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**Sustain’s mental health in the workplace policy and guidance**

Sustain is committed to being a supportive employer. Sustain is aware that mental ill health and stress are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society, and that promoting and protecting the mental wellbeing of the workforce is important for individuals’ physical health, social wellbeing and productivity.

Many factors, both in the workplace and outside – whether on a personal basis or in relation to news and world events – influence the mental wellbeing of individual members of staff, particular teams or the organisation as a whole. Understanding and addressing the factors that affect people’s mental wellbeing at work have a wide range of benefits, both for individuals and for the organisation.

Mental wellbeing in the workplace is relevant to all members of staff and everyone can contribute to improved mental wellbeing at work. Addressing workplace mental wellbeing can help strengthen the positive, protective factors of employment, reduce risk factors for mental ill health and improve general health. It can also help promote the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems and support them once they are at work.

Useful information on the issues covered by this policy and guidance is published by Mind: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/useful-resources/](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/useful-resources/)

Mind promotes the use of a Wellness Action Plan: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/)

# Policy aims

The aim of this policy is to create a workplace environment that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing for all members of staff. This policy covers the following aspects of mental health and wellbeing:

**Promotion of mental wellbeing**

Promoting the mental wellbeing of all staff members through:

* providing information and raising awareness about mental wellbeing;
* providing enhanced opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing;
* promoting policies and practices that promote good wellbeing.

**Management skills**

Developing skills for managers and supervisors to:

* promote and support the mental wellbeing of staff members;
* help staff members adopt practices that support a balanced approach to managing workload;
* deal with issues around mental health and stress effectively (both for their own mental wellbeing and for that of staff members).

**Support**

Providing support to staff through:

* providing a work environment that promotes and supports mental wellbeing for all staff members;
* offering assistance, signposting and support to people who experience a mental health problem while in employment, whilst recognising that some crises or ongoing conditions require medical or other professional attention, which Sustain can support through flexible working;
* support for staff members returning to work after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

**Employment**

Helping people get back to work after a period of absence due to mental illness through:

* recruitment practices;
* making reasonable adjustments;
* retaining staff who develop a mental health problem.

# Scope

Mental health problems and stress can affect anyone, regardless of their position in the organisation. This policy applies equally to all members of staff.

The implementation of this policy will also be supported by other Sustain health and safety policies (e.g. Sickness and Absence policy; Bullying and Harassment policy; Equality and Diversity policy).

# Policy objectives and guidance

The following objectives and guidance give more detail on how we intend to achieve our aim of creating a workplace environment that promotes the mental wellbeing of all staff members:

**Workplace factors**

As an employer, Sustain aims to support and promote positive mental wellbeing in the workplace. We acknowledge that certain working conditions and practices can negatively affect employees’ mental wellbeing, including aspects of work organisation and management, and environmental and social conditions. We also recognise that adopting better working practices can actively help cultivate better mental wellbeing. As general guidance to how Sustain approaches these issues, we endeavour to:

* Talk openly about stress, mental wellbeing, personal experiences and factors that affect people’s mental health in an appreciative and non-judgemental way, demonstrating that Sustain will treat people with a history of mental distress with compassion and respect.
* Respect the right to privacy and confidentiality if people are not comfortable talking in this way.
* Ensure employees can access information and good practice, for example via colleagues and on the Sustain intranet, and increase their awareness of mental wellbeing and the factors that can affect or improve mental wellbeing. Useful information on the issues covered by this policy and guidance is published by Mind: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/useful-resources/](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/useful-resources/)
* Provide opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing, for example through friendly and problem-solving working relationships, physical activity, stress-reducing activities, and social events.
* Normalise time off to manage mental distress through sickness days, where staff are experiencing acute stress and/or short-term mental distress, just as for physical illness.
* Actively encourage people to take their annual leave throughout the year to support times for replenishment and renewal.
* Help employees set realistic targets that do not require working unreasonable hours, and encourage a culture in which colleagues do not pressurise with unreasonable expectations.
* Support a culture that encourages time off where staff have worked outside normal working hours. Sustain’s Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) policy recognises that fluctuating workloads are commonplace in organisations like Sustain, and staff at all levels will contribute to a culture in which TOIL days are taken where appropriate – in accordance with Sustains TOIL policy – to help staff recover from busy periods of work.
* Offer employees flexible working arrangements and the opportunity to spend some time working from home (see Sustain’s flexible working and working from home policies).
* Ensure all staff members have the opportunity to influence how they do their jobs, scope for varying working conditions within reasonable bounds, and opportunities to develop and use their skills. This could be planned using a Wellness Action Plan such as promoted by Mind: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/](https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/)
* Ensure all staff members have clear job descriptions, objectives and responsibilities and provide them with good management support, training and adequate resources to do their jobs.
* Manage conflict effectively and ensure the workplace is free from bullying, harassment, or any form of discriminatory behaviour (for more detail see Sustain’s policies on e.g. Bullying and Harassment; Equality and Diversity).
* Establish good communication to ensure staff involvement, particularly during periods of project, campaign, contractual or organisational change.
* Include workplace stress in Sustain’s risk assessments and mitigation actions, for example in quarterly risk management reports to the Sustain Council of Trustees.
* Provide training in good management practices, including those related to health and safety and stress management to all staff with management or line management responsibilities.
* Provide adequate resources to enable good practice.

**Culture of trust and mutual support**

Sustain aims to create and promote a culture where all employees are able to talk openly about their job and mental health challenges and to report difficulties without fear of a judgmental reaction, discrimination or reprisal. As general guidance to how Sustain approaches these issues, we endeavour to:

* Give non-judgemental and proactive support to individual staff members who experience mental health challenges.
* Deal sympathetically with staff members experiencing mental health problems due to circumstances outside the workplace, and who consequently have difficulty at work.
* Help staff members, volunteers and interns to understand the organisation, our way of working, our open approach to discussing and addressing challenges, and opportunities to get involved in a wide range of activities.
* Appoint one or more ‘lead trustee(s)’ to guide and advise Sustain on good practice with mental wellbeing, and to support decision-making when difficult circumstances emerge.
* Help colleagues understand their role in the organisation, within delivery of the Sustain Strategy and improve their connectivity with colleagues, including senior managers, to help them feel valued, connected, guided and supported and overcome isolation that can be associated with working in silos.
* Incorporate reflection on workload and personal mental wellbeing into catch-ups and appraisals.
* Enhance the appraisals and personal development process within Sustain, including cultivating connections and feedback between staff members, line managers and SMT.

**Support and assistance for employees experiencing mental health issues**

As general guidance to how Sustain approaches these issues, we endeavour to:

* Ensure individuals experiencing mental health problems are treated fairly and consistently and are not made to feel guilty about the circumstances they are dealing with.
* Encourage staff members to access an external Occupational Health provider, their own GP, or a counsellor of their choice. Sustain will treat occasional medical and counselling appointments for mental health as we would appointments for physical health, agreeing time off to enable attendance. For regular or longer-term arrangements, we can offer flexible working arrangements and/or apply our Sickness and Absence policy.
* Investigate the contribution of working conditions and other organisational factors to mental wellbeing through staff surveys and discussion in suitable forums. Suggestions for measures that could improve mental wellbeing and reduce stress and anxiety for Sustain staff will be taken seriously and enacted where possible.
* In cases of long-term sickness absence, put in place, where possible, a graduated return to work, kept under review, in line with Sustain’s Sickness and Absence policy.
* Make every effort to identify suitable alternative tasks or roles, in full discussion with the employee, where a return to the same job is not possible.
* Treat all matters relating to individual employees and their mental health problems in the strictest confidence and share on a ‘need to know’ basis and only with consent from the individual concerned.

**Employment of people who have experienced mental health problems**

As an employer we recognise that people who have or have had mental health problems may have experienced discrimination in recruitment and selection procedures. This may discourage them from seeking employment. While some people will acknowledge their experience of mental health issues openly, others may fear that stigma will jeopardise their chances of getting a job. Sustain recognises that, given appropriate support, the vast majority of people who have experienced mental health problems continue to work successfully, as do many with ongoing issues. As part of Sustain’s commitment to diversity, equalities and inclusion, we will ensure that we act in a non-discriminatory way. As general guidance to how Sustain approaches these issues, we endeavour to:

* Remove diversity data from the shortlisting process so that shortlisting occurs only on the basis of suitability for the job while also maintaining our commitment to offering an interview to a disabled job applicant if they meet the essential criteria set out in the job specification.
* Show a positive and enabling attitude to employees and job applicants with mental health issues, if this is declared by the applicant at any stage of the recruitment process.
* Ensure that all staff members involved in recruitment and selection are aware of mental health issues in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, and interviews are accessible and inclusive.
* Make it clear, in any recruitment check undertaken, that people who have experienced mental health issues will not be discriminated against and that disclosure of a mental health problem is for the purposes of enabling both employee and employer to assess and provide the right level of support or adjustment.
* Not make assumptions that a person with a mental health problem will be more prone to workplace stress or take more time off than any other employee or job applicant.
* Ensure all line managers have information on the intranet, and training where needed, about managing mental health in the workplace.
* Undertake surveys of staff (including volunteers and interns as appropriate), and provide other opportunities for feedback, to enable people to express their concerns and their ideas for how to solve common issues. Sustain will ensure such feedback is considered by the SMT and the Trustee lead(s) for staff wellbeing, and/or brought to the attention of the Sustain Council if serious issues are raised that need Trustee advice and oversight.

# Data protection

Sustain will treat all information about mental health with care, compassion and the utmost sensitivity. In the implementation of this policy, Sustain may process personal data and/or special category personal data collected in accordance with its GDPR and data protection policy. Data collected from the point at which this policy is invoked will only inform the organisation for the benefit of implementing this policy. All data is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of this policy. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the organisation's GDPR and data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under Sustain’s disciplinary procedure.

# Information for internal use

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| Date of most recent update: | 18/05/21 | | |
| Reviewer and lead on policy: | Kath Dalmeny, Merav Shub, with CBR Solutions | | |
| Staff consultation: | All-staff consultation, closed 16 June 2021 | | |
| Considered by management team: | Yes | Done (date): | 24/06/21 |
| Approved by (usually Chief Executive): | Kath Dalmeny | Done (date): | 24/06/21 |
| Sustain Council of Trustees approval required? | Checked by Trustee wellbeing lead Alison Swan Parente | | |
| At which Council meeting? | n/a | Done (date): | July 2021 |
| Is this policy in the list of ‘required’ policies? | Yes | | |
| For required policies only, updates include (describe the changes in brief list format; keep and add older date to the list of previous updates):  *Note: For discretionary policies, these updates will be recorded in Council meeting minutes.* | Policy published as part of HR Healthcheck 2021, adapted from CBR Solutions template  For staff consultation | | |
| Next review date (minimum period – usually three years – or if prompted by legislative change; or in the interim at the discretion of Sustain/trustees): | July 2024 | | |
| Filed in Sustain drive (drive and folder names): | Line Management\HR and other policies\Mental health | | |
| Publish privately on intranet? (include the final part of the file location; page name not full URL): | /intranet/health-and-well-being/ | | |
| Publish publicly on Sustain website? (include URL) | [about/sustains\_sustainability\_policies/#health\_and\_wellbeing](http://www.sustainweb.org/about/sustains_sustainability_policies/#health_and_wellbeing) | | |
| Policy adapted from template provided by CBR Solutions: [www.cbrsolutions.org.uk](http://www.cbrsolutions.org.uk/) | | | |