

# Wellbeing in the Workplace

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Professional Associations  
**RESEARCH NETWORK**

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# Introduction

In 2018/19, the Health and Safety Executive estimated that 12.8 million working days were lost in the UK due to stress, anxiety, and depression. 602,000 workers were affected, with each of these individuals losing an average of 21.2 days of work due to these issues. Poor mental health and wellbeing is an issue which affects many of us in our lives, and in turn can affect how we work and interact with our colleagues. The last year has exemplified this, with the COVID-19 crisis adding new pressures to our mental health, from adjusting to home working, changes in routine and having to juggle home-schooling with work. With this in mind, PARN decided to ask the professional body sector about the mental health support and wellbeing of their staff, volunteers, and members.

Wellbeing in the Workplace is the second Flash Report produced by PARN. A quick turnaround research report which looks at key, topical issues for the sector. As usual we have based our findings on a short survey supplemented with interview case studies.

The project started with a ten-question survey looking at the ways professional bodies support the mental health and wellbeing of their staff, members, and volunteers. The survey was run between the 10<sup>th</sup> of September and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2020. It solicited 40 responses, a 10% response rate. All respondents were sent a simple summary of tabulated results.

We followed the survey up by running four interviews in December 2020 and January 2021. These virtual interviews were half an hour long and aimed to expand on the responses which were given in the survey and uncover some detailed examples of good practice and resources. Each were transcribed and written up as case studies, which have been approved by the interviewees. The full case studies are included at the back of the report.

PARN would like to express thanks to all the organisations taking part in this exercise and especially those four who agreed to take part in the short discussions. These were: The Education and Training Foundation (ETF), The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM).

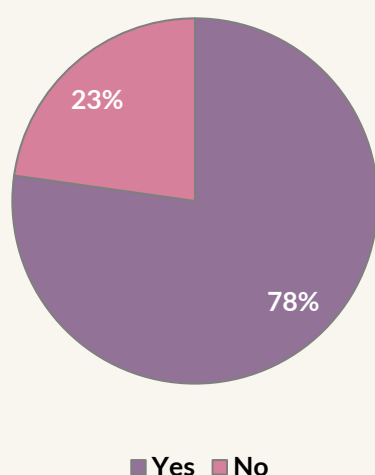
# Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work

In the first section of the survey, we asked respondents how they promoted mental health and wellbeing at work. This included asking questions about how they promoted an open speaking culture in their place of work, along with a set of questions about if this was a topic which they surveyed their staff, members, and volunteers on. We also asked about the running of campaigns and partnerships with specialist, external, organisations and charities.

*We first wanted to establish the role of mental health and wellbeing in professional body strategy.*

**We asked: Is mental health and wellbeing part of your organisation's strategy?**

Encouragingly, 78% of our respondents indicated that mental health and wellbeing was a part of their organisation's strategy. One of our interviewees – RCVS – exemplified this further by sharing that compassion is one of its core values and wellbeing is supported at a leadership level.



Base: 40

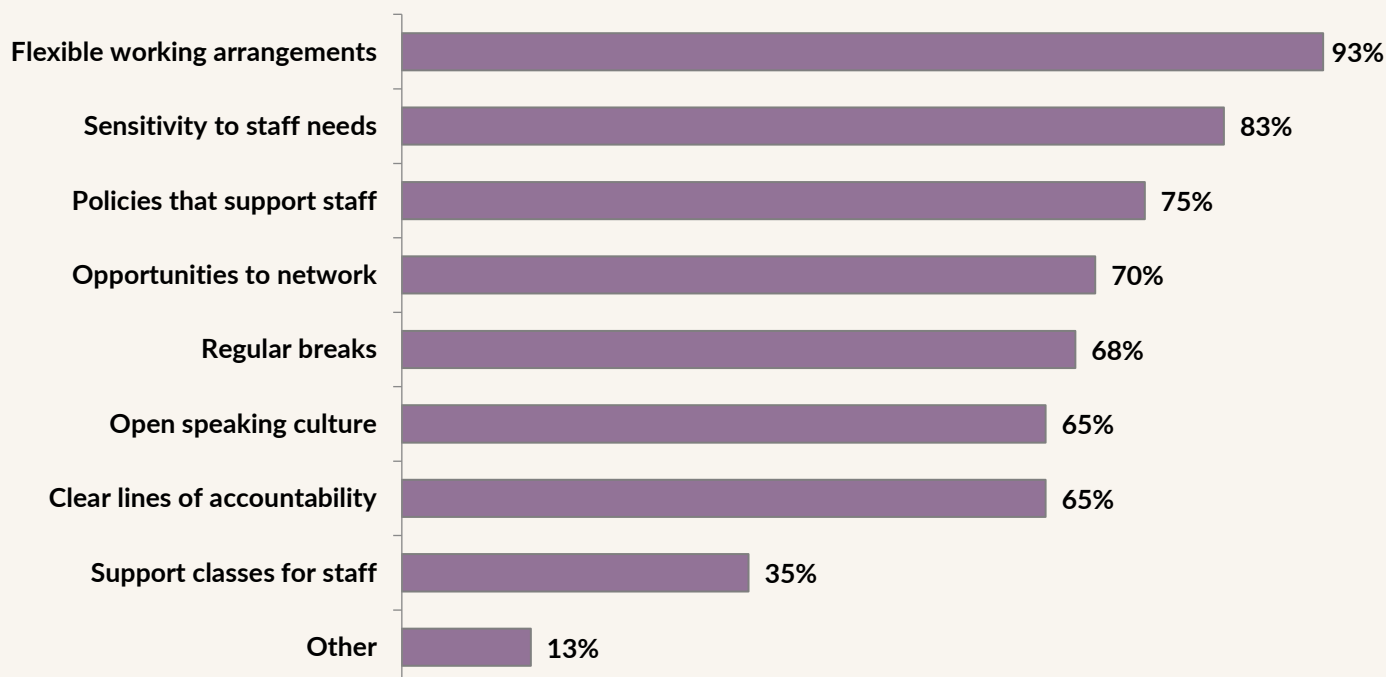
*Next, we wanted to find out more about the ways organisations implemented this in their workplace.*

## So, we asked: How does your organisation create a safe and fulfilling working environment?

There was a wide variety of responses suggesting many different approaches. However, the most common of these was having working from home arrangements and other flexible working methods. GTCs, for example, has no core hours and has removed the need for staff to “clock in or out” ensuring best flexibility of working hours. We might have anticipated this given the long shadow of COVID-19 that was cast over all working arrangements.

A more general sensitivity to staff needs was commonly cited, along with having specific anti-bullying policies in place to help support staff. Well over half of responses noted that their organisation had an open speaking culture regarding mental health.

Our interviewees shared in more detail the ways they did this. ETF talked about their ‘pay it forward’ culture, encouraging staff to praise each other when someone says something nice to them as a way to make staff feel valued. Both RCVS and ETF mentioned that they were signed up to the [Time to Change](#) pledge, which focuses on changing attitudes and stigmas towards mental health in the workplace. Over a third of our respondents went even further and offered support classes for staff, such as yoga, exercise, and mindfulness. Three organisations mentioned mental health awareness training, and two mentioned extra mental health training for managers. We talk more about both of these later in the report.



Base: 40

The top three ways professional bodies create a safe and fulfilling work environment were:

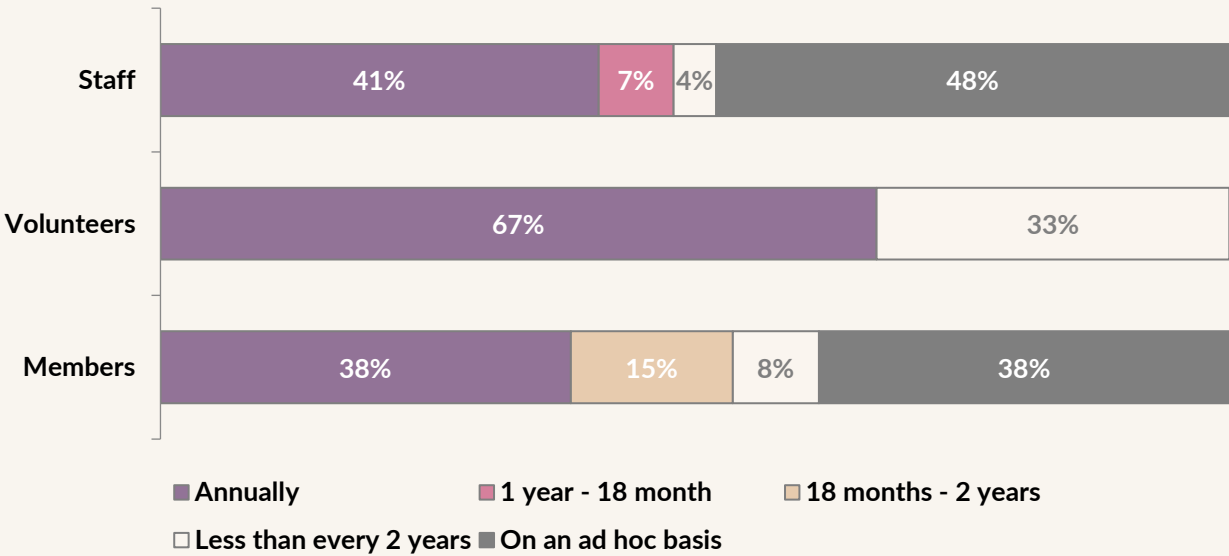
- Flexible hours and other working arrangements (93%)
- General sensitivity to staff needs (83%)
- Policies that support staff (75%)



*We next wanted to find out if professional bodies used surveys to gather data and feedback.*

**With this in mind, we asked: Does your organisation survey staff, volunteers and members on mental health and wellbeing issues?**

Surveys were a commonly used method to gain information and wellbeing data for staff and members. Over half of our sample (68%) surveyed staff on wellbeing issues and a third (33%) surveyed their members. Only a very small proportion (8%) surveyed their volunteers. Among both staff and members, surveys were most commonly run on an ad hoc basis, or annually. The value of surveys for identifying mental health and wellbeing issues was also something which was emphasised by our interviewees. SOM uses staff surveys and self-assessment tools to identify possible structural issues in the organisation regarding mental health. ETF runs an annual staff survey, which includes a section on mental health and wellbeing, and follows this survey up with informal staff check-ins throughout the year. GTCS runs a survey for both registrants and staff. A registrant survey has a section on mental health and wellbeing and is run, every three to four years. Voice surveys for staff are annual.



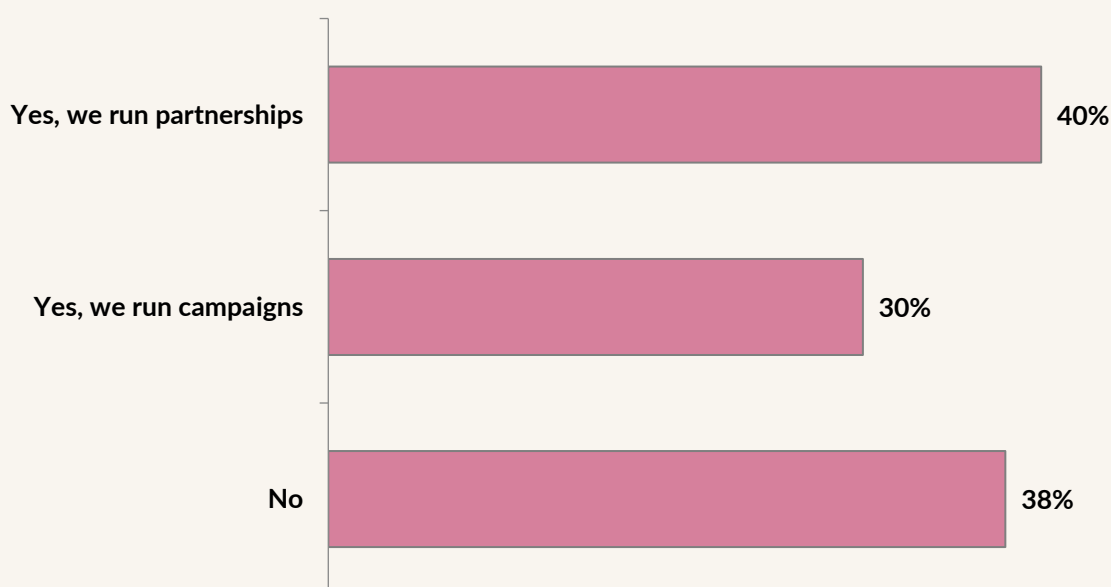
Bases:  
Staff: 27      Volunteers: 3    Members: 13

Reassuringly, the vast majority of our respondents who used surveys have made changes to their workplace as a result (89%). In our interview with RCVS, we found out that RCVS uses the data it obtains from recent surveys to feed into their large-scale [Mind Matters](#) initiative.

*Next, we wanted to find out if respondents had partnerships with specialist organisations to involve experts in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.*

**We asked: Does your organisation form partnerships with specialist organisations and/or run campaigns to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing among your key stakeholders?**

A fair share of respondents ran these types of partnerships and campaigns. Notably, partnerships were more common than campaigns (40% and 30% respectively). GTCS noted it had partnerships with several mental health and wellbeing specialist organisations such as Mind, Barnados, [The Hive of Wellbeing](#) and the Scottish Mental Health Association and had also commissioned specialists to provide additional resources. SOM indicated that it had formed a number of partnerships to produce reports and resources on mental health and wellbeing. For example, it worked with Public Health England on a series of seven webinars on key mental health issues, and with Chartered Institute of Personal and Development (CIPD), ACAS, Mind and Business in the Community on the [Return to Work](#) toolkit. ETF partnered with Mind as part of its [Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) survey. Over a third of respondents (38%) did not run anything of this sort at all.



Base: 40

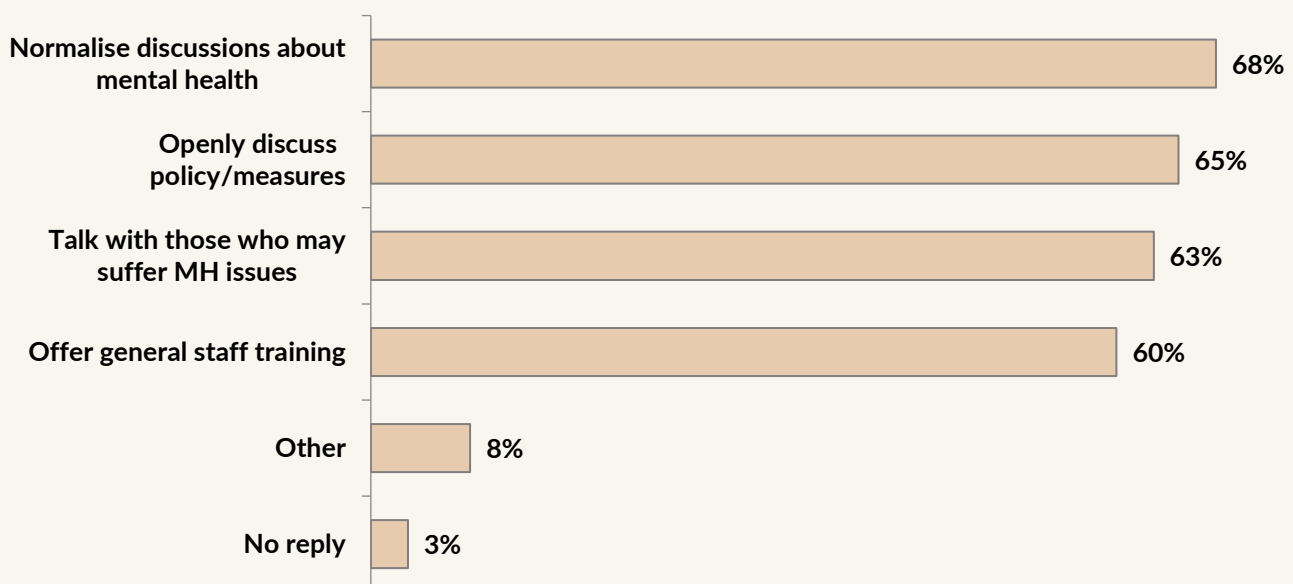
# Identifying mental health and wellbeing issues at work

The next section of the survey asked more specifically about encouraging staff, members, and volunteers to speak up about mental health and wellbeing issues. This included questions on how professional bodies ensure their staff and managers are trained to identify signs of stress and support their colleagues with their mental health and wellbeing.

*First, we wanted to find out about how professional bodies create an open speaking culture when it comes to mental health.*

**Accordingly, we asked: How does your organisation encourage staff and volunteers to speak openly about mental health and wellbeing?**

Most commonly respondents told us they normalise discussions about mental health in the workplace. A significant number of respondents told us they openly discuss the organisation's policy and measures with its staff. Notably, all the given response options were selected by a high proportion of respondents, showing many of these steps seem to be standard for professional bodies.



Base: 40

- 68% of respondents normalised discussions about mental health in workplace.
- 65% openly discussed the organisation's policy and measures to ensure wellbeing in the workplace.

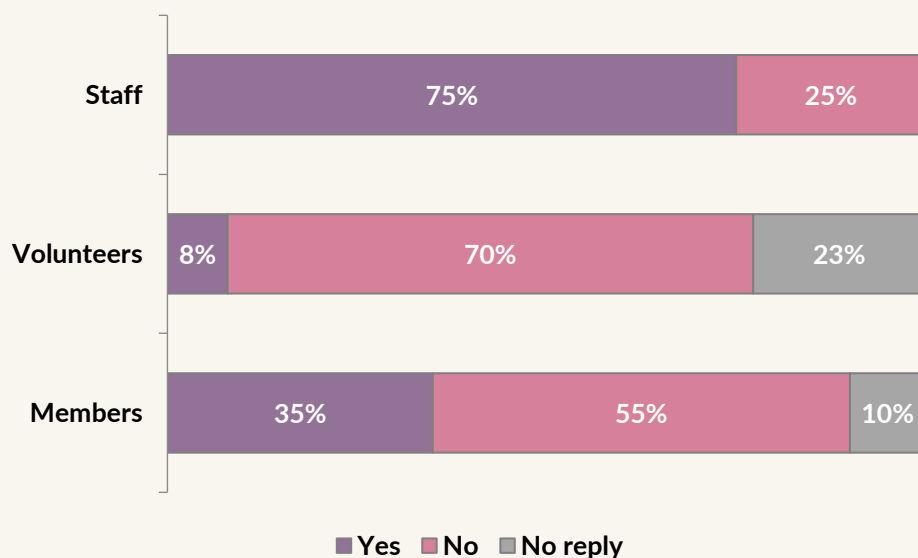


*Next, we wanted to ask more about the ways professional bodies educated their staff and members on key mental health issues.*

**We asked: Does your organisation educate your staff, volunteers and members on recognising stress and other mental health issues?**

Continuing the trend from earlier questions, professional bodies most often educated staff on these types of issues when compared to the other two groups. 75% educated staff on mental health issues, 35% educated members and 8% educated volunteers.

The importance of providing awareness training was something which was clear from the interviews we carried out. ETF had worked with Mind to roll out a mandatory e-learning course for managers on mental health and wellbeing. SOM provided awareness training through [I-ACT](#). RCVS ran several training courses for staff and registrants, including resilience training provided by [PIPS](#).



Bases:  
Staff: 40      Volunteers: 40      Members: 40

*To follow on from this, we wanted to find out if and how professional bodies educated managers on mental health issues.*

**So, we asked: Do managers have explicit responsibility to support mental wellbeing of their team?**

Just under half told us that managers had explicit responsibility for the wellbeing of their team. Most of these provided awareness training to support this.

- 45% gave managers explicit responsibility to support mental wellbeing of their team.
- 83% of these provided awareness training.

# Dealing with mental health and wellbeing issues at work

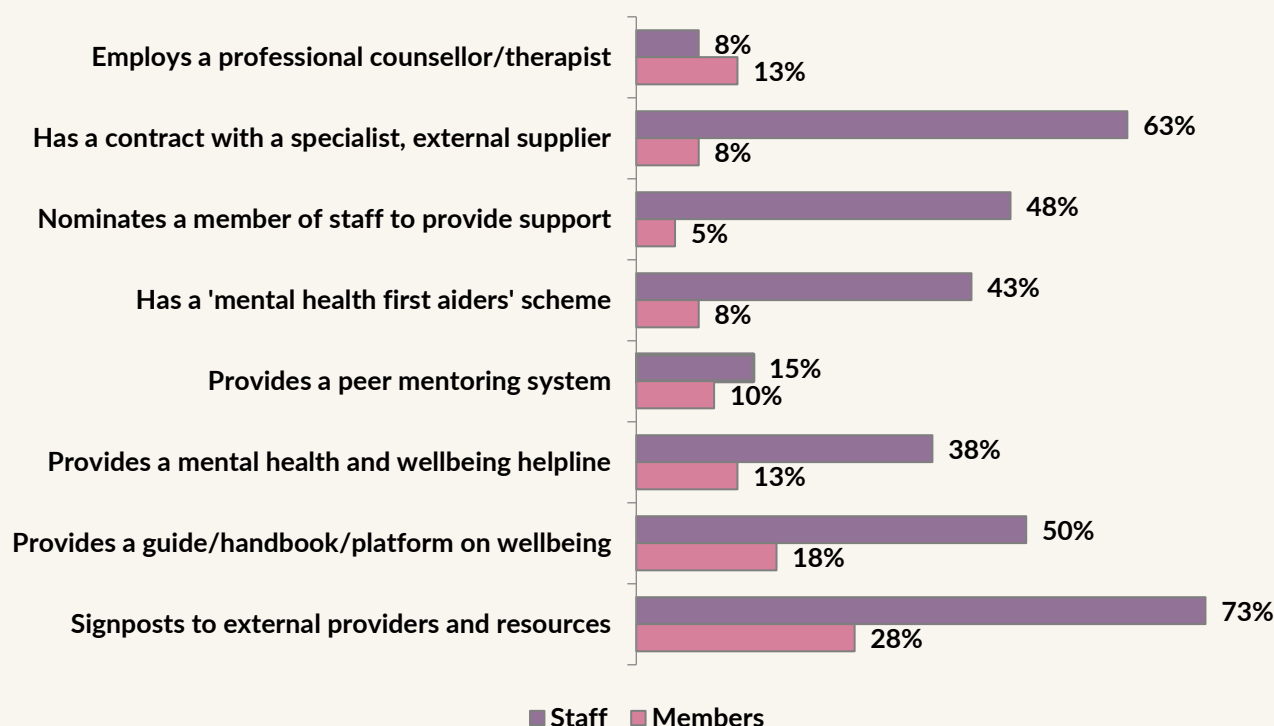
While promotion and awareness of mental health issues are important as measures to prevent poor mental health, unfortunately not all the causes of poor mental health can be alleviated. The next section of our survey asked about how professional bodies tackled situations where staff, members and volunteers suffered poor mental health.

*With this in mind, we wanted to find out which specialist resources professional bodies provided for their staff, members, and volunteers.*

**We asked: What specialist resources does your professional body provide to support mental health and wellbeing?**

The most common resource provided for staff was signposting to other organisations. A large proportion noted that they had a contract with a specialist external supplier, such as counselling services for staff. This approach was preferred by most organisations, a very few noted the alternative of having an internal counselling/therapy facility.

While signposting to external resources was also the most common response for members/registrants, a reasonable proportion of respondents provided them with either a guide or a platform for wellbeing, such as the [platform](#) GTCs provides for its registrants. However, it should be noted that percentages across the board tended to be lower than for staff, indicating that most of our sample provided a wider range of resources to their staff as opposed to their members/registrants. *Mental health first aider* schemes were also commonly used among survey respondents. ETF indicated that it used the course provided by [St Johns Ambulance](#) for this.



Bases:  
Staff: 40      Members: 40

- For staff, 73% signposted to external providers and resources, and 63% had a contract with a specialist, external supplier.
- For members/registrants, 28% signposted to external providers and resources and 18% provided a guide/handbook/platform on wellbeing.

*Many of our respondents indicated that they used external resources and suppliers to support the wellbeing of their staff and members/registrants.*

**With this in mind, we asked: Which external providers do you signpost to?**

This question returned a varied response, revealing a wide range of charities and resources which professional bodies called on. The most used charity by far was Mind, followed by Samaritans and CALM. Several respondents stated they used Employee Assistance Programmes. A handful mentioned that they signposted to an organisation/industry specific service or app, such as the [Practitioners Health Programme](#) for medical professionals.

The most given answers to this question were:

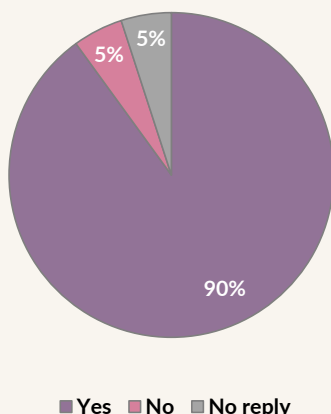
- Mind (17)
- Employee Assistance Programme (6)
- Samaritans (5)
- Organisation/industry specific services and apps (5)

In the follow up interviews, our interviewees also mentioned a wide range of experts and external resources who they signposted to. Information about these is included in the respective case studies at the end of the report.

*Following on from this, we wanted to find out how professional bodies supported their staff with accessing mental health services.*

**We asked: Does your organisation pay staff for time off when accessing mental health services?**

Almost all respondents (90%) paid for staff time when accessing mental health services, showing that this was clearly the norm and that many wanted to ensure that accessing mental health support is as easy as possible for their staff.

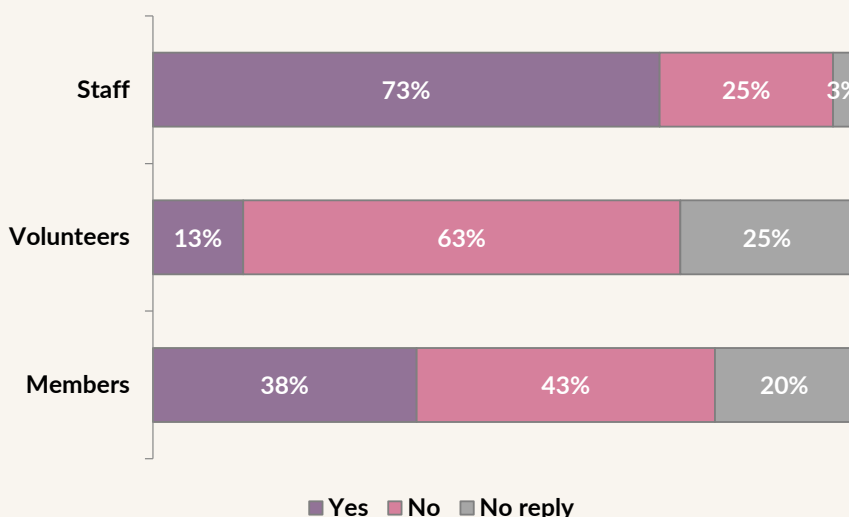


Base: 40

*Next, we turned to the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic and the provision of additional support.*

**We asked: Has your organisation provided additional wellbeing support due to the increased pressures of current events (e.g., COVID-19)?**

Through the survey and our interviews, it was clear that professional bodies have provided additional support and wellbeing for both staff and members/registrants during the COVID-19 outbreak. Our survey showed this was especially the case for staff, although a sizable proportion of our sample had also provided additional support for their member/registrant base. This is interesting as most professional bodies have additional resources for members regarding COVID-19, but this is not reflected in the survey results, perhaps these resources provided are more practical in their focus.



Bases:

*Finally, in light of the fact a large proportion of our respondents had provided additional resources for members/registrants and staff, we wanted to find out more about the measures which had been put in place.*

### **We asked: What additional support has your organisation put in place?**

Respondents listed a wide range of additional resources which they had provided to their staff and members/registrants over the COVID-19 outbreak, ranging from a buddy system to flexible working arrangements. The most given responses were the provision of webinars and online resources, additional signposting to external resources and holding staff meetings and catch ups to discuss wellbeing. From these it is clear that virtual resource hubs and webinars have proved a very useful way of sharing both internal and external resources. Two examples of organisations who have done this over the COVID-19 pandemic are GTCS and SOM, both of which have commissioned and collaborated with other experts and organisations to provide resources and webinars for members/registrants and staff.

However, respondents clearly valued the ability to have meetings and talks with their staff. From the interviews we carried out, this was a key theme, where several of our interviewees said that one of the biggest problems which came with working from home was the risk of staff losing a sense connection with each other. Our interviewees told us about ways in which they have tried to mitigate these feelings. ETF has introduced a wide range of wellbeing initiatives to support staff with working from home. One example of these being *Wellbeing Wednesdays* which involved weekly emails to staff covering different types of wellbeing as well as signposting to resources. As part of the initiative, ETF has used Microsoft Teams for hosting social events such as a Christmas crafts session. RCVS has also provided social events for staff over the COVID-19 pandemic, such as an afternoon tea social where staff were sent hampers, and volunteering days which were inspired by the NHS's *5 Steps to wellbeing* to help ensure staff feel connected even when working from home.

The top five responses given were:

- Webinars and online resources (10)
- Signposting to external resources (8)
- Meetings and catch ups to discuss wellbeing (8)
- Wellbeing champion/first aider role/more training (5)
- Awareness raising of systems in place (5)
- Social activities (e.g., Wellbeing Wednesday) (5)

# Conclusion

Against the backdrop of COVID-19, protecting the mental health and wellbeing of both staff and members is seen as more important than ever. The results from this survey and subsequent interviews clearly illustrated just how seriously these issues are being taken by the sector.

A large proportion of our sample include wellbeing in their strategies and almost all of those who use surveys to gather wellbeing data act on the findings in order to improve their workplace and membership offering. External partnerships and signposting were also something many of the respondents used. The sector displayed a readiness to consult with external experts, this became especially apparent through the case study interviews where respondents shared experiences of joint projects and campaigns.

Inevitably the pandemic has amplified the effectiveness of existing activities that the sector was already doing well. Working from home for example has moved from an occasional ad hoc facility to something that for many has simply replaced their workplace completely. Staff and members will have faced many anxieties about their health and their job security, but the sector has taken steps to provide additional support through extra signposting and through the introduction of new support measures, such as member webinars and virtual social groups for staff.

We found that platforms such as Microsoft Teams were being used extensively across the sector in order to maintain social contact and reinforce corporate culture.

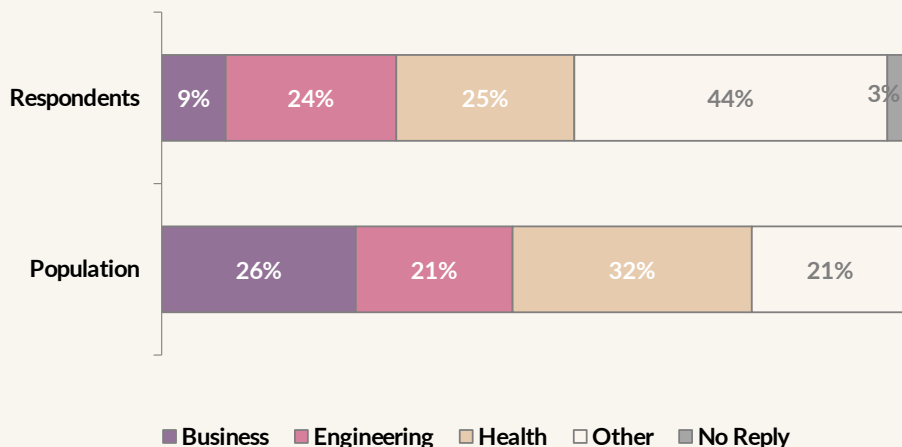
We will be following this report up with a virtual seminar which will feature several speakers and will give a chance for professional bodies to discuss the topic in more detail. More details about this will follow over the coming months.



# Survey Demographics

## Sector

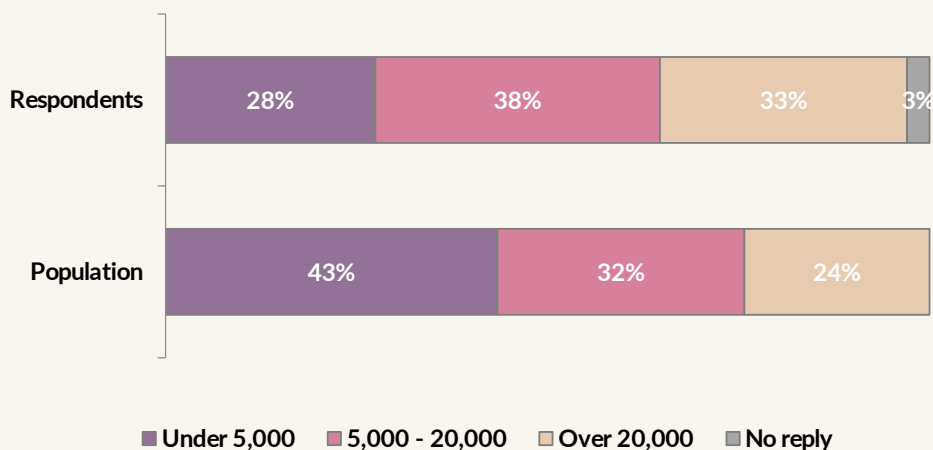
While the Engineering Sector was fairly accurately represented, the Business and Health sector were underrepresented by the survey sample and the Other sector was overrepresented by the survey sample.



Bases:  
Respondents: 40      Population: 512

## Size by members

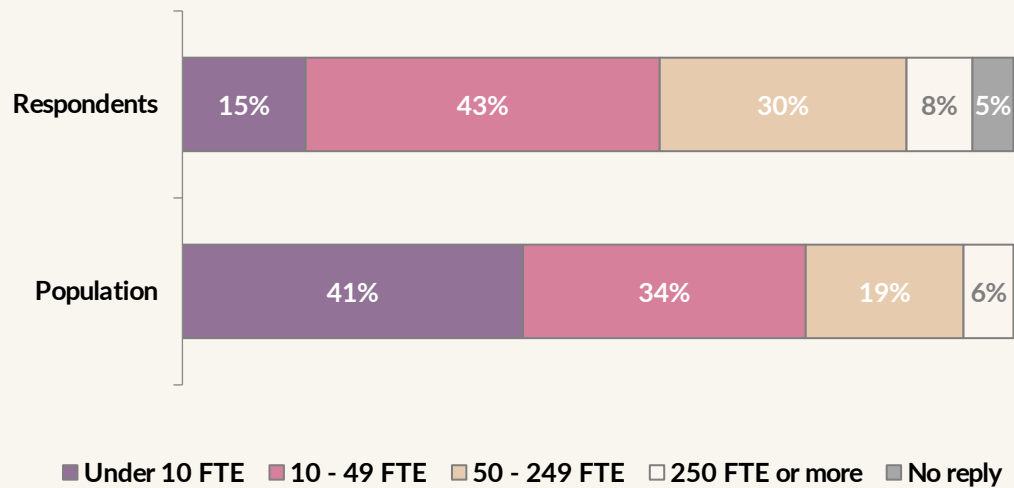
Small organisations (under 5,000 members) were underrepresented by the survey sample while medium (5,000 – 20,000 members) and large organisations (20,000 members) were both overrepresented.



Bases:  
Respondents: 40      Population: 272

## Size by FTE Employees

Micro sized organisations with less than 10 FTE were largely underrepresented by the survey sample. All other size groups were overrepresented by the survey sample.

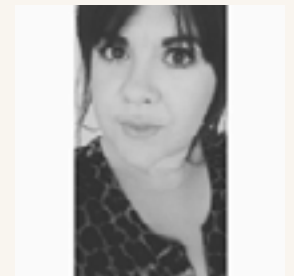


Bases:  
Respondents: 40      Population: 365

# Case Studies



## Education and Training Foundation



The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) is the expert body for professional development and standards in Further Education (FE) and Training in England. It has a wide range of initiatives designed to support staff mental health and wellbeing, and these have been expanded during the COVID-19 outbreak. We spoke to Organisational Change and Engagement Officer Nicola Martin to find out more about the way the ETF supports the wellbeing of staff.

### Supporting staff mental health and wellbeing

Since signing the [Time to Change](#) Employer pledge in 2019, the ETF is committed to creating a mentally healthy workplace and engaging in positive conversations and initiatives in this area. This is a priority for the organisation, especially during COVID-19. Nicola looks after staff mental health and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis and manages the ETF's change project, SHAPE, of which mental health and the wellbeing of staff is a component.

The ETF holds an annual staff survey which includes a specific section about mental health and wellbeing and carries out informal wellbeing check ins with staff via different means throughout the year. The surveys are the formal way of monitoring mental health and wellbeing, while the check ins are informal. It is part of Nicola's job to look at the feedback by staff and consider ways to make improvements and changes in this area.

One of the biggest initiatives the ETF has recently introduced is *Wellbeing Wednesdays*, which started during the first COVID-19 lockdown. As part of this, Nicola sent out weekly emails to staff covering different areas of wellbeing, such as mental, environmental, and financial wellbeing, as well as signposting to key resources. The ETF has made use of Microsoft Teams to support mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic and has a channel for *Wellbeing Wednesdays* to share advice, information and resources, and provide morale boosting pages such as Pets of ETF, favourite recipes and a regular gameshow. The ETF has also hosted a Christmas crafts session on the channel, inspired by Mind's money-raising [Crafternoon](#). Mental Health First Aiders also provide support and resources on the channel, which all ETF staff have access to.

Nicola told us about several other initiatives the ETF has, which include:

- Information on using the Stretchly app which supports staff with working from home. The app issues a reminder to take breaks and go outside while it is still daylight. The Senior Management Team regularly remind staff of our flexible hours to ensure they go outside during daylight hours.

- A video pal system to encourage staff to talk to each other and to also introduce new starters into the organisation.
- A 'Pay it forward' culture in the workplace, of saying/doing something nice to someone when someone says /does something nice for you.
- Encouraging staff to use the 'praise' feature on Microsoft Teams, known internally as "Recognise a colleague".
- The ETF's *Wellbeing Champions* forum, which runs a number of activities, such as:
  - Virtual book club
  - Virtual yoga sessions
  - Mindfulness sessions
  - Fitness classes
  - A weekly Tea and Talk
  - Gameshow mashup
  - Step challenge
  - An ETF Spotify playlist with upbeat songs

Next, we asked how these initiatives are being taken up. Nicola told us that the idea of creating these activities was to provide resources and support mechanisms that would help everyone, as and when they needed them. Consequently, the take up varied from week to week, but typically there were always people, even if a small number at times, that engaged with these initiatives.

### **Mental health awareness training and external partnerships**

We went on to ask about the mental health awareness training the ETF provides. The ETF has worked with Mind to roll out a mandatory e-learning course for line managers. The course consists of 4 to 5 modules which are 20 minutes each. With the launch of a new Learning Management System (LMS) more training will be provided through several short courses and the ETF are also looking at holding specific 'learning hours' to help staff understand the different areas of wellbeing and how they may impact them. Other training the ETF provides includes training for *Wellbeing Champions* and training with St. John's Ambulance as part of the [Mental Health First Aiders](#) scheme.

Nicola has recommended the training providers that the ETF uses and thinks it is important to involve experts in mental health training. The ETF also works with Mind through their [Workplace Wellbeing Index](#), where Mind surveys ETF staff to determine if the ETF is carrying out effective practice in this area. Mind puts together a report on the findings and recommendations for the organisation which are taken forward through a strategic wellbeing group.

### **Signposting to resources**

We also discussed the ways the ETF publicised its resources. Nicola told us initiatives were shared in *Wellbeing Wednesday* emails as well as through weekly e-newsletters and the Teams channel. In the office, the ETF also has a wellbeing noticeboard, which has been adapted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Nicola believes that it is important that information is shared in as many engaging ways as possible. Engagement with mental health and wellbeing initiatives has improved during the COVID-19 pandemic and feedback on the initiatives that the ETF provides has been very positive.



## General Teaching Council for Scotland



The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) is the regulatory body for the teaching profession in Scotland. Over the COVID-19 pandemic, the GTCS has put a lot of work into developing resources on mental health and wellbeing and providing support to its registrants and staff. We spoke to Chief Executive and Registrar Ken Muir to find out more about what GTCS did.

### Supporting registrants and staff mental health and wellbeing

We started by asking if GTCS surveyed its registrants and staff regarding mental health. Ken told us that every three to four years GTCS surveys its registrants, covering mental health and wellbeing as well as other areas. As a result of the feedback from these surveys, GTCS has enhanced its focus on health and wellbeing in its recently published Professional Standards for Teachers 2021. Over the last six years, GTCS has also ran an annual Voice survey for staff through Macquarie University Australia. This survey has returned positive results, with 90% of staff responding they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with how GTCS handles the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

GTCS has diverted some of its budget to commission several mental health and wellbeing experts to develop resources and provide support to its registrants. These experts held a series of webinars on topics such as dealing with uncertainty and transforming the emotional load, to prepare teachers for returning to a post-COVID workplace and dealing with the pandemic. These webinars are continuing and all have supplementary resources which can be accessed on the GTCS [website](#). Other initiatives to support registrants include:

- Articles on health and wellbeing matters in its [Teaching Scotland](#) magazine
- A Brew & A Blether discussion session to encourage registrants to discuss matters of health and wellbeing and their feelings in lockdown
- '[Sketch notes](#)' on protecting mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, which are produced by a teacher who is also a cartoonist

At the start of the pandemic 76,500 registrants were given support with regards to their mental health and wellbeing through making a wide variety of resources available on the GTCS website.

GTCS has introduced some initiatives specifically for student and probation teachers, who have had a particularly difficult year due to missing out on some of their initial teacher education programme, including placements during the COVID- 19 pandemic. These resources include targeted expert guidance and support resources as well as access to a specialist coach. Out of 3,500 probationary teachers in Scotland, about 200 were identified or self-identified for this support and were given one to one coaching sessions.

Despite the cost of these initiatives, paid through the annual registrant fee and a re-distribution of the GTCS budget, they have been highly successful. The webinars and resources which GTCS has built up have been used by many international regulatory bodies.

Staff mental health and wellbeing is at the core of GTCS as an organisation and forms part of its Health and Safety policy. GTCS has achieved the [Health and Wellbeing Healthy Working Lives](#) Silver Award and is now working towards the Gold Award. As part of their professional learning, 70 members of staff are encouraged to complete a set of questionnaires. One of these is on health and safety and includes wellbeing issues. Other supports for staff include:

- An anonymous suggestions box on its intranet to allow any issues or concerns to be raised with HR managers and the Corporate Management Team.

- A variety of flexible working arrangements, including no core hours for staff and the removal of the need for staff to “clock in” to allow them to better manage their home/work balance
- Use of Microsoft Teams for team chats and all staff quizzes
- Non-work activities and a break with a prize draw on payday

Ken feels that these help staff feel valued within the organisation and that they support staff morale.

### **External partnerships**

GTCS has good partnerships working with several mental health and wellbeing organisations, which are supported by GTCS. These include the confidential helpline Salvesen Mindroom Centre along with Mind, Barnados, The Hive of Wellbeing and the Scottish Mental Health Association. GTCS has also recently commissioned several individual experts to provide guidance, webinars, and one-to-one and group support to its registrants, including:

- Clinical psychologist Emma Hepburn
- Health and wellbeing expert Hugh Smith
- Life Coach Sarah Philp
- Claire Lavelle from [The Hive of Wellbeing](#)
- Hypnotherapist Paul Mills.

### **Signposting to resources**

GTCS promotes its resources on mental health and wellbeing through newsletters and other communications. The main depository is a dedicated hub on the GTCS [website](#), which is freely available to anyone to consult. The hub contains links to recordings and slides from previous webinars and events, along with signposts to relevant articles, and links to resources from some of the external experts mentioned above.





The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) is a professional body for professionals working in or with an interest in occupational health. Protecting the mental health and wellbeing of the public is a key part of what occupational medicine involves. We spoke to Chief Executive Officer Nick Pahl to find out more about the way SOM promotes mental health and wellbeing among its members and staff.

### **Supporting members and staff mental health and wellbeing**

Nick told us that SOM developed a wide range of resources for members and the public on the topic of mental health at work, all which are accessible on the [SOM website](#). Among these resources are:

- Guidance on mental health strategy, which should be measured and accredited
- [Mental Health at Work](#) standards
- A [report](#) on the value of occupational health
- Evidence on how occupational medicine and health can improve the wellbeing of the workforce
- [Additional guidance](#) to support working from home

SOM takes several steps to support staff with their mental health and wellbeing. While SOM has an *Employees Assistance Programme*, Nick told us it has a low take up. The main way SOM supports staff is by implementing interventions to tackle the core wellbeing issues in the workplace. Nick advises it is important to understand what concerns are and to do an intervention based on this. This could include workload changes to deal with stress, or ergonomic support for back and comfort problems. It is equally important to assess the intervention's impact and, if the desired result has not been achieved, to try a different intervention. SOM uses surveys, including self-assessment tools, to gather data on mental health and wellbeing, and Nick believes that surveys can be especially useful for finding out structural issues.

Nick told us that there has been a greater demand among staff and members for mental health and wellbeing resources due to COVID-19 and the pressures of working from home.

### **Mental health awareness training and external partnerships**

SOM provides awareness training to staff through [I-ACT](#). Nick advises it is important to ensure that training is high quality as the [Stevenson-Farmer](#) review of mental health at work highlighted that there is still poor practice out there. Nick mentioned that while mental health awareness training benefits individual members of staff, the [Health and Safety Executive Report of 2019](#) reveals that the benefit for an organisation will be minimal unless other factors in the workplace, such as management and culture, are also addressed.

SOM works with several external partners. Some of these partnerships are:

- Work with Public Health England (PHE) on a project looking at key issues in mental health. These include standards and inequality in mental health, such as how young people can be susceptible to suffering mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a higher chance of redundancy. As part of this project, SOM is running seven [webinars](#) with PHE on these topics.
- Work on [Return to Work](#) toolkit with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), ACAS, Mind and Business in the Community
- Webinars in collaboration with CIPD
- Work with the [Bevan Commission](#) on *Return to Work* webinars

- A [report](#) on the mental health of nurses and midwives which was funded by the Royal College of Nursing Foundation
- A [report](#) on the mental health of doctors, which was written in collaboration with the [Louise Tebboth Foundation](#)
- Work with [Charlie Waller Trust](#) on how occupational health professionals can look after themselves

Nick told us that as well as working on projects and running joint webinars, SOM uses social media to promote initiatives of external partners and vice versa.

### **Signposting to resources**

SOM has a wide range of resources for mental health and wellbeing on its website, both for individuals and organisations.

SOM staff are signposted to relevant information and resources at one-to-one sessions and team meetings, while externally, resources are promoted through SOM collaborative partners and specialist occupational health networks.



## Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons



The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is a regulatory body for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK. Mental health and wellbeing are emphasised at leadership level at RCVS and compassion is one of the core organisational values. RCVS has built up a substantial body of research and practical experience as part of its large-scale *Mind Matters* initiative. We spoke to Chief Executive Officer Lizzie Lockett to find out more about how RCVS promotes mental health and wellbeing among its staff and registrants.

### Supporting staff and registrants' mental health and wellbeing

RCVS is signed up to the [Time to Change](#) Pledge and wellbeing is included in its strategy. It regularly surveys staff on mental health and wellbeing issues and provides a range of practical supports to those who need them.

RCVS has taken great care to supply staff with quality equipment, such as desks, chairs, additional screens and laptops, to enable them to work comfortably from home during COVID-19. When it has been feasible, it has enabled staff who struggle to work from home to come into the office for the odd day, although this is not possible during lockdown. To keep the sense of community while working virtually, RCVS provides social events, such as an afternoon off in the summer, complete with afternoon tea hamper and photography competitions, and an opportunity to spend some time together. Among other ways RCVS supports staff mental health and wellbeing are:

- Volunteering days, which are inspired by the *NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing* and the idea of 'giving back'
- A wellbeing allowance of £250, which can be spent on anything from running shoes to training courses
- Access to the *Babylon* app to support work-life balance and receive medical care without having to take time off for appointments
- A staff Wellbeing Group
- Access to an Employee Assistance Programme, which includes a counselling service

RCVS uses the [Warwick - Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing Score](#) for measuring and benchmarking when it comes to the mental health of the veterinary profession, and has run [surveys](#) on the impact of [COVID-19 on practice](#) which feature questions about mental health and wellbeing. This data has fed into the RCVS's [Mind Matters](#) initiative - a large-scale project which looks at the wellbeing of the veterinary sector. The project has a three-tiered structure:

- Prevent: Identifying systemic issues that cause mental health problems within the profession (e.g., stigma)
- Protect: Recognising that dealing with systemic issues can take time and providing individuals with skills and tools to protect their personal wellbeing (e.g., courses on mindfulness and resilience, mental health champions)
- Support: Having actions in place if someone in the profession has a mental health crisis (e.g., financially supporting the independent charity Vetlife, and other arm's length support services)

RCVS administers the Sarah Brown Mind Matters Veterinary Mental Health Research grant, that funds research projects looking at a wide range of mental health issues in the veterinary sector. The most recent two grants are considering racial discrimination and mental health, and the issue of moral injury. It also hosts a biennial research symposium, drawing together mental health research from across the global veterinary profession.

### Mental health awareness training and external partnerships

RCVS provides a varied training programme for its staff and registrants. This programme includes general mental health awareness training courses as well as specific courses, such as dealing with people in difficult situations.

These courses are delivered by both external and internal trainers. Lizzie recommended trainers that RCVS uses:

- Trevor Bell, who delivers mental health awareness training
- [PIPS, who delivers](#) training on resilience

While the training RCVS provides to its staff is voluntary, Lizzie feels that the messages gleaned from good training tend to spread across the organisation. Training courses are in high demand and there is normally a waiting list. As befits a body that sets standards, the RCVS takes CPD for its teams seriously and there are generous budgets to allow staff to develop and learn in other areas – also a key part of the NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing.

Lizzie noted that adapting mental health training to virtual delivery has presented a degree of difficulty as trainers face a harder task of observing their participants and responding sensitively to any reactions that the course may elicit.

RCVS has partnered with several organisations in its work on supporting mental health and wellbeing. It has worked with the University of Manchester as part of *Pillars of Stress within the Profession* project and with [the Doctors Support Network](#) as part of a project on reducing stigma called &Me.

### **Signposting to resources**

RCVS promotes resources on mental health and wellbeing to staff by email. Meanwhile, the RCVS website and social media accounts, as well as its database of vets and nurses, are used to disseminate these resources to registrants and the wider audience. As part of the *Mind Matters* project, Lizzie personally does talks and visits veterinary practices up and down the country to promote the cause – although currently this work is online.

Lizzie shared with us an encouraging trend that she observed in the recent years. About five years ago, when *Mind Matters* started, regulators did not focus much on wellbeing and mental health, but in the intervening years there had been a change in mindset and most regulators now felt they have a duty to proactively look after the wellbeing of their registrants and staff, which had a knock-on benefit for the public those organisations served.

# About Flash Reports

This Wellbeing in the Workplace report is the second PARN Flash report. These Flash Reports are intended to provide a quick and concise view of key and current issues. The subject areas can be wide ranging but inevitably will focus on special areas of interest that reflect the activities and concerns of professional bodies.

The process begins with a simple survey of PARN service users and members, very much like the regular PARN Ask the Network questionnaires sent out each fortnight. However, these may perhaps cover issues in a little more depth. This is then followed up with a number of one-to-one interviews exploring the subject area in more detail. These interviews are used to create case studies that uncover interesting and good practice, and occasionally examples of what can go wrong.

This creates a really useful backcloth to the topic allowing more detailed examination and further discussion, something that we believe the sector will find both stimulating and very valuable. But PARN then goes on to develop the Flash Report further with the addition of round table events (virtual or live) to extend the discussion and follow up on prompted concerns and ideas.

The idea always is to have a very quick 'turn around' between inception and completion. Our target is to complete the survey, interviews and report within around eight weeks. The round table events will be run according to availability with the regular PARN calendar.

Flash Reports can be commissioned by any professional bodies (we do offer a discount for PARN members) for any subject area they wish to explore. If you would like further information on this new service, please contact Lily Roff - [lily@parnglobal.com](mailto:lily@parnglobal.com) or Robert Pitts - [robert@parnglobal.com](mailto:robert@parnglobal.com). We are very happy to discuss your requirements.

In the meantime, PARN will be conducting a number of other flash reports as an occasional series of research pieces.