

Take Care, Take
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health@work

Survey Results of over 100 HR Managers in Ireland

Workplace Health: Why it makes good business sense





Workplace Health: Why it makes good business sense

A survey of over 100 HR Managers in Ireland,
on the value of health initiatives in the workplace,
June 2011

QUINN-healthcare, Eastgate Business Park, Little Island, Cork

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Introduction

Beyond the provision of private health insurance, QUINN-healthcare is one of the leading providers of Occupational Health and Health & Wellbeing programmes to employers in Ireland. We provide a broad range of employee health services to corporate clients, organising seminars and talks from a wide range of health experts, undertaking screening of employees and providing occupational health advisers & nurses to address specific health issues.

In order to help QUINN-healthcare better optimise the services we provide to our clients and employers, and indeed to understand their needs better, an independent research survey was commissioned by Behaviour & Attitudes marketing research. A sample of over 100 senior Human Resource Managers were interviewed. The majority of these interviews were by phone and a small number of the interviews were undertaken face-to-face at their company's premises.

A structured questionnaire addressed employer needs and wants in the area of employee health requirements and explored perceptions of the services available in the market and how these need to shift and evolve into the future.

This document presents an outline of the current views and perceptions of these senior HR managers and illustrates an interesting perspective of the current attitude to the provision of added value health initiatives in the workplace.

We have also set out services and solutions available from QUINN-healthcare in these areas.

We feel that this report will be of great benefit to employers and illustrates how employer initiatives in this area may need to change in the future, and how QUINN-healthcare can Take Care of your employee's health & wellbeing.

Executive Summary

Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace

There is a clear recognition of the economic benefit of supporting health & wellbeing programmes, and an acceptance that this illustrates a commitment to employees which goes above and beyond the norm. Many companies provide a variety of different services and facilities to promote and address health & wellbeing in the workplace.

The current social and economic environment presents a unique and different array of potential issues for employers. These may necessitate a spectrum of expertise and advice which exceed those of the HR manager at present, and on which it may be difficult to have a proper, confidential dialogue with the employee. There is a need to address depression, financial stress and similar issues. Health & wellbeing programmes need to be tailored, confidential and relevant.

Those that have an employee assistance programme (EAP) highly value it. Perspectives of other services available to employees are broadly very positive too.

Employers perceive barriers to be cost, employee interest, their own time and of management commitment, but nonetheless recognise the economic and human benefit of health & wellbeing programmes.

42% recognise that Health & Wellness is an area in which employees may not fully appreciate what is available to them. Only 21% feel that mental health and relationship issues should be excluded from the potential Health@Work agenda.

Thus the perceived scope of health & wellbeing initiatives is quite broad and extends more widely than many employers would seem to cater to at present.

Almost half of the employers facilitate health & wellbeing workshops and may provide fitness opportunities and situations whereby employees can relax and de-stress during the working day.

Practices in this area are quite varied with 45% exercise opportunities during work time, the subsidisation of gyms and so forth. The internal publicity of initiatives seems quite conventional and employers recognise the need to promote these more comprehensively to prompt interest and uptake. Equally few receive much feedback about health & wellbeing initiatives (just 43% ever receive any) so it is evidently an area in which the employee may be appreciative but nonetheless somewhat guarded.

What can be offered to employees?

Four in five employers provide free health insurance for their employees and 74% operate an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Health Screening or assessments are facilitated by the vast majority as is Pre Employment Screening.

These are not the only services that employers think about in this area. As many as a third of employers facilitate a variety of other health & wellbeing related activities, ranging from:

Executive Summary (continued) Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace

GP access at **5%**, to corporate health programmes at **5%**, eye tests at **5%**. **4%** of employers are providing each of the following: the bike to work scheme, blood pressure testing, flu vaccinations etc.

These aspects were spontaneously mentioned in addition to the listed activities probed.

There is a need to address psychological issues to include anxiety & depression, low morale, financial stress, relationship and similar issues. Other health issues include smoking, obesity and eating disorders.

About three in ten companies don't provide these services because of their perceived cost while about one in six feel that it isn't an employer's place to become involved. Lack of knowledge of the availability of such services is claimed by about one in ten.

Sickness absence management is one of the key elements that employers appreciate with **77%** using an external occupational health adviser in this regard. The general view is that a properly administered sickness absence management plan will significantly reduce the cost impact of absenteeism.

There is almost universal recognition that employees would benefit from exposure to a range of experts and consultants, from addiction counselling right through to personal counselling. Even 52% feel that parenting advice should be made available in the workplace.

“ 76% of the HR managers say that investing in workplace health reduces absence costs and adds value to their businesses ”



Services used & promoted in workplace

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Reasons for not providing services

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Attitudes to Workplace Health & Wellbeing Programmes

There is a very clear recognition among employers of the economic benefit of supporting workplace health & wellbeing programmes. 88% of employers agree that there is a distinct economic benefit to introducing health & wellbeing services in work, with half of all employers strongly agreeing with this sentiment.

“ 95% of employers are committed to the active promotion of health & wellbeing in the workplace ”

Equally there is agreement that companies with health & wellbeing programmes have a generally happier workforce, and almost eight in ten believe that companies with these sorts of programmes have better employee retention levels. Encouragingly, there is a slight majority agreeing that health & wellbeing programmes are subject to strong commitment of senior management so clearly there remains the opportunity to foster greater buy-in at boardroom level.

“ Just 15% of employers are slightly sceptical about the notion of companies running health & wellbeing programmes at work ”

Most employers are providing a variety of different health related services to their employees. Very few believe that a company should not get involved in an employee's mental health or relationship issues: only a fifth think that it is safer to avoid these territories, while the vast majority disagree and feel it is appropriate space for company involvement, where relevant. A key facet of health & wellbeing programmes is that HR recognises that these illustrate 'an above and beyond' commitment by the company to its employees, but the corollary of this is that it is felt to lead to distinct economic advantage for the company as well. When asked to describe their personal attitude to investing in workplace health initiatives, there is almost universal agreement

that it is the right thing to do for employees, and improves both the welfare of employees and indeed constitutes best practice. One could argue that these elements are perhaps 'hygiene factors' and that one would expect any HR manager to agree with these.

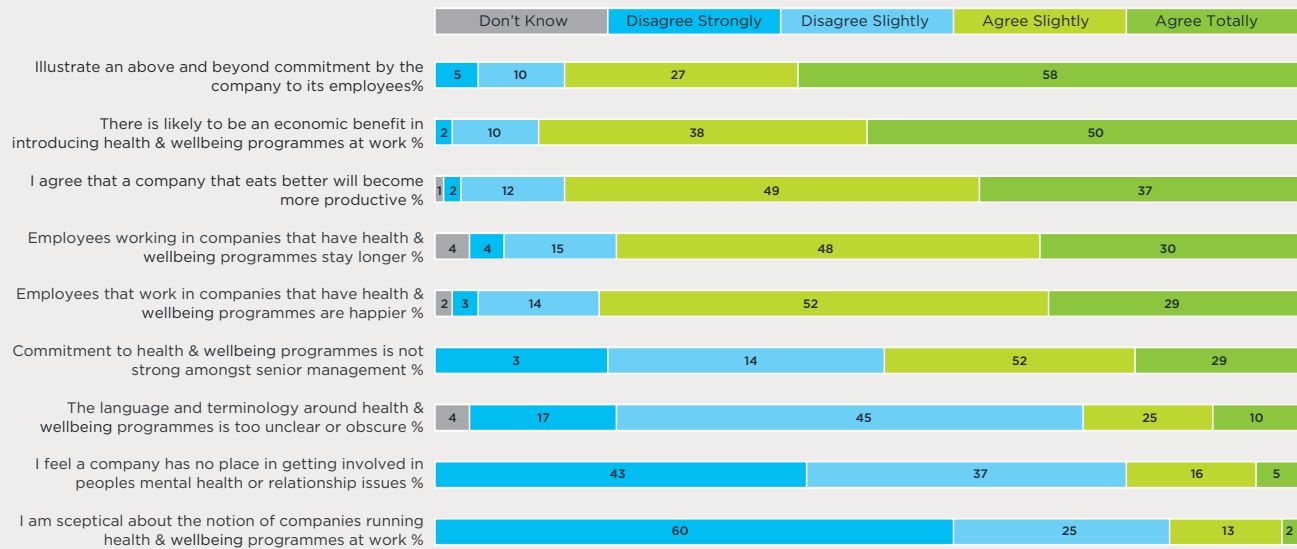
“ Eight in ten HR managers believe that investing in workplace health helps them to manage and reduce long term absenteeism. This reduction in absence costs directly adds value to the business, with three quarters agreeing with this direct economic benefit. Almost three in five suggest that this type of investment allows for most effective cost management ”

90% agree that investing in workplace health is the right thing to do for employees. There is perhaps lower importance placed on investment in workplace health as an aid to recruitment or retention. Most encouragingly in this regard, there are few who say that they invest in the area mainly because they were legally required to: just over a third endorses this view, although just one in eight agrees strongly with this sentiment.

“ 79% of employers believe that investing in workplace health enables them to manage and reduce long term absence ”

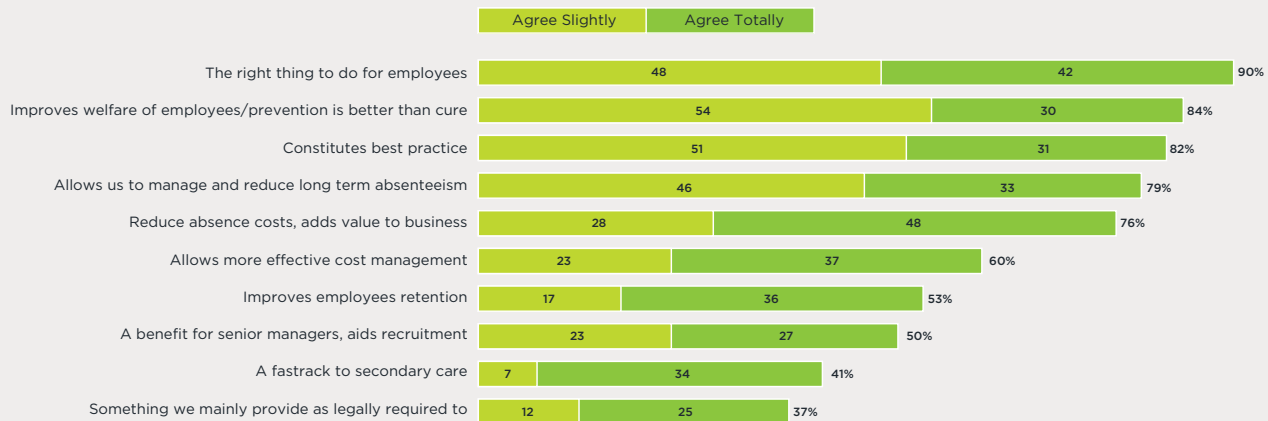
Attitudes to health & wellbeing programmes for own workplace

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Motivation to Invest in Workplace Health

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



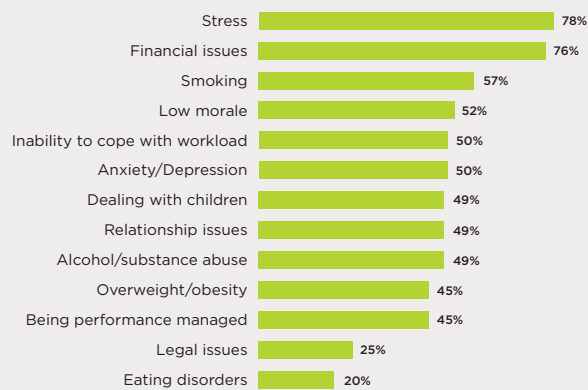


Workplace Issues

It is very clear that the current social and economic context is presenting greater challenges for employees. Employers are quite sensitive to this and it is striking that almost four in five now mention that they encounter stress in the workplace with three quarters believing that their employees are being confronted by financial issues.

Current Workplace Health & Wellbeing Issues

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Perhaps related to this, employers see a broad prevalence of morale issues and almost half of employers think that their workforce may experience issues to do with anxiety and depression.

Stress:

In Europe, stress is the second most frequently reported work related health problem, affecting 22% of workers from EU 27. *ILO figures 2005.

Stress costs European employers up to 10% of GNP in terms of lost productivity and insurance claims.¹

It is perhaps not surprising or unusual that employers continue to be confronted by problems related to smoking and indeed to other substance and addiction issues.

Employees being overweight are acknowledged as an issue by **45%** of all companies, however it was interesting to note that just **20%** suggest that their employees are facing other eating disorders.

Obesity:

Two out of three adults on the island of Ireland are overweight. This has led to fat becoming the “new normal” with the average weight now a stone more than it was 20 years go.²

Turning to work itself about half of all companies feel that there is some inability for more employees to cope with workloads these days, and a similar number suspect that some have problems with being performance managed.

However, it is in focusing on what might be perceived as family or personal issues, and their possible ramifications for the workplace, where some of the most interesting data is revealed. About half of those interviewed believe that relationship issues can manifest in the workplace and a similar number believe that problems with children can also be influential.

Thus, organising talks and seminars about parenting, relationship harmony and other facets, that may ostensibly seem external to work (money, finances, debt and so forth) are now perceived to be within the remit of the modern HR practitioner and employer.

Commitment to change:

Nine out of ten adults would be prepared to make changes to their lives to become healthier.³

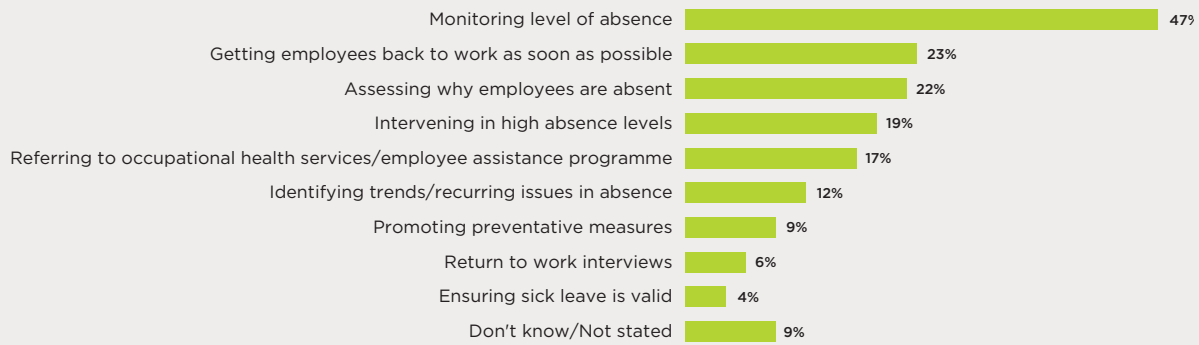


Sickness Absence Management

Those who use external occupational health services in management of sickness absence, see it as a means of monitoring and driving down absenteeism. 75% claim that they are satisfied with their performance, with the balance being neither positive nor negative by and large.

Understanding of Sickness Absence Management

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



The benefits of external consultants are clear, with users particularly stressing that this helps them to ensure that employees get back to work as quickly as possible and enables their filtering through EAP's or the health services more quickly.

Sickness Absence:

The involvement of occupational health professionals is one of the most effective methods for managing long term absence.⁴

Irish employees have an average (median) of 6.4 days unscheduled absence from their jobs each year.⁵

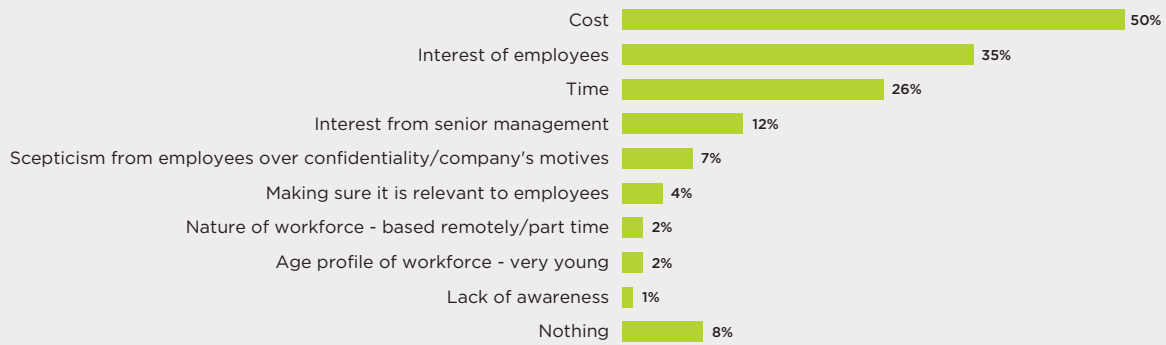
With the average Irish salary of €36,000, absenteeism is costing Irish businesses approximately €1.4 billion per annum.⁵

Barriers facing the introduction of Health & Wellbeing Programmes

Half of companies admit that cost is a barrier to the implementation of successful health & wellbeing programmes.

Barriers to Successful Health & Wellbeing Programme

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Employee interest, or the lack of it, is an issue for about a third, while HR professionals themselves indicate that the commitment of their own time can be a problem for about a quarter. Many commented on how HR functions are over-stretched and under-resourced, and are thus reliant more often on external providers to provide tailorable, but total, solutions in such instances.

A lack of senior management interest or buy-in is indicated as problematic by just one in eight companies.

Also, the issue of achieving employee buy-in is evidently significant, but it must be stressed that many employers appear to use very conventional modes of communication about their health & wellbeing programmes. About half communicate through emails and newsletters, three in ten organise meetings or talks, a fifth run specific days or weeks and a similar number place posters and leaflets on notice boards etc.

Employers should undoubtedly seek to find greater common cause with employees in this regard and be more proactive and vocal about such programmes.

An interesting finding from the study is that just **43%** of HR professionals get feedback about the health & wellbeing programmes which they run. It seems quite likely that employees are a little bit guarded about engaging with the employer in relation to these aspects, perhaps feeling the need to preserve confidentiality about them.

“ Just 43% ever get feedback about their workplace health programmes ”

There is clearly a need for the employer to maintain a dialogue or a stream of communication with employees about health & wellbeing programmes. Employees can be reluctant to ask about them, but have a significant need to find out more about services the company provides. Undoubtedly the need for these services is growing in the current environment.

What Organisations would like to see

When asked about the kinds of service they felt their employees might benefit from, a variety of aspects were suggested by HR professionals. These included occupational health advisors on issues at work impacting health, health assessments, and counsellors in relation to personal matters, nutritional experts and so forth.



When asked about a range of possible services that they could potentially make available within their own company, there is almost universal buy in for elements such as drug and alcohol counselling, personal counselling and the provision of smoking cessation programmes.

Even elements such as parenting advice and relationship counselling get majority support from employers. The provision of aspects such as heart screening for Sudden Adult Death Syndrome and indeed men and women's health workshops receive a substantial majority support with almost four in five interested in stress and resilient straining for employees and managers.

“ 75% of all employers would like to provide men's and women's health workshops ”

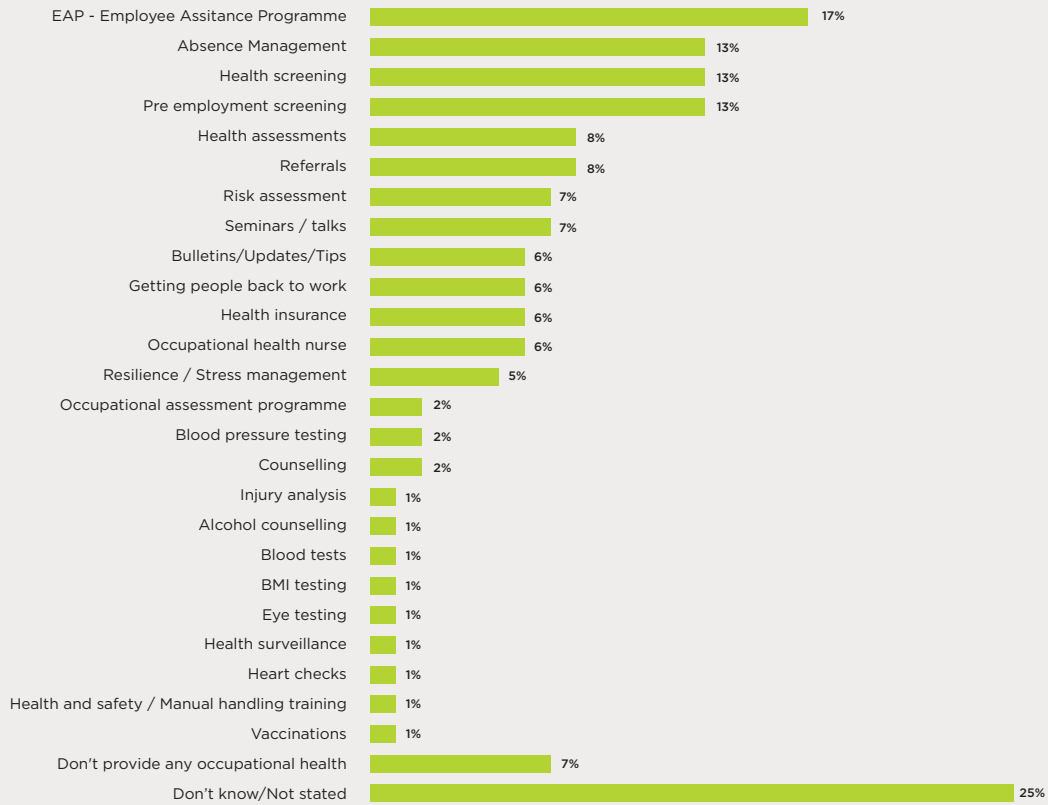
Methods of Employee Engagement for Health & Wellbeing Programs

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Occupational Health Services Considered Useful (Spontaneous)

Base: 101 HR Professionals.



Recommendations for successful Health & Wellbeing Programmes

For employers taking action on workplace health is compelling, worthwhile and will bring return on investment. Health & Wellbeing programmes in the workplace can and do work by following some key points.

Top Down Business Support

It is essential to get buy in and support from the top down to show that senior managers believe in the concept of health & wellbeing. It should become part of the culture and the values of the organisation. Health choices should become easy choices – integrated into the culture of the organisation.

Clear Rationale for Implementation of Health & Wellbeing Programmes

Outlining the benefits of Health & Wellbeing programmes, from both their return on investment and health gains for the employees will ensure greater buy in and commitment from all the parties involved.

Tailored Health & Wellbeing Programmes

Establish what the health issues are for your employees to allow you to identify programmes relevant. These will impact and improve their health & wellbeing and in the long term their productivity.

Survey and Engage Employees

Conducting employee surveys and health assessments will allow you to identify key 'hot spots' in your organisation and will also encourage engagement and increased support from employees. Good participation will ensure a change in mindset, to ensure a greater momentum which will in turn make it easier to identify the benefits of the programmes that you have delivered.

Measurement and Commitment

Clear communication of the Health & Wellbeing programmes is essential-use a variety of tools to promote your programmes. To establish if these programmes are working, measure the metrics to include health indicators, absenteeism levels and feedback from employee surveys.



QUINN-healthcare Health@Work Services

QUINN-healthcare can deliver a wide range of tailored employee health services through our Health@Work team. Services can include health workshops, health screening, health surveillance, sickness absence management and 1:1 consultations.

We also have considerable experience in the provision of Occupational Health services providing managed on-site, remote and adhoc Occupational Health services nationwide. Our premium Employee Assistance Programme service is a combination of telephone and up to eight face-to-face counselling sessions. The service is confidential, immediate and is made more effective through early intervention.

All services are delivered by an appropriately qualified experienced specialist in their chosen field. QUINN-healthcare's specialist advisor team consists of occupational health advisors, dieticians, stress management consultants, fitness experts, nurses and qualified therapists.

If you would like further information on our Health@Work services, please contact **1890 907 088** or email och@quinn-healthcare.com

Health & Wellbeing services provided by QUINN-healthcare



QUINN-healthcare Health@Work has considerable experience in the delivery of Health & Wellbeing Programmes and Occupational Health Services in Ireland. We are best placed to provide your organisation with innovative, high quality, value added services.

Mary Forde
Health @ Work Contracts Manager
RGN,H Dip In Occupational Health & Hygiene, BA In HealthCare Mgt

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- 2 May 11th 2011, Irish Independent
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- 4 CIPD Annual Survey Report 2010 -Absence Management
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A summary of Health & Wellbeing services
provided by QUINN-healthcare



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