

A Guide to Mental Health in the Workplace

The argument for helping to create a working environment which puts the mental health and well-being of employees' front and centre is many faceted. In the foreground of any such argument has to be a clear emphasis on the duty of care which an employer has toward their employees, and an understanding that this duty of care covers mental well-being just as much as it has traditionally covered physical safety. This duty of care is not simply a question of fairness or morality. As we'll see, a workforce which feels that their mental health is being prioritised and that there are options and pathways open to them when things get difficult is more likely to be productive and effective workforce. The ethical case for creating a healthy working environment, minimising stress and allowing employees to avoid burnout through a healthy work life balance happens to chime precisely with the legal imperatives for doing so and the wider business argument.

A range of statistics shows that one of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was an increased emphasis on the mental health and well-being of employees on the part of a wide range of organisations. The CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) publishes an annual survey into [Health and Wellbeing at Work](#), and the 22nd edition, published in April 2022, was the result of responses from 804 organisations in the UK with more than 4.3 million employees. On the plus side, this survey showed that 81% of workplaces had increased their focus on employee mental health in the period following the pandemic, but also noted that 36% still take a reactive rather than proactive approach to implementing support for their employees. The same report also found that the focus on health and well-being which emerged during the first year of the pandemic had slipped somewhat as the pressures of the pandemic became a less urgent and immediate issue. The number of HR respondents believing that employee wellbeing is on senior leaders' agendas had dropped, year on year, from 75% to 70%, while those convinced that line managers are genuinely committed to the importance of wellbeing has dropped from 67% in 2021 to 60% in 2022. Other key findings of the report were as follows:

- The trend toward presenteeism (working when ill) is higher amongst those working at home at 81% than it is amongst those in the workplace (65%)
- 52% of HR managers are taking steps to deal with this problem

The shift to home-based or hybrid working across a range of sectors has thrown up a whole new range of factors which might impact upon mental health of employees, and 72% of organisations responding to the survey said that they had come up with new or improved ways of supporting employees working from home, with 47%, for example, encouraging a more responsible approach to digital technologies, in the midst of a realisation that things such as time spent away from screens and dedicated movement breaks are now an essential component of many employee's health and wellbeing.

The increased pressure on employees' mental health and wellbeing which emerged as a result of both the pandemic and the shift to homeworking which followed is emblematic of the way in which employee mental health and wellbeing presents an ever-moving target for employers. The wider societal shift toward removing the stigma around mental health issues has been reflected in workplaces, and has resulted in employees being more willing to express issues with their mental health and wellbeing and more demanding in terms of what they expect from their employers.

The [Deloitte UK Mental Health Report](#), published in March 2022, takes an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of employees and on the costs to employers, and looks in particular at the return generated by investment in measures which support mental wellbeing. After speaking to 'a nationally representative sample of 3,599 individuals in the

UK' the report found that the picture is less positive than might be hoped for. For example, the total annual cost of mental ill health to employers has increased by 25% since 2019, a third of respondents said they would like or expect more support for their mental health and wellbeing from their employers and 50% had experienced at least one characteristic of burn out due to:

- Greater job demands and expectations
- A lack of social interaction
- A lack of boundaries between work and home life

On the plus side, and of particular note to any employees still hesitant about investing fully in an effective support ecosystem for their employees (particularly during a period of rising costs and potential reduced demand), was the finding that for every £1 spent by employers on mental health interventions, £5.30 would be returned, in the form of reductions in absenteeism, staff turnover and presenteeism.

The somewhat negative picture painted by the Delloite report was, sadly, reinforced by another publication from CIPD, this time in the form of the [Good Work Index](#). This takes the form of an annual snapshot of job quality in the UK, and is the result of a survey of more than 5,000 workers across the widest possible range of sectors and occupations. Although covering every aspect of work, from pay and employment contracts to work-life balance, the Good Work Index does touch directly on health and wellbeing as a metric of job quality, while there is also clear overlap between issues such as 'job design and the nature of work', 'relationships at work' and 'employee voice' and the narrower issue of health and wellbeing. As we'll see in this guide, almost every aspect of any given role can help to shape the way in which it impacts on the mental health of the person tasked with that role, and employers and employees alike need to be able to recognise this fact and either act on the negative impacts or – in the case of employers – provide a framework which minimises the negative aspects and offers a clear route to seeking help, support and advice. As things stand, the findings of the Good Work Index included the following:

- 46% of employees had worked in the months prior to the report despite not feeling physically or mentally well enough to perform their duties
- 55% of respondents who had experienced depression in the past 12 months said that work had contributed to this depression, with only 36% able to discuss it with a manager or their employer
- Only 38% of respondents think that line managers within their organisations are fully able to have sensitive conversations and signpost members of staff to any expert sources of help needed
- 26% of employees said they struggle to relax in their own time because of work

The financial argument for good mental health

While the moral and ethical case for supporting the mental health and well-being of employees is the aspect which generally drives the conversation forward, another angle which deserves to be covered is the wider economic impact of not providing adequate support for employees. Any business leader still unconvinced of the need to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of their employees, or paying lip service to the concept without

properly thinking through effective delivery of support, needs to consider the impact which poor workplace mental health provision is likely to have on their bottom line.

According to a 2022 report entitled 'Mental health and employers: the case for investment - pandemic and beyond' [published by accountants Deloitte](#) – the kind of observers we can rely on to take a financially dispassionate view of the questions raised – the issue of poor mental health costs UK employers as a whole as much as £56 billion a year, a 25% increase on the £45bn figure recorded in 2019. A large proportion of this increase was driven by the cost of higher staff turnover, with 28% of employees having either left their job during 2021 or planning to do so during 2022. Of these employees, 61% cited poor mental health as the reason they were leaving. Elizabeth Hampson, Deloitte director and author of the report, sums up the issue in these terms:

“Mental health issues are a strong driver for the ‘Great resignation’. Long hours, increased stress and job insecurity have had a detrimental impact on quality of life during the pandemic. People are leaving their jobs, re-evaluating their careers and changing occupations in large numbers.

“Burnout among employees, such as feelings of exhaustion, mental distance from the job and reduced job performance, have been more evident during the pandemic. Measures by employers to improve mental wellbeing should not only benefit employees themselves but should also reduce employment costs such as recruitment costs and provide broader societal benefits.”

Elsewhere in the same report, Emma Mamo, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at mental health charity Mind, highlights the impact which the pandemic had on mental health across the board:

“We know that the pandemic has taken a huge toll on the mental health of the nation, including our colleagues. A 2021 survey by Mind of over 40,000 staff working across 114 organisations taking part in our Workplace Wellbeing Index revealed that two in five (41 per cent) employees said their mental health had worsened during the pandemic.

“The lockdowns and restrictions gave lots of us more time to think about what we wanted from our lives and our careers, and as a result more of us decided to leave or move jobs. Recruiting and retaining talent is hugely important to employers, and we know employers who invest in staff wellbeing are more likely to report having staff who are happy, productive and less likely to leave.”

A global perspective

While this guide is focused on the situation in the UK – with particular reference to the legal framework around the mental health of employees – the question of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is one which is rising up the agenda on a global basis. The [11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases \(ICD-11\)](#), for example, is only the second edition to include Burn-out, listed as an occupational phenomenon rather than a medical condition, and given a far more detailed definition than when first listed:

“Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;

increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job;

and

reduced professional efficacy.

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.”

A 2022 article published in Corporate Wellness Magazine brought together statistics from across the globe which indicate that, post-pandemic, the mental health of employees is worsening:

- 31% said that their mental health had declined over the past year, an increase on the figure of 24% recorded at the end of 2020
- 84% of workers had experienced at least one mental health challenge over the previous year, from stress and burnout to specific diagnosable conditions such as depression and anxiety
- The number of employees dealing with an issue such as anxiety had risen by 14% since 2020
- 59% of employees reported mental health condition affecting them at work, up from 48% in 2020

Looking at the situation from a global perspective, the World Health Organisation (WHO) produced a list of workplace risks to mental health which includes the following:

- An employee's skills being under—used
- An employee lacking the skills needed for the work in question
- Working hours which are long, unsocial or inflexible
- A lack of personal control over the workload or the design of the job
- Working conditions which are poor or unsafe
- An organisational culture which enables negative behaviours
- Limited support from colleagues or those in positions of authority
- An unclear job role
- Violence, harassment or bullying
- Under or over-promotion
- Discrimination or exclusion
- Job insecurity
- Poor investment in career development
- Conflicting demands on home and work life

The recommendations set out by the WHO are useful in as much as they form an overarching blueprint for creating a workplace culture which focuses on preventing risks to the mental health of employees and offering means of seeking help and support whenever mental health and wellbeing is negatively impacted. The circumstances in each individual workplace are clearly going to vary, but the blanket recommendation for organisational interventions which assess and then mitigate, modify or remove workplace risks to mental health is one which applies across the board. Interventions of this kind could include creating frameworks and processes for dealing with instances of violence, bullying or harassment in the workplace or simply offering employees more flexible working arrangements. More specifically, the recommendations of the WHO include instigating manager training in the area of mental health. Managers and supervisors who have been given training of this kind will be better equipped to:

- Recognise and respond to those employees who are experiencing emotional distress
- Enhance their own interpersonal skills in areas such as active listening and open communication
- Foster a better understanding of how stressful aspects of a particular job or workplace can affect mental health and how this can be managed

An exclusively 'top down' approach to improving mental health in the workplace is never going to be truly effective, however, and so equal attention needs to be paid to working from the ground floor up in order to provide initiatives such as:

- Training in mental health literacy and awareness, in order to improve the knowledge around mental health at the same time as reducing any stigma still attached to mental health conditions in the workplace
- Offering interventions which will help employees to build the skills needed to manage stress and reduce mental health symptoms. These could encompass everything from psychosocial interventions to leisure based physical activity and access to and training in the use of digital app based mental health tools.

On a very basic level, any employer seeking to embed a healthy attitude toward mental health across their workplace should seek to embed mental health, as a core issue rather than an optional extra, into any existing health and safety management system. The integration of mental health-based concerns into health and safety thinking needs to take place across all parts of the management system which operates in a workplace, from drawing up initial policies to organising, planning and implementing those policies and on to any evaluation of the policies and subsequent action for improvement. Any activities, policies or initiatives designed to bolster mental health in the workplace need to be developed on a collective basis, with meaningful input from employees and their representatives in identifying the factors across a workplace which put mental health at risk and helping to devise measures intended to mitigate that risk.

In simple terms, the strongest framework in the world isn't going to be effective unless the employees to whom it applies buy in to that framework fully, and that it far less likely to happen if it is imposed on them from on high rather than being developed organically with their input and insight.

Organisational interventions designed to create a framework of this kind will vary in specific detail from case to case, but it is possible to create a template which identifies specific aspects of any workplace which are potentially problematic, the risk associated with those aspects and the type of intervention which could help to put the problem right:

- Issue: task design or job content leading to a lack of variety in work, an under-use of the skills of an individual or the placing of an individual into a role for which they lack the necessary skills
- Potential Intervention: rotating tasks across a workforce and adopting a participatory approach to the design of jobs and tasks through input from employees
- Issue: an over intensive workload involving an excessively high working pace, extreme time pressures and continual tight deadlines, all exacerbated by understaffing.
- Potential Intervention: limits placed on the working hours or number of shifts of individual workers, collaboration with workers in setting achievable targets and deadlines and demands which are neither too low nor too high and staffing levels which are adequate for the work being done.
- Issue: a work schedule which features long or unsocial hours, shift working and inflexible shift patterns.
- Potential Interventions: a collaborative approach to scheduling work, flexible working arrangement offered to employees, planned and enforced breaks, and welfare facilities and support offered for those occasions when working unsocial or atypical hours is unavoidable.
- Issue: a lack of control over the work being done, either in the design of the job itself or the workload placed on an individual, with employees feeling they have little input into their own work.
- Possible Interventions: a collaborative approach to designing tasks and work delivery and open channels of communication between employees, line managers and executive levels.
- Issue: poor or unsafe working conditions including inadequate equipment, excessive noise, poor ergonomics etc.
- Possible Interventions: investment in improved equipment and an adherence to all health and safety regulations, via consultation with the employees.
- Issue: an organisational culture within the workplace which results in poor communication, particularly between management and employees, a poor understanding of organisational objectives, and a workplace in which discrimination, bullying and/or abuse happens under the radar.
- Possible Interventions: creating regular and ongoing opportunities for dialogue and consultation between line managers and employees, in order to build organisational frameworks for preventing abusive, bullying or discriminatory behaviour. The framework should include support for any workers who have been impacted by such behaviour.
- Issue: a lack of clarity around the job role within either the wider organisation or a specific team

- Potential Interventions: the creation, through a collaborative process, of clearly defined job roles, including structures for reporting along the management chain and specific performance requirements.
- Issue: poor work/life balance for employees
- Potential Interventions; offering flexible working arrangements and providing support for those employees combining work with a caring role.

The legal situation

The business case for thinking carefully about the mental health and wellbeing of employees is fairly clear, both on an individual basis and in terms of the wider societal and economic impact of poor mental health provision, but employers and employees alike need to be aware of the legal situation with regard to mental health in the workplace. In simple terms, the [Equality Act 2010](#) protects employees from discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics which include disability, with mental health problems being covered by disability under the Act. Further detail can be found in the [UK Government Office for Disability Issues Guidance15](#), which lists the following specific mental health conditions as being covered by the Act:

- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Panic attacks
- Phobias
- Unshared perceptions
- Eating disorders
- Bipolar affective disorders
- Obsessive compulsive disorders
- Personality disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Some self-harming behaviour
- Depression
- Schizophrenia

Under the auspices of the Act, it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee on the grounds of a mental disability, with discrimination defined in the following terms:

Direct – treating an employee less favourably than others on the basis of their mental health condition. This also applies to those cases in which an employee is discriminated against on the basis of an association with a person with mental health problems i.e. someone not

being given a promotion on the basis of the fact that they are a carer for a person with mental health issues.

Indirect – in which an employer applies a provision, criteria or practice which discriminates against employees with mental health issues. Indirect discrimination of this kind can be justified by employers on the basis that it is a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'. Although a 'legitimate aim' is not defined in the Act, examples might include:

- The health and safety of employees or people using a service
- The business needs of the employer
- The need to make a profit

The use of the word 'proportionate' means that there has to be a fair balance between the needs of the employer and the rights of the person with mental health issues and the burden in any case like this will be on the employer to show that the unfavourable treatment in question could be objectively justified.

Discrimination arising from disability – this refers to an employee being treated unfairly because of something which is connected to their mental health condition. As with indirect discrimination, the employer is entitled to claim that the treatment in question was 'proportionate to achieving a legitimate aim'. An employer can also claim that they didn't know or couldn't be reasonably expected to know that the worker had the mental health issue in question, but the onus is on the employer to take reasonable steps to ask the employee about any difficulties they face due to their mental health issues.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments – an employer has a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make conditions easier for the employee in question. There are no specific adjustments listed in the Act, but the [Statutory Code of Practice](#) Chapter 6 contains suggestions which include:

- Changing equipment
- Providing aids – including extra support and equipment
- Changing the location of work or allowing working from home
- Changing policies and procedures
- Allowing extra time off work eg for counselling or other medical appointments
- Allowing flexible working
- Changing the employee's role or parts of the employee's role
- Offering counselling or mentoring

In deciding what they regard as a 'reasonable' adjustment, an employer can take into account factors such as the size of an organisation and its financial situation, how much the change would cost to make, how helpful the adjustment would be and how practical the change would be.

The issue of work related stress is also covered by the law, in this case under Section 2 of the [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#), which states that employers have to try to remove

or reduce stress 'as far as is reasonably practical'. The [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#) includes a requirement for employers to carry out assessments of health and safety risks, and to identify measures which could reduce those risks, and this includes risks to mental health. In addition to the duties placed on employers by health and safety law, there is also a common law duty of care between an employer and an employee, which includes a duty not to cause 'psychiatric injury'. A study of tribunal cases related to stress at work shows that employees wishing to make a claim on the basis of their employer failing to meet this duty of care need to demonstrate that psychiatric injury has been caused, and that suffering stress alone is not enough for a tribunal case to succeed. In the case of psychiatric injury a successful claim will need to demonstrate that:

- There is expert medical evidence showing psychiatric injury
- The psychiatric injury was caused by work-related factors
- The psychiatric injury to the employee was reasonably foreseeable
- There was something that the employer reasonably could do to avoid the psychiatric injury

Employees also need to note that amendments to the Health and safety at Work Act 1974 introduced in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 shifted the burden of proof onto the employee, who now has to prove that an employer has been negligent. To prove negligence in the case of mental health in the workplace an employee will need to demonstrate the following:

- The employer had a duty of care towards them
- The employer did not take reasonable care to fulfil the duty
- The employer's actions actually caused injury
- The harm from the actions was foreseeable
- The negligence resulted in actual damages to the person, whether physical, mental or financial

Workplace mental health policy

In order to meet their duties under the various laws and regulations which cover mental health in the workplace, employers need to implement a workplace mental health policy, and if one is already in place it should be examined in depth and revised, if need be, in collaboration with the employees and/or the employee's representatives. An effective workplace mental health policy needs to cover the following aspects of a workplace:

- Recruitment and selection – it should encourage and support applicants with mental health issues and provide for reasonable adjustments to be made
- A definition of mental ill health – it should include a clear and concise definition of mental health problems which goes beyond stress or anxiety
- Holistic – the employer should take a holistic approach to mental health in the workplace, and so this particular policy needs to link to other policies and procedures, such as those covering flexible working, disability leave, career breaks,

grievances, disciplinary procedures, capability, sickness absence, performance management, substance abuse and dependency, dignity at work (bullying and harassment), training and development. It should identify how the mental health policy relates to these other policies and how they are used to help support people with mental health problems. An example would be absences which are related to disability (mental health in this case) being recorded separately to absences related to general sickness.

- Indicators – the policy should include details of the kind of signs which might indicate an employee is having problems with mental health, such as changes in their behaviour, as well as identifying the steps that the employer will take to support and promote mental health and wellbeing
- Stress management – details of how the mental health policy will be linked to health and safety policies, with reference to risk assessment and measures to control risks
- Line managers – the policy should identify the role to be played by line managers in encouraging people to talk about mental health problems and offering support
- Human resources – the policy should set out the role to be played by the HR department, including the role played in monitoring the effectiveness of the policy and of those other policies linked to mental health in the workplace. Specific services to be offered through HR might include occupational health or access to a confidential counselling service.
- Employees – the policy should set out the responsibilities which employees have towards each other on mental health issues, possibly including roles for specific employees such as mental health first aiders
- Awareness – setting out how the policy will be promoted, and how awareness and understanding will be shared across the organisation
- Contacts – a list of contacts – internal and external – for employees to contact should they need help or support for themselves or for someone else within the organisation, and details of the support on offer in the local community

Once the policy has been drawn up and is in place, training needs to be provided in order to support its practical application. This training needs to include mental health first aid, which involves employees being trained in identifying, understanding and helping any person who may be developing a mental health issue. This training includes being taught how to recognise the common first signs of mental ill health, as well as how to provide support on a first aid basis in the first instance, and offer guidance toward the right support services going forward. Once in place, the policy also needs to be supported via an organisation-wide campaign which offers:

- Information on mental health wellbeing and mental ill health
- Details of the help available and the workplace policy
- Details of the sources of help and advice available locally
- Details of the mental health first aid arrangements in the workplace

Practical Steps

The overarching approach to instigating effective mental health and wellbeing policies within a workplace needs to put the emphasis squarely on clear communication and effective people management skills. These can help to stop problems remaining undetected and being allowed to escalate in severity before being dealt with.

Induction

In practical terms, any work related mental health policy will have to begin with the induction programme offered by the organisation. This should cover any employees who are new to the organisation, as well as those who have been redeployed or promoted. Starting in a new role – particularly within an entirely new organisation – is clearly a potentially unsettling experience, and if employees are given insufficient or poor quality guidance on the expectations and processes in place then confidence could be severely undermined and new problems triggered or existing problems exacerbated. An induction programme which works effectively should include the following:

- Explanation of how the individual will fit into the team and how their specific role aligns with the aims and strategies of the wider organisation
- One to one meetings with the new employee and their line manager, and also with other key employees. If face to face meetings are impractical they should take place online.
- An explanation of how other parts of the organisation function
- Health and safety information (including provisions for mental health) as required by law
- A clear explanation of terms and conditions, alongside details such as pay and benefits
- An explanation of the history of the organisation, including the culture and values it upholds
- A clear outline of the specific job role and the requirements and expectations attached to it
- Information on working patterns, such as details of flexible working or homeworking

Many organisations – post-pandemic – are now operating a hybrid working model, and this will need to be incorporated within the induction process, particularly if the employee in question is new to hybrid working. In addition, the chance to build working relationships with fellow employees will need to be instigated via introductory meetings, which can take place remotely if need be.

Management

The day-to-day management of employees can have a direct and powerful influence on their mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Effective line management can play a key role in supporting the wellbeing of employees, making it much more likely that any early signs of distress will be spotted and early intervention made possible. The [2020/21 Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) found that only 66% of employees felt that their manager supported their mental health, and of those that felt their manager did not support their mental health, 72% had experienced anxiety in the last month alone. Further research by CIPD has found that –

in the view of HR professionals – the style of management in an organisation is the third main cause of work related stress. Taken together, these statistics help to underline just how important the approach taken by managers is when it comes to protecting the mental health and wellbeing of employees. By building a culture in which trust-based relationships thrive in an atmosphere of communication and respect, managers can empower their employees to speak up about issues around mental health in the workplace safe in the knowledge that they will be listened to, understood and supported.

A management culture of this kind will only embed itself within an organisation if it can be seen to be supported from the top. The senior management team, and the approach they take to issues of mental health in the workplace, will have a direct and consequential bearing on the approach taken by line managers and, subsequently, the ethos in place across an organisation. One practical example of a ‘through line’ of mental health awareness is that line managers supporting employees should be given the appropriate training in the management skills the role demands, and should be offered support of their own, as supporting employees with mental health issues can be a stressful experience in and of itself.

Creating a Culture

The right management style can play a huge role in creating a positive culture across an organisation, and managers can take the following practical and relatively simple steps to ensure that this type of culture becomes embedded:

- Lead by example when it comes to healthier, stress-reducing work habits. Managers should ensure, for example, that they work reasonable hours, take proper lunch breaks, take annual leave and place barriers between work and home life to maintain a healthy work/life balance.
- Enhance knowledge around matters of mental health and wellbeing by becoming fully conversant with all of the policies the organisation has in place as well as taking advantage of resources such as the wealth of material available at the [MIND website](#).
- Talk to employees on a regular basis to find out how they are feeling and create space and opportunities for them to raise any issues which they might be finding stressful. By making it ok to raise both work and home issues, if desired, managers can help to normalise the issue of mental health and wellbeing.
- Include wellbeing as an item on the agenda at any team meeting, enabling members of the team to raise any issues which might be impacting negatively. Once raised, issues such as this can be examined in detail, and an action plan drawn up to address them.
- Instigate regular one-to-one and catch-up sessions with employees in order to build strong relationships. Extra care needs to be taken to ensure that those team members who are working remotely know how and when they can contact line managers in this way, whether that is via email, phone or a digital platform.
- Involve employees in discussions around how the team is run and the way their role should be carried out. Use these discussions as a chance to make sure that all employees understand how their role relates to the wider aims and vision of the organisation, to ensure that they don't feel they are working in isolation.

- Enable employee development through coaching and learning opportunities, so that all employees feel they have the skills and confidence needed to deliver their role to the highest standards. This can involve both formal training and regular work-related feedback.
- Set an example of teamwork, collaboration and transparency in the way you manage a team in order to promote that approach within the team and throughout the wider organisation.

The key to all of this is an approach in which employees are regularly asked if they are ok in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, and feel able to answer honestly in the expectation that help and support will be forthcoming. By adopting this approach, employers will create a culture in which employees feel empowered to raise any problems they have at the earliest possible opportunity, thus making it possible to find support and a solution before the problem in question spirals out of control.

Catch-up session and one-to one supervisions need to take place in a private and confidential space in which the employee feels comfortable and on an equal footing with their line manager. In some cases there may be a specific cause for concern, such as a dip in performance or increased absences from work, and these should be addressed as early in the process as possible. Managers need to understand that people don't always feel comfortable when discussing issues of this kind, and so any questions asked need to be simple, sympathetic and relatively neutral, designed to provide opportunities for the employee to open up and discuss how they are feeling if that's what they want to do. A line manager needs to ensure that the conversation can take place without interruptions, which includes switching phones off, and other tips include speaking calmly, listening carefully and actively, being prepared for periods of silence, focussing on the employee and not the 'problem', avoiding any assumptions and using open questions such as 'How are you doing at the moment?' Line managers should also ask employees whether they would like any of the issues discussed to be shared with colleagues. While confidentiality is the default setting, employees may sometimes feel helped and supported by having the people around them aware of any issue which they are dealing with. Where confidentiality in general is concerned, the duty of care of a manager means that they will be obliged to break that confidentiality if they feel that the employee is suffering a crisis which puts that employee, or anyone else, at risk of harm. The circumstances under which any information shared may need to be disclosed should be outlined to the employee at the start of any discussion.

Employees

Although much of the emphasis on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is placed on the role played by management – the people who, after all, set the culture of the workplace – there are some simple steps which employees can take to improve their own mental health in the workplace. The first of these is to set boundaries with fellow employees and managers around the workload being taken on and the targets being given. In practical terms, setting boundaries of this kind often amounts to saying 'no' when asked to take on extra responsibilities which the employee feels would leave them feeling overstretched or stressed. Boundaries of this kind can play a positive role in maintaining a healthy work/life balance, but once the time has been freed up it needs to be utilised in the best way possible. The specifics will vary from person to person, but a healthy work/life balance means spending the time away from work doing things which promote relaxation and well-being. For some people this may mean physical activity or practicing a form of meditation, while for others it could mean pursuing a hobby or simply spending quality time with their family. For everyone it means freeing up time away from work and spending that time doing things which make you happy. If someone works from home a key part of this might involve getting

away from the part of the house where the work is carried out, and putting down or turning off the device which they usually use. The issue of communication has been covered in depth, but as important as the approach taken by management is, it won't work unless the employee being communicated with is honest about how they feel and what they need. Employees should never assume that the problems they are experiencing are apparent from the outside, and if the culture in the workplace encourages honesty and openness they should take full advantage. Even if a workplace fails in their duty of care toward an employee, the fact that they were willing to go on the record and set out the degree to which they were struggling will help if action such as going to a tribunal needs to be taken.

Wellbeing Apps

One of the latest tools in the armoury of any employer wishing to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their employee is the use of apps designed to make it easier for people to access help, support, advice and, in some cases, direct therapy, all accessed via a mobile device. Many of the leading providers of mental health apps offer solutions specifically designed to be used by employers as a means of helping their employees to avoid stress and anxiety. The fact that apps of this kind can be accessed 24/7 makes them particularly useful for employees who may wish to access help and support in the privacy of their own home or at least when away from the workplace. Among the leading mental health apps are the following:

- [Headspace](#) – a mindfulness app which is offered as an employee benefit by companies such as Google LinkedIn and Monzo. It includes tools which help to support healthy sleeping, eating and financial mindfulness.
- [Calm](#) – this app aims to increase mindfulness and improve sleep patterns, and is one of the most popular mental health apps in the world. It offers guided meditations, a library of resources such as guided sleep stories read by the likes of Matthew McConaughey and Stephen Fry and virtual classes led by wellness experts.
- [Talkspace](#) – this is an app which connects users with therapists and specialists, making it much easier than would usually be the case for employees to connect with mental health professionals. It also includes a personalised self-help toolkit and access to wellness exercises.
- [Happify](#) – Happify by Twill is an app which promises 'science based activities and games'. The activities in question are based around cognitive behavioural therapy and enable users to build an on-going 'happiness score' based on data about activities, activities and behaviours.
- [Ginger](#) – companies which use the corporate version of Ginger include BuzzFeed, TaskRabbit and Sephora, taking advantage of help with issues such as sleeping problems, depression and anxiety. The Ginger app connects users with practitioners such as therapists, psychologists and mental health coaches for video sessions at any time of the day, as well as providing access to a library of mindfulness exercises.

Good Practice Examples

The ethical and responsible investment management company [CCLA](#) recently began measuring the 100 largest UK-listed companies with more than 10,000 employees using a set of Corporate Mental Health Benchmarks which were drawn up in collaboration with workplace mental health experts, data providers, charities and UK-listed and global companies. This action came about in response to a growing awareness of how important the mental health and wellbeing of employees was to the ethical framework of an

organisation, and of how much of a consideration it now needed to be for any prospective investors. The companies in question represent 11 industry sectors:

- Communications
- Consumer (Discretionary and Staples)
- Energy
- Finance
- Health Care
- Industrials
- Information Technology
- Materials
- Real Estate
- Utilities

In total, the companies in question have a combined workforce of more than five million employees.

The [first UK 100 report](#), published in 2022, ranks these companies on the basis of benchmarking ranges across four core areas:

- Management commitment and policy
- Governance and management
- Leadership and innovation
- Performance reporting and impact

The benchmarking places the companies into five tiers, with those in Tier One being described in these terms: 'Companies are leading the way on workplace mental health management and disclosure', while the description of Tier Two companies is: "Companies are well on the way to demonstrating a strategic approach to workplace mental health management and disclosure."

The following quotes are taken from relevant materials published by those companies which made it into Tier One or Tier Two of the rankings, and demonstrate the kind of approach taken to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace by those companies who can be judged to be doing things in the right way.

Centrica – Tier One

Our people are fundamental to us achieving our goals. We work collaboratively to create a culture of mutual trust and respect, where our people feel motivated and able to develop their skills and experience, so that we can be an employer of choice and trusted corporate citizen.

We believe that the health and wellbeing of our people is vital to our business success and recognise the potential impact that work can have on their physical and mental health and wellbeing. (From 'Our Code')

J Sainsbury - Tier Two

Our wellbeing commitment: Every colleague will have access to mental health and wellbeing support through tools and other resources that enable them to make positive and proactive choices to thrive in all aspects of life.

Looking after our colleagues:

Our colleagues are at the heart of everything we do. They make a big difference to our customers, serving them well day in, day out, and we know that having happy, healthy, and engaged colleagues is critical to the long-term success of our business. (From 'Colleague Mental Health and Wellbeing')

Serco Group – Tier One

Serco recognises the importance of employee wellbeing, engagement, retention, and attraction to ensuring a positive and productive working environment. At Serco we define 'wellbeing' as having strong relationships – both inside and outside of work, providing employees with good work that is interesting and for which they are rewarded appropriately, an environment where we promote physical and psychological good health and provide early intervention and proactive support to employees to promote their wellbeing.

Applicability: Serco Group covering all business regions, operating companies and business units throughout the world, covering:

- Employees, officers, directors and individuals working as consultants and contractors and any other parties acting as representatives or agents of Serco (Employees)*
- Wholly owned subsidiaries and majority-owned operations*

Where a minority interest and in regard to its subcontractors and suppliers Serco encourages alignment with this Standard. (From 'Group Standard Employee Wellbeing')

Centrica – Tier One

Senior oversight

The Board has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the health and wellbeing of colleagues. Our Group Chief Executive supports the Board in this duty by delegating oversight to the Group People Officer, who reviews plans and performance quarterly to ensure frequent review and oversight, with improvements made as needed.

A detailed MyHealth report with key insights and actions is also shared quarterly with wider Business Leaders, HR Partners, safety teams and trade union working groups. This enables key people across the business as well as those connected to our business, to better understand colleague wellbeing and take action in the respective areas they're responsible for.

Day-to-day management

We've dedicated people in place to ensure the strong day-to-day management of colleague wellbeing via collaboration between the Wellbeing Benefits Team and the Health Care team. Together, they not only manage and enhance the suite of support available for colleagues, but work at ways to increasingly inspire colleagues to take positive steps to manage their health and wellbeing. Should a colleague need time away from work to get better, absence is recorded in our HR management system to formalise the process and ensure colleagues receive the further help they may need via MyHealth. All sickness absences are passed to our MyHealth Case Management team to assess and triage each absence within 24 to 48 hours, and depending on the nature of sickness, will drive further interventions via MyHealth to ensure appropriate treatment or action is provided with underlying issues identified and addressed wherever possible. It's in everyone's interest for colleagues to get better so line managers will also have guided conversations with the person affected at key stages of absence, to see how they're doing and monitor when and how they're best to come back to work. This may include a phased return so that they don't take on too much too soon. (From 'Our Health and Wellbeing Statement 2021)

Anglo American – Tier One

Taking care of mental health: In line with our Global Mental Health Framework, in 2021, we provided immediate mental health support to our people by introducing several initiatives through our WeCare programme. We have trained more than 530 mental health first aiders globally, so that they can offer our workers support specific to Covid-19. We also gave all colleagues access to a global mindfulness and guided meditation app, and offered counselling through employee assistance programmes. (From 'Sustainability Report')

Lloyds Banking Group – Tier One

Our Mental Health Advocate programme continues and we have surpassed our target of training 2,500 colleagues for this role. This network proactively works to raise awareness of mental health and support our colleagues by signposting to professional support. We will continue to work with Mental Health UK to maintain this number of Mental Health Advocates and to ensure that support for this network continues.

The Group has extended our partnership with Headspace for a further two years, offering all colleagues a free subscription to the market-leading meditation app, providing access to mindfulness modules covering a range of topics from stress to self-esteem. These initiatives continue to help us to change our culture around mental health, and empower our colleagues to openly talk about, and take ownership for, their own wellbeing and take action to support it. Over 18,000 colleagues have registered and 20 per cent are using the Headspace app regularly.

The EAP, run by Validium, provides colleagues and their families with free confidential support and advice on a range of issues from health and wellbeing related issues to financial issues. It is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, ensuring that support is always available. From January to October 2021, over 24,000 calls and formal counselling sessions took place. While calls are up 67 per cent, counselling cases are down 10 per cent, indicating that colleagues are taking steps to proactively manage their mental health. (From 2021 'ESG Report')