

## MENTAL HEALTH

# Employee Wellbeing

New figures from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reveal that 15.4 million working days were lost due to work-related stress in 2018. Furthermore, it has been found that 595,000 workers were reported as suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety over the last 12 months, with 239,000 of these representing new cases. The number of days lost to stress is up 24 per cent year on year. In addition, research conducted by the CIPD suggests that employees feel that they are working harder than ever, and in an age of rising customer demand and fast technological change, this is often resulting in increased stress and 'burnout'.

It is therefore with little surprise that in light of the current mental health crisis, the subject of Employee Wellbeing is set to be one of the hottest HR topics over the next 12 months.

The term 'wellbeing' refers to the state of an individual's physical and mental health. It is highly influenced by the way that people feel about their jobs, their relationships and the people around them. Employers can have an influence on an individual's sense of wellbeing in the way they run a workplace.

It is therefore in your best interest to place a focus on wellbeing and consider how, as an employer, you can build a happy and healthy workplace.

### HOW TO BUILD A HEALTHY AND HAPPY WORKPLACE

There is no "one size fits all" and different factors will influence wellbeing at an individual level.

ACAS' analysis of a wide range of research studies has suggested that there are 11 key factors that influence employees' wellbeing at work:

- 1 Input** – ensure that staff have a say in how they do their job and are involved in decision making. Ensure that employees ideas are taken on board.
- 2 Job variety** – ensure that jobs are designed effectively. Employees will benefit from the opportunity to engage with a range of tasks and responsibilities at work.
- 3 Job significance** – employees experience increased wellbeing if they understand the purpose of their work. Managers should ensure that the workforce understand the organisations aims and objectives, and how their role feeds into these.
- 4 Clear expectations** – employees will experience increased wellbeing when they receive clear feedback on their performance. This can be addressed through an effective induction, clear terms and conditions and a regular appraisal. Specifically, an effective appraisal will provide employees with feedback on what they are doing well and areas for improvement.
- 5 Support** – create a culture where co-workers and line managers work collaboratively. Robinson and Hayday (2009) identified that the most engaged employees had managers who listened to and valued their team, showed an active interest in others and who had good leadership skills.
- 6 Positive interpersonal contact** – our wellness is highly influenced by our interactions with others. This includes contact with managers and co-workers, as well as with customers or the general public.

- 7 Developing Skills** – employees feel an increased sense of value when supported through both on and off the job training.
- 8 Physical Security** – ensuring a pleasant working environment, where staff have access to the equipment required to undertake their role. There should also be some focus on employees Health and Safety.
- 9 Job Security** – clear career prospects will help increase employee wellbeing.
- 10 Fair treatment of employees** – developing effective policies for managing people issues including those which promote diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination and support managers to handle conflict at work.
- 11 Pay** – higher pay has of course been registered as a strong positive motivator!

Based on these facts we have developed a Wellbeing Policy to support you to develop and promote a workplace environment that promotes the mental wellbeing of all employees. Employers who place a focus on improving workplace wellbeing have been shown to reap benefits including, not only reduced levels of sickness absence, but also happier and motivated staff, who maintain strong working relationships and demonstrate increased productivity.

## MANAGING STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Even within organisations who promote employee wellbeing, there may still be employees who suffer from mental health difficulties. Mental health problems and stress can affect anyone, regardless of their position in the organisation.

The HSE defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’. Six factors have been identified which affect an employee’s susceptibility to experiencing stress at work. These are:

- 1 Demands** – employees not able to cope with the demands of their job
- 2 Control** – employees are unable to control the way they do their work
- 3 Support** – employees don’t receive enough information and support
- 4 Relationships** – employees are having trouble with relationships at work, or are being bullied
- 5 Role** – employees don’t fully understand their role and responsibilities
- 6 Change** – employees are not engaged when a business is undergoing change

If an employee has reported that they are experiencing increased stress at work, it is advised that employers assess the level of risk in the above areas. CIPD research found that just 58% of organisations carried out stress risk assessments, despite it being a statutory requirement.

The [HSE](#) provides several valuable tools to support employers with this including a [Stress Risk Assessment Template](#). We have also provided access to other tools to support you with this, including a [Stress Bucket Template](#) and a [Wellbeing Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#). These tools aim to encourage communication between employee and employer to identify what triggers their mental health condition and what support can be put in place at work to reduce this.

Often, employers are very quick to identify what adjustments can be implemented to support an employee with a physical disability. However, it can be more difficult to identify what support may benefit an employee suffering from a mental disability. Our list of [Reasonable Adjustments](#) includes many examples of support you could put in place, however as the impact of mental health affects different people in different ways, it is always recommended that you have a conversation with the employee first to identify the type of support required.

Finally, once adjustments have been discussed and agreed, it is recommended that these are recorded using the [Tailored Adjustment Agreement](#). This agreement should then be reviewed on a regular basis.