

Health and Support in the Work Place

June 2019

This report is based on conversations or responses freely given by employers and employees of small to medium sized businesses in Bolton. Where possible quotations are used to illustrate individual or collectively important experiences.

Engagement officers collect responses verbatim. This is important in showing the accuracy of our analysis, and so that further work can be done by anyone wishing to do so.

*A full explanation of the guiding principles and framework for how we do engagement and analysis can be found online on our website:
(<http://healthwatchbolton.co.uk/research-bank/>)*

This project fits with our 2017/2018 priority Health and the Workplace.

- Our [The Working Well Report 2017](#) worked with a large employer to look at employees opinions on health and care services. The participants identified a need for better information and flexibility to maintain good health and wellbeing. This project builds on some of those opinions and explores the context for small to medium sizes businesses.
- This project aligns with early help aspect of the Greater Manchester Health and Employment Programme – [Working Well](#).

We wanted to:

- Find out how well people are supported in their employment if they have health or care issues.
- Find out what support employers offered their employees if they have health or care issues.
- Find out how employers may be supported to support their employees.

To employees:

- How does your employer/manager support people if they have a health issue? (Think about any adaptations, sharing of information, change in workload, flexi time, adjustments etc.)
- How does your health and wellbeing impact your work/volunteering?
- What would help you manage work/volunteering around your health and wellbeing needs? (time off, productivity etc.)
- Does your employer/manager offer any initiatives to look after employees' health and wellbeing? (Cycle to work, keep fit classes, gym memberships, healthy snacks etc.)
- Do you have a health condition, disability or care need?
- Do you feel able to discuss your health and wellbeing needs with your employer/manager? Please explain.
- What industry do you work/volunteer in?
- How many people work in your organisation?
- Demographic questions

To employers:

- How do you, as an employer/manager, support people if they have a health issue? (Think about any adaptations, sharing of information, change in workload, flexi time, adjustments etc.)
- How does people's health and wellbeing impact your business?
- What would help you support your employees/volunteers' health and wellbeing in the workplace?
- Do you offer any initiatives to look after employees' health and wellbeing? (Cycle to work, keep fit classes, gym memberships, healthy snacks, counselling etc.)
- How many people work in your organisation?
- Which industry do you belong to?

How well are staff supported?

From answers received, the following needs were rated as the most important when being supported with health or welfare issues:

- Flexible hours - time off for appointments or change to working hours if required.
- Phased Return to work - after illness
- Change of duties - if unable to perform contracted duties after illness.
- Equipment. - changes in furniture, office, working environment.
- Approachable managers/Employers - the ability to speak freely about their welfare or concerns.

Most people surveyed stated they were happy with their employer and the support they received from their managers.

Support offered by employers

The employers who answered this survey seemed to mirror what employees stated they wanted from an employer.

They considered the Health and Welfare of their employees as very important and recognised that the businesses benefited from a workforce that was well supported.

The smaller businesses wanted to provide more for their employees but found it difficult due to a lack of resources. These businesses also potentially suffered the most when anyone of the workforce became ill.

All considered having an open, approachable policy the best when dealing with staff welfare.

Support for Employers

The smaller businesses stated that they would benefit from some better links between smaller and bigger businesses and some kind of mentoring or skills sharing.

They also stated that waiting times for health or counselling appointments are sometimes lengthy and this can have an adverse effect on their staff. One even offered to pay for private counselling when NHS waiting times were too long.

How we carried out the research

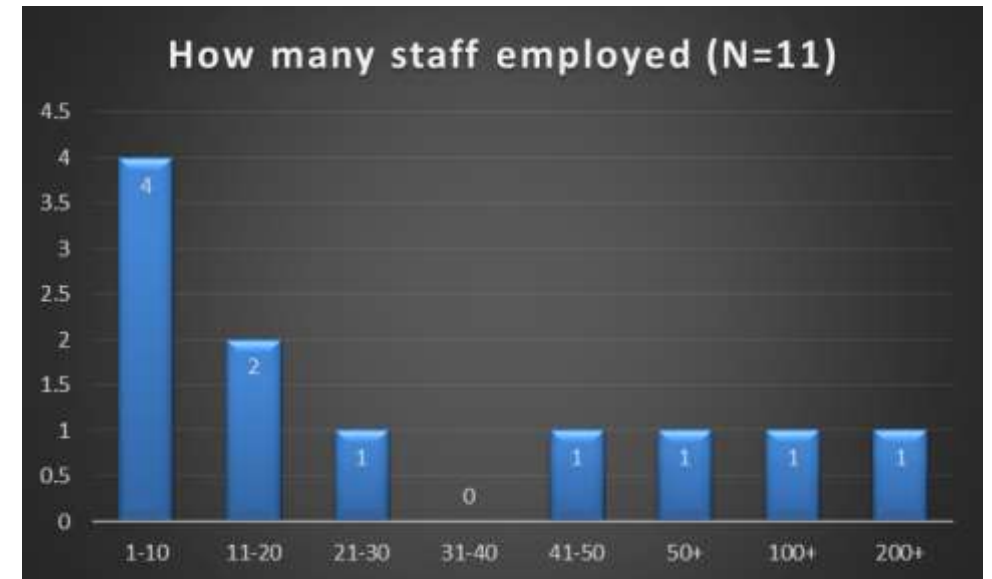
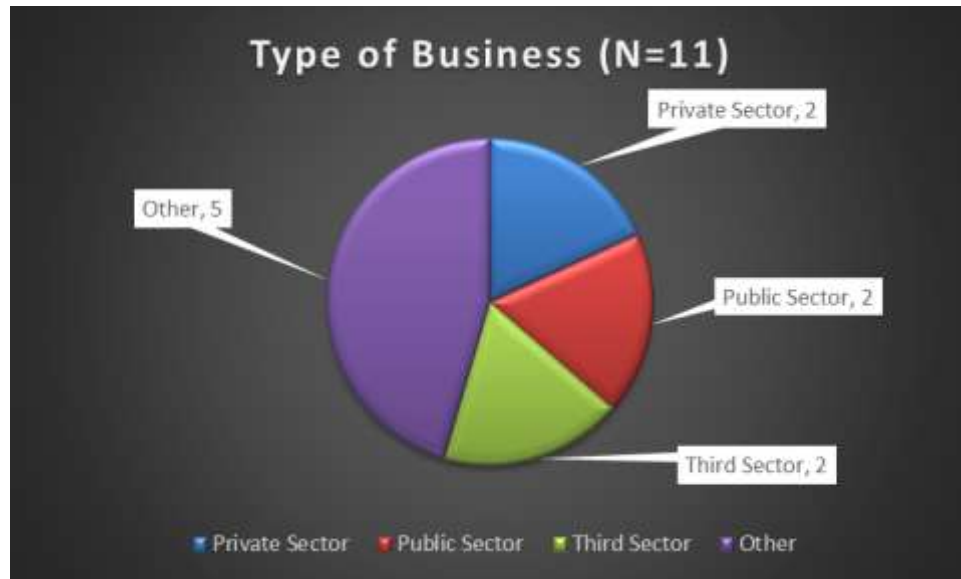
- We used an online and paper survey and some guided discussions.
- We collected counts of Number of employees, types of support offered, and comment on how effective available support is to help people maintain employment whilst navigating health and care issues.

Who we spoke too

- Small/medium organisations such as Bolton CVS, Scruffy Monkey, care homes, MHIST, Caterers, Bars and restaurants, The Octagon.
- We engaged with 11 small to medium organisations and 39 employees within the project duration.
- We used a snowball sampling method, initially using our membership, locality board and trustees and social media to identify small to medium employers and employees.

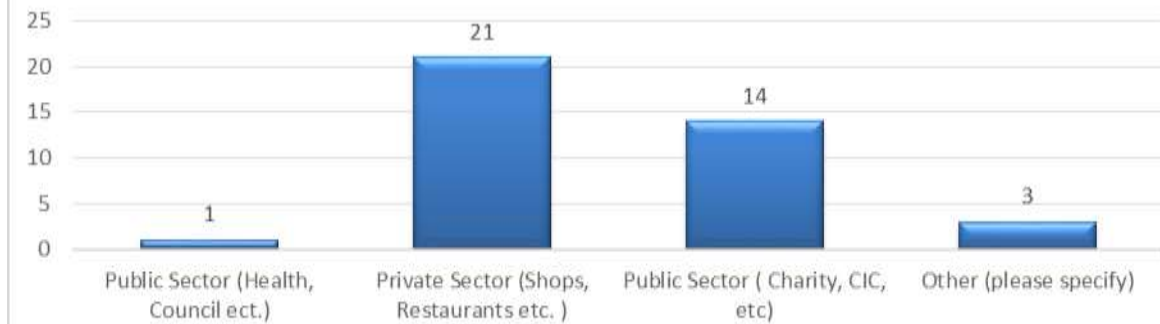
The timetable

- The engagement took place over November and December 2018

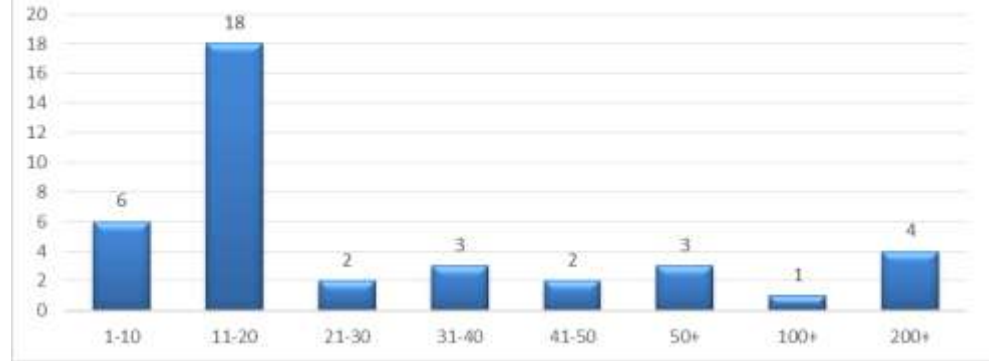


Who we spoke to: Employees

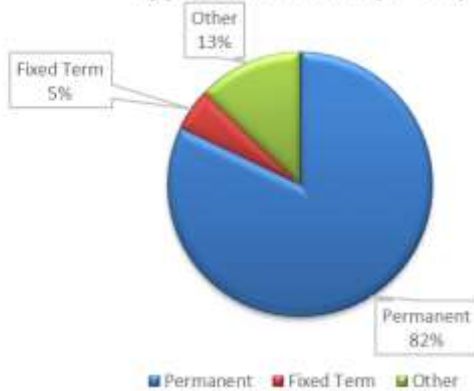
What industry do you work/volunteer in? N=39



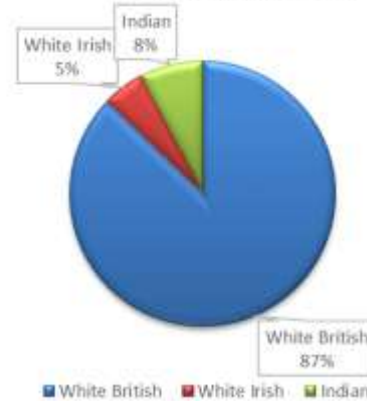
Number of employees N=39



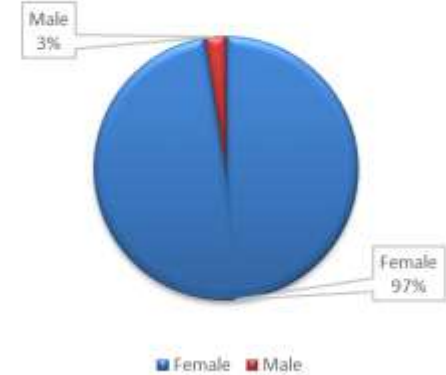
Type of contract (N=39)



Ethnicity (N=39)

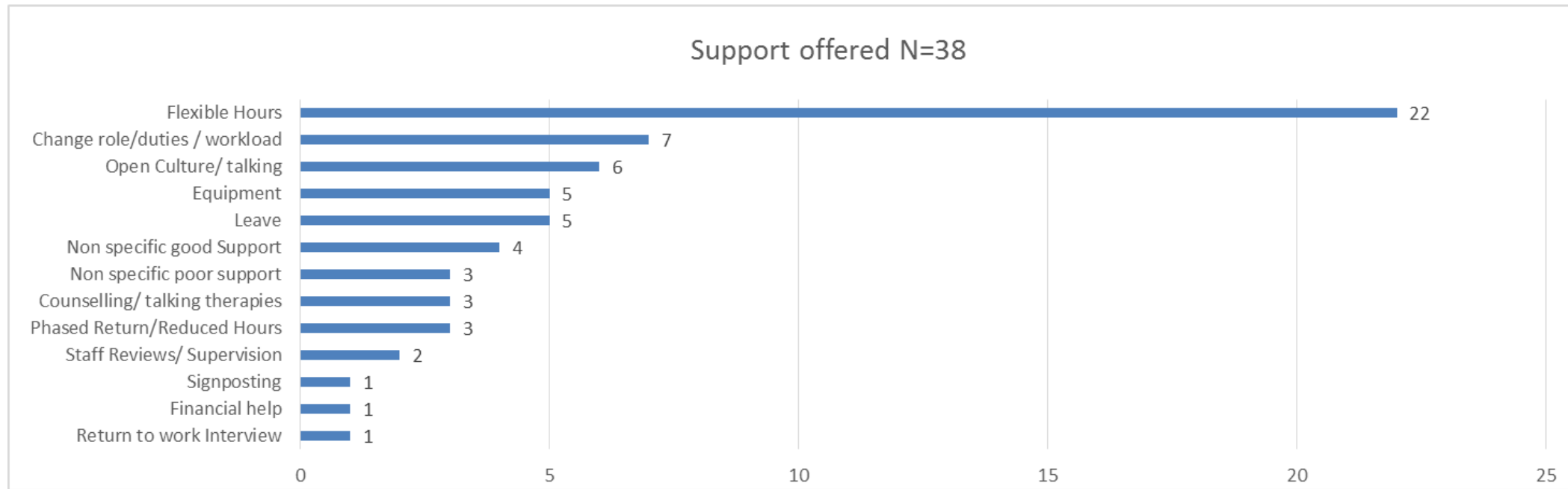


Gender (N=39)



What We Asked Employees (39 Responses)

How does your employer/manager support people if they have a health issue? (Think about any adaptations, sharing of information, change in workload, flexi time, adjustments etc.)



It is clear to see that most respondents (22) stated that their employer offered flexible hours when they have a health issue. Close together after that is the fact that their employers listen to what they need and change duties/ offer equipment or leave to help with the health issue.

There were only 3 instances where people stated their support was poor.

What may be a little surprising is the small number that mentioned Supervision, financial help, signposting or a return to work interview.

Flexible working examples:

- very supportive and will allow to change shifts.
- adaptable- allowing time off for appointments
- He gives time off for appointments etc..
- He is very good. Alters hours for appointments etc. Illnesses, days off.
- Allows time off for sickness, hospital appts, six month sick pay and gradual return to work if applicable

my manager's
would swap rooms
to suit me

initial consultation with
approachable managers

always open to discuss anything

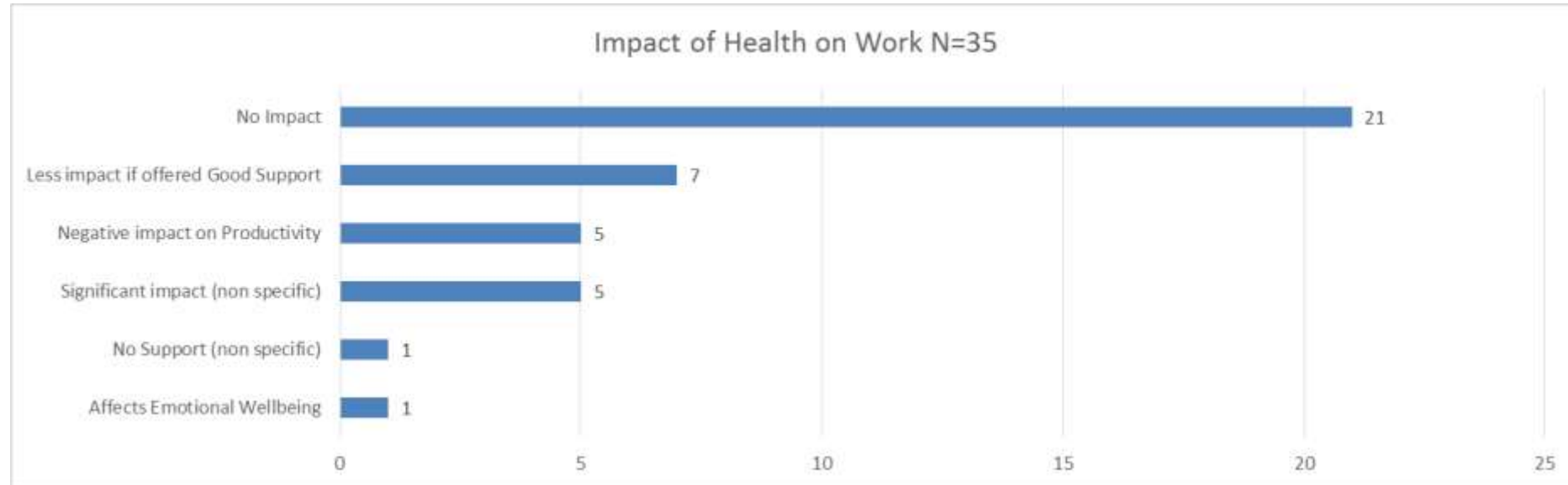
they don't want to support people if it effects their way of
doing things

Change role/Duties/workload examples:

- In the past workload has been changed (office based during pregnancy)
- Adjusting workload, time off for appointments etc.
- I sometimes struggle lifting heavy objects so my employer gets other people to help and gives me some different duties.

less hours- shorter days time out
of the room if needed
counselling support

How does your health and wellbeing impact your work/volunteering ?



- In this question over half of the respondents stated that their health and wellbeing had no effect on their work.
- **This was due to the fact that most didn't have health issues at the time of answering the survey.**
- Of those that did have health issues, 7 stated they could manage if they were offered good support.
- 10 people stated that their health impacted their productivity, 5 stating the impact was significant.
- There was only one instance where lack of support caused the situation to get worse.

Examples of no impact:

- It doesn't really as I have no health issues.
- Doesn't effect
- Not at all
- I don't have any health issues

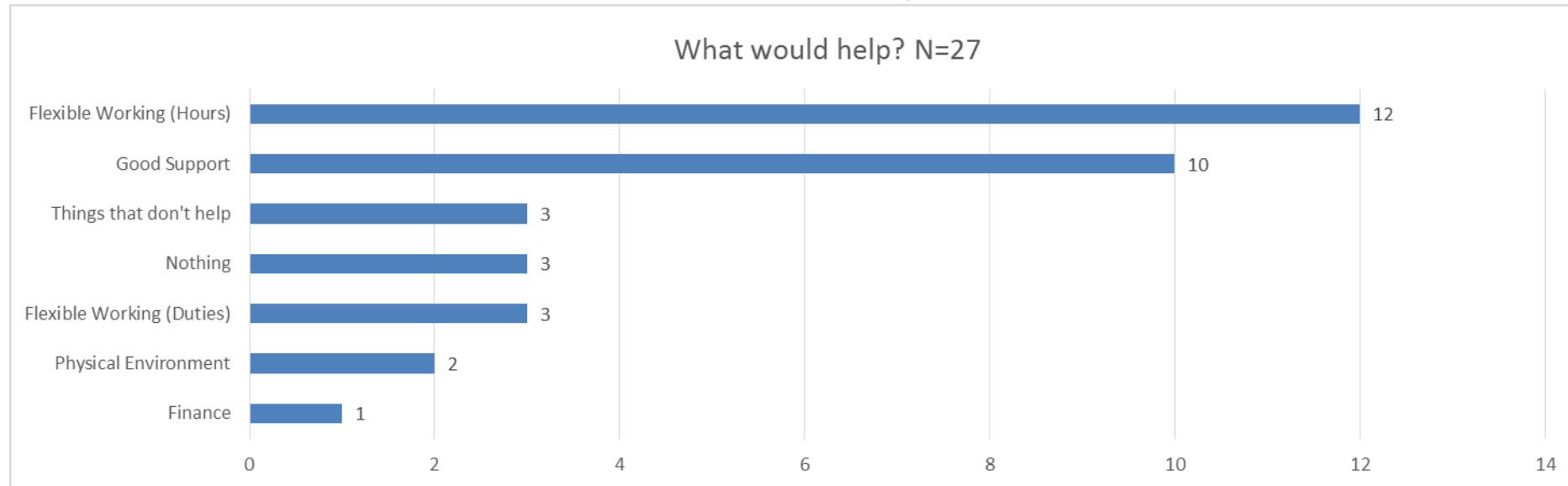
Lack of proactive manager has led to situation getting worse and more stressful

I can struggle to be productive when my mental health is poor

Examples of good support:

- It doesn't effect my work as my employer works with me.
- It doesn't because our boss is very adaptable to our needs.
- The work can be challenging but good support

What would help you manage work/volunteering around your health and wellbeing needs?
(time off, productivity etc.)



The respondents in this question chose *flexible working hours* and *good support* as the most important issues around looking after Health and Wellbeing needs.

The results of this question mirror question one quite closely. (Which is a positive sign that the employers we surveyed are offering their employees the correct support).

Flexible working examples:

- In theory adjustable hours, time off and help lifting heavy items
- If I need time off/appt flexibility etc. can usually have
- mentoring, some paid leave
- time off if needed
- shorter working hours time off

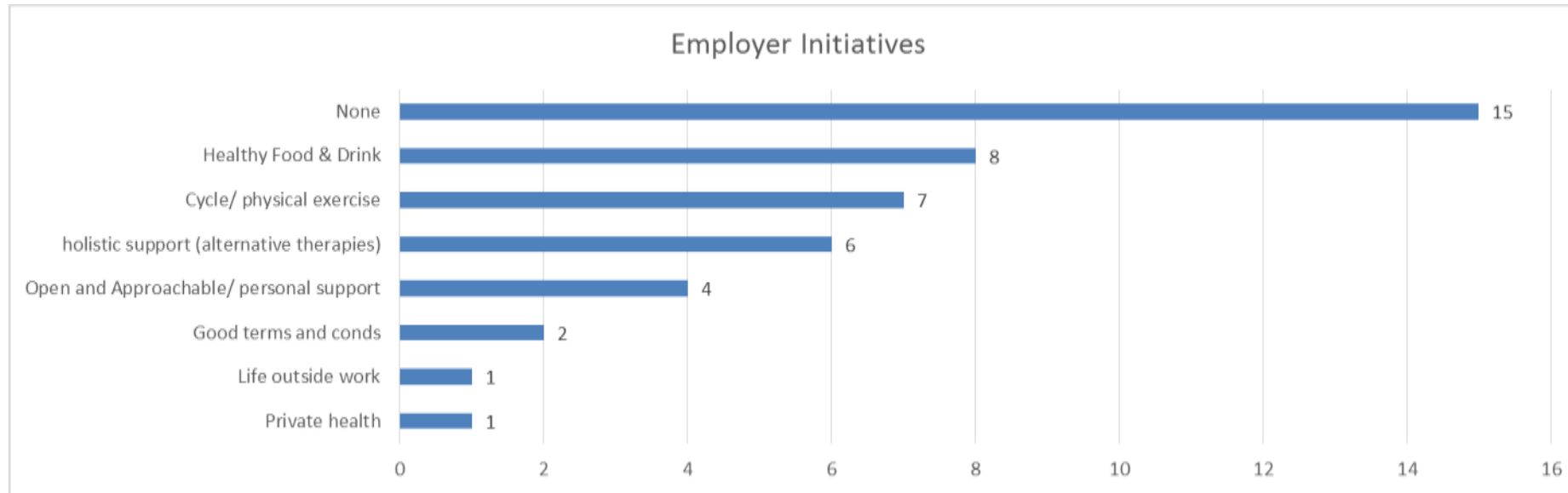
Not being made to feel guilty for needing any time off

When off sick not being nagged for sick notes before even asking if ok.

Examples of good support:

- Nothing, it is already in position with our employer :)
- We have appropriate strategies in place if time off needed.
- Being able to use other holistic /alternative professionals
- Mental health support

Does your employer/manager offer any initiatives to look after employees' health and wellbeing? (Cycle to work, keep fit classes, gym memberships, healthy snacks etc.)



- A large number of respondents state that their employer offers NO initiatives for health and wellbeing.
- 8 people did however state that healthy snacks were available in the workplace.
- 7 people stated they were **encouraged** to do physical exercise but fell short of stating they had gym membership or a cycle to work scheme.
- **Under 'holistic support', pamper/tranquillity/relaxation days were offered by employers and were appreciated by staff.**

Healthy Food & Drink Examples:

- He supplies healthy snacks to all staff
- Healthy drinks and snacks
- manager buys water weekly for all, staff buy snacks.
- healthy eating is encouraged

Not on site
like other
places and
schemes not
set up to
locality

Tranquillity day
for all staff

Tranquillity days,
pamper days, time
off for kids events at
school

- Yes we can cycle on our deliveries as we have use of a bike upstairs.
- Not sure, but we are encouraged to use the stairs!
- There is a bike to use for deliveries and lots of healthy foods

Do you feel able to discuss your health and wellbeing needs with your employer/manager?



yes, really understanding and caring.

It is clear to see most respondents have approachable Manager/Employers.

yes.
Good relationship and approachable

Yes - my line manager is very supportive and I feel I can talk to her.

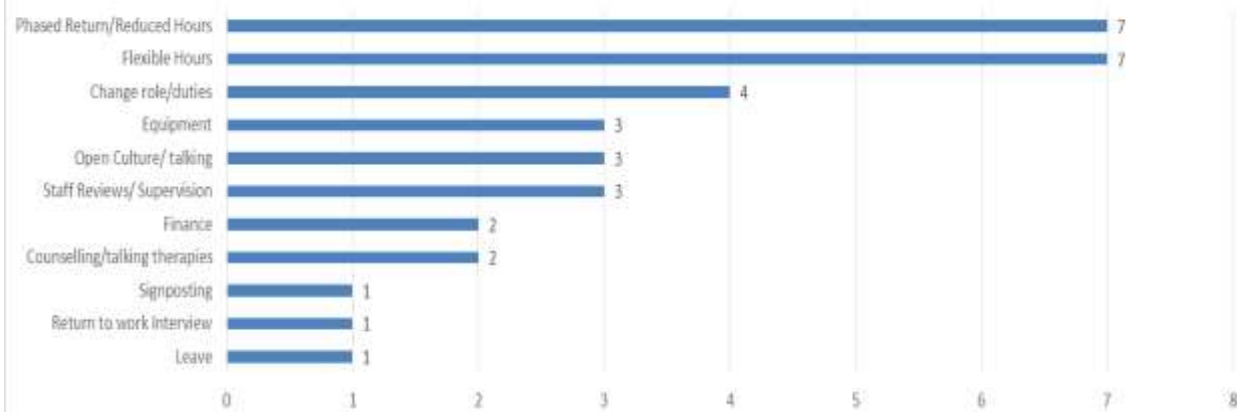
I don't feel my employer/manager listens

Yes.
I was reluctant at first, but when I did find the courage, they took notice of my needs.

What We Asked Employers (11 Responses)

What we asked employers – Questions (N=11)

How do you, as an employer/manager, support people if they have a health issue?

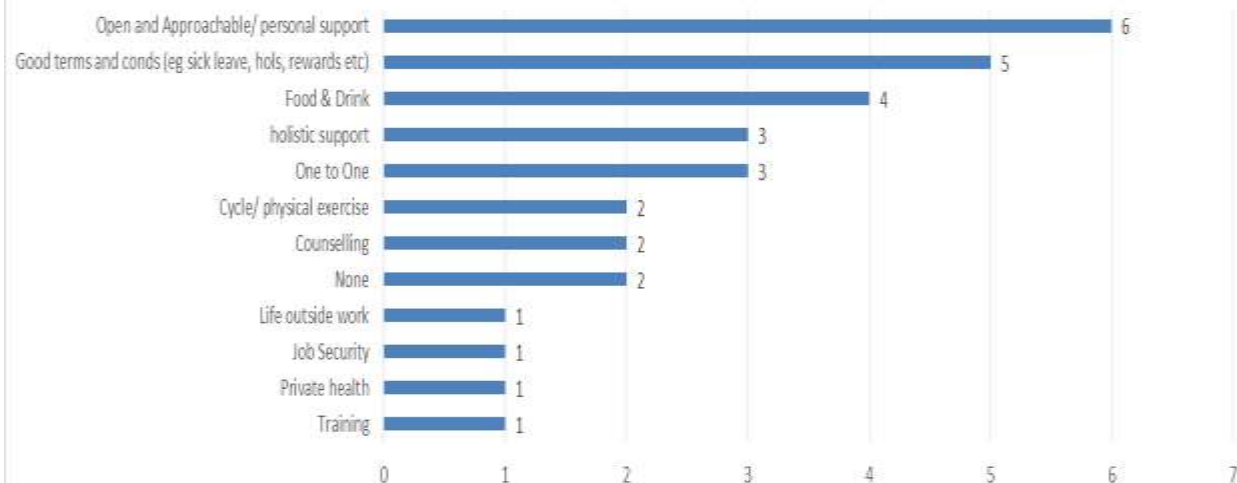


These two questions focus on the employees and what employers offer when there are health issues in the workplace.

The results of these two questions reflect what Employees were asking for/provided with :

- Flexible hours
- Phased Return to work
- Change of duties
- Equipment.
- Approachable managers/Employers.

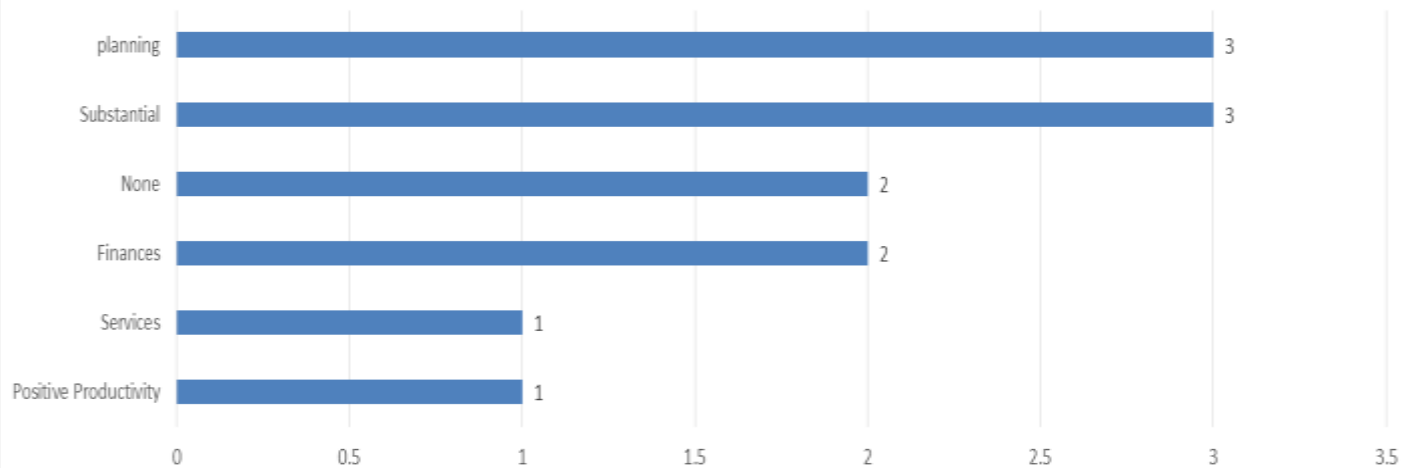
Do you offer any initiatives to look after employees' health and wellbeing?



It would seem that the employers who answered this survey have **listened to their employees and realise that a 'personal approach'** to the welfare of their staff is actually more important than policies and an overly structured approach.

What we asked employers – Questions (N=11)

How does people's health and wellbeing impact your business?

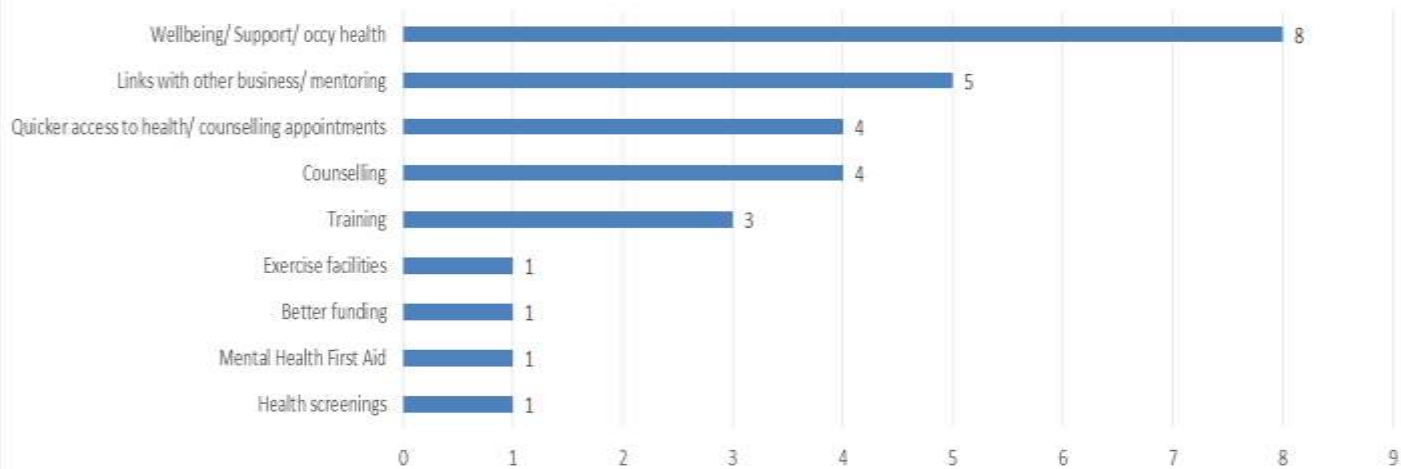


These two questions focus on how employees health and wellbeing affect the business and what help businesses require.

3 employers stated that ill health had a substantial effect on their business as well as difficulties planning. These respondents were small businesses and stated that planning shift patterns and providing a good service became very difficult when staff were away from the workplace at short notice.

One also stated that good health and a happy workplace had a positive effect on productivity.

What would help you support your employees/volunteers' health and wellbeing in the workplace?



Smaller businesses stated that they would like additional advice/support or links with other businesses to help them provide better support for their employees.

They do not have the capacity to have 'occupational health' departments and stated that a mentoring facility would be a help when they themselves need advice.

One stated that they would like quicker access to counselling for their employees when needed. If they do not employ qualified counsellors staff just have to be referred through the NHS and waiting times can be an issue.

I just don't know what I'd do if someone was off but I would have to find out

Some better links between smaller and bigger businesses, some kind of mentoring or skills sharing, so the resources are spread.

Reasonable adjustments which could include temporary reduction of hours, altered duties phased returns

The impact is enormous. Two third of our staff are frontline staff. If their health and wellbeing is not good then we can't run a service.

We don't have a HR person, I wouldn't even know what to provide or who to speak to if an issue happened with our permanent staff. Someone to talk to about that would be good.

It would be good to see what others are doing.

All staff get free food and drinks within reason.

Some people are on the waiting list for counselling and it's too long so we can get them in and pay for it

Shorter waiting lists for counselling

Healthwatch Bolton would like to thank all those that took part in this research or facilitated it to take place.