

Section two

Workplace mental health champions

Workplace mental health champions are employees who challenge stigma and encourage positive mental health in the organisation and for its workforce - both paid and voluntary.

Mental health champions aren't intended to replace or duplicate the important role of human resources (HR) within your organisation. Instead, they work alongside your HR team to create a positive mental health at work experience for everyone.



How to establish a workforce mental health champions scheme

There are three stages to establishing a scheme in your organisation. We will look at each in turn with practical tools, templates and examples from the sector to help you put these steps into action.

1) Designing and planning your scheme

Gaining consent from decision makers

Before anything else, you'll need to gain consent and support from decision makers in your organisation, such as line managers and senior managers. To do this, you'll need to highlight the benefits of establishing the scheme and what it will involve. We've outlined these below:

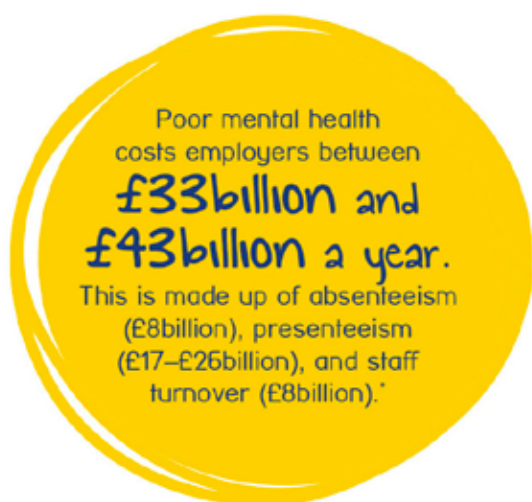
- **A mechanism to support your workforce's mental health**
Mental health problems can impact productivity, increase absence and have financial implications for your organisation. Introducing a mental health champions scheme could reduce the number of staff who are affected by mental health problems.
- **A more welcoming and inclusive workplace**
This could help you recruit and retain staff to ensure your organisation has the best possible workforce and to save time and money on recruitment.
- **Development opportunities for staff**
This also helps to retain and recruit staff, as they feel the organisation is committed to their development.

“ After becoming a mental health champion and completing the [Mental Health First Aid] training, I feel comfortable to engage with someone that I think needs a chat, or to provide guidance etc. Not only in the racing industry but in everyday life I have come across people needing to talk/be listened to, and to get advice or help from a professional. ”

British Horseracing Authority mental health champion

“ As part of a team that works directly with the full spectrum of our sport’s participants, being a mental health champion and access to Mental Health First Aid training was becoming increasingly important. It was a great opportunity to de-bug such a sensitive subject; I have no doubt we are a stronger team for having taken part. ”

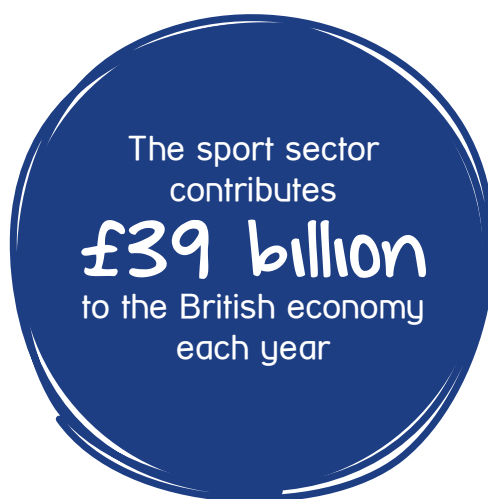
British Horseracing Authority mental health champion



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



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



www.sportengland.org/why-were-here/economic-development. Sport England

What it will involve:

- **Staff time.** Establishing and managing a mental health champions scheme involves a significant amount of staff time. If one employee is to be responsible for the scheme, it's important that their workload is reduced to enable them to coordinate it effectively.
- **Finance.** You may need a small budget to pay for champions to complete training and any resource development to support them with their role.

Designing your scheme

We know from experience that the most successful schemes are developed by the people you're trying to reach. This includes employees from across the organisation and those with lived experience of mental health problems. It's important to involve them from the beginning to help you plan and design your scheme (often called a co-design or co-production approach).

Mind's [influence and participation toolkit](#) provides a range of tools to help you involve people effectively in the design, development and delivery of activities.

Running a co-design workshop

We suggest running a short workshop to co-design your champions scheme. This can be delivered virtually or face-to-face. The 5 Ws and H is a simple and effective tool ([see Annex A](#)) you can use in your workshop to map out the scheme. It involves asking questions beginning with Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. For example, what should the role entail, what it shouldn't entail, and what it should be called. For example the RYA (Royal Yachting Association) champions decided to call their scheme Wellbeing Colleagues.

Creating a plan

Once you've decided what your champions scheme is going to look like, you need to put it into action. We've created a template action plan to help you do this ([see Annex B](#)). It includes sections on timelines and deadlines, goals and KPIs, roles and responsibilities and updates and reviews. It's important to consider how the scheme impacts on any of your existing policies and procedures, particularly in relation to safeguarding and managing risk. You'll find more information in our guide to [safeguarding and managing risk](#).

Good practice

On the back of signing the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) have established a mental health champions scheme. The scheme has included training a number of staff as Mental Health First Aiders.

To introduce their mental health champions, the BHA created a short film. The film includes some of the Champions talking about their personal experiences and how they manage their mental health. The film struck a real cord with BHA staff as it was honest and homemade during the coronavirus lockdown.

Important note

If someone needs urgent medical attention due to their mental health, direct them to their GP, Accident & Emergency at their nearest hospital, or the Samaritans on 116 123, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Alternatively, the yellow box at the top of every page on the [Mind website](#) will help direct people appropriately.

2) Developing your scheme

Recruiting workplace mental health champions

When an employee wishes to invest their time to volunteer as a champion this should be embraced. However, to ensure employees fully understand the role and have the skills, experience and knowledge to fulfil it successfully, it is good practice to undertake a recruitment process. This will also ensure champions are recruited in a fair and objective manner.

The following checklist provides an example of how to recruit workplace mental health champions within your organisation:

- **Talk to your HR team**
Ask if they have a policy, process and/or relevant forms for recruiting internal volunteers. This could save you a lot of time and effort in the recruitment process.
- **Confirm the recruitment process**
Some organisations have used an expression of interest or application form ([see Annex C for a template](#)) to open the opportunity to employees. If you decide to do this, you'll need to create an assessment panel to review and approve or decline applications.
- **Create a role description**
This should include the aim of the role and the skills and commitments needed to fulfil it. [See Annex D](#) for more information and a template job description.
- **Promote the opportunity**
Use internal communications such as staff updates, newsletters, intranet, posters and emails to promote the benefits of taking on the role of mental health champion to encourage staff to apply.
- **Assess applications**
The assessment panel could assess applications individually then meet to decide which to approve and decline. If decisions can't be made on the basis of the application alone, it may be necessary to host interviews.
- **Inform applicants**
Notify the successful applicants and ask those who were unsuccessful if they'd like to support the work and/or other mental health activities your organisation delivers.

Supporting workplace mental health champions

Before promoting your new champions scheme, take the time to put together a support package to help your champions fulfil their role effectively and to provide support when they need it. We've outlined some ideas below, but best practice is to run a co-design workshop with your champions to understand what support they would like. This is a chance to reaffirm what their role as a champion entails, to set boundaries (see Annex E) and to highlight the aims of the scheme.

- **Existing support**
Details of support available in your organisation such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs) or private health insurance.
- **Mental health training**
It's crucial that champions have the confidence, skills and knowledge to fulfil their role. There are several training courses that can help with this (see Available training in Section four for details):
 - 1 Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity eLearning.
 - 2 Mind's mental health training.
 - 3 Time to Change's free champion eLearning training.
- **Champions**
It's good practice to create a [handbook](#) providing information on your champions scheme, guidance around the role, the support available to champions and where to signpost people who may be experiencing mental health problems.
- **Wellness action plans (WAPs)**
[Wellness action plans](#) are an easy, practical way of helping people to support their own mental health. They help us to identify what keeps us well, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should we experience one.

In any organisation, there will be several different employee relationships that impact on the success of a mental health champions scheme. It is important to be clear on the responsibilities of each role and how they can interact:

- **Workplace mental health champion**
Promotes positive mental health through the planning and delivery of a range of wellbeing activities. Provides light touch support to colleagues by signposting to appropriate professional support as required.
- **Mental health lead**
Provides strategic leadership of mental health across the organisation, shaping policy and practice. Supports the whole organisation with crisis management and complex mental health support.
- **Line manager**
Supports positive mental health as part of line management and leadership duties. Signposts to additional resources and training support as required.

See [Annex D](#) for example job descriptions for both workplace mental health champions and mental health leads.

3) Delivering your scheme

- **Announcing your champions scheme**

You could do this through internal communications such as staff updates, newsletters, intranet, posters, and email from your chief executive or senior management. Champions may like to add that they are a workplace mental health champion to their internal email signature

- **Adapting and delivering activities**

Time to Change provides information and ideas on how to engage people in wellbeing activities, which can be adapted to your organisation. Having a broad range of activities helps you to keep people engaged and appeal to a wider audience.

Below are some examples of activities that champions could deliver to raise mental health awareness in your organisation:

Got a few minutes?	Got a few hours?	Got longer?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information and good practice about mental health across the organisation, using a variety of formats such as intranet, social media and/or posters and flyers. • Signpost people to sources of professional help and support. • Provide top tips to other members of the workforce on how to engage people with a mental health problem. • Walk and talk during meetings. • Bring and share lunch. • Organise a Time to Talk day tea trolley with cake. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a blog or case study about your organisation's work to promote positive mental health. • Have positive conversations with people and signpost them to sources of professional help²; • Give a talk or presentation to colleagues on mental health and stigma. • Sit on an interview panel to help with the recruitment of future colleagues. • Help your HR department to organise and promote mental health awareness training for staff. • Run activities with your workforce to raise awareness of mental health and challenge stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create local links with mental health organisations to support your workforce. • Develop social media and promotional campaigns. • Work with diverse communities to promote mental health and recruit people into your organisation. • Make the services your organisation offers accessible. • Support your organisation to commit to the Thriving at Work standards, or to deliver on your Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation pledges. • Coordinate and deliver events to improve workforce wellbeing. • Set up a peer network of champions to share experiences and best practice.

² If appropriate within your organisation's champions scheme, and with appropriate training.

- **Provide ongoing support to champions**

Have regular check-ins with your champions to ask about their wellbeing and if they need any additional support. You could do this through a face-to-face meeting, social media such as a closed Facebook group, or using an anonymous survey.

- **Review the scheme annually**

It is important to check that your workplace mental health champions scheme is achieving the goals and objectives you set out when you first established it, and to ask your champions if they want to continue in the role.

Good practice: EIS champion scheme

The English Institute of Sport (EIS) worked with Changing Minds to establish their mental health champions scheme. Abi Lewis (HR Officer) and Sam Cumming (Mental Health Manager) share some of their learning and tips from their scheme:

- Take the time to clarify what a champion is, what they will do and how they will fit into your organisation. There was early confusion about whether the scheme intends to create a new 'role' or a set of 'skills'. We've clarified our intentions to say that 'the champions scheme provides additional skills to help you carry out your normal role'. This may not be the right approach for everyone, but having this clearly stated helps to avoid confusion.
- Our training is set up as three one-day workshops but we have had to come up with a two one-day option to fit in with busy schedules.
- The need to deliver the content the content virtually following the COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected challenge! Flexibility was required to deliver the training online while maintaining the interactive nature of the sessions.
- Be clear about what ongoing support is available to your champions beyond initial training.