



HCLG – Mental Health Workshop – 22 June 2021

The group continues to focus on the principle of positive intervention and the creation of environments to prevent mental ill health but, importantly, proactively fostering positive mental health and wellbeing.

Acting swiftly on the previously identified potential quick wins is essential – any delay will result in missed opportunity.

As a result, the group has agreed that the following priority area be developed further:

Managing Anxiety in Emerging from Lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the construction sector. Most construction activities have continued through the period of restrictions and numerous national lockdowns with sites applying appropriate COVID controls in accordance with Construction Leadership Council (CLC) and Public Health England (PHE) guidance. Anecdotal evidence has, however, suggested the emergence of a new phenomenon, “COVID fatigue”, which has had a negative impact on some workers mental health.

Whilst site workers have endured through the restrictions, office workers and those able to do so have worked from home for a prolonged period. Various surveys undertaken across numerous projects have highlighted reservations from a proportion of staff regarding their planned return to offices and indicated a preference to adopt a hybrid approach for future working. The approaches to hybrid/flexible working within the industry vary significantly from company to company, from an immediate full-time return to office locations, to staff being able to choose their normal work location.

However, work location is only part of the problem, and for both site-based staff and office workers across the sector some have reported general anxiety in emerging from the current restrictions and returning to the new norm.

It is recognised that differing approaches will be required to address the needs of site-based staff and those working in office environments. Care must also be taken to avoid creating or exacerbating the “Us and Them” culture that has emerged throughout the pandemic.

The HCLG Mental Health Group believe this is an important area of focus and propose addressing this challenge with the following approach:

Communications

Develop a draft communications plan for use by HCLG supporters and their supply chains. The communication plan will include:

- Pointed but generic answers to FAQs regarding the future challenges – many members have already embarked on this approach and therefore this data can be collated and amended to meet the needs of the wider community. In order to better support the industry, and to avoid

perpetuating tensions between site/office staff, it is envisaged that separate FAQs will be provided for site and office teams.

- Collation and sharing of case studies from members - not intended as guidance but more as opportunities for others to evaluate what may be beneficial to their own organisations. Whilst these would naturally be made available on the HCLG webpage the plan needs to be more proactive. A regular “drum-beat” has been cited as essential and therefore these case studies could form part of the regular HCLG communications bulletins/newsletters.
- Organise a webinar and or podcast featuring a panel of volunteers from the group to discuss their challenges and approaches. This will also give the opportunity for attendees to openly question the panel – hopefully giving guidance for a solution or to identify further areas for HCLG to develop. A recording of the webinar can also serve itself as a resource that can be distributed to the industry.

Line Manager Guidance

Again, many of the represented organisations on the group have already developed such guidance. The intention would be to review this collaboratively and develop an indicative guide as a reference resource.

As well as collating existing guidance around return to work, guidance should address the anxiety and apprehension many will be feeling regardless of their work situation. Therefore, guidance will include signposting to useful resources to equip managers to identify signs of poor mental health amongst their teams and give confidence to be able to support. This could include recommending the Mates in Mind “Managing the Conversation” programme or similar.

Self-Support

Collation of information and signposting to useful resources to allow individuals access to helpful information or links to self-support.