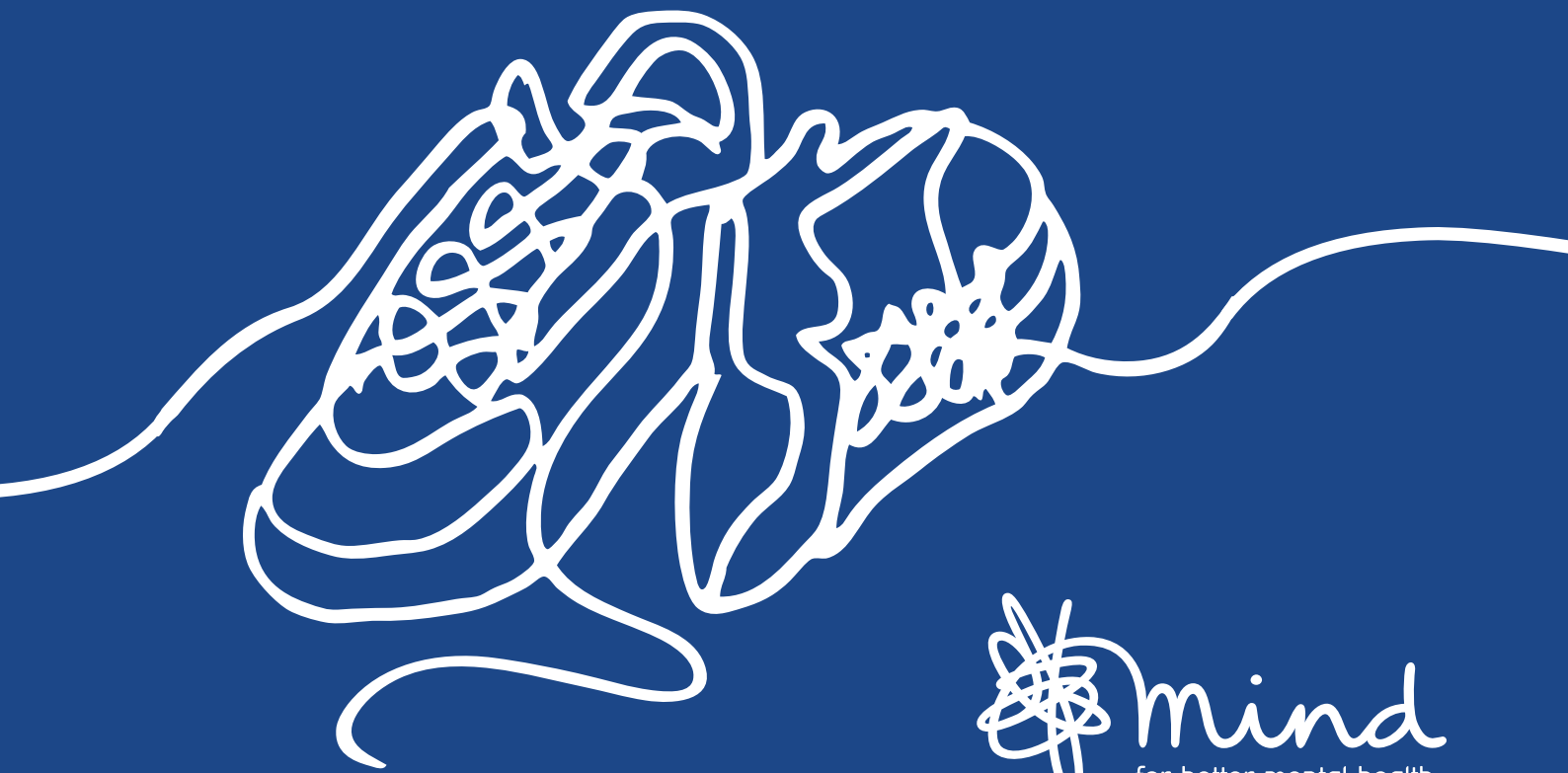




Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

SPORT+
RECREATION
ALLIANCE

A guide to implementing the **Thriving at Work** standards in the sport and physical activity sector



 **mind**
for better mental health

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Foreword by Mims Davies MP, Minister for Sport and Civil Society

Great progress has been made in recent years to break down the stigma and raise awareness of mental health issues in society, including in sport and physical activity. But with 1 in 4 people in the UK experiencing a mental health problem each year it is vital that the right level of support exists to help everyone who is affected. And I believe there is scope to do more.

The Government's sport strategy '[Sporting Future](#)', published in December 2015, not only recognised the positive impact sport can have on physical and mental health, but also highlighted the importance of welfare and wellbeing in sport, recognising the sacrifices athletes make in striving for success.¹

We know that the sport and physical activity sector as a whole has its own unique challenges in relation to mental health in the workplace. This can include the high-pressured nature of sport at an elite level, alongside a high level of public scrutiny, risk of injury, and the impact of transition and working conditions. This includes working hours, seasonality of sport, extensive travel and periods away from home.

In 2018 we published a [Mental Health and Elite Sport Action Plan](#). One of its actions was to produce and disseminate specific sport-related resources to support the implementation of the *Thriving at Work* recommendations across the sport sector.² These guidelines are the result of that work.

I'd like to thank Mind and everyone who contributed to the development of this guide. I hope it serves as a useful resource for people working in sport and physical activity, and that we continue to improve awareness and raise standards across the sector.



Mims Davies MP,
Minister for Sport and Civil Society



1 (2015). *Sporting Future*. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport.

2 (2018). *Mental Health and Elite Sport Action Plan*. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport.

Foreword by Paul Farmer CBE, Chief Executive of Mind

At Mind, we're proud to be working with the sport and physical activity sector to raise mental health awareness and open up activities to everyone. We achieve this through initiatives like the **Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation**, **Get Set to Go** (a programme to support people living with mental health problems to get active), and our **On Your Side** partnership with the English Football League.

Research shows that being active boosts wellbeing. But for people working in the sector it can be difficult to talk openly about mental health and get support. The sport and physical activity sector is growing fast. It contributes £39billion to our economy each year³ and employs more than 400,000 people.⁴

Money spent to improve employee's mental health has a consistently positive return on investment. So it's in everyone's interest to do more in this area.

Thriving at Work is an independent review that outlines what employers can do to better support all employees – including those with mental health problems to remain in and thrive through work.⁵ This guide has been developed by Mind in collaboration with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Sport and Recreation Alliance, and Sport England to help employers across the sport and physical activity sector to understand and implement the *Thriving at Work* standards. It offers practical support, with relevant examples and tools. We hope you find it useful.



Paul Farmer CBE,
Chief Executive of Mind



3 (2015). Sporting Future. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport.

4 (July–September 2017). Labour Force Survey. Office for National Statistics.

5 (October 2017). Thriving at Work: An independent review of mental health and employers. Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer.

About this guide

Who is this guide for?

It's aimed at people who shape mental health policy and practices in sports and physical activity organisations. These include senior leaders, HR professionals, safeguarding, welfare and mental health leads.

We know employers come in all shapes and sizes, and the way you work with your people probably includes a range of working relationships, from performance-based contracts through to full-time, permanent employment. We have designed this guide to support employers across the sector – including professional sports clubs, leisure trusts, national governing bodies, charities and small businesses.

How do I use this guide?

After outlining the *Thriving at Work* standards, we'll look at each of them in turn, and provide practical examples of what employers across the sector are doing in these areas, as well as helpful tools.

It's important to see mental health at work as more than just supporting people with mental health problems. We all have mental health and supporting everyone's wellbeing will improve the performance of your organisation as a whole.

Consider how you can most effectively support the mental health of your people across all areas of the organisation. You'll need to use a mix of approaches and channels to engage people in non-office based roles, remote workers and volunteers.

If your organisation is just beginning to take action, use this guide to help you take the first steps and make a long-term commitment to a better way of working. Organisations that are further along can use it to formalise and improve their current approach.

Please bear in mind that we aren't providing legal advice but practical guidance. Employers may also need to get their own legal advice on the right approach to take in any particular case.

General terms and definitions

To make this guide relevant to everyone in the sector we've used some general terms to refer to the many different job roles that exist in the sports sector.

Employee is shorthand for anyone who's part of your workforce, including volunteers, part-time and full-time staff, officials and professional athletes.

Line manager or coach covers anyone whose role includes line management, developing or supervising people at work. For elite sports this includes coaching, welfare and performance staff.



What are the Thriving at Work standards?

Thriving at Work is an independent review of mental health commissioned by Government and led by Lord Dennis Stevenson CBE and Paul Farmer, Mind CEO. It outlines what employers can do to better support all employees – including those with mental health problems – to remain in and to thrive through work.

Thriving at Work sets out six core standards and four enhanced standards.⁶

Six core standards

These standards are for all employers.

1. Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan...

...that promotes good mental health for all employees and outlines the support available for those who may need it.

2. Develop mental health awareness among employees...

...by making information, tools and support accessible.

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

...during the recruitment process and at regular intervals throughout employment. Offer appropriate workplace adjustments to employees who require them.

4. Provide employees with good working conditions...

...and ensure a healthy work/life balance and opportunities for development.

5. Promote effective people management...

...to ensure that all employees have a regular conversation about their health and wellbeing with their line manager, coach or organisational leader. Train and support line managers and supervisors in effective management practices.

6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing...

...by understanding available data, talking to employees and considering risk factors.

Four enhanced standards

These standards are for employers that can and should go further. They're designed for larger employers and the public sector, but any employer can put them into practice.

1. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting...

...to include a leadership commitment and an outline of the organisation's approach to mental health.

2. Demonstrate accountability...

...by nominating a health and wellbeing lead at Board or Senior Leadership level, with clear reporting duties and responsibilities.

3. Improve the disclosure process...

...to encourage openness during recruitment and throughout employment. Ensure employees are aware of why information is required and make sure the right support is in place to facilitate a positive employer response following disclosure.

4. Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help...

...including digital support, employer-purchased Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Programmes, or NHS services, among other sources of support.



6 (October 2017). Thriving at Work: An independent review of mental health and employers, Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer.

Spotlight on mental health in elite sport

It's a rollercoaster emotionally. The threat of leaving the game is constant – will I get to the next stage? Will I be dropped? Will I get a contract or be released? What happens if I get injured? What happens when I retire?

– Elite Athlete

Professional sportspeople face a unique set of pressures – from scoring goals and winning trophies to facing media scrutiny and meeting fans' high expectations. This all makes for an extraordinary workplace, but it's still work. Line managers, coaches, clubs, governing bodies and players' unions all play a role to help sports professionals manage their mental health at work.

After some suicides with lots of media coverage and more sportspeople speaking out about mental health, Mind commissioned [dedicated research on mental health in elite sport](#).⁷ It explores how sport's governing bodies and players' organisations currently respond to, manage and prevent mental ill-health among athletes and identifies successful best-practice programmes.

The impact of winning and losing, being promoted and relegated has an impact on everyone working in elite sport, from coaches and managers to performance directors and administration staff.

Find out more about how Government and the sector are taking action to develop mental health support specifically for elite sport, and what more needs to be done in the [Mental Health and Elite Sport Action Plan and Duty of Care in Sport Review](#).⁸

⁷ www.mind.org.uk/media/1085139/Mental-Health-and-Elite-Sport.pdf

⁸ (April 2017). Duty of Care in Sport Review. Independent report by Baroness Grey-Thompson.

Giving athletes a sporting chance

Colin Bland, Chief Executive Officer, Sporting Chance

Sporting Chance is a charity that helps over 800 professional and former professional sportspeople who are experiencing emotional problems or who are worried about addiction.

“There is an assumption that mental health in sport is different from mental health in the general public,” says Colin.

“Sports professionals are people first. There are different pinch-points, but one bit of research among footballers suggests it’s the same as in wider society.”

What differs are the pressures professional sportspeople face. Colin points out that in team sports, players are lucky if they have contracts that last longer than two or three years. And, to add to the anxiety, the biggest competition can come from members of your own team looking to impress the coach.

“One of the big challenges we face in sport is making it OK to not be OK,” Colin explains.

“If you’re worried about being selected for the team you need a confidential space to talk about that. You might not want your coach to know that you’re struggling.”

Find out more at sportingchanceclinic.com

Workplace mental health: what's happening now?

1 in 6

British workers are
affected by mental health
problems each year.⁹



Poor mental health
costs employers between

**£33billion and
£43billion a year.**

This is made up of absenteeism
(£8billion), presenteeism
(£17–£26billion), and staff
turnover (£8billion).¹⁰

9 (2012). Absence Management Annual Survey Report 2012. CIPD in partnership with Simply Health.

10 (2017). Mental Health and Employers: Supporting the Case for Investment. Deloitte.

Workplace mental health triggers

Typical workplace triggers for stress and mental health problems in the sport and physical activity sector can include:

Uncertainty

- insecure or performance-based contracts
- uncertainty around sustainability of funding
- job insecurity or poorly managed change
- financial worries

Working relationships

- poor managerial support
- poor relationships with line managers or coaches
- poor relationships with colleagues
- bullying

Work pressures

- unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work
- unrealistic expectations or deadlines
- pressure to win/get medals and awareness of impact on all staff if unsuccessful
- overly pressurised work or training environments

Working patterns

- long hours and no breaks
- irregular hours and seven-day contracts
- extensive travel, including overseas working
- inability to use annual leave

Working environment

- a poor physical working environment
- lone working
- poor internal communication