

Mental health in the workplace

Our engagement programme



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Executive summary

Mental health awareness is nothing new; the oldest UK mental health charity was founded in 1879.¹

However, in the past decade, progress has been made in shifting mental health from a problem battled in private and weighed down by stigma, to one that is openly discussed and debated across the globe.

Poor mental health represents the largest single cause of disability in the UK and is responsible for 23% of NHS pharmaceutical costs. It accounts for 14% of certified sickness absences in the UK, translating to a loss of approximately 80 million working days every year.^{2,3}

There is, however, a growing recognition that employers can make a huge difference to individuals' mental health, and in doing so, improve the health of society at large. By directing resources thoughtfully, not only can we improve the wellbeing of our employees but also create a workforce that is more productive and with fewer absences to sickness. Employee health and corporate health are intrinsically linked.⁴

To businesses, poor workplace mental health should be a cause for concern; it costs UK employers between £42 billion and £45 billion every year, accounted for by a combination of sickness absence, lost productivity and outgoings associated with staff turnover. This equates to an average cost per employee of £1,652 in the private sector.⁵ We are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis in the UK and in order to address it, we must look to remedy the psychological distress of today's workforce.

Why mental health?

As investors, we want the companies in which we invest to be successful. We believe that the human and economic costs associated with poor workplace mental health represent a substantial obstacle to this success.

There is a wealth of data to demonstrate that in the long-term, the most successful and competitive companies are those that have the best health and safety records, and the most physically and mentally healthy workers.⁶ As investors, we try to be responsible stewards of our clients' assets; we also aim to invest in successful companies. Pushing for progress in workplace mental health is a moral and economic imperative.



What have we done?

CCLA's mental health engagement programme was launched in February 2019. Using the recommendations set out by the government-commissioned 'Thriving at Work' report and with the support of an expert advisory committee, we created a set of five best practice measures.

1. Establish a mental health at work plan that outlines the approach to improving and protecting the mental health of employees and regular contractors.
2. Promote mental health awareness amongst employees and clearly 'signpost' the support provided.
3. Integrate mental health safeguarding into:
 - a) job design
 - b) workplace conditions.
4. Train line managers in mental health.
5. Monitor and report on employee mental health and wellbeing.

Armed with these asks, we wrote to and met a select group of investee companies with an underlying workforce of approximately 400,000 people.

While some of the businesses have gone above and beyond legislated minimum standards, others have made little or no progress. Fortunately, most large organisations are making efforts to improve workplace mental health. However, we are only at the beginning of this journey and it will take a concerted effort to establish mental health as an equal to physical health and safety in the corporate mindset.

Our vision

Through focused dialogue and ongoing engagement, our aim is to:

1. drive workplace mental health to the top of the corporate agenda
2. build a substantial coalition of investors to push for improvement
3. boost the mental wellbeing of workers across all sectors and industries.



Context

Why is discussion of mental health so topical? Because put simply, it is a huge problem.

Poor mental health represents the largest single cause of disability in the UK and is responsible for 23% of NHS pharmaceutical costs. It accounts for 14% of certified sickness absences in the UK, translating to a loss of approximately 80 million working days every year.^{7,8}

Discussions about mental health are becoming more commonplace in society; however, it continues to be a difficult subject for companies and their employees. In a workplace environment it can be harder for employees to be open, particularly if they do not believe their employer will be understanding or have the resources in place to help. By directing our efforts thoughtfully, not only can we improve the wellbeing of our workforce, but also create an environment that is healthier and more productive.

This paper aims to outline what is meant by mental health, the statistics behind the problem, and what employers can do to help. It also looks at why corporations should take mental health seriously by exploring the strong ethical, legal and business cases for doing so. Finally, we discuss CCLA's mental health engagement programme and its success to date.

Very few investors have addressed mental health in the workplace, leading to little pressure on investee companies from their ultimate owners. At CCLA, we believe that good mental health is inextricably linked with corporate success and that it is an area of utmost importance.

Why is CCLA focusing on mental health?

- We want the companies in which we invest to be successful, and we believe that good mental health in the workplace is essential to this success.
- As responsible investors, we believe we are in a unique position to be able to sway and change corporate behaviour.
- We believe that the workplace is a setting that can assist in the identification of mental illness, and the facilitation of proper treatment.⁹
- We believe that creating a workplace that does no harm to the mental or physical health of workers is a moral necessity.¹⁰
- Creating a positive environment for mental health demonstrably costs less than failing to do so.¹¹
- Although employers are legally bound to assess risks to mental health, there is no guidance on what they should do with the results.^{12,13} We believe we can help.
- In 2017 poor mental health cost the UK economy between 3.6% and 4.9% of GDP.¹⁴ We believe that with the right tools, employers can pull these figures meaningfully down.
- The current socioeconomic factors pose an unprecedented challenge to mental health; employers must act early to offset the effects.

What is mental health?

Mental health is not the same as 'mental ill health'. It is a continuum that includes emotional wellbeing, mental health conditions and mental illness. We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. The World Health Organisation defines good mental health as:

*'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her society.'*¹⁵

'Poor mental health' includes the full spectrum, from common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression, to more severe illnesses, such as bipolar and schizophrenia.

'Mental health at work' includes not only mental health problems that have been caused by work, but also those that are brought to and experienced in the workplace.¹⁶

Definitions of a 'healthy workplace' have evolved over past decades, from an almost exclusive focus on the physical work environment (traditional occupational health and safety, dealing with physical, chemical, biological and ergonomic hazards), to a much broader definition, that includes lifestyle and psychosocial factors as well.¹⁷

Mental health in the UK: statistics

Human cost

- One in six of the total population is currently experiencing a mental health problem.¹⁸ The great majority of those affected are in the working-age population.¹⁹
- Among the adult population, one in four have a mental health issue in any given year.²⁰
- In 2014, one in six adults in England met the criteria for a common mental disorder in the past week. Of these, around half had more severe symptoms.²¹
- One in five adults have considered taking their own life at some point.²²

Economic cost

- The cost of poor mental health to government is between £24 billion and £27 billion per year. This includes benefits costs, falls in tax revenue and costs to the NHS.²³
- Poor mental health costs the UK economy between £74 billion and £99 billion a year equating to between 3.6% and 4.9% of total GDP.^{24 25 26}
- Mental health is the single largest cause of disability in the UK accounting for approximately 22% of the total, compared to 16% for cancers and 16% for cardiovascular diseases.²⁷

Mental health in the workplace

In 2017 the incumbent Conservative Party's election manifesto aimed, 'to transform how mental health is regarded in the workplace,' acknowledging that the existing level of support was inadequate.²⁸ The government commissioned a review into workplace mental health by Lord Stevenson and Paul Farmer (CEO of mental health charity, Mind, and Chair of the NHS Mental Health Taskforce).

The resulting report, 'Thriving at Work', can be regarded as a tipping point in the broad acknowledgement that employers can have a tangible impact on improving the mental wellbeing of their workers.

How does poor mental health display itself in the workplace?

- **Sickness absence:** Mental health is the top cause of long-term absence from work.²⁹ Poor data – and difficulty collecting it – means that the problem is often hidden.
- **Presenteeism:** This is defined as showing up to work when one is ill, resulting in a loss of productivity (and often making the individual's condition worse).³⁰

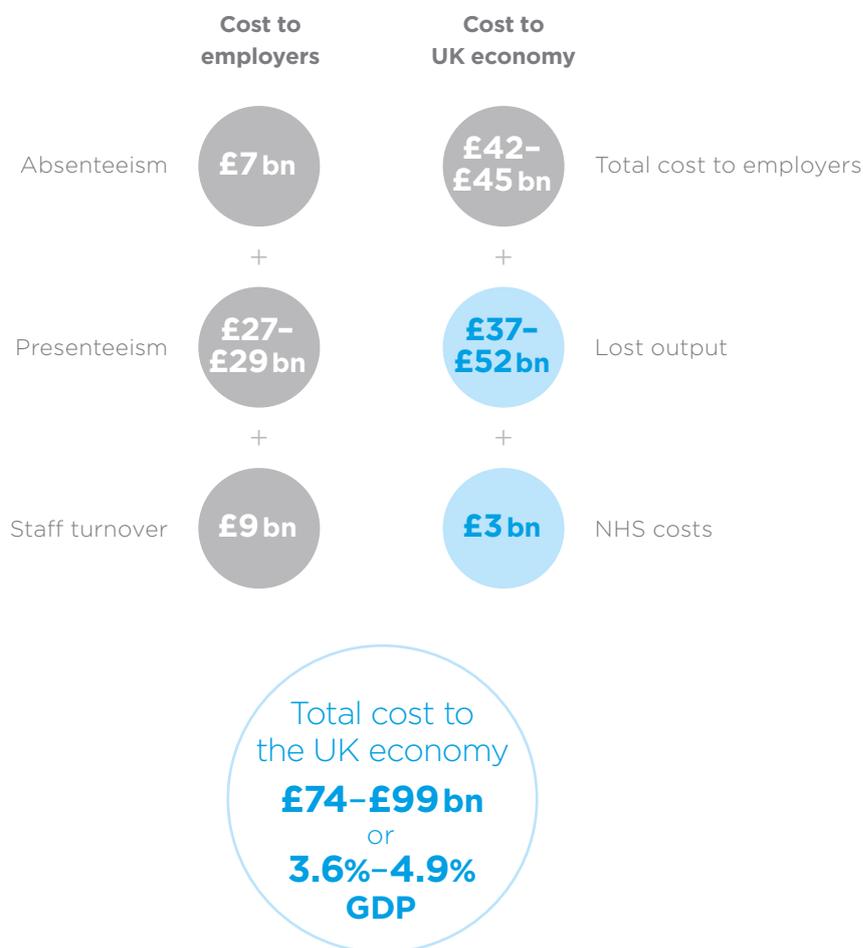
- **Limiting progression:** Employees tend to perceive that having a mental health problem will limit their progression, so choose not to discuss it. Less than half of employees would talk to their manager in the event of being stressed or anxious at work, and more than one in five would not talk to anyone at work.³¹
- **Staff turnover:** An employee may leave if they feel they are unable to continue due to poor mental health, or because of the impact of work on their mental wellbeing. The employer must bear the cost of recruitment, temporary staff, training and reduced productivity.
- **Impact on wider workforce:** If an employee is absent from work, others are left with an increased workload, with consequences including heightened stress, poor morale and lower productivity.
- **Newer trend of 'leaveism':** where employees take annual leave instead of sick leave, take unfinished work home or work while on holiday. Lack of time away from work can lead to lower productivity, stress and burnout.^{32 33}



'Thriving at Work' aimed to evaluate the cost of poor mental health to employers, broken down into expense incurred as a result of absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover. What it does not

quantify is the knock-on effects to the wider workforce; we can assume that the invisible secondary and tertiary effects magnify the figures, outlined below.

The cost of poor mental health



The cost to employers equates to an average of **£1,652 per employee** in the private sector. This is for **every employee**, not only those who are ill.

Source: Hampson and Jacob, (2020); and Steven and Farmer (2017).

Why should employers address mental health in the workplace?

The ethical case

Moral duty and social responsibility

Every major philosophy and religion highlights the importance of a personal moral code to define interactions with others. The most basic ethical principle deals with avoiding doing harm to others.³⁴ Unfortunately, this code isn't always applied to business. While work can be extraordinarily beneficial to one's wellbeing, for many, it can be the root cause of a mental health problem; the most common manifestations of which are depression and anxiety.

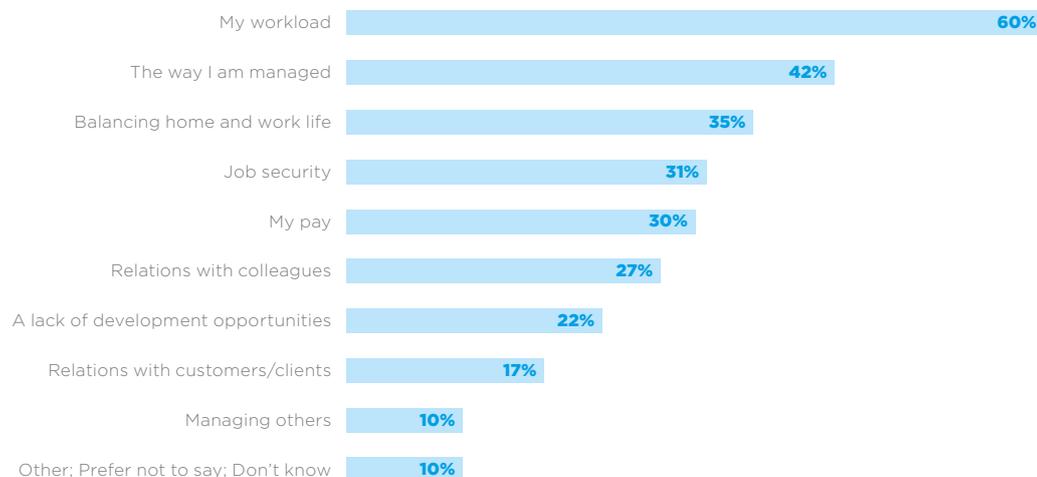
There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that one of the major triggers of mental ill health is stress, frequently caused by an individual's working conditions.³⁵ Indeed, work-related stress accounts for an average of 24 days of work lost for every person affected.³⁶ The cause of stress at work is multi-faceted (see below), indicating that the solution is not a simple one. However, we believe that employers have a moral and ethical duty not to cause psychological injury, and that they must, therefore, endeavour to address these issues.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals

'Good health and well-being: ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'; this is the United Nation's (UN) third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).³⁷ Although the emphasis is on physical health, the third progress assessment relates to, 'non-communicable diseases, mental health and environmental risks.'³⁸

The SDGs were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty and ensure a better planet for future generations. Importantly, it is recognised that action in each of these areas is interlinked. The mission cannot and will not be realised unless we take mental health – as part of the 17-piece SDG jigsaw – seriously. Achieving the SDGs requires a cohesive effort by governments, the private sector, civil society and citizens alike.³⁹ Employers must do their bit.

Which, if any, of the following have caused you to feel stressed and/or anxious about work?



Source: Stress and anxiety at work: personal or cultural? (2019); https://archive.acas.org.uk/media/6245/Stress-and-anxiety-at-work-personal-or-cultural/pdf/Stress_and_anxiety_at_work_personal_or_cultural.pdf

Note: Multiple response question; percentages do not sum to 100.

The business case

Duty of care

Regardless of the size of a company, employers have a duty of care under UK law to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees. This includes assessment of the risks arising from hazards at work, including work-related mental health problems.

To create a mentally healthy workplace, employers must develop a comprehensive strategy that:

- promotes wellbeing for all staff
- tackles work-related mental health problems
- supports staff who are experiencing mental distress.⁴⁰

Corporate profitability

The case for employers promoting health and wellbeing goes far beyond their statutory obligations. Mental ill health is the highest cause of long-term absence from work and accounted for 57% of the total number of lost working days in the UK in 2018.^{41 42}

Most companies are in business to make money. Non-profit organisations are in business to achieve their missions. All workplaces require effective workers to achieve their goals, and there is a strong business case to be made for ensuring that workers are mentally *and* physically healthy.⁴³

It has been estimated that mental ill health in the workplace costs employers between £42 billion and £45 billion a year, equating to an average cost per employee of £1,652 in the private sector (this is the cost for every employee; not only those who are ill).^{44 45} A significant proportion relates to the 300,000 people who leave work each year because of a long-term mental health problem. The resulting staff turnover costs to the employer are estimated to be £9 billion each year.^{46 47}

Creating a positive environment for mental health demonstrably costs less than failing to do so.⁴⁸ A study published by Deloitte in 2020 shows that returns from investing in mental health in the workplace is overwhelmingly positive: the average return to employers for every £1 spent was £5, up from the £4 to £1 return identified in 2017.⁴⁹ This has been supported by international academic literature in the form of meta-studies.⁵⁰

At a time of extreme pressure to cut costs, enhancing workers' wellbeing seems an obvious first step.

ACAS STUDY FINDINGS

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) highlighted the impact that mental ill health can have on organisations. It found that:

- 37% of sufferers are more likely to get into conflict with colleagues
- 57% find it harder to juggle multiple tasks
- 80% find it difficult to concentrate
- 62% take longer to do tasks
- 50% are less patient with customers/clients.⁵²

Our work

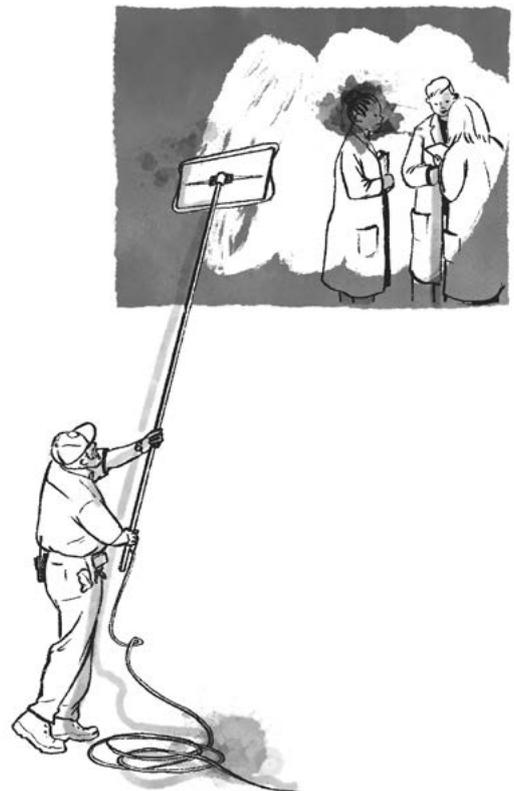
Promoting employee mental health at the companies in which we invest is a key engagement priority. We began our mental health engagement programme in February 2019, with the support of the Church Investors Group (CIG), with combined assets under management of £30 billion. Using the recommendations set out by the 'Thriving at Work' report, and the input of an expert advisory committee, we created a set of five, workable best practice measures for companies to address.

1. Establish a mental health at work plan that outlines the approach to improving and protecting the mental health of employees and regular contractors.
2. Promote mental health awareness amongst employees and clearly 'signpost' the support provided.
3. Integrate mental health safeguarding into:
 - a) job design
 - b) workplace conditions.
4. Train line managers in mental health.
5. Monitor and report on employee mental health and wellbeing.

In order to maximise the impact of our engagement programme, we selected and wrote to 11 UK-listed financial services and pharmaceutical companies, each with a very large, global workforce: AstraZeneca, Barclays, Compass Group, Dechra Pharmaceutical, GlaxoSmithKline, HSBC, Lloyds, Prudential, RBS, Roche and Standard Chartered. Our 11 target companies employ between them approximately 400,000 UK workers, resulting in wide positive reverberations should management choose to embrace our recommendations.

We received a response from all 11 companies and have held face-to-face meetings with almost all of them. While many businesses are at the very beginning of their journey to create a more supportive and mentally healthy workplace, every single one of them is keen to engage and improve. Nonetheless, there is a broad recognition that although the measures are practical and cheap to implement, building a permissive culture takes time. As the managing director of one company put it:

'Protecting mental health is about culture change, and changing the culture of a workplace is not something that can happen overnight and cannot be dictated. It must be created organically, by leaders who are able to empower their employees to be open and bring their true selves without fear of judgement or discrimination.'



Our findings

Our research showed that there is a wide disparity between employers.

Meetings with employers revealed a range of approaches to mental health in the workplace; some companies go well beyond the standards we are pushing for, while others have made little or no progress in the area.

All but two of the companies we met have developed (or were in the process of developing) a mental health at work plan. This should be applauded. For some businesses, however, it was unclear to us whether the plan was systematic, or simply hinged upon willing leaders in distinct business units. There is some way to go before mental health is institutionalised to the same extent as physical health and safety.

Two of the elements most frequently raised were line manager training and employee feedback. Most companies provide some form of mental health training for managers, who are, after all, on the front line in assisting team members, with a particularly important role to play in job design.

Wellbeing and satisfaction surveys are employed widely to gauge worker sentiment. There is, however, less evidence that the information is used to its full potential. We were looking for confirmation that scores might be reflected in, for example, manager appraisals, remuneration or disciplinary procedures. In addition, it was not always clear what process the businesses would follow on identifying a problem 'hotspot'.

Company	1. Does the company have a mental health at work plan	2. Promote mental health awareness amongst employers and regular contractors?	3a. Integrate mental health safeguarding in job design?	3b. Integrate mental health safeguarding in workplace conditions?	4. Are managers trained on mental health?	5. Are steps taken to monitor and report on employee mental health and wellbeing?
Financial A	●	●	○	●	○	○
Financial B	○	○	○	○	○	○
Financial C	●	●	○	○	○	○
Financial D	●	○	●	●	●	●
Financial E	●	●	○	●	●	○
Financial F	●	○	●	●	○	○
Pharma A	●	●	○	○	○	○
Pharma B	●	●	○	●	●	○
Pharma C	Meeting scheduled for 2020					
Pharma D	●	●	●	●	○	○

- Best practice
- Good practice
- Some practice
- Poor practice

Source: CCLA.

The most divisive topic was how to assess the success of a workplace mental health programme. Very few businesses are setting key performance indicators (KPIs) on employee mental health; fewer still are reporting on the success or otherwise of their work. This is a difficult issue and there is no consensus. The best example we identified was monitoring the uptake of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the number of sick days taken due to mental ill-health. If done properly, an effective mental health programme should result initially in a rise in the number of mental health sick days taken, and a rise in the use of the EAP. If successful, the number of mental health sick days should start to go down.

In the following pages we share real-life case studies, informed by our meetings with the companies in question. We hope that the material will be useful for employers looking to address our recommendations.

Next steps

Workplace mental health has rocketed up the corporate agenda and it is clear that leading organisations are making efforts to make mental health a board level issue. The bad news is that time and time again, we are told by companies that we are the only investors asking questions about mental health and wellbeing.

Our goal is to build a large mental health investor coalition, working together to engage with companies from all sectors and industries. While external socioeconomic factors begin to take their toll, companies across the world must act before mental health becomes the next global pandemic.



Case studies

1. Establish a mental health at work plan that outlines the approach to improving and protecting the mental health of employees and regular contractors

Most of the companies that we met have a formal mental health plan in place, the oldest of which was developed in 2012. In most cases, mental health stands alone as a single issue, although in one notable example, mental health is part of the company's 'Global Wellbeing Programme'. This includes workplace culture and physical, mental, social and financial health. Given calls to lend equal priority and value to mental and physical health ('parity of esteem')⁵¹, a plan that combines them seems a sensible approach.

Many of the mental health at work plans are reported to the company board. In the best examples, responsibility for implementation lies with senior leaders (or a dedicated committee that includes senior members of staff).

Mental health monitoring is undertaken extensively by use of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), staff surveys and information relating to staff absence. It was not always clear to us how the data is used in efforts to improve overall wellbeing.

2. Promote mental health awareness amongst employees and clearly 'signpost' the support provided

There are four main ways in which the companies we spoke to promote mental health awareness:

1. Office-based mental health events, often live, mostly annual, with a view to raising awareness of mental health in the workplace. One company runs a mental health conference; another broadcasts a video globally with footage of employees sharing their mental health experiences.
2. Internal mental health campaigns, such as 'Speak Up', 'Be Well' and 'This is Me', to reduce the stigma attached to mental ill-health and encourage employees to share their history.
3. Three of the companies we met have built an online community for employees, used as a forum for shared mental health experience and coping strategies (one company did this in collaboration with Mind). This appears to be an effective way of engaging employees and has a good take-up.
4. A successful approach used by some is encouraging senior leaders to share publicly their experience of mental ill-health. Others invite external people or organisations to speak on the subject. Examples include well-known footballers, actors, charities and the NHS.

3. a)

Integrate mental health safeguarding into job design

Around half of the companies we met encourage agile/remote working where appropriate and say that they allow flexible hours and job share arrangements. Two companies have taken proactive steps to assess and re-evaluate existing job design with a view to improving employee wellbeing. The most successful of these commissioned a consulting firm to examine working hours/days and commuting arrangements for a select business unit. The recommended measures resulted in increased employee engagement and improved customer service.

Two companies ask line managers to discuss their job with their reports on a regular basis – at one company, these discussions take place every three months. Feedback is collated and used to inform and adjust job design, including content of work, organisation, social factors and the working environment.

3. b)

Integrate mental health safeguarding into workplace conditions

Most of the companies that we spoke to have an EAP in place, although – despite significant advertising – take-up is at best just 18%. Some of the companies couldn't specify a figure and one company believes the EAP provider is responsible for the low usage rate.

Where workplace conditions are immutable, companies offer training to support their staff in areas such as energy, resilience, mental health and wellbeing. One employer provides an on-site occupational health training provider and in-house nurse. Another has an on-site psychologist at some locations.

4.

Train line managers in mental health

Six of the companies we met provide mental health training for managers, although only two of them make the training compulsory.

One company believes that the best way to motivate managers in this area is to make them responsible for the mental health and wellbeing of their own teams. Individuals are asked to complete a questionnaire on the level of support provided by their manager. The results are used to establish which managers are underperforming in this area, which is fed into their annual performance review.

5.

Monitor and report on employee mental health and wellbeing

Almost all the companies we met monitor employee wellbeing via a staff engagement survey at least once a year (six-monthly in many cases). Data from EAPs and absences is also commonly used. One company has gone a step further by piloting a smart phone app to track employees' biometrics, behaviour and mood. In the best examples, the data is used collectively to identify problem areas, which are then brought to the attention of the board.

In general, the companies we spoke to are reticent to report the results of their employee engagement programmes externally in any detail. Very few businesses are setting KPIs on employee mental health; this is something that we hope will improve over time.

Endnotes

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The views expressed do not constitute financial, investment or professional advice.

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Want to know more?

Please contact:

Amy Browne

Stewardship Lead

amy.browne@ccla.co.uk

020 7489 6030

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