

# Mental health in the workplace

Supporting your approach  
to employee wellbeing



**BANK OF  
SCOTLAND**

By the side of business

# Supporting the wellbeing of Britain's businesses

## **Awareness of mental health as a key issue for society has grown. It is a critical aspect of wellbeing that is as important as good physical health.**

Employers have an important role to play in supporting the wellbeing and mental health of their employees. The issue affects all employers, from small and start-up SMEs to large corporates.

Supporting employees to maintain or recover good mental health is naturally an ethical responsibility for any business. It also makes good commercial sense.

### **Benefits for businesses and employees**

Supporting employee mental health can bring benefits for staff, business, society at large and the UK economy. Recruitment and retention of employees can be very competitive. Research from organisations such as Mind, shows that businesses with a reputation for supporting mental health and wellbeing are better able to attract and retain the highest quality candidates.

Helping to create an environment where good mental health thrives, and where employees can feel supported if they experience a period of poor mental health, often means that productivity improves.

There is no doubt that support and awareness around mental health has improved significantly. However, more needs to be done to break down the stigma for people experiencing difficulties, and create an inclusive environment where employees feel able to be open about their mental health and bring their whole selves to work.



As part of our commitment to Helping Britain Prosper, we have worked in partnership with Mental Health UK to create this guide. It draws on our own experiences to look at why mental health matters for businesses and provides some helpful tools and insights you can use to create a more robust mental health environment for your workforce.

## What do we mean by 'mental health'?

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Like physical health, our mental health can fluctuate, so it's important that we look after it. In practice, being mentally healthy means 'feeling good and functioning well', whatever that looks like for the individual concerned. Individuals with a diagnosed mental health problem can still enjoy a high level of wellbeing by learning to manage their mental health - just as we'd expect someone with a physical condition like diabetes to do.

We spend a lot of time at work, and work can trigger or exacerbate mental ill-health. Leaders, managers and other colleagues are well placed to spot the signs if someone is experiencing mental health problems. Behaviour that is not normal for that person is a tell-tale sign. Sometimes, someone may be unwell without realising it. Stepping in to offer or signpost support can prevent someone's mental health deteriorating needlessly and can help them to continue being an asset to your organisation.



**"As responsible employers it is not only good for our people, but also makes good commercial sense to support everyone with their wellbeing — that's why we're committed to helping organisations take the next step to having a mentally healthy workforce."**

**Brian Dow**  
Managing Director,  
Mental Health UK

## Why mental health matters to businesses



**1 in 4**

Approximately, 1 in 4 people has experienced a mental health problem.<sup>1</sup>



**£1,652-£1,716**

Average cost per employee of poor mental health in the private sector.<sup>2</sup>



**£42bn-£45bn**

Cost of poor mental health to UK employers each year.<sup>2</sup>



**70 million**

Working days lost due to mental health problems each year.<sup>3</sup>



**£8.6bn**

Annual cost of mental health related turnover including loss of skills.<sup>2</sup>



**39%**

Proportion of employees that said work had affected their mental health in the last year.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-in-england-2007-results-of-a-household-survey>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/poor-mental-health-costs-uk-employers-up-to-pound-45-billion-a-year.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-mental-health-work>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/bitc-wellbeing-report-mhawmentalhealthworkfullreport2019-sept2019-2.pdf>

# How can we support the mental health of our workforce?

In 2017, Lord Stevenson and Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, were tasked by Government to undertake a review into 'how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment including those with mental health problems or poor wellbeing to remain in and thrive through work.'

In response, they created the Mental Health Core Standards. We take a look at these and the practical steps businesses can take to apply them.

Mental Health Core Standards	Making it work for business
Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan	Tools and advice are available (see resources at the end of this guide) to help you build a plan that meets the needs of all employees.
Develop mental health awareness among employees	Highlight where information and support can be found. Consider including this in internal training/induction.
Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are experiencing problems	Include this in recruitment, induction and as part of regular reviews. If employees are experiencing problems, discuss any adjustments that could help.
Provide employees with good working conditions and ensure they have a healthy work life balance and opportunities for development	Know your employees, especially those working remotely, so you are aware of relevant personal issues, such as bereavement, illness and other stress factors. Communicate regularly to check their wellbeing and lead by example.
Promote effective people management through line managers and supervisors	Train and support line managers to engage with employees about their wellbeing. If time off is needed for poor mental health, explore adjustments for their return to work and put a recovery action plan in place.
Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing	Regular surveys can provide data allowing you to monitor and benchmark progress, but taking time to talk with your employees is also important.



More information about how to implement the 'Thriving at Work' Mental Health Core Standards in your workplace can be found [here](#).

**At Bank of Scotland, we have actively embraced the Mental Health Core Standards alongside our support for colleagues. Here's how:**

**Develop mental health awareness among employees**

We have ensured that line managers and colleagues are equipped with a better understanding of the importance of good mental health and wellbeing through E-learning modules which thousands of colleagues have completed. We have also hosted calls with experts which are available to all colleagues, and provided resilience training for leaders.

**Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling**

We participate in the national Mental Health Awareness Week, and created mini-campaigns to encourage open conversations to ensure that colleagues feel comfortable discussing their mental health and wellbeing, especially with their line manager.

**Provide tools and resources**

To support these conversations we have shared case studies from leaders and colleagues who hope that their experiences can inspire others to seek support. In addition, we are providing tools to learn new skills, such as meditation and mindfulness through the Headspace app, that can help with everything from stress and sleep to focus and anxiety.

**A little support goes a long way**

**Su Pillinger**, a Lloyds Bank employee, shares her experience of how she managed to channel her ongoing struggles with anxiety and depression to become a mental health champion at work, encouraging others to learn more about the range of conditions and helping to remove the stigma associated with poor mental health.

**Hitting rock bottom**

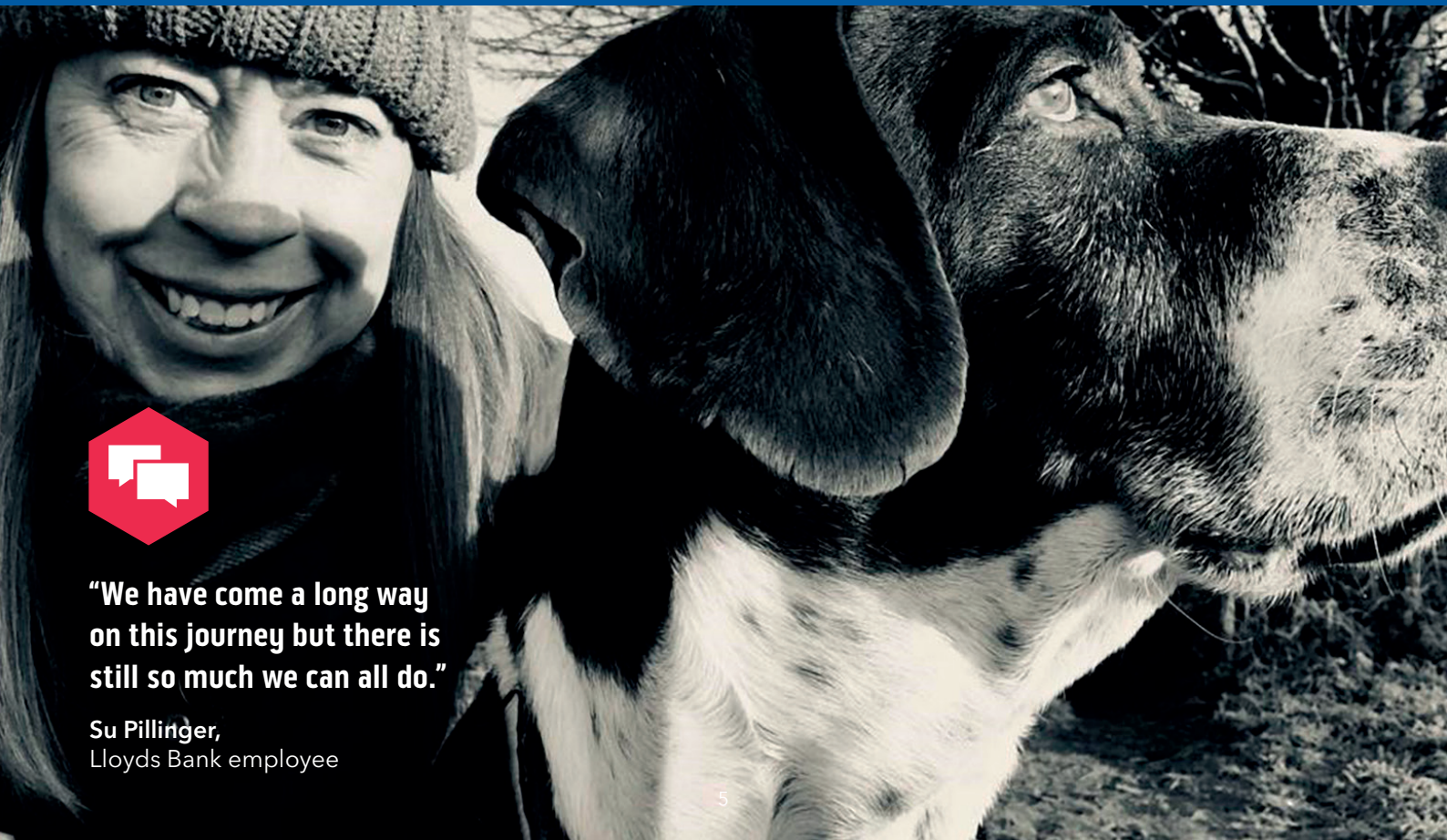
"I remember the overwhelming feelings of emptiness and fear that I experienced when I was in the grip of my breakdown. I couldn't sleep, had zero appetite and had no interest in anything going on around me. As a bubbly person, I realised very early on that this was more than simply 'being stressed'. What's more, this happened more than 15 years ago,

when mental health conditions were barely understood and certainly not spoken about.

**The support of those around me**

"I am forever grateful for the support I received from my then line manager, who had personal experience of a similar condition. He went out of his way to ensure I could return to work in a safe environment, without too much pressure to get straight back to my

normal routine. I have been incredibly lucky to have worked with many fantastic line managers and colleagues over the years, who have helped me through this journey and encouraged my wish to help others in the same sort of circumstances. By regularly talking about my condition and learning new ways to cope with situations, I am now in a great place and proud to be a mental health advocate."



**"We have come a long way on this journey but there is still so much we can all do."**

**Su Pillinger,**  
Lloyds Bank employee

## Supporting employees working from home

The working patterns of people are changing. More employees are working from home, whether it's to work more flexibly, take care of children or save on travel time.

This can create some great benefits and some unique challenges for employees, but there are things employers can do to make sure the welfare and mental health of these employees is looked after. Ensuring that your employees have a suitable place to work which is both comfortable and allows them to have a divide between their work and personal life so they are able to switch off at the end of the day is important.

### Communication

Many employees report that keeping in touch is the most important thing that can support their wellbeing when working regularly from home. Without the day-to-day interactions, it's easy to feel isolated from what's going on. Whether it's video chats, email or instant messaging, regular contact can help reassure colleagues that they're still a valued member of the team.

### 'Open door' policy

Home-workers often report that they feel reluctant to raise issues by phone or email, as it can feel more formal than dropping by a desk or office. It can therefore be helpful to reassure employees that it is still important to raise issues through whatever medium they feel most comfortable using, and that they are always welcome to come into the workplace to discuss anything they're concerned about.

### Talking about things other than work

Most phone or video calls tend to be focussed around work. This means it's easy to miss conversations where you learn about what's happening in the lives of colleagues or employees.

Just as you'd ask someone in the office how their weekend was, it can be really helpful to spend a few minutes talking about things other than work. In addition to building and maintaining better relationships, this can also help identify if a home-worker is struggling with issues such as isolation, feeling overwhelmed, medical issues or domestic abuse.

### Building trust

There can sometimes be a sense that home-workers don't have the same commitment or workload as employees who attend the workplace. Many businesses have found that it can be helpful to set the right cultural tone of trust, under-pinned by clear expectations of performance regardless of the location of work, and with full access to support from line managers and other business areas.



Find out more at [acas.org.uk/working-from-home](https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home)

### Tips on helping people feel included whilst working alone.



Being included in any emails and distribution lists they would receive if they were in the office.



Using reliable IT equipment and technology solutions like conference calls and video calls to improve effectiveness of communications.



Participating in any meetings or discussions that affect their work.



Being invited to any social events that are taking place, or hosting virtual social events.

## How can I take action for my business?

There is a wide range of support available to help businesses better understand the impact of wellbeing and how to ensure their employees have access to tools and information that can support their mental health needs. These include:

### Mental health at work resources:

## MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Find resources to support your managers and staff, assess your organisation's approach, source ideas to improve your culture, or develop policies and practices.  
[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](https://mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)



Mental Health UK supports people affected by mental health problems including friends, family and carers. Working across the UK, they bring together over 40 years of expertise from our four national founding charity partners to provide advice, information and support.  
[mentalhealth-uk.org](https://mentalhealth-uk.org)



Campaigning for better mental health, Mind offers dedicated support for employees and employers seeking to improve wellbeing in the workplace.  
[mind.org.uk/workplace](https://mind.org.uk/workplace)



The Prince's Responsible Business Network

Business in the Community's annual Mental Health at Work report shows how employers are aware of and are acting to improve mental wellbeing across their workforce - but cautions that urgent change is still needed.  
[bitc.org.uk/report/mental-health-at-work-2019-time-to-take-ownership](https://bitc.org.uk/report/mental-health-at-work-2019-time-to-take-ownership)



Thanks to the partnership between Lloyds Banking Group and Mental Health UK, they have developed a dedicated service to help people understand, manage and improve their mental health and money issues. The website offers tools, top tips and advice.  
[mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en](https://mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en)



Headspace is a global leader in meditation and mindfulness with hundreds of themed sessions on everything from stress and sleep to focus and anxiety.  
[headspace.com/work/resources](https://headspace.com/work/resources)

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