



## **White Paper**

# Appraising the risks with workplace mental health and wellbeing

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Pre pandemic it was widely considered that the safety aspects of 'health and safety' dominated. Although this was not wholly true, particularly with the areas of mental health and wellbeing we are now seeing both subjects high on the corporate agenda.

Certainly, some working environments will pose greater potential risks in some areas than others, but the argument over the relative merits of the safety or health cases are by large a distraction, because both affect employees and their productivity, and so ultimately the organisation, therefore both need to be invested in equally.

With that in mind, this month we're taking a broad look at mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.



## Background

In 2001 the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that:

'One in four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide.'

Last year WHO also highlighted:

- Depression is one of the leading causes of disability.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds.
- People with severe mental health conditions die prematurely – as much as two decades early – due to preventable physical conditions.
- Many mental health conditions can be effectively treated at relatively low cost, yet the gap between people needing care and those with access to care remains substantial. Effective treatment coverage remains extremely low.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have been publishing annual statistics on health and safety in Great Britain for a number of years. Be it broader 'work-related mental health' or more specifically 'work-related stress depression or anxiety' and the trend is an increasing one.

The HSE's 2022 report on 'Health and safety at work Summary statistics for Great Britain' identifies (in 2021/22), 914,000 workers suffering from work-related stress, depression, or anxiety (new or long-standing) with a loss of 17.0 million working days.

A report published last year by Deloitte 'Mental health and employers The case for investment – pandemic and beyond' further identified:

'Poor mental health has an impact on employers' costs. The estimated total annual costs of absenteeism, presenteeism (attending work while ill and so underperforming or being less productive) and labour turnover have increased 25% since 2019, reaching an estimated annual total of £53-56 billion in 2020-21 (£43-46 billion in the private sector and £10 billion in the public sector).'

From a safety perspective, the HSE report that over the long-term both the rates of fatal and self-reported non-fatal injuries to workers 'showed a downward trend', although in the recent years the rate had been broadly flat.

The hopefully decreasing stigma associated with mental health, at times its lack of visibility (physical injuries are usually much more visible), or the lack of knowledge to recognise the signs, has meant it can go unnoticed, but that doesn't mean it is not there, or not having an effect.



## What does the law say?

In the UK, laws recognising and governing general aspects of mental health have been around for a number of years and include for example the Mental Health Act 1983. From a workplace perspective, while there is no specific legislation for mental health, the subject is captured through:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974) – places a duty on employers to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their employees, including protecting their mental health, as well as providing a safe working environment;
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 - requiring employers to carry out risk assessments to identify and address workplace hazards, including those that may affect employees' mental health.
- The Equality Act 2010 - prohibiting discrimination based on disability, including mental health disabilities and requires employers and service providers, amongst others, to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure that people with disabilities are not disadvantaged at work;
- The Mental Health (Discrimination) Act 2013 - eliminating discrimination against people with mental health conditions in areas, including employment, by removing barriers to employment and making sure that people with mental health conditions are treated fairly and equally; and
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, which regulates the processing of personal data, including data relating to mental health.



In addition to these, in 2004 the HSE introduced a set of Management Standards for work-related stress. These support the 'legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it.'

They cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates. The Management Standards cover:

- **Demands** – including issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment;
- **Control** – relating to how much say the person has in the way they do their work;
- **Support** – including the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues;
- **Relationships** – including promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation makes sure that they do not have conflicting roles; and
- **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The expectation on employers is that they need to gain a detailed understanding of what these risk factors look like in their organisation, identify which areas may be presenting problems, and work with employees and their representatives to take action to reduce them. The HSE also indicate, that 'as well as helping your managers understand the causes of stress at work, the Standards process provides a means of assessing how your workplace is performing and gives ideas on how to make improvements.'

Unlike many aspects of safety, where the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 is underpinned by specific regulation (COSHH, Work at Height, DSE, manual handling, etc.), the process for managing work-related stress takes a slightly different path, but the aims remain essentially the same.

The HSE provide information and resources on work-related stress and the management standards at - [Work-related stress and how to manage it: overview - HSE](#)



## What are some of the current drivers and initiatives?

In addition to the legal and moral obligations to protect employees from work-related stress, there are also potential financial and reputational costs to employers who fail to manage it effectively. This could include the costs of lost productivity through, absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover, as well as the potential for litigation.

Thriving at work, 'The Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers' was an independent review initiated by the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, in 2017.

Including detailed analysis that explored the 'significant cost of poor mental health to UK businesses and the economy'. It estimated that 'poor mental health costs employers between £33 billion and £42 billion a year, with an annual cost to the UK economy of between £74 billion and £99 billion.' The review also quantified how investing in supporting mental health at work was good for business and productivity.

Based on the findings The Mental Health at Work Commitment is a framework created to support businesses achieve better mental health outcomes. The six standards, which have already been adopted by a range of organisations, cover:

- Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity;
- Proactively making sure that work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes;
- Promote an open culture around mental health;
- Increase organisational confidence and capability;
- Provide mental health tools and support; and
- Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.

More information on The Mental Health at Work Commitment can be found at [The Mental Health at Work Commitment – Mental Health At Work](#)



In 2022, the IWFM Sustainability survey considered wellbeing (as well as circular economy and carbon and net zero) as part of a suite of work. Headline findings found:

'Three-quarters of end user respondents said that their organisation gives high significance to wellbeing (75%), 84% of them stating that their organisation already actively invests in mental health initiatives.'

The main drivers for developing wellbeing in organisations according to the survey included:

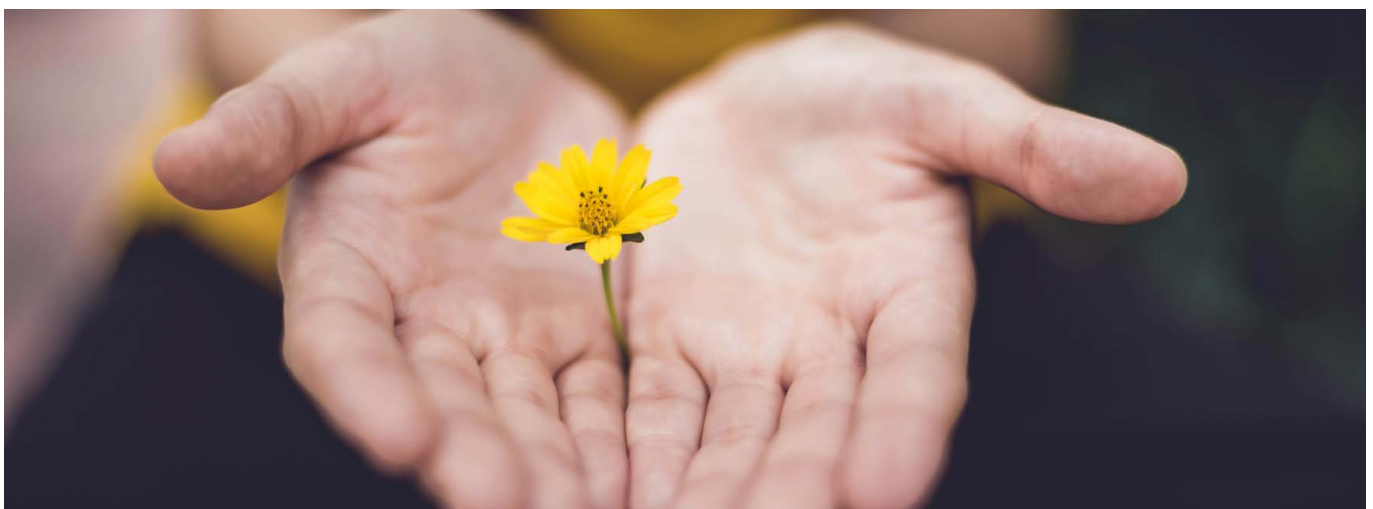
- Employee attraction/retention 74%
- Better business/more productive staff/better resilience 70%
- Greater employee awareness 64%
- Brand image/reputation/responsible business 52%
- Sickness reduction/less lost time 47%
- CSR/ESG/initiatives 31%

The full survey can be found at [Sustainability survey 2022 - wellbeing \(iwfm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwfm.org.uk/sustainability-survey-2022-wellbeing)

The Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) have identified that 'seven inter-related 'domains' of employee wellbeing'. While recognising that each organisation needs to create its own content, unique to its characteristics, the domains are 'guided by the principle that an effective employee wellbeing strategy needs to go far beyond a series of standalone initiatives'. The domains cover:

1. **Health** - physical health, physical safety and mental health;
2. **Good work** - working environment, good line management, work demands, autonomy, change management and pay and reward;
3. **Values/Principles** - leadership, ethical standards, inclusion and diversity;
4. **Collective/Social** - employee voice and positive relationships; and
5. **Personal growth** - career development, emotional, lifelong learning and creativity;
6. **Good lifestyle choices** - physical activity and healthy eating; and
7. **Financial wellbeing** - Fair pay and benefit policies, retirement planning and employee financial support.

Information of the CIPD work can be found at - [Wellbeing at Work | Factsheets | CIPD](#)

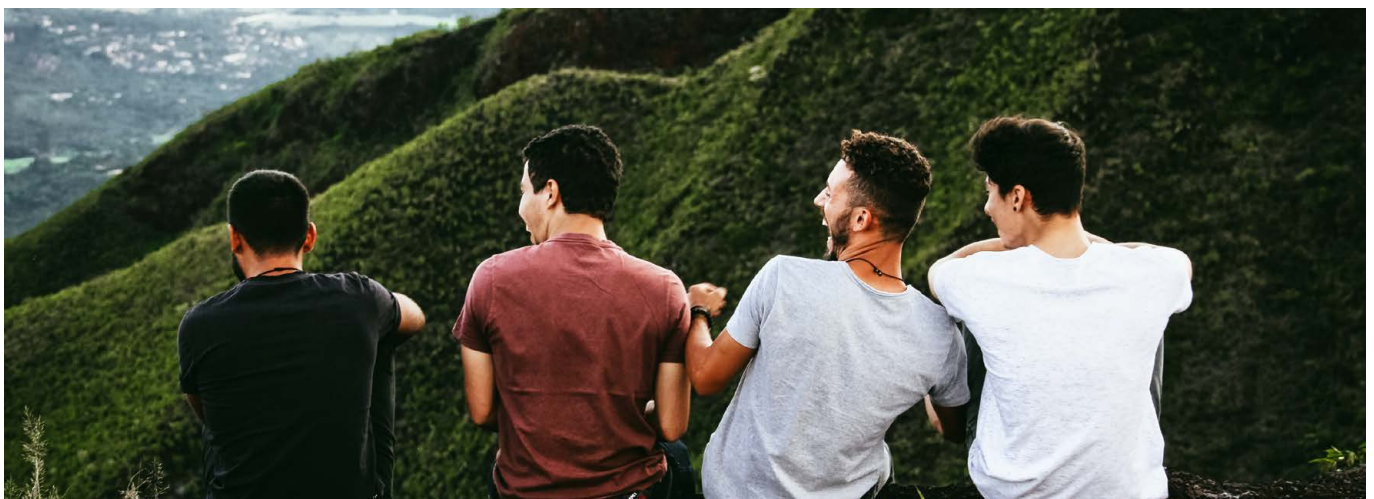


## In summary

Work-related mental health was a topic many organisations were tackling prior to the pandemic. The last three years has seen activities further accelerate and develop. Some of the more common work support on mental health and wellbeing we are now seeing customers adopt include:

- Health and safety policies covering work-related stress and identifying arrangements (risk assessments, reviews, and training) and mental health first aider provision;
- Employee assistance programs (EAP), designed to provide employees with access to confidential counselling and support for personal and work-related issues;
- Mental health awareness training for managers and employees to help them identify and support colleagues who may be struggling with mental health issues;
- Flexible working arrangements, such as part-time working, job sharing, or remote working, to help employees achieve a better work-life balance;
- Health and wellness programs, including initiatives such as on-site fitness classes, health screening and check-ups, and healthy eating programs;
- Occupational health services, such as counselling, physiotherapy, or occupational therapy, to help employees manage physical and mental health conditions; and
- Employee engagement initiatives, such as employee recognition programs, team-building activities, and social events, to help build a positive and supportive workplace culture.

Both health and safety play important roles in the culture, identity, and productivity of organisations. They do though need to be positioned for best effect within the prevailing risks that exist; what may work well for one, may not for another. Getting the balance right from a people and management perspective and engaging with employees are key to supporting good mental health in your workplace.



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Call us on  
+44 (0)1403 269375



Email us at  
[info@assurityconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@assurityconsulting.co.uk)



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