Work Stress

WORK stress

The UK National Work-stress Network ● workstress.net

Report on Mental Health in the Workplace Conference, November 19th, 20th & 21st 2016

This was the 20th Annual Conference of the UK National Work Stress Network and was as usual well attended by 85 delegates from across the UK representing public and private sectors as well as the TU community. As always we welcome back several regulars and are always pleased to see new delegates too.

Conference was chaired by Les Roberts, founder member of the Network and until recently Treasurer and Conference Secretary. It was good to welcome Les back to the fold and we are grateful to him for his contributions once again.

The programme followed its usual pattern – a panel of 5 speakers in the morning to open the conference, and then two sessions of workshops, each offering 5 topics, with some repetition to enable delegates to access as much as they could.

> **10.00 till 12.45 Saturday morning Speaker Panel including Q&A**
>
> **Conference Chair – Les Roberts, Founder Member, Stress Network**
>
> **Kevin Daniels, Professor of Organisational Behaviour, UEA, Norwich**
>
> **Anne Mathie, Scottish Mental Health First Aid**
>
> **Wayne Bates, National Negotiating Official, NASUWT**
>
> **Rob Johnston, Policy and Campaigns Officer, Midlands TUC**
>
> **Final Question and Answer session 12.50 to 13.00**

Professor Kevin Daniels opened proceedings with a presentation around his work on well-being. The programme covers work, learning and worklessness and their impact on workers. Through interviews with over 400 participants, it had been possible to identify factors represented by quality jobs; workers having a sense of fairness and belonging; good levels of management competence and the impact of job creation. Well-being associated with unemployment was found to be far worse for younger people, who were left with scars

even after assimilation into the workforce, and with additional effects on partners being apparent. Following re-employment, life seemed better for men, was better for better jobs and in Retirement there were better choices and health, and there was a greater availability of bridging jobs which could improve feelings of well-being. Overall work-based learning helped to provide improved well-being including leadership and management training which improved professional capabilities and greater job satisfaction.

Management understanding and commitment was essential to success, and strong backing from the top and Trade Union involvement were found to be key factors leading to happier workforces. Safety and training in safety, improved communication skills helped focus more on skills and abilities. Motivational change came from a shift in performance management from the punitive/disciplinary angle towards rewards-based and Departmental bonus systems. Opportunities to influence work processes and develop specialist roles, giving workers openings to take decisions came from changes in job design.

It became clear that well-being relied upon the availability of good quality work, being secure, skilled and with workers involved in decision making and having a good work life balance.

Good quality work needed to be supported by skills training, well-being training for workplace risks, management training and a genuine policy of concern and support for wellbeing throughout the organisation. All of this, backed up by proper implementation of policy and procedures.

www.whatworkswellbeing.org

Kevin's presentation slides are included with this report as a pdf file.

Anne Mathie was welcomed to the conference and special thanks extended to her for stepping in to replace a previously booked speaker who was prevented from attendance through ill health. Anne had originally agreed to provide workshop sessions but was also happy to help set the scene in the plenary session.

Anne began by creating an alphabetic list of feelings around mental health from the audience. These included:-

Apathy, anxiety, agitated, bullying, bonkers, complacent, despair, despondent, dysfunctional, empathy, fatigue, failure, fear, grumpy, guilty, happy, helpless, irritated, isolated, joy, knackered, lonely, lethargy, misery, mindfulness, morose, nothing, negative, overpowered, overworked, optimistic, pressure, pissed off, positivity, quarrelsome, quiet, queer, queasy, rejected, sad, stressed, suicidal, strong, tired, tense, unhappy, unresponsive, undervalued, violated, violent, vengeful, worries, worthless, worn out, well, zen…..

This was a simple exercise which set the scene of thinking around the whole issue of Mental Health at work. Anne then moved on to pose the question – *"How are you doing?"*, a simple, basic everyday question asked all the time – but do we ever anticipate the answer? Are we prepared for a negative response, if so what might it mean? Some 25% of all of us will face a mental health problem in any given year. Mental health is present in everyone - good, bad or indifferent, and changes over the course of our lives, triggered by a range of factors. Talking about it can help and indeed prevent mental ill-health.

Anne went on to confirm the basics of stress and its impact upon individuals, quoting almost 500,000 cases of work-related stress 2015/16 and revealing a loss of some 12 million working days, being some 24% of all days lost due to ill health.

Stress becomes mental ill health when:-

It is untreated; impacts on physical health; affects us in a negative and adverse way; makes us feel unwell and unable to function properly; impairs motivation and affects personal relationships.

Anne referred to Mind 2012 report that 56% of employers would like to improve staff well-being but feel inadequately trained. It is a key function in the workplace to support and care for each other. Mentally *unhealthy* workplaces with poor policies are a sure sign of problems, leading to staff absence, loss of productivity, and a financial impact on business.

The difficulties of concealment are common – there is a stigma attached to perceptions of mental health, and often fears for the future of employment on the part of sufferers.

People who disclose may feel they have nothing to hide, want to raise awareness and educate and feel protected by law.

Good employers committed to supporting employees ensure appropriate management training, train staff to be emotionally literate, review as necessary existing policies, promoting healthy workplaces through regular staff consultation and peer support.

Anne's presentation slides are included with this report as a pdf file.

http://www.mentalwealthtraining.co.uk/

Wayne Bates of NASUWT gave a presentation of the many mental health issues currently facing the teaching profession. He outlined the long-standing concerns around work-related stress in schools, and reminded delegates that the social partnership with the previous Labour Government particularly through 2003 brought essential workload agreements through which many onerous tasks were passed on to support staff and systems. It also introduced a statutory right to a good work-life balance.

However since the 2010 election and a return to Conservative Government, workload pressures have continued to grow, resulting in more staff absence and higher levels of work-related stress. Many of the changes introduced by the social partnership were seen as fair game for the new Government particularly with Michael Gove in post as Secretary of State.

NASUWT has annually posed "The Big Question" of members through an online survey showing in 2016, 90% of teachers reporting excessive workload. Teachers were also reporting lack of recognition of well-being on the part of managers and school leaders.

80% were reporting increased levels of workplace stress, and 60% were reporting adverse effects on their mental health. Some 50% revealed impact on their physical health. 10% had undergone counselling and 5% admitted to hospital. Children are also being affected.

It was also accepted that the picture revealed for teachers was not very different for many other public sector workers. There is a growing recruitment and retention crisis in schools and the DfE has been slow to react, more often denying the existence of a problem.

In defence of their general working conditions and physical and mental health NASUWT members across the country have been taking selective 'Actions short of Strike action'. This has been specifically targeted at conditions imposed by heavy handed management seeking to squeeze more and more out of the school day.

Wayne also referred to recent HSE data confirming that work-related illnesses continue to remain stubbornly high. It was confirmed that NASUWT among other unions was defending the position of members in pursuit of proper recognition of the need for sympathetic approaches to workload and health and well-being in the workplace.

Wayne's presentation is included with this report as a pdf file.

Rob Johnston, Midlands TUC and the Dying to Work Campaign – Rob is Policy and Campaigns officer for the Midlands TUC and is leading on TUC on the Dying to Work campaign.

The campaign is about workers who are terminally ill and struggling to find sympathetic support during their illness, often with employers taking a hard view that if they are not fully fit to work then they must leave or be dismissed on health or capability grounds.

http://www.dyingtowork.co.uk/   http://www.dyingtowork.co.uk/videos/

He used video footage to outline the situation of Jacci Woodcock, GMB member, who was facing these very problems. In interview with HR, it was questioned whether she was still able to carry out many of the functions required in her job.

The campaign was now successfully recruiting many employers to take on a positive caring attitude towards such employees.

The Plenary Session closed following short Q&A after each speaker and then as a general forum.

Delegates began workshop sessions after lunch, and the conference concluded with a short plenary session on the Sunday morning.

Workshops:-

	SATURDAY AFTERNOON 2.30 TO 4.30 P.M.	
	Subject	*Facilitators*
A	**Workshop on Making Better Jobs** *Kevin Daniels, Work, Learning and Wellbeing Evidence Programme, What Works Wellbeing Centre And Employment Systems and Institutions Group, Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia* In this session, Professor Kevin Daniels, the lead for the Work, Learning and Wellbeing Evidence Programme, presented detailed findings from one of the first evidence reviews of the Centre that is focused on finding out what other factors may contribute to building high quality jobs (e.g., training, alignment of job redesign with other organisational initiatives).	Professor Kevin Daniels
B	**Mental Health First Aid in the workplace** The example examined in this workshop is from Scotland where work has already commenced. We hope to draw from those experiences north of the border information to provide support for English workers where mental health is present and yet largely ignored. Physical first aid support is commonly found in most workplaces but not Mental Health first aid – why is this? What is missing? What is the role of an MH First Aider? The workshop will examine how this tool has developed. (repeated on Sunday morning)	Anne Mathie
C	**Handling Casework for members – the Stresses and Strains of TU activity** Following the Success of a handout publication entitled TU Stewards Stress by the Network we felt it time to revive the discussion on the issues around the work that Stewards and Safety Reps do and how it affects their own situation. This will be a chance to consider how we need to support ourselves and each other.	Bob Woods, Vaughan Skirrey Stress Network
D	**Mental Health, Absence Management and return to work** Mental Health issues, stress related illness, anxiety and depression all lead to sickness absence and often extensive time off work. This workshop will examine how casework can be handled and in particular how return to work programmes can be established. The workshop will be case study based.	Scott Donohoe, Stress Network

E	**Risk management and root cause analysis.** A brief overview of the different theories used in root cause analysis in the decision making process of identifying factors that have led to stress injuries. We will be discussing processes management use in finding out what happened and to prevent re-occurrence in the future and why management fail in the true identification of the real root cause. Two examples will be used and worked through within the workshop - a managerial failure and a stress case. Further discussion will surround the role of the rep in the return of the employee back into the workplace with arguments against managements blaming the employee as the root cause and the failures of resilience training as a method of keeping the workplace safe.	Sean Duignan Stress Network and SOR
	SUNDAY MORNING 09.45 TO 11.50 A.M.	
F	**Mental Health First Aid** The example examined in this workshop is from Scotland where work has already commenced. We hope to draw from those experiences north of the border information to provide support for English workers where mental health is present and yet largely ignored. Physical first aid support is commonly found in most workplaces but not Mental Health first aid – why is this? What is missing? What is the role of an MH First Aider? The workshop will examine how this tool has developed. (Repeat of Saturday afternoon *session)*	Anne Mathie
G	**Just what is stress and how does it affect people?** A retrospective approach, identifying the physical and psychological symptoms of stress, the employee, support of the rep in the process of supporting the employee, basic, basic info for risk assessment and the legal aspects of the employer towards the employee.	Sean Duignan, Stress Network and SOR
H	**Fatigue at work** New TUC Guidance for Stewards and Safety Reps on the subject of workplace fatigue examines issues around the decline in mental and physical performance resulting from prolonged exertion, sleep loss or disruption of the body clock. People who suffer from fatigue lack motivation and energy and from this apathy may also be present. The workshop will examine how these factors affect workers, their work and their relationships both in an out of work. We hope to produce an advice sheet to complement other stocks.	Philip Lewis and Marilyn Bramble Litchmore Stress Network
J	**Well Being at work - Mind's approach** This presentation begins with the premise that healthy workplaces and fulfilling work requires integrity, honesty and a willingness to change. It examines: - good pressure and stress - symptoms of anxiety disorder/depression in staff - how to have conversations with people displaying signs of mental distress/illness, - constructive interventions for staff who struggle with mental illness - self-care - the economic and moral case for putting well-being at the top of a business/service agenda.	Richard Wakerell, Mind
K	**Suicide and Work** With increasing numbers of suicides being reported each month, the workshop will consider the subject and how to deal with associated effects and subsequent casework, also the issue of providing support to workmates affected by the loss of a close friend/colleague.	Kerry Webb Mental Health Nurse

Workshop reports, materials and hand-outs are included with this report as pdf files.