to include five organisations who were members of the Mayo Sports Partnership Board, all workplaces were located close together so time was not wasted by staff members travelling to and from venues. This is particularly important if you are running lunch time classes where people are under pressure to be back at work on time.

Research the Needs and Interest of Your Target Group
In order to meet the needs and interests of the participants in a workplace physical activity programme it is important to do some research. Focus groups or questionnaires can be used to find out
- What types of activities staff are interested in
- What times they would like the programme to take place i.e. before work, during lunch break, directly after work
- What days of the week the programme should be run
- How long they would like the programme to run i.e. 4, 6, 8 weeks at a time
See appendix 1 for sample questionnaire. Online survey methods can make this task easier and can be used to compile a report on the information received. www.surveygizmo.com & www.surveymonkey.com are two free websites which can be used for this research.

Map Available Resources for the Project
List all potential resources that may be used for a physical activity programme. This may include large meeting rooms or canteens that could be cleared out for use. There may also be facilities locally e.g. a gym, pool, running track or a community/ sports hall that you could use for activities. Make a list of shower facilities in your workplace if they are available or else they may be available in a community / sports building close by. The times and days these facilities are available can be mapped in the template Appendix 2.

Recruit Suitable Instructors
Once you have established from your research what types of activities you want to run and at what times you will need to make contact with instructor to run the programme. Mayo Sports Partnership have a register of instructors, you can contact the sports partnership to find instructors based close to your workplace who would be available to run classes. The success of the programme will be determined by the quality of the instructors. Instructors should provide the steering committee with a copy of their insurance and they should use their own steering forms to ascertain the fitness of participants. It is a good idea to provide instructors with attendance sheets and registration forms so they keep track of attendance at the classes and you can monitor the success of classes. See appendix 4 & 5 for copies of registration form and attendance sheet.

An evaluation form for classes can also be used to monitor participant’s satisfaction with the classes on offer. See appendix 6.

We suggest that classes should cost €30 for six weeks to ensure that they are affordable for staff. It is also a good idea for instructors to pay the steering committee a percentage of the cost of the class to make a contribution to promotion of the programme and the facilities. Appendix 3 is a sample contact for instructors.

Promote the Programme
When instructor and venue availability have been mapped you can then timetable classes which can be promoted in the workplace. It is useful to have an explanation of the classes to go with the timetable. Appendix 7 is a copy of a timetable with class explanation.

Registration for the Programme
The next stage is to decide on how staff register for the classes on offer. We recommend that all participants pay up front the cost of the 6 weeks of classes to ensure that the programme is financially viable for instructors and also to ensure regular class commitment. It is useful to have a registration event where all instructors attend and staff can come along and ask questions about classes on offer before paying for the programme. If this is not possible staff should register for classes by contacting the instructor directly and arranging to pay for classes prior to them starting.

**Evaluate Programme**

It is a good idea to monitor the success of the programme on an ongoing basis. This can be done by the class evaluation forms, informally enquiring with participants or by carrying out an evaluation using a questionnaire or focus groups.
Resources

Useful organisations to contact

Mayo Sports Partnership www.mayosports.ie

Health Promotion Services, HSE www.healthpromotion.ie

Irish Sports Council www.irishsportscouncil.ie

Irish Heart Foundation www.irishheart.ie

Irish Society for Chartered Physiotherapists www.iscp.ie

Useful Websites

www.getirelandactive.ie For information on the national physical activity guidelines

www.walkireland.ie For information on trails and walks in Ireland

www.mayotrails.ie For information on trails and walks in Mayo

www.dttas.ie For information on government support to sport in Ireland

www.womeninsport.ie For information on physical opportunities for women

www.mayo.ie For what is going on in Mayo
Activities That Can be organised for a Workplace Physical Activity Programme

Group Exercise Classes: Aerobics, Circuits, Core & Tone, Pilates, Yoga, Zumba, Boxercise, Cardio-Kickboxing, Kettlebells, Step Aerobics, Tai-Chi, Cardio Tennis, Aqua Aerobics

Beginners Exercise Class – An instructor can be hired to run a class specifically for people who do not usually exercise and would not have the confidence or fitness to join a regular class.

Sports Tournaments – tennis, soccer, tag rugby, peil abú (recreational GAA)

Mayo Sports Partnership Programmes

Fit Walk – Fleet Feet Programme

The overall aim of this programme is to promote Fitness through Walking. The Programme comprises 5 x 1hr once-weekly sessions delivered in an indoor setting. The key outcomes are that participants will;
- understand the key components of physical fitness and how to get best fitness benefits from walking;
- understand how to use Step Counters and Heart Monitors and their function in getting best fitness benefits from walking;
- be familiar with the techniques of StrideWalking and PowerWalking.

Meet and Train

People of all various abilities meet to walk, jog or run together on a particular day, time and venue with a leader in attendance. Participants are matched with people of their own ability for the session. The sessions can be held on a track, pitch or walking / jogging path. 7 of these groups are now established throughout the county.

Meet and Spin

Similar to the above the only difference is that you are cycling. Some cycling clubs such as Covey Wheelers Westport now have a significant leisure cycling branch to their club.
References


Physical Activity and Health Alliance. Physical Activity in the Workplace. www.paha.org.uk

Fit4work?

Health Promotion Services, Mayo Sports Partnership & GMIT
Castlebar would like to offer you opportunities for physical activity close to your workplace at convenient times.

To help us organise activities you are interested in please complete the attached questionnaire – it will take you less than 5 minutes!

Please return by Friday 24th July 09 to:
Health Promotion Services
St Marys HQ
Castlebar

Alternatively you can complete the survey on line @
http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/142283/physical-activity-options-for-staff

The project is open to Castlebar based staff who work in the HSE, Mayo Co Council, Western Care, Mayo VEC, GMIT.
Physical Activity Options for Staff
Questionnaire

1. Who is your employer?
   a. HSE
   b. Mayo Co Council
   c. GMIT
   d. Mayo VEC
   e. Western Care
   f. Other

2. What is your office address? ________________________________
                                           ________________________________

3. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female

4. Do you have a disability?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. How far do you live from your workplace?
   a. Less than a mile
   b. 1-3 miles
   c. 4-7 miles
   d. More than 10 miles

6. How do you usually travel to work?
   a. Car
   b. Walk
   c. Cycle

7. How often do you exercise?
   a. Never
   b. About once a month
   c. Once a week
   d. 2-4 times per week
   e. 5 or more times per week

8. If you exercise how long do you exercise for?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. 30-45 minutes
   c. 1 hour or more
9. During exercise how do you feel?
   a. Not very different to when I am not exercising
   b. Warm, my heart is faster and I am slightly out of breath
   c. Sweating, heart rate very fast and I am breathing heavily

10. What type of exercise do you usually take? ______________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________

11. Would you like to take more exercise?
   a. Yes
   b. No

12. What would encourage you to take more exercise? _________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________

13. Are you trained as a leader/coach in any sports?
   a. Yes
   b. No

   If yes please give details _______________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

14. Would you be interested in taking part in exercise programmes at work?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t know

15. If yes, what activities would you be interested in?
   a. Walking
   b. Running/Jogging
   c. Yoga
d. Pilates
e. Circuits class
f. Aerobics
g. Dance
h. Martial Arts
i. Soccer
j. Tag rugby
k. Cardio-tennis
l. Beginners Exercise Class
m. Tai Chi
n. Other

Have you any other suggestions for work place exercise?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

16. Would you prefer
a. Male only/Female only activities
b. Mixed gender activities
c. Either

17. What days & times would suit you best for workplace exercise?

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<th>Friday</th>
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<td>Evening 5-6pm</td>
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18. Please add any other comments or suggestions you may have
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey

Please return by _____________ to: ____________________________.
Appendix 2

Instructor / Venue Availability

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### Appendix 3 Sample Instructor contract

**PART TIME TUTOR CONTRACT**

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<th>Title</th>
<th>Fit4Work</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Address</td>
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<td>Phone</td>
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**Duration**  
The deliveries of these courses are and will continue on an ongoing basis.

**Term of contract**  
The tutors services will be contracted on an ongoing basis to deliver any of the above courses and will be paid a course fee. As it is a contract for services, this sum will not be taxed at source. Tax affairs are to be dealt with by tutors themselves.

**Pay**

**Other**  
The above fees cover preparation and travelling expenses

**Type of Work**  
The tutor will deliver classes in the above programme and other programmes from time to time

**Evaluation**  
Tutors will be continually monitored by the host organisation

**Indemnity**  
____________________________ confirms that his / her tax affairs are in order and agrees to indemnify________________ against any liability to the Revenue Commissioners ( or their agents ) that may arise from payments under this contract.

**Signed by Tutor**  

____________________________

**Signed on behalf of Organisation**

____________________________

**Date**

____________________________

**Date**

16
Appendix 4: Registration Form

Registration

Class Name, Day & Time:

Instructor:

Participants Name

Workplace & Address

Email address

Phone Number

Paid €30

Date
## Appendix 5: Class attendance Sheet

**Class:**

**Venue:**

**Day & Time:**

**Instructor:**

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# Class Evaluation Form

**Date of Class:** ___________________

**Name of Class:** ____________________________

**Venue:** ____________________________

**Day & Time:** ____________________________

**Instructor:** ____________________________

1. **Overall, how would you rate the course?**  
   *(Please circle the number)*
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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2. **How would you rate the instructor?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
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</table>

3. **How would you rate the social element of the course?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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</table>

4. **How did you find the level of intensity of the course?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not strenuous enough</th>
<th>Just Right</th>
<th>Too strenuous</th>
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5. **Did you think the course was reasonably priced?**  
   **Yes:** _______  **No:** _______

6. **What did you think of the time of the class?**  
   ____________________________________________________________________________
7. Would you be interested in attending this course in the future?  Yes:________ No:________

8. Any other comments about the course?  ________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Have you any other suggestions or comments about the Fit4work project?  _________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you
Appendix 7

Only 8 weeks till Christmas....

For only €30 for 6 weeks of classes you can improve your fitness during your lunch time or directly after work in venues close to your workplace.

As well as the usual favourite classes we have 2 great new classes – Circuit training with David Whelan & Kettlebells with Eamonn Shaughnessy.

To book please contact the instructor by phone or email.

Classes are for staff working in the HSE, Mayo Co Council, Western Care, Mayo VEC and GMIT.
Pilates with Taragh: Pilates is a form of exercise which builds your body's core strength and posture. This is done through a series of stretching and conditioning exercises. It is an excellent way to improve your posture and breathing and will have an excellent effect on your general well-being and fitness.

Bootcamp with Paul is a comprehensive fitness class for 40 minutes. The class will combine cardio, body resistance and light weight training. This class is suitable for all levels, if your goal is weight loss, toning up to look good for the beach or pushing your fitness to the next level this class is for you.

Circuits training with David is a 45 minute workout incorporating exercises to improve core strength, flexibility, weight resistance, speed and agility. A great overall workout which will help improve your muscular strength, improve your cardiovascular performance and sculpt, shape and tone your body.

Ease into Fitness with Eduardo is a gentle exercise programme for people who would like to improve their fitness but do not feel fit enough to join a regular exercise class. The class will work at your level and help you to slowly improve your fitness.

Metafit Training with Siobhan: It's a 30 minute session that will tone muscles, boost metabolism, and burn fat. It builds strength, improves core balance and mobility--so what are you waiting for sign up today!

Boxercise with Adrian is a low impact high intensity class based on all the fitness principles of boxing, expect to burn up between 500 and 700 calories per hour in this fun and action packed class. This interval style training class is excellent for weight loss and muscle tone, a boxing training workout leaves the long lean look rather than bulk, you will learn to hit the focus pads, bob and weave and punch your way to that perfect physique!

Kettlebells with Eamonn From old school champion strongmen to today's modern combat athletes, Hollywood's movie stars to Premier League soccer teams, all have found the Kettlebell to be an extremely efficient and effective training tool for improving performance, strength, endurance and all around fitness. Acquire the skills necessary to train at home or in the gym with kettlebells be it as part of your personal fitness regime or as an effective add on to your chosen sport.

Kundalini Yoga with Joanna is known as Yoga for the Householder, suitable for any person regardless of age, size, level of physical fitness or flexibility. Within each class there is a dynamic blend of breathwork, postures both still and moving, relaxation, active and passive meditation using eye focus, mudras and mantra sound current. It can help us be flexible and balanced in these modern times.
# Instructor Contact Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taragh Cosgrove</td>
<td>087 6471919</td>
<td><a href="mailto:taragh.cosgrove@gmail.com">taragh.cosgrove@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siobhan Hughes - Geraghty</td>
<td>087 7643822</td>
<td><a href="mailto:shughesgeraghty@gmail.com">shughesgeraghty@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Moran</td>
<td>087 2462591</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sangatyoga@gmail.com">sangatyoga@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul O’Brien</td>
<td>086 1674515</td>
<td><a href="mailto:paul@bootcampwest.com">paul@bootcampwest.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Whelan</td>
<td>085 1069414</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@gaga.ie">info@gaga.ie</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo Santos</td>
<td>087 2520411</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eduardosantosssp@hotmail.com">eduardosantosssp@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eamonn Shaughnessy</td>
<td>087 2196657</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eamonnshaughnessy@gmail.com">eamonnshaughnessy@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Sheerin</td>
<td>086 0581956</td>
<td><a href="mailto:adosheerin@hotmail.com">adosheerin@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 6 Week Fit4work Timetable 7th Nov - 16th Dec

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
<td>1.10 - 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Bootcamp</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Paul O'Brien)</td>
<td>St Marys Hall, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.10 – 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Pilates</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Taragh Cosgrove)</td>
<td>Area 15, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.15 -6.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Ease in to Fitness</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Eduardo Santos)</td>
<td>St Marys Hall, GMIT</td>
<td>€15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3 weeks only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
<td>1.10 – 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Metafit Training</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Siobhan Hughes-Geraghty)</td>
<td>St Mary's Hall, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.15 – 6.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Circuit Training</strong>&lt;br&gt;(David Whelan)</td>
<td>St Mary's Hall, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>1.10 – 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Boxercise</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Adrian Sheerin)</td>
<td>Castlebar Celtic</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td>1.10 – 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Bootcamp</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Paul O'Brien)</td>
<td>St Marys Hall, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.10 – 1.50pm</td>
<td><strong>Kundalini Yoga</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Joanna Moran)</td>
<td>Area 15, GMIT</td>
<td>€30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.15 – 6.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Kettlebells</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Eamonn Shaughnessy)</td>
<td>St Marys Hall, GMIT</td>
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