



Supporting occupational health  
and wellbeing professionals

**A Centre for Work and Health  
Research**

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# Context

- The Covid-19 pandemic has brought **the relationship between work and health into focus**. Including concerns around:
  - **mental health** at work
  - Older workers
  - **diversity** in workplace ill health and
  - return to work after **Long Covid**
- Prior to the pandemic the UK faced huge challenges in getting/keeping people with disabilities and long term conditions in work. The UK's **comparatively low productivity** is in part down to the health of the workforce.

# UK economic impact

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Up to 1.2 million possible cases of Long Covid<sup>[1]</sup>

**1 in 6** (18%) of people aged 16-64 are disabled in the UK <sup>[1]</sup>



**1 in 3** (31%) of people aged 16-64 have a Long Term Health Condition (LTHC) in the UK <sup>[1]</sup>



- The highest proportion of the population on **disability benefits** in the OECD.
- Economic **costs of sickness absence / worklessness** of over £100bn/ yr in 2008 .<sup>[3]</sup>
- A significant gap between **work participation and pension age**.
- **Comparatively low productivity** in part down to the health of the workforce.
- **Long Covid** could mean a huge increase in people struggling to get back to work.

**Sources:**

[1] Based on likely total Covid cases to date.

[2] Statistical Bulletin – UK Labour Market: November 2018

[3] Working for a healthier tomorrow. 2008.

# Occupational health and medicine

- Numerous occupational health interventions have been shown to help people with disabilities and LTCs **find and stay in work** and increase **productivity across the workforce**.
- At present **only half of the workforce** has access to occupational health services. SOM is calling for **universal access to occupational health** as a priority. This could be provided for as little as £20 per head.



Source

[1] Occupational Health: The Global Evidence and Value. April 2019.

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# Research base

A stronger UK OH research base is needed to focus on the bespoke workforce demographics, economic development, sociocultural backgrounds and health and safety legislation of the UK.

# Current risks

<b>1</b>	<b>Strategic incoherence</b> in calls for proposals in the work and health space – E.g. Long Covid; mental health at work.
<b>2</b>	<b>Poor quality policy advice</b> – E.g. Initial PPE : Covid return to work.
<b>3</b>	<b>Poor policy implementation</b> – E.g. failure of Fit for Work service.
<b>4</b>	<b>Data not analysed</b> – E.g. ‘fit notes’ and DWP statutory sick pay payments.

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# Proposal

A new collaborative **Centre for Work and Health Research is established** to strengthen the OH research base and provide a route to translate research into policy and practice;  
identify interventions which work  
Beneficially extending working lives

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# Global centres for work and health

Centres for work and health exist across the world E.g. Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy and South Africa.





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# Leaving the EU

The UK has left the **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)** – it played a role in collecting, analysing and disseminating relevant information on work and health. The proposed Centre would **fill some of the roles no longer performed** by EU-OSHA in the UK.

# Centre Functions

<b>1</b>	<b>Champion</b> the value of Occupational Health Research and convene leaders in the field.
<b>2</b>	<b>Commission</b> new cutting-edge research that meets the UK's bespoke priorities.
<b>3</b>	<b>Grow the academic base</b> and the number of work and health research centres and groups.
<b>4</b>	<b>Translate research into practice</b> to properly equip policy makers and industry to meet work and health challenges.
<b>5</b>	<b>Assess</b> the effectiveness of different measures to reduce the burden of health on work and work-related ill health.
	<b>6. Rapid response to developing issues</b>

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# Return on investment

- **Better government advice** on emerging issues – E.g. home working and mental health.
- **Improved policy implementation** – E.g. avoid failures of the Fit for Work programme.
- **Increased research capacity** in a key area for the UK economy.
- **Improved work and health outcomes** – including quicker return to work post pandemic.

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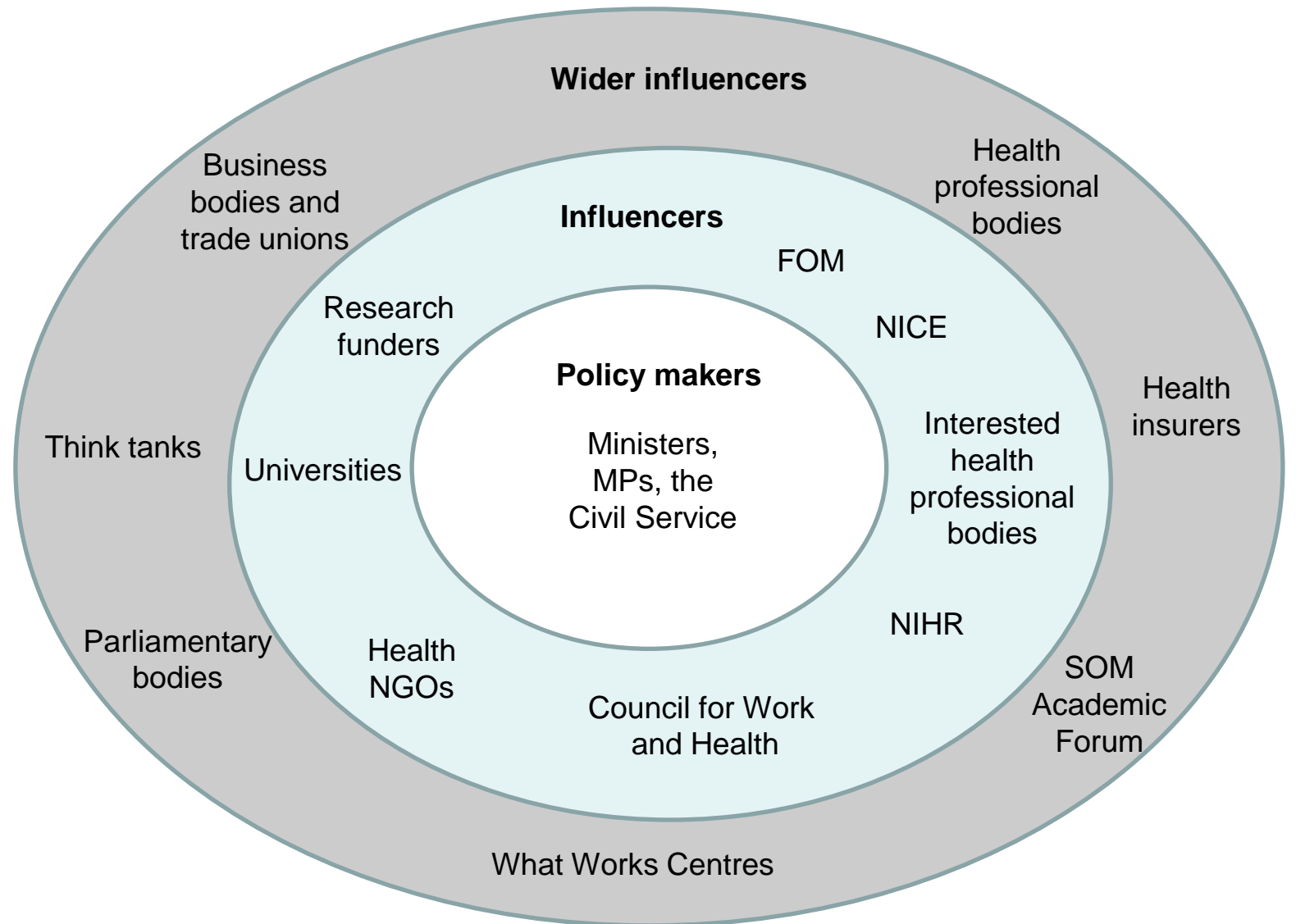
# Development so far

The DHSC/ DWP Joint Work and Health Unit has commissioned reviews into **research funding dissemination** and **knowledge translation**, laying the **groundwork for the Centre**.

SOM has engaged with stakeholders **across the health sector, government and industry**, with a public stakeholder event in November 2020 and support from the Academic Forum for Health and Work.

**SOM Patrons** (Lord Blunkett, Carol Black and Sir Norman Lamb) wrote to the **DWP Secretary of State February 2021** about the centre.

# Stakeholders engaged:



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## About SOM

The leading **professional association for workplace health**, representing 1,850 occupational health professionals.

Publishes the Journal of Occupational Medicine and hosts the **Academic Forum** – which aims to inform government and support the health of the UK workforce.



Dame Carol Black



Sir Norman Lamb



Lord Blunkett

## SOM Patrons

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## About FOM

SOM works closely with the **Faculty of Occupational Medicine** – a charity committed to improving health at work. It is also a professional and educational body for occupational medicine in the UK.