

# Wellbeing in the Workplace

## What is the link between wellbeing and the workplace?

Whilst medical advances have increased life expectancy in the UK, risk factors such as obesity and mental health problems are a growing cause for concern.

The physical characteristics of our built environment and how it is planned, designed and constructed can contribute directly to people's health and wellbeing. Employers are showing a growing interest in the link between productivity, health and wellbeing, and the possibility of improving the organisation's bottom line through better workplace facilities.



The *Health, Wellbeing and Productivity in Offices* report by the World Green Building Council<sup>1</sup> tries to calculate the financial benefits to an organisation of considering occupant wellbeing as a central part of their space.

## What is the link between wellbeing and carbon?

At first sight, wellbeing and its impact on carbon emissions are very separate issues. However, the reality is that a building which supports the physical and mental wellbeing of its occupiers is likely to be well used and have a longer life. Buildings that are hostile to their users' wellbeing are fundamentally unsustainable and may end up being demolished and rebuilt. This eventuality is extremely negative for carbon emissions and has led to many environmental certification schemes integrating user wellbeing in their agenda.

As the drive for low carbon projects continues, more pressure is placed on the design team to reduce carbon emissions. However, it is important that this focus does not result in the design being pushed too far or in such a way that it detracts from the fundamental need to ensure the space supports the wellbeing of its occupants.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Green Building Council: [Health, Wellbeing and Productivity in Offices: The next chapter for green buildings](#)



## What is the relevance of wellbeing to office fit out and refurbishment?

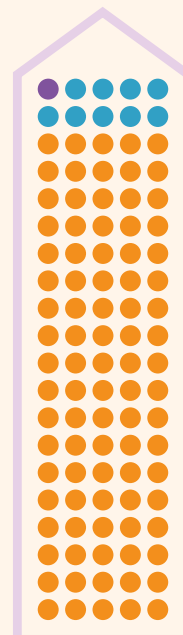
Organisations need to be able to justify the capital spend of a workplace fit out or refurbishment which can be significant. However, staff costs (including recruitment, salaries and benefits) typically account for about 90% of business operating costs.

The justification of saving money on energy bills may still be valid, but is less significant when compared with the potential financial upside of increasing the health and wellbeing of a workforce. This can lead to:

- Better staff retention (reducing time and cost spent on recruitment and training)
- Greater organisational performance
- Increased productivity
- Reduced absenteeism

Improving office wellbeing through seemingly small but significant changes is a way of tackling these costs by having a positive impact upon the workforce.

### Typical business operating costs



● **1%**  
Energy costs

● **9%**  
Rental costs

● **90%**  
Staff costs in salaries and benefits

Source: World Green Building Council Health, Wellbeing and Productivity in Offices

# Which space elements can improve wellbeing in the workplace?

Our understanding of the health, wellbeing and productivity implications of office design, fit out and refurbishment is deepening, supported by advances in technology and growing awareness. The following are some of the key areas referenced by **The World Green Building Council** report that can improve occupant health, wellbeing and productivity in the office.

## Indoor air quality

The quality of air in an office can be indicated by low concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> and pollutants and high ventilation rates. A comprehensive body of research suggests that productivity in offices can increase by around 8-11% as a result of better quality air. Increasing the visibility of indoor air quality through visual displays is also becoming a focus.

## Thermal comfort

Temperature control has a significant impact on workplace satisfaction and increased productivity is common but variable depending upon circumstance and the type of work being undertaken. Personal control over temperature is a contributing factor.

## Daylight and lighting

Good quality lighting and increased levels of daylighting can have positive impacts upon sleep and has found to provide consistent benefits in terms of satisfaction and health.

## Biophilia

Evidence suggests there are many positive benefits for mental health that derive from green spaces and nature which has implications for office design and fit out. Biophilia can also have positive impacts on indoor air quality.



## Amenities and location

Local amenities and services are increasingly important to occupants to improve the enjoyment of where they work and improve their productivity.

## Noise and interior layout

Noise distraction can be a major source of employee dissatisfaction which can relate closely to the internal layout of a workspace. The density and configuration of workspaces, breakout rooms and places for social connections all impact occupant wellbeing.

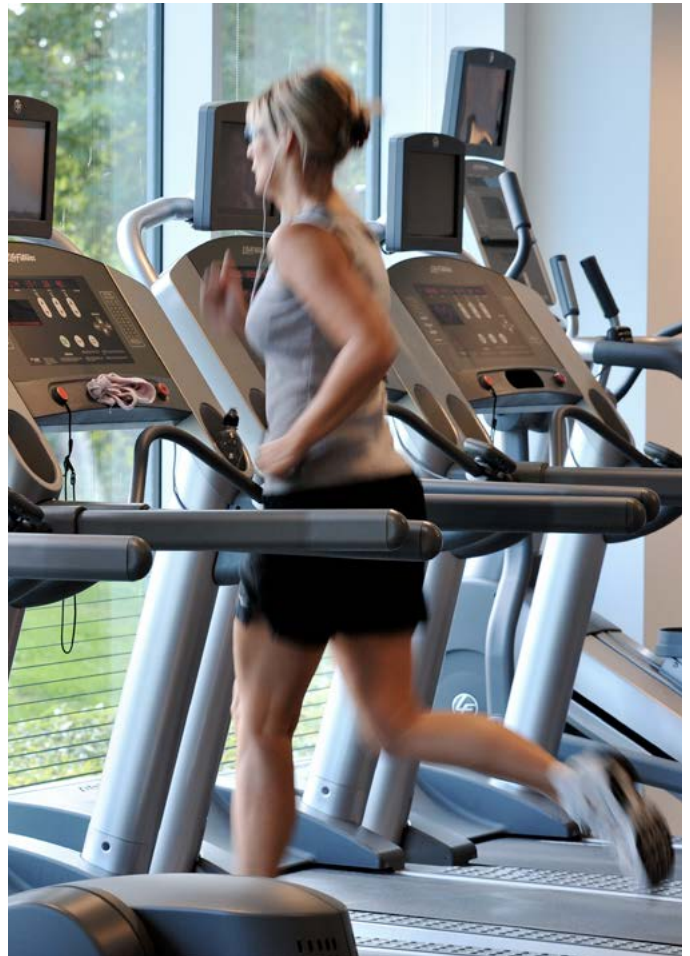


## Wellbeing certification schemes

The **WELL** Building Standard is a certification scheme developed by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI) based upon robust scientific and medical research.

WELL is aimed at improving buildings and the indoor environment for occupants by placing health and 'wellness' at the centre of design, construction and management. The WELL standard explores the connection between the buildings we work in and the health and wellness that impact on us as occupants.

**Fitwel** is another certification aimed at supporting healthier workplaces and improving occupant health and wellbeing. It can be carried out at any time and suggests that simple changes to a building's design and operation can make a big difference to people's health, wellbeing and productivity; and potentially result in savings on recruitment and lost work days due to sickness absence.



## About Overbury

At Overbury, we fit out and refurbish outstanding offices and higher education facilities across the UK. Every project is carried out by passionate people who thrive on delivering an exceptional result, precisely as promised.

Our company-wide commitment to low carbon and sustainability means we have reduced our own emissions by 64 percent since 2010, as we continue to work towards our net zero target by 2030. On every project, we work closely with our clients, consultants and supply chains to help them achieve their own low carbon goals.

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