



Mental Health and Employment

Key opportunities to put policy into practice

Jenni Bacon, Bob Grove and Helen Lockett

Following the publication of much new policy in December 2009, [we published a summary explanation of the links between four key mental health and employment documents](#). In this paper we aim to make sense of what all the policy means in practice and pick out the key commitments and opportunities as we see them.

[Working our Way to Better Health, New Horizons and Work, Recovery and Inclusion](#) represent a cross-government commitment to mental health and employment, and to the recommendations made in the independent [Perkins review, Realising Ambitions: better employment support for people with a mental health condition](#).

What does this mean in practice? Much of what was set out in Working our Way to Better Health, the Mental Health and Employment Strategy, is described as being 'long-term vision', which means that there is much scope for regional and local action to influence change. Having set the direction with the help of experts, government is looking now to those working in the field for ideas, for best practice and for the practical realisation of the vision.

Between them the strategies cover a wide range of issues, from wellbeing at work to long-term disability and unemployment. These different areas of focus and need should be addressed separately. Each offers areas of opportunity for practitioners to bring about change locally to improve employment opportunities for people with a range of mental health problems.

Healthy workplaces

Healthy workplaces are key to the Government's public health approach which runs through both Working our Way to Better Health and New Horizons. The Government's Health, Work and Well-being Strategy Unit (HWWB) is now [committed to establishing a National Centre for Working Age Health and Well-being](#). Tenders have been invited from organisations who can set-up and host this centre, the aim of which is to 'strengthen the evidence base on working age health and well-being and to communicate this in an accessible way to aid Government in policy making and stakeholders in implementing that policy'.

Support for employers is high on the agenda, particularly for small to medium size enterprises. To help them develop, the DWP's £4 million Challenge Fund will continue to fund innovative projects that improve employees' health and welfare at work. Details of the second round of bidding for grants will be available on the [HWWB website](#) later in 2010, or you can approach your local HWWB Coordinator for details as they are administering the scheme. [Find out who is the Coordinator in your region here](#).

Health promotion measures, while important, should complement the understanding that, at any one time, a proportion of the workforce will be managing or will develop a mental health condition, for which they may need support. Working our Way to Better Health recognises that 'effective and supportive' managers who can identify the signs of mental distress and help employees get practical support are crucial to the mentally healthy

workplace. One of its commitments is to encourage employers to commit to training for managers (WoWtBH, 32). Such ‘early-response’ training has long been missing from the support available to employers. Sainsbury Centre is now offering a workplace mental health training programme.

Impact on Depression

Sainsbury Centre has launched Impact on Depression, a nationwide training programme for employers and line managers to help them to identify and respond to common mental health problems in the workplace.



Delivered by accredited mental health professionals, Impact on Depression quickly raises awareness of the issues and helps leaders identify, speak with and encourage access to treatment for staff with potential mental health problems.

Impact on Depression is a tried and tested programme, based on the Australian national charity *beyondblue*'s highly successful, award winning National Workplace Programme.

Keeping people in work

Preventing people from falling out of work because of mental health problems depends on intervening quickly when things go wrong, for example when people don't return to work after sickness absence as expected. Ensuring that relationships between employer and employee don't break down is crucial. The Government has made a number of commitments aimed at providing employers with easy access to the specialist help they need (WoWtBH, 35-38). The new ‘fit-note’ will have an impact here: employers will need to know what constitutes an adequate fitness assessment, and

GPs need to be equipped to give better return-to-work advice for patients to share with employers. The change from ‘sick-note’ to ‘fit-note’ takes place on the 6 April 2010 and an education programme for GPs is being designed by the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

One area of real opportunity here is in the research and practice of job retention. Preventing relationship breakdown at work and helping employees and employers negotiate health and work adjustments can often best be accomplished by an independent agent who works with all parties. Job retention approaches are currently being trialled in the various Fit for Work pilots but Working our Way to Better Health also commits to utilising the expertise of voluntary and third sector providers to ‘develop more joined up and comprehensive work-related health and vocational support services’ (WoWtBH, 38).

For people who are struggling with a mental health condition and whose employment is at risk, job retention services can be vital. But provision is very patchy across the UK. This emerging profession is distinct from the specialist employment support that aims to find people work.

Certain principles and evidence of good practice do exist and the distinct skills and characteristics of specialists have been examined in a survey of experts (a DELPHI study). Job retention needs to be recognised in its own right as the effectiveness of programmes like Improving Access to Psychological Therapies and the Fit for Work pilots with regard to keeping people in work depend on the best practice of this crucial work intervention.

Overcoming individual barriers to employment

Running through all the new policy is a focus on coordinated, individualised support for people wishing to gain employment or get back to work. Proposed changes to the Access to Work programme, which helps to fund ‘reasonable adjustments’ for disabled people in workplaces across the country, bring a renewed focus on people with mental health conditions, complete with a set

The public sector

Running through public policy is an emphasis on the public sector supporting its own mentally healthy workforce. Following the recommendations of the [Boorman Review](#), the NHS is addressing its workforce issues with the [Open your Mind campaign](#). Running in parallel with the anti-stigma programme across England and Wales, [Time to Change](#), it is designed to support NHS employers to simultaneously create a better working environment for staff and to improve employment rates for people with mild, moderate and severe mental health conditions within the NHS.

target. Take-up of this scheme by people with mental health conditions has been low over the years. From April to September 2009, only 1% of those who received support cited mental health conditions as their primary disability. However, the commitment and the money are there and the DWP is looking to professionals to promote and publicise the fact to individuals who might benefit.

A pilot scheme in London led by Mind in 2009 demonstrated that it is possible to use Access to Work funds to pay for in-work support, through a job retention approach, for people with mental health conditions. Access to Work is also being reshaped to offer more personalised and flexible help to individuals and their employers, which should help people with fluctuating mental health conditions, and a 'pre-certificate' for jobseekers to show that they would, in principle, be eligible for help, as recommended in [Realising Ambitions](#).

Employment as part of recovery

The publication of [Working our Work to Better Health](#) and the New Horizons future vision for mental health services on the same day was designed to signify the inter-relationship between the two agendas. Both emphasise that employment should be at the heart of the 'recovery vision' for mental

health services generally. Taking on board the recommendations from [Realising Ambitions](#), both documents highlight that mental health service providers and commissioners should promote a focus on employment for the populations they serve. This means that employment and employment status will increasingly be seen as a key indicator that will need reporting on, and that local commissioning decisions should be influenced by what we know works on supporting people into work.

Taking effect in April 2010, the [guidance to the standard mental health contract for PCTs](#) features encouragement to include employment as an indicator to be routinely supplied by providers. Employment as an indicator will appear in the draft of the new performance framework for non-foundation trust mental health providers as of April 2010 and employment for people on the new Care Programme Approach in mental health services already appears as an outcome indicator in the [World Class Commissioning Assurance Framework \(year 2\)](#).

At the regional level, as of April 2010, Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) will be charged with working with mental health providers and commissioners to increase access to employment services in secondary care in a change to the guidance of the standard mental health contract.

Help is also available for SHAs looking to understand how to improve their regional baselines. Sainsbury Centre's ['Measuring what Matters'](#) details, among other things, contextual data that will provide a local baseline against which to collect other employment related data.

This increased focus on employment needs to be managed carefully – it should not feel like a threat to those who use services: a cynical agenda simply to move people 'off benefits'. Nor should it be seen as simply an outcome of treatment. Rather, this embedding of employment in the New Horizons vision should be seen as the opportunity it is – an open door to push at in changing the culture of mental health services; to seeing employment aspirations as realistic and integral to many people's recovery.

Centres of Excellence in IPS

Mental health and employment services in Central and North West London, Essex, Shropshire, Somerset and South West London have committed to being full partners in the Sainsbury Centre's Centres of Excellence in Employment scheme. They will act as exemplars of how Individual Placement and Support (IPS) can be implemented in localities across England.

Alongside these trailblazing sites, another four 'emerging centres' have been invited into the programme from Sussex, Leeds, Devon and Nottingham. Find out more on the [Sainsbury Centre website](#).

Employment support for people using secondary mental health services

The independence and authority of the Perkins Review should help to ensure the longevity of many of its recommendations. In particular, the growing acceptance amongst policy makers of the evidence-base for [Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\)](#) is encouraging.

Continued provision of high quality employment services for people in contact with secondary mental health services who need more intensive support to find and retain work remains a priority. People who need additional support are too easily left behind in times like these. However, such is the profile and acceptance of the IPS evidence-base at a national and international level that, despite pressures on budgets, now is a very good time to be building the case with local commissioners:

- All three strategies and the Perkins Review endorse the evidence base for IPS and point out the waste of talent that not investing in these services represents
- Employment will be incorporated into the World Class Commissioning framework guidance for commissioners of mental health services

- There is evidence on IPS's value for money and affordability, with evidence that, in the long-term, reductions in health care costs can accrue from those who become 'steady workers'
- There are increasing examples of successful implementation across the country: IPS is very 'do-able'.

The development of evidence-based employment services will be supported nationally by the National Mental Health Development Unit (NMH DU). Their [PSA16 Project](#), and national Employment Lead, will support the Department of Health's [Deputy Regional Directors of Social Care](#) in their responsibilities for delivering on employment targets for people with mental health conditions. NMH DU and the Department of Health will also develop a resource to provide information, practical support and build local capacity to deliver improved outcomes for people accessing services.

Conclusions

There have been more developments in mental health and employment policy in recent months than at any time in the last decade. There may be more to come.

But however the situation develops or changes in the coming months, this recent activity has given rise to some tremendous opportunities that we can all take now, whatever our different areas of expertise: from assisting people with mental health conditions to achieve their employment ambitions to helping everyone attain and maintain better mental health in their working lives.

Published: April 2010

Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health
134-138 Borough High Street,
London
SE1 1LB
T 020 7827 8300
www.scmh.org.uk

Charity registration no. 1091156. A Company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 4373019.