



Mental Health
Foundation
Scotland



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Academy of Government



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

Mental Health in the Workplace

Seminar Report

28th February 2018



1. Introduction

On 28th February the Mental Health Foundation, the Academy of Government and Healthcare Improvement Scotland hosted a seminar on workplace mental health in the Scottish Parliament. The event was sponsored by Alex Neil MSP, former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

The aim of the seminar was to bring together representatives from government, private, public and third sector organisations to discuss the challenges and opportunities in creating mentally healthy workplaces. The seminar would kick off the debate on how the Scottish Government and employers could, collectively, deliver Action 36 of Scotland's Mental Health Strategy.

Action 36: Work with employers on how they can act to protect and improve mental health, and support employees experiencing for mental health.

"Let's shift the discourse from talking about mental health as a financial burden on employers to a workplace asset."

Mental Health Foundation

It was stated that a summary of the proceedings would be published to share the various insights of the participants and reinforce common messages arising from the conversation - this report is the result.

To provide anonymity and encourage openness the Chair, Richard Norris, Visiting Fellow, Academy of Government, first set the context for the seminar by reminding participants that the seminar was to be conducted under the Chatham House rule. He then thanked the participants for attending the seminar and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Acknowledgement of Participants

Ira Madan, Reader and Consultant in Occupational Medicine, Guys and St. Thomas NHS trust and King's College London.

Catherine O'Connell, Head of Occupational Health and Safety, Standard Life Aberdeen Plc.

Kathleen Preston, Board Member, Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Mairead Rowan, Health Improvement Practitioner, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Toni Giugliano, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Mental Health Foundation.

Chris O'Sullivan, Head of Business Development and Engagement, Mental Health Foundation.



Patty Lozano-Casal, Health, Social Care and Workplace Manager, See me.

Sarah Moore, Wellbeing Lead, Yorkshire Building Society.

Kate Hughes, Research Consultant, Mental Health Foundation.

John Kamoto, Policy Intern, Mental Health Foundation.

Alex Neil, MSP, Scottish Parliament, former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, former Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights.

Richard Norris, Visiting Fellow, Academy of Government.

(Due to the weather conditions apologies had been received from a number of people who had registered.)

Following introductions, there was a presentation on the challenges and opportunities in workplace mental health.

2. Challenges and opportunities in workplace mental health

(This section was conducted by Chris O'Sullivan from the Mental Health Foundation)

In his opening remarks, Chris O'Sullivan, Head of Business Development and Engagement at the Mental Health Foundation (Scotland) observed that:

- For many of us, work is a major part of our lives. Therefore, good workplaces can be a key factor in supporting and

protecting mental health, while toxic workplaces can be corrosive to mental health, and must be addressed.

- At any one time many employees will be thriving, but with frequent movement between thriving, struggling and those who are ill, and possibly off work.
- 15% of working adults are living with symptoms of a mental health problem, but only half that have experienced mental health problems have disclosed it at work – statistics from the Department of Work and Pensions reveal that 300,000 people with a long term mental health problem leave the UK workforce each year.
- Only 13% of Britons are living with high levels of positive mental health.
- Employees still face stigma and discrimination through contractual agreements as companies can terminate your employment if you become "of unsound mind", or a patient under any statute relating to mental health.

The seminar participants were also invited to think about specific challenges in creating mentally friendly workplaces:

How can we create safe, disclosure friendly workplaces, when we can't legislate to make people compassionate?

How can we move focus upstream to prevention, without losing/excluding people with complex experiences?

How can we address the nature of work, and not focus purely on addressing individual 'defects/illnesses'?

How can we ensure engagement in



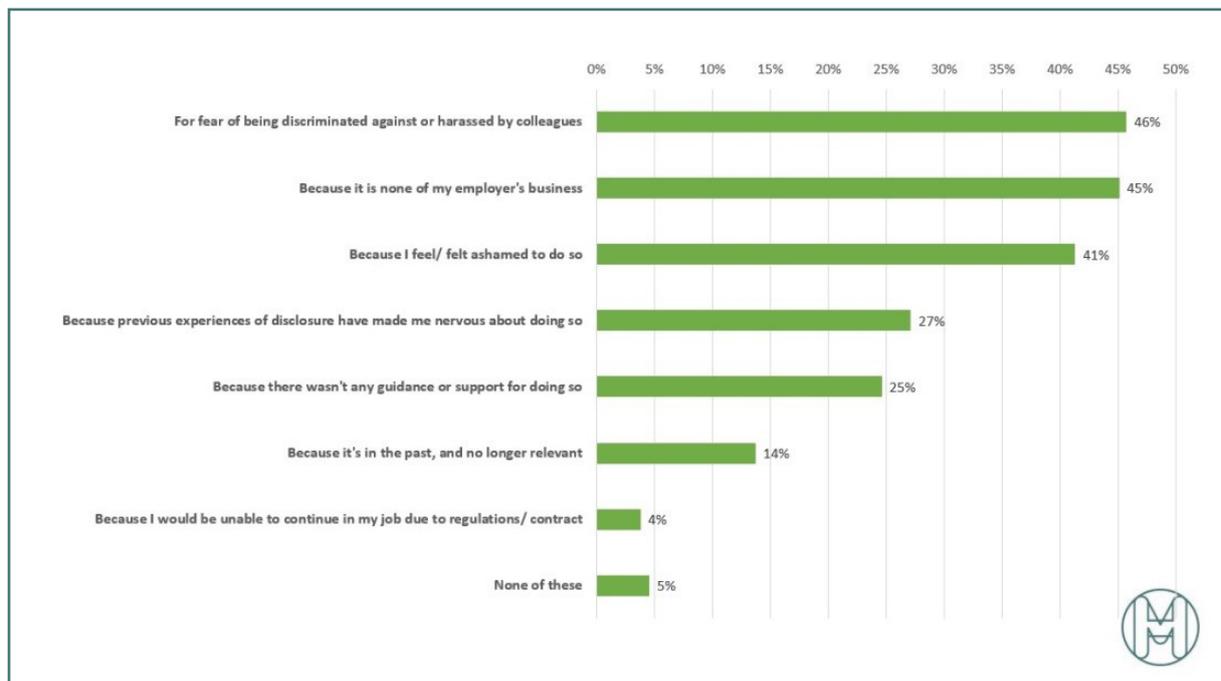
challenging work environments including temporary employment, gig economy, self-employed?

How can we ensure that asking for help leads to quick referral to effective services in and out of the work context?

A key challenge in addressing mental health at work is recognising distress and disclosing it to others. For many of us deciding whether to tell employers and colleagues about our mental health problem is considered difficult or different than disclosing about other health concerns. Spotting signs of mental ill health at an early stage and its disclosure means the problem is dealt with before it escalates into a crisis or sickness absence. However, we may not feel confident in speaking up about our

mental health problems in an inherently high-pressure environment, where we invest a lot into trying to be at our best and where our personal performance is constantly under scrutiny.

Notably, a survey commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation found that many people choose not to disclose about their mental health problems for fear of jeopardising their career progression, being victimised as a direct result of a mental health issues and having a lack of clear established protocols and procedures for managers to follow if staff experience mental ill health. Because of this it is estimated that mental ill health costs Scottish employers over £2 billion annually.

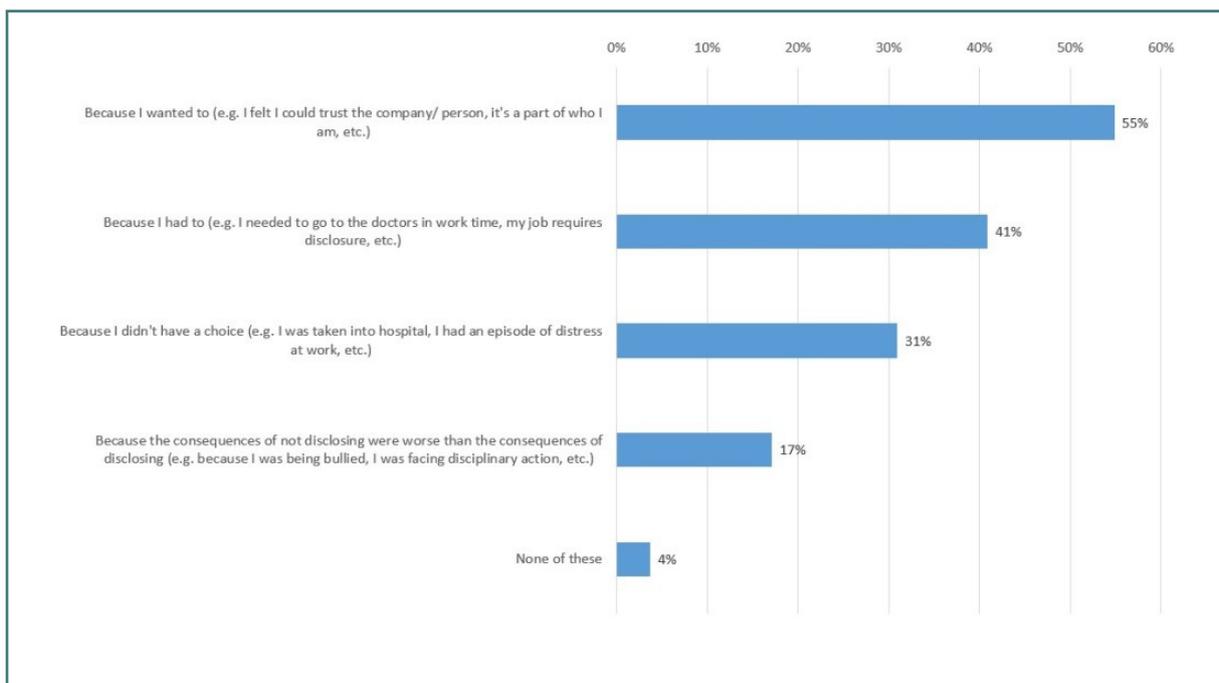




- (46%) feared being discriminated against or harassed by colleagues.
- (41%) felt ashamed to do so.
- (25%) alluded to the lack of guidance or support for disclosing.
- (4%) thought that they would be unable to continue in their job due to contractual regulations.

The survey also found that most respondents who choose to disclose about their mental health problems did so 'because they wanted to'. This being the ideal situation where the employee felt the company and colleagues encouraged effective management of mental health in the workplace and implemented appropriate support or reasonable adjustments. Forty-one per cent of respondents had disclosed because they were required to disclose

by the company – for example, because they had to see their doctor during working hours. Around a third of workers who had disclosed selected the reason 'because I didn't have a choice (e.g. I was taken into hospital, I had an episode of distress at work, etc.)'. Seventeen per cent who had disclosed reported that they had disclosed 'because the consequences of not disclosing were worse than the consequences of disclosing' - for instance, because they were bullied or were facing disciplinary actions. These accounts highlight that many people do not disclose until the decision or the terms of disclosure is out of their hands. The aim for employers should be to curb circumstances where disclosure is reactive and create a workplace culture and environment that is engaging and conducive to personal choice.





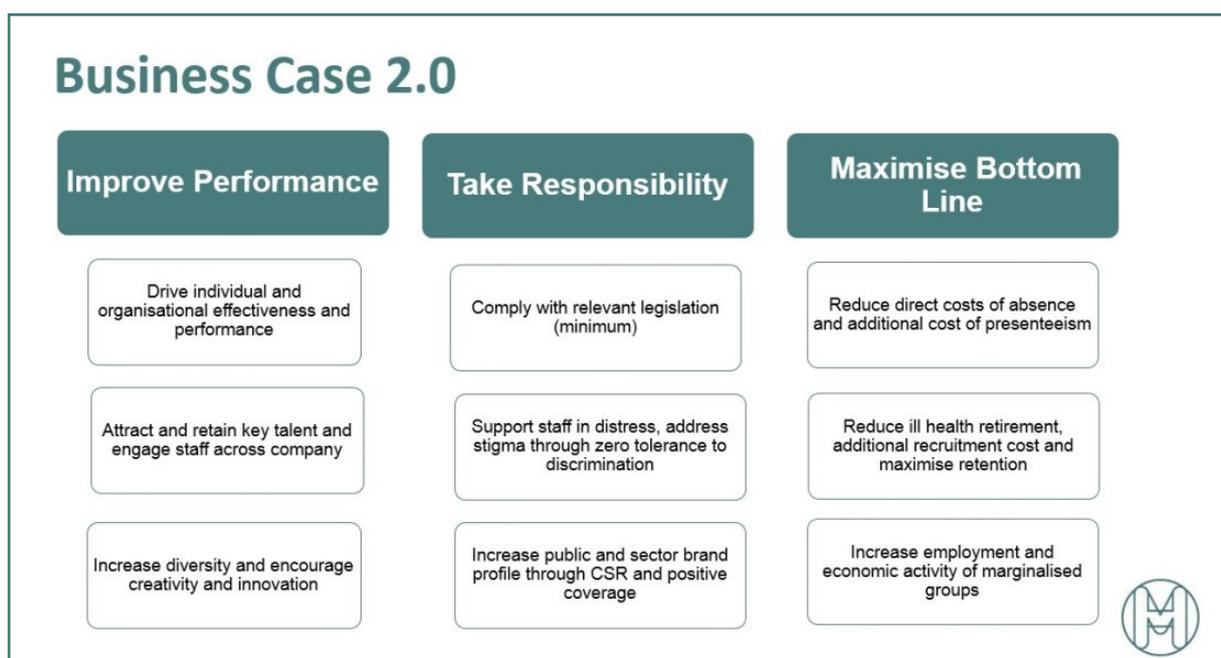
- (55%) trusted either the company or colleagues
- (41%) were required to disclose by the company (e.g. I needed to go to the doctors, etc.).
- (31%) didn't have a choice (e.g. I was taken into hospital, because I had an episode of distress at work, etc.)
- (17%) thought that the consequences of not disclosing were worse than the consequences of disclosing (e.g. because I was bullied, I was facing disciplinary action, etc.)

After explaining the mental health challenges facing Scottish employees, employers and therefore business efficiency, the second part of the presentation dealt with improving mental health to promote employee performance, employer responsibility, and consequently driving up productivity and maximising the bottom line.

Investing in supporting mental health at work is good for business and productivity - and not, as often seen, as a cost employers must bear. Most people will be affected by mental health problems, either personally or through family and friends, so every employer in Scotland is affected by mental health problems and ill health in the workforce. The presentation also built upon key findings from a review into mental health and employers by Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer to explore the positive reasons for supporting mental health of employees and to set out core principles and standards that all employers should commit to.

Thriving at Work - The Stevenson / Farmer review of mental health and employer.

- The review by Stevenson / Farmer has emphasised on prevention at all levels and has called for sector-





wide collaboration with public sector leadership.

- Increased focus on existing legislation - for example, recognising psychological hazards and increasing use of rights at work.
- Recommends a ten year research strategy, alongside calls for transparency and harnessing the digital potential.

Counting the cost.

The Stevenson / Farmer review has calculated the economic cost of failing to address mental health in the workplace. It notes the annual cost of poor mental health to employers in the UK at £33-£42 billion in sick leave, staff turnover and productivity. Poor mental health costs the UK economy - in terms of lost output - between £74 billion and £99 billion a year. This gives sufficient evidence to support the case for greater investment in mental health promotion in the workplace. Moreover, the clear relationship between poor mental health in employees, for example, stress, anxiety and depression, and toxic workplaces means a modest improvement in creating mentally healthy workplaces is likely to have significant cost benefits.

The Role of Business in Creating Mentally Healthy Workplaces.

1. Value mental health and wellbeing as a core asset of organisations:

- Have clear mental health policies/ plans that are implemented at all levels.
- Make senior leaders responsible for leading mental health activities, with

all managers engaged in all activities.

- Undertake regular staff surveys and other research to build data about staff mental health - what is measured is managed.
- Assess the mental health impact of all processes and systems to ensure they protect the mental health and wellbeing of staff and reduce barriers to seeking help.
- Recognise and celebrate the impact of existing employee benefits and corporate social responsibility activities on mental health and wellbeing of staff.

2. Support the development of compassionate and effective line management relationships:

- Provide opportunities for managers to attend relevant training that addresses mental health in a holistic way.
- Provide support for line managers of people with mental health problems, including access to HR and where necessary occupational health services.
- Recognise those line managers who have personal lived experiences are a unique asset to a company.

3. Address discrimination and support disclosure:

- Ensure that discrimination on grounds of mental health status is seen to be as unacceptable as discrimination in relating to other protected characteristics such as race, gender or sexual orientation.



- Give people positive reasons to disclose by establishing a culture that values authenticity and openness.
- Encourage staff to report discrimination or harassment they face and to blow the whistle on discrimination they witness.
- Support national and local anti-stigma programmes, including See Me.

4. Value the diversity and transferable skills lived experience of mental health problems brings:

- Include mental health in diversity and inclusion strategies, and recognise the mental health component of wider equality initiatives.
- Nurture and develop peer support in the workplace, both formally and informally.

The seminar also provided an opportunity to highlight the Yorkshire Building Society's positive and innovative steps to support the mental health of their employees – this was heard in the second presentation.

3. Perspectives on Implementing a Holistic Approach to Mental Health in Business.

(This section was presented by Sarah Moore, Wellbeing Lead, Yorkshire Building Society.)

In her introduction Sarah Moore, the Wellbeing Lead at Yorkshire Building Society, made the point that:

“We all have this asset of mental health that affects how we think, how we feel and, in the perspective of business, how it affects what we can do at work - so, how can we work with employees to improve and protect mental health in the workplace?”

Examples on how to create and implement a holistic and preventative approach to mental health in workplaces from Yorkshire Building Society:

- Encouraging a warm and supportive culture.
- Pull together resources that are readily available and start the conversation from there. For instance, get senior managers talking about their experiences of mental health at work and how to stay well - consequently, this will change the narrative of showing vulnerability from a weakness to a strength (a sign of strong leadership).

Example of platforms in workplaces dealing with mental health:

A range of recent initiatives supporting mentally healthy workplaces from the Yorkshire Building Society included:

- ‘My Wellbeing’ - an intranet site launched May 2017 with information, support and signposting.
- ‘Unmind’ which launched in September 2017 and is available to all employees - 1100 employees have signed up, and from those that signed up, 30% use the platform regularly to maintain their mental health. Unmind has information on how to focus,



relax, have better sleep, and it uses tools around mindfulness, noting, and visualisation techniques - all the content is short making it accessible (10 mins or less).

- The Yorkshire Building Society made use of October's Mental Health Day as an opportunity to platform mental health centred events. For instance, they encouraged their senior members to explore the recognition, understanding, managing and supporting of good mental health in the workplace through the company's 'Time to Change Employer Pledge' & colleague stories. To set standards and increase transparency and accountability, these initiatives were broadcasted to the external environment through social media and company website.
- The Yorkshire Building Society also works with third sector organisations (the Mental Health Foundation) to ensure employees feel comfortable when disclosing about their mental health problems. This has been achieved by distributing leaflets, pamphlets, and e-learning guides to all employees to help them understand: What mental health is? What do we mean by the spectrum? How to stay well? How to support someone else? And if I am a manager, how do I support my colleagues? The most positive evidence of effectiveness of the e-learning guide on mental health awareness - since its implementation - is the guide having had 800 hours of views by staff and being adopted as a prerequisite to managerial training. It is also worth noting its implementation has led to senior managers furnishing a supportive culture centring on prevention.

- Another practical approach has been incorporating scenario-based training when helping colleagues think about how to spot mental health problems in the workplace. Through this approach managers have been more engaged, instead of saying 'just carry on with your job', they're being more understanding and supportive to colleagues. As reflected by a comment from one manager in a video: 'it was thought-provoking and very practical'.

Sarah concluded her presentation by observing that:

"If we are to change the narrative of mental health in the workplace, we have to face it head on and be mindful that our language is sensitive to the needs of our colleagues."

4. Keynote responses.

Following the presentations, some key note responses were heard from Alex Neil MSP, former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing

- "Jim McColl gave evidence to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee on 30th January 2018 and he stated that the - 'three big productivity factors are happiness at work, security and fair pay. If people have those three things, productivity—surprisingly—goes up. We need to focus on higher-quality jobs, fair pay and security. Higher productivity will then follow' - I tend to feel that the absence of all or any of these three not only impedes productivity but is also the major contributing factor to mental health



problems in the workplace which affects the entirety of an individual's life - as we spend a chunk of our time in the workplace, so you would think it would be the reasonable thing to implement such strategies."

- "Much of the new economy, the gig economy, and self-employment is a result of unemployment. So, we shouldn't forget the impact that unemployment or underemployment has on mental health. This applies to people who have never worked or those that are in and out of work over their lifetime."
- "Furthermore, this agenda aligns and plays on to the agenda of growing a country that is empathetic to the needs of its citizens. This is where Scandinavian countries have one over the rest of us, as they have pushed for many decades now the security of employment, decent wages and being respected in the workplace - as these results in happiness at work."
- "Having similar platforms as those talked about in the second presentation should be a basic right to employees - as it aligns with the idea of equality of opportunity. That's the first point. The second point is, I have to say, that I thought the Farmer / Stevenson report was an excellent report, it was very well researched and possibly more in-depth, quite frankly, than the Scottish Mental Health Strategy. Scotland's new mental health strategy needs to develop one of its themes from the Farmer / Stevenson report and start applying it as quickly as possible. It should become an integral part of the Scottish mental health strategy. And,

although the strategy discussed the importance of mental health in the workplace, ultimately, it didn't have the in-depth analysis let alone the prescriptions that were outlined by Farmer / Stevenson in their 10-year report - the Scottish strategy should be a minimum of ten years if it is going to be impactful."

- "Standard Life Aberdeen and Yorkshire Building Society models should be applauded - but we should remember that one size doesn't fit all."
- "It should also be noted that some of the big employers, most noticeably, the NHS, are among the worst in dealing with mental health problems at work - and when you add that to the high-stress aspect of the job, the long hours and the contractual implications of being sick for 12 months, where ultimately you get sacked, it is quite alarming; moreover, the unions inactivity stance on this issue is frightening. There is no excuse for any big employer in the UK not to implement a mental health strategy that priorities prevention through happiness at work, security and fair pay."
- "But the biggest challenge for us in Scotland is that a very high percentage of employees are employed by small to medium size enterprises. Depending on what sector it is there is a lot of stress involved in these types of businesses - as a significant number of them are hit with a wide swath of regulations"
- "Small and medium businesses don't have the time and resources that the big companies have to develop comprehensive mental health



strategies. Big companies such as the Yorkshire Building Society and Standard Life Aberdeen Plc should extend their programmes to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), even if it's only the SMEs that are their business partners, which would be a good place to start."

- "Small businesses have the right attitude but don't have the resources to implement comprehensive strategies - we need to penetrate them as soon as possible as the current reach is very limited, possibly, fewer than 10% of SMEs have a mental health strategy in their workplace."
- "We need to target those industries that have a high amount of stress as priorities, for example, financial services, care etc. These sectors drive up the average, so we do have to target these."
- "We also need to prioritise those under self-employment as they tend to have an above average mental health problems - their work drying up can exacerbate stress, they have no insurance policy, and benefits system doesn't help them either. Around 15% of Scotland is self-employed which is a large chunk of the workforce."
- "Farmer / Stevenson review noted that the annual cost of poor mental health to employers is £33-£42 billion in sick leave, staff turnover and productivity. Therefore, it is in the interest of the employers to improve the mental well-being of their employees."
- "Poor mental health costs the UK economy - in terms of lost output - between £74 billion and £99 billion

a year. And even if were to take the lower figure it is quite significant, it amounts to nearly 60% of the yearly budget of the NHS in England. So, financially, the government will be better off tackling this issue - provided they follow the right strategies and policies."

5. Roundtable discussion.

Taken together, the presentations and subsequent responses produced a number of key discussion points:

- Those present agreed that we shouldn't force guidelines for businesses to follow but provide scenarios to allow businesses to think about how those scenarios may transpire in their workplace - almost as a mental health first aid. This will allow them to look at the circumstances in which these problems develop and tackle them head-on.
- There was some discussion about both the private and the public sector overlooking the impact bereavement has on individuals. Having one or two days off is not enough, there should be bereavement services in workplaces to try and get colleagues to get through the mental stress because those that suffer from bereavement tend to have unresolved issues when they go back to work.
- It was thought that access to services through the NHS can oftentimes be a barrier to a person's mental health. But, ultimately, the cost to a business losing a highly trained individual, possibly, in a specialised role, is too



much of a cost on companies in the long run - it would be beneficial for the employers to have a contingency in place to avoid this.

- Another issue was that of recruitment. Specifically, individual with mental health problems being amongst the most excluded people when it comes to employment - and it was argued that this leads to further social exclusion which precipitates and exacerbates mental ill-health.
- It was felt that one of the single biggest factors that predict success is a stable desire to work. And critically, one of the challenges with our benefits system is that it forces or compels people to work, and through that, they're not necessarily able to form a stable desire to work. It does nothing to reduce the barriers to the labour market due to mental health implications involved with it and other range of things.
- It was noted that it's harder for smaller businesses that don't have the resources, and that there is a strong reliance on the NHS instead of getting direct referral access to work schemes. It was agreed that it would be good to get the Federation of Small Businesses on board. This would, probably, be the right way to go - working through established federations instead of reinventing the wheel, as it were.
- There was a discussion about challenges of implementing similar initiatives, as was already mentioned, one size doesn't necessarily fit all. For example, smaller companies can be more agile than the larger companies in implementing the ideas discussed.

Furthermore, businesses in the rural areas might not be as inclined to follow some initiatives, which in the urban areas we take for granted. So, it was agreed that there is a social as well as an economic limit in the Highlands and Islands.

Some further points made by seminar participants are summarised in the box:

- Some professional services might expect an awful lot from their employees, but they also deliver an awful lot of support.
- Managers can put their colleagues under a lot of stress by putting them under pressure because they are not aware of how their actions can affect the mental health of their employees.
- The 'sweet spot' for implementing new initiatives is around 1,000/1,500 employees. Medium size businesses such as these can have a real potential to take on some of the innovations from the bigger businesses because they tend to have a mature HR function that can handle the sort of initiatives we've talked about.
- Burn out is another issue for the public/third sectors, a remarkable similarity between passion driven jobs (including startups, nursing/carers, and teachers) and hitting walls. Especially, the care sector where the turnover is huge because of the overbearing stress.



- Since it is a wide socio-economic issue, it would be important to look to and make use of management structures. We shouldn't lose sight of what happens with high-level policy - for example, zero hours contracts can put real stress on people and enforce anxiety. These are big issues that are affecting people and the workplace. And if we are to follow the advice of Jim McColl - we need to investigate these types of jobs and see if they reflect this ideal and legislate on it.
- And when it comes to implementation, targeting businesses that have a high health and safety culture can be productive since they tend to have a willingness to take on new health and safety provisions. Moreover, the Health and Safety Act covers psychological hazards but unfortunately, it's not applied by so many businesses, the government enforcing this legislation would be helpful.
- Changing the conversation can be a measure of success, allowing an open workplace on broader aspects and application of mental health. As training alone cannot fix the problem, the culture of the organisation can play a big role in being open. There are also other complications such as not

having enough resources and the hierarchical nature of some businesses impeding progress because of differing attitudes.

- Leadership is important depending on the structure of the business. It must come from the top, and if doesn't come from the top, it will not cascade down. Especially with larger organisations.
- However, with smaller organisations, grass-roots initiatives are more effective. If we could model the culture through the management, we are going to have a better chance adjusting the narrative in the business place. The concept of being reasonable falls on individuals, but the obligation should fall on businesses.
- Going forward from today, and looking at the discussion, I think we need to have a look at approaching different workplaces across all of Scotland, especially, targeting sectors that have high stress.



6. An overall summary of the seminar:

- Many workers are sceptical about raising issues with their manager, particularly in a time when they are under severe pressure.
- Digital tools and products are an enabler of change and give businesses the opportunity for low cost, scalable interventions in the workplace.
- The employer must be convinced to carry out a stress risk assessment, on the basis that stress can lead to mental health problems.
- The arguments for employers having decent policies on stress and mental health are not only moral but include a strong business case.
- We shouldn't look at those who experience mental ill-health as problems but as assets to business; employers should use their experience and knowledge to help others in the company.
- It is better to ensure that employers have robust policies and procedures negotiated and in place to deal with reasonable adjustments, disability leave, return to work procedures, stress risk assessments, so that these policies can be called upon to protect employees' jobs. However, it is known that employers do not always follow their own policies - possibly, a legislative component is needed.
- Although Scotland's Mental Health Strategy discusses creating mentally healthy workplaces, ultimately, there is a need for clear and robust policy framework that outlines sustainable approaches for a range of businesses.

7. Appendix 1 – Resources.

During the seminar, participants drew attention to a number of resources:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-support-mental-health-work>

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/added-value-mental-health-as-a-workplace-asset-executive-summary.pdf>

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11342&mode=pdf>

For more information on this seminar and how the Mental Health Foundation is following up on this work please contact Toni Giugliano: [**tgiugliano@mentalhealth.org.uk**](mailto:tgiugliano@mentalhealth.org.uk)

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