

## Universal access to OH Campaign – key messages July 1<sup>st</sup>

Only half the UK population has access to occupational health (OH). Swift action is needed in the light of the COVID-19 crisis to ensure the UK population has access to occupational health (OH) advice and assessment.

There is [a strong economic case](#) to implement access to OH for all employers. Evidence shows this can significantly increase revenue and reduce costs. Current high costs of ill health and absence from work are unsustainable for individuals, businesses and governments. These costs consist not only of the immediate impact to absenteeism, under-performance and liability, but chronic costs arising from increased costs of benefits and healthcare treatment and many individuals sadly enjoying limited productive economic lives. OH supports employees back to work and keeping them in work safely during these challenging times. There is an opportunity now to positively influence the health and wellbeing of the working population and the prosperity of the UK.

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance to the economy and public health of effectively managing workplace health. Strategic and expert use and management of precautionary control measures is particularly important.

Most public spaces are workplaces and many of the spikes in occupational mortality have been associated strongly with groups least likely to have access to preventative measures or to occupational health support (e.g. as highlighted in the recent meat factory outbreaks, and workers in social care contexts).

Early research shows that many returning to work during the COVID-19 crisis will return with depleted mental health. OH services have been proven to enable those on sick leave due to mental health problems to return to work successfully. Preventative measures in place through the application of occupational hygiene is also critical. By investing in OH, the government can support employers to safeguard their workforce and manage risks. Consultation and involvement of workers or their representatives regarding the provision of OH and OH activity is also important.

*“In the post-pandemic world there will be greater scrutiny and expectation from stakeholders including investors, regulators and current and prospective employees to understand what organisations are doing about the health, safety and wellbeing of their workers. Occupational health is ideally placed to fulfil these expectations.”*

*Dr David Roomes, Rolls Royce*

SOM also has the support from the FOM, Faculty of Public Health, RCN, BMA, Unite and the TUC for this campaign.

Management of workplace health risks consists of these essential elements:

- 1) Responsibility by employers to effectively manage health risks that may enter the workplace;
- 2) A precautionary and preventative approach, looking at a hierarchy of controls to minimise the need for personal protection, and individual healthcare interventions;
- 3) The vital role of occupational health (OH) to manage and limit the impact to the individual, the workplace and society.
- 4) A focus on occupational hygiene in the sense of designing out health risks that impoverish and undermine business.

A key ask is ensuring the government delivers on the [Health is everyone's business consultation](#) e.g.:

- Health Education England and its equivalents in the devolved administrations invest in training of OH professionals such as OH nurses and specialist medical training posts
- There should be investment in expert OH advice in government, the establishment of an OH national data set and UKRI investment in a research Centre for Health and Work to translate evidence into policy
- Tax incentives by the Treasury so employers can invest in OH
- Access to OH for GPs
- A National Clinical Director for Work and Health to lead this work.

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SOM and partners are encouraging members and interested parties to write to their MP using the [attached letter](#) as a basis.

The following parliamentary question was asked in June 2020:

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they plan to publish a White Paper in response to the 'Health is everyone's business: proposals to reduce ill health-related job loss' consultation, which closed on 7 October 2019; and what plans they have to include in any such White Paper proposals to reduce the costs of ill health and absence from work for (1) individuals, and (2) businesses.

Answer: Baroness Stedman-Scott: We plan to publish the response to the consultation 'Health is everyone's business: proposals to reduce ill health-related job loss' later this year. The consultation set out proposals to encourage all employers to take positive action to support employees who are managing health conditions in work, and to manage sickness absence more effectively.