

# Consultation Questions: Public Consultation Occupational Health: Working Better

I am responding as or on behalf of:	Response
Employee	N
Manager	N
Employer	N
Organisation / Company	Y
Your sector <sup>1</sup> (Please type)	Public Health
Size of your company/organisation <sup>2</sup> ( <i>Large -250+ staff, medium (50-249 employees) or small/micro (0-49)</i> ) (Please type)	Small/Micro
Which region(s) do you operate in – (London, South West, South East, North West, North East) (Please type)	All
<b>Your Employment type</b>	
Self employed	N
Public sector	N
Private sector	N
Voluntary Sector	N
<b>Health sector only</b>	
Your sector (public or commercial) (Please type)	N
Occupational Health Professional	N
Occupational Health Profession (Please type)	N
Occupational health professional body (Please type)	N
Other (please state)	N

*Please indicate, next to any responses given, if you are **not** content for DWP to publish relevant sections of your responses in the future. Without a specific request for anonymity, we reserve the right to publish your response in full.*

For this consultation, we will publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding

<sup>1</sup> As a guide, you may want to state which section under SIC codes your firm operates in eg construction [Nature of business: Standard Industrial Classification \(SIC\) codes \(companieshouse.gov.uk\)](https://companieshouse.gov.uk/nature-of-business-standard-industrial-classification-sic-codes)

<sup>2</sup> [Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2022: statistical release \(HTML\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/business-population-estimates-for-the-uk-and-regions-2022-statistical-release)

in a professional capacity will be published. We will remove email addresses and telephone numbers from these responses, but apart from this we will publish them in full.

The personal information you provide will be retained for a period of 12 months.

For more information about what we do with personal data, you can read DWP's [Personal Information Charter](#).

## **Chapter 1: Opportunities for greater employer action, best practice sharing and voluntary health at work standards**

**Question 1: What would you consider to be a robust and reliable source of evidence to establish a simple and clear baseline for quality OH provision?**

- **Evidence based outcomes from an Expert Advisory Group.**
- **The Government guidance to support employee health outcomes in the workplace, including specifying a clear and simple baseline for minimum levels of OH support.**
- **Anything else? Give reasons for your views below.**

The value and importance of Occupational Health (OH) has increased recently as institutions, businesses and the government acknowledge the link between public health and economic productivity. RSPH are approved by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) to run the Diploma in Occupational Medicine course which ensures that health professionals can achieve a competence appropriate to a generalist working in occupational health. RSPH also provides training on workplace health and wellbeing, which aims to identify how people can fall into unhealthy practices, the personal and social consequences of this and how to improve the health of others around them by providing help and support.<sup>34</sup>

The RSPH workplace health and wellbeing training, specifically the programme 'Understanding Health Improvement', also focusses on how inequalities in health may develop. This should be a core consideration in the development of a national OH approach. Those populations who have more severe health problems may require further, or more focussed, support to maintain their ability to work, and this training allows OH service providers to understand the impact that health inequalities has and how they can be addressed.

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<sup>3</sup> The Workplace Health Champions (WHC) programme has four units, each focusing on different areas of healthy living and promoting positive health behaviours. The WHC programme will help individuals to engage with people to talk about health, provide information on relevant campaigns and guide them to relevant services where appropriate.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Understanding Health Improvement' programmes gives learners a better understanding of how inequalities in health may develop and what the current policies are for addressing them with the objective of encouraging employers and organisations to support a healthy workforce. The 'Supporting Behaviour Change' programme also aids this objective by informing people over the importance of effective communication in building rapport with individuals, whilst the 'Understanding Mental Wellbeing' programme provides learners with a better understanding of the principles of mental wellbeing and the effect of mental wellbeing on the individual and community.

There is evidence and insight from organisations dedicated to improving access to OH services across workplaces.<sup>5</sup> This has contributed to increasing awareness of the importance that they have on maintaining a healthy workforce, by ensuring that everyone understands the benefits of good public health within the workplace, which has also taken a larger prominence following the pandemic.

There is a well-established body of work into the value of OH including the development of numerous programmes which, with strong governance and collective approach, could operate together to effectively provide a clear baseline for quality OH provision.

**Question 2: What best practice examples have you seen where workplaces are used to better support employee health outcomes that could be used instead to bolster greater take-up of OH provision? What kind of model would you prefer for sharing this good practice, particularly to support SMEs?**

Many large organisations such as Unilever,<sup>7</sup> BT, Rolls Royce, John Lewis Partnership and now the NHS, through its Growing Occupational Health and Wellbeing Together strategy (OHWBT), embed services to improve OH in their businesses. It is possible for OH service providers within large corporations to extend their provisions into other local businesses, particularly if these workforces require similar OH services. There is a strong case that effective partnering between the relevant businesses and occupational health providers (whether in-house or contracted in) is the key to improved health outcomes. This approach could allow providers to deliver a bespoke service to the needs of that employer even if numbers of referrals are small.

The RSPH Health Champions programme supports employers and organisations to deliver mental health and wellbeing support for their employees.<sup>8</sup> Workplace-based Health Champions is a way of ensuring that organisations consistently have easy access to mental health support. The need to connect colleagues with each other has taken a greater prominence in recent years as more and more employees are now regularly working from home. This approach has the added benefit of giving workforces transferable skills across different employers and businesses.

There are numerous examples of the types of services and support that this approach provides to employees through organising health promotion events and activities (both in-person and virtual), setting up safe spaces for people to voice mental health concerns and directing colleagues to resources to help them work from home safely and healthily. The Health Champions training has provided learners with the key understanding of multiple areas of health improvement and can be incorporated to improve take-up of physical activity by signposting people to community and online exercise classes, encouraging workplaces to provide healthy food for employees, directing people to mental health support services and through directing people to local health support services such as sexual health support and smoking cessation resources.

**Question 3: What benefits does, or could, access to OH services bring to your organisation?**

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<sup>5</sup> The professional experience of specialist organisations and individuals such as: Council for Work & Health, Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), the society of Occupational Medicine (SOM), National School of Occupational Health (NSOH), NHSE Growing Occupational Health Wellbeing Together Strategy (which has been designed to improve the health and wellbeing services for those in the NHS, to keep them safe and healthy, and empowered to pass good care onto patients), the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing, NHS Health at Work network, the Commercial Occupational Health Providers Association (COHPA), have all been working on this for several years and have already made much progress.

<sup>6</sup> The Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS) standards have been in place since 2010, and have recently been revised and relaunched in 2023 following wide consultation with all bodies within the Council for Work and Health, and specifically including DWP, HSE, and the NHS Growing Occupational Health and Wellbeing Together (OHWBT) team.

<sup>7</sup> (No date a). Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/rsph-health-and-wellbeing-awards-health-and-wellbeing-in-workplaces-finalist-unilever-uk-ltd.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/qualifications/health-champions.html>.

RSPH is an organisation (and an SME) with experience in understanding the practical value of accessing good OH services, we know that OH brings positive benefits in providing employees with a healthy place to work and protecting employees from developing health conditions whilst also raising awareness of the value of OH and promoting support services.

There is a strong economic case for taking an OH approach. The Society of Occupational Medicine's (SOM) recent publication on the 'Value Proposition' demonstrates the clear benefits of OH services to employees, workforces, employers, and the overall economy.<sup>9</sup> There is also further evidence that demonstrates the financial benefits that business can utilise from by investing in occupational health services.<sup>10</sup> Given the right conditions, employees could expect to see an improvement in their overall health, maintain workability and maintain their earnings. According to the evidence, another benefit of this approach can be a reduction in absenteeism and an improvement in productivity, performance, and profits.<sup>11</sup>

A healthy nation is a wealthy nation. Well-integrated evidence-based workplace health initiatives are clearly associated with improved employee health status and productivity in the workplace. Therefore, protecting and promoting employee health is in everyone's best interests.

### **Question 6: a) What should such a national health at work standard for employers, embedding a baseline for quality OH provision, include, especially given the requirement to accommodate different employer needs?**

These standards could include provisions from the Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS), which requires accredited services to demonstrate they have maintained the standards at their service on an annual basis by completing an annual renewal assessment.<sup>12</sup> The SEQOHS 2023 standards have been set by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) and are reviewed every 5 years to incorporate any legislative changes, ethical considerations and evidenced based best practice guidelines. SEQOHS accreditation provides independent and impartial recognition that the service provider, having been independently assessed against these standards, has objectively demonstrated their competence. This ensures that consistent, reliable, and credible requirements are met by employers (regardless of their size) on the minimum standards for accessing effective OH support, which enables them to meet the levels needed to provide a healthy workplace culture for their workforce.

In addition to adopting these standards into a national "health at work" standard from the government, it is also important that inequalities faced by people in the workplace are considered and addressed through OH, for example by ensuring that individuals who may require additional support to address their relevant health needs, can easily access the right services.

Thinking long-term, strategic analysis from the [report](#) by the Council for Work and Health suggests that there are three main driving forces for change in the organisation and delivery of occupational health services over the next 20 years: 1) The economic situation and availability of funding, 2) Demographic shifts in the UK working population, and 3) The impact of an increase in of chronic and long-term conditions.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> (No date a) *Occupational health: The value proposition - som*. Available at: [https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Occupational\\_health\\_%20the\\_value\\_proposition.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Occupational_health_%20the_value_proposition.pdf) (Accessed: 06 October 2023).

<sup>10</sup> (No date a). Available at: <https://www.centrichr.co.uk/what-are-the-benefits-of-occupational-health-and-safety/#:~:text=The%20main%20benefits%20of%20occupational%20health%20and%20safety%20is%20that,rate%2C%20and%20enhances%20company%20reputation.>

<sup>11</sup> (No date a) *Occupational health: The value proposition - som*. Available at: [https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Occupational\\_health\\_%20the\\_value\\_proposition.pdf](https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Occupational_health_%20the_value_proposition.pdf) (Accessed: 06 October 2023).

<sup>12</sup> (No date a) *2023 standards - fom.ac.uk*. Available at: <https://www.fom.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023-SEQOHS-Standards-March-2023.pdf> (Accessed: 03 October 2023).

<sup>13</sup> (No date a) *Planning the future - council for work & health*. Available at: <https://www.councilforworkandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final-Report-Planning-the-Future-Implications-for-OH-Proof-2.pdf> (Accessed: 06 October 2023).

## **b) What should the OH elements of that standard look like, particularly to ensure a simple and clear baseline for quality OH provision?**

These elements are already listed in the 2023 SEQOHS [standards](#), which sets out the requirements that employers must remain aware of in order to regularly review access to effective OH services and to ensure that they remain suitable for their workforce.<sup>14</sup> This includes provisions that must be assessed such as professional governance and minimum standards, independent review, regular clinical audit, range of services provided, customer and client satisfaction, inclusion of service development and innovation and regular review of client needs.

This allows employers to ensure that any agreements in place with OH providers, or the principles could apply to services they might deliver in-house, remains effective and efficient to consistently meet the needs of their workforce. Regular feedback from those providing and receiving the support also enables a trustworthy, open, and credible line of feedback on services. This ensures that these services remain up-to-date, relevant, applicable, and useful for all workers.

Furthermore, priority must also be given to managing exposure to work-place risks that may give rise to ill health by ensuring the application of sound occupational hygiene and ergonomic principles to identify hazards, assess risk and implement prevention and control measures. This strategy must also target employers and people new to the workplace and continue to emphasise the need to address occupational health as a consistent part of work life.

## **Chapter 3: Developing the work and health workforce capacity, including the expert OH workforce, to build a sustainable model to meet future demand**

### **Question 15: What more can be done to build the multidisciplinary clinical and non-clinical workforce equipped with the skills needed to deliver occupational health and wider work and health services? Please include any examples of creative solutions.**

Through delivering a Diploma in Occupational Medicine, RSPH have learnt that the health workforce (clinical and non-clinical) hold a significant role in the delivery of appropriate OH services due to their expertise in the impact of public health approaches, understanding inequalities (and their impacts on health) and the differing needs of communities and groups of people, alongside the tangible benefits of OH.

Both the clinical and non-clinical workforce requires the capacity to further understand the widespread benefits of delivering OH services. This applies to the wider public health workforce (WPHW), which RSPH defines “*Any individual who is not a specialist or practitioner in public health but has the opportunity or ability to positively impact health and wellbeing through their work.*” This wide-spread group plays a critical role in delivering public health and OH-type services across a wide range of health and care settings as well as in business and organisations. There is a wealth of experience across this workforce and RSPH would welcome a further discussion on how they can be tapped into to deliver health prevention and supportive care across businesses. RSPH are committed to supporting the wider public health workforce and, similarly to Businesses for Health are focussed on solutions to support workplace-based health interventions and services. The workforce is skilled at identifying where workplace-based interventions will be effective and developing innovative solutions. They are key to the future health of the UK.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> (No date a) *2023 standards - fom.ac.uk*. Available at: <https://www.fom.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023-SEQOHS-Standards-March-2023.pdf> (Accessed: 03 October 2023).

<sup>15</sup> RSPH (no date) *Wider Public Health Workforce, RSPH*. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/wider-public-health-workforce.html> (Accessed: 06 October 2023).

The [report](#) from Council for Work and Health demonstrated the precise steps to ensure that the clinical and non-clinical workforce is led by a vision for OH practice and a consequent workforce plan is developed to underpin the delivery of the vision.

To develop the relevant skills required to deliver OH services, the groups of people most likely to need to access and interact with OH services should help guide the building of sustainable OH models to meet future demand. This could focus on employees with a higher risk of falling into unemployment, those with pre-existing conditions known to impact fitness for work, those living with or at risk of long-term conditions, those with increased prevalence of chronic disease, people working in SMEs, employers, and those involved in work and workplace design and planning.

Training, awareness, and sufficient resources are needed to enable all members of the workforce to remain informed on the benefits of employees accessing OH services. Employers must ensure that the focus of their business shifts towards an acknowledgement that a healthy workforce is a productive workforce. This will enable businesses to develop and target OH services that are most valuable to their workforce and in turn, this also allows the government and business to work together to consistently understand their OH needs, the precise benefits they bring (through increased productivity and tangible financial gains) and the makeup of an appropriate OH workforce. By partnering businesses, OH service providers and the government, and encourage regular discussions around the delivery of OH services by employers, we will then develop a greater understanding of the different health needs of employees across a range of sectors. This, in turn, will aid the government ambition of developing a national “health at work” standard which meets the requirements of different employees to consistently access appropriate and relevant OH services.

**Question 22: What further action can the Government take to support multidisciplinary teams to deliver work and health conversations in other settings (for example NHS or community settings), to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities?**

It is vital for governments, OH service providers and businesses to work together. Investment into the workforce is key to delivering sustainable OH services which meets the needs of all workers. This will contribute to the government’s ambitions set out in the major conditions strategy of returning people with long-term conditions to the workplace. The government must provide the support and resources necessary to encourage sustainable collaborative partnerships between providers and businesses to ensure that the public health and OH needs of workers, employers and the local community is consistently addressed. Health professionals and the public health workforce (in its widest sense) urgently need the resources, capacity, and training to work with OH services to develop the skills to consistently identify and deliver appropriate care for the national workforce.

Furthermore, the government must identify the standards that multidisciplinary teams should use (such as those in the 2023 SEQOHS [standards](#)) across a variety of settings. This will ensure that the services and groups in need of OH services can be identified and receive the necessary support. If we get OH right, the impacts on the health of the nation will be great. It should lead to a decrease in preventable conditions, free up NHS resources and tackle the impacts of inequalities at source.