

**MARCH 2023**

FITNESS & ACTIVE LEISURE  
WORKFORCE

# State of Mind

———— 2023 SURVEY ————

## SUMMARY REPORT

**WORKPLACE  
MENTAL WEALTH**  
*fitness & active leisure*

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# Dear Colleague

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to participate in and support this research – the third Fitness & Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Survey. We appreciate the time and openness you have shown that has allowed us to publish these findings.

This work is a significant undertaking. While the research, analysis and recommendations are independently delivered by us (Workplace Mental Wealth), we are reliant on the support, trust and collaboration of the sector to make it all happen. In particular, we would like to thank CIMSPA for partnering with us again, Active IQ and Myzone for sponsoring us for a second time, and Alliance Leisure and Les Mills UK for joining us this year. We salute and thank you all for stepping up to support the sector. We are also grateful to a great many other organisations and people who have helped – we appreciate you all.

Our ambition is to drive systemic change. This means not only asking the workforce for their views and experiences, but understanding the perspectives and capacity of employers as well; both have a role to play in managing workforce mental health. However, the foundational change the sector needs will be employer-led, so this year we have drilled deeper into factors in the control of employers which should be understood and managed as part of their duty of care.

As in previous years, we again see over half the survey's respondents saying they have experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months, and nearly three-quarters saying they have experienced a mental health issue 'at some point'. And while there are pockets of great practice among employers, we see an overall trend that suggests the sector is even less focused on approaches and actions to support psychological health and safety at work than it was in 2022, after a drop in 2021. This is at odds with what is increasingly being expected of employers nationally and globally. The emphasis on understanding and managing workplace mental health and safety is growing, and so we call for the sector to start taking systemic steps to improve.

Cont.../

We fully appreciate the permacrisis of recent years and the pressure this puts on resources. It has been tough for people at every level of the workforce to navigate. However, like physical health and safety, this work is not a 'nice to do'. It is also pertinent; many of the issues that are front of mind for employers right now are intimately linked to workplace mental health – staff retention and turnover, recruitment, absenteeism, productivity and cost management. As a guide, Deloitte (2020) estimates poor mental health at work costs private leisure employers £702 – £769 per employee per year. As a conservative estimate then, based on CIMSPA's figures of around 600,00 FTE workers, it could mean poor mental health is costing sector employers at least £421 million per year.

Our 2023 data from employers and the workforce suggests many organisations are not meeting legal requirements which is, of course, deeply problematic, but they are also missing out on the commercial benefits of having happier, healthier, safer and more productive teams. Our data suggests one of the reasons employers may not be acting is a gap between the work experiences of the most senior leaders and the majority of the rest of the workforce. It's demanding at the top, it's also demanding at other levels, in different ways, and without the routine support and control most senior leaders report. There is no doubt that this industry is driven by passionate, talented people, but it can't run on passion and goodwill alone. People are telling us where action is needed. We should listen and act.

We offer three recommendations on page 32 to drive sector-wide development as well as the opportunity for employers to take decisive action and join pioneering organisations who have signed The Good Work Pledge (page 33) to accelerate meeting the challenge ahead.

With very best wishes

**Lindsey Simpson & Katie Lewis**

Co-founders, Workplace Mental Wealth

[www.workplacementalwealth.com](http://www.workplacementalwealth.com)

March 2023

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**WORKPLACE  
MENTAL WEALTH**  
*fitness & active leisure*

# Key findings 2023

**54%**

57% in 2022, 53% in 2021

of respondents said they have experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months. This is the third year running that over half our respondents have said this.

**73%**

73% in 2022, 69% in 2021

of respondents said they have experienced a mental health issue at some point. Again, this is the third year in a row we are seeing levels like this.

**63**

New for 2023

is the average rating for 'sense of belonging at work' (out of 100). Seniority is the strongest correlating factor across the sample; CEOs/board score highest at 84, entry-level the lowest at 52.

**72%**

75% in 2022, 78% in 2021

of those with a line manager felt this manager cared about their mental wellbeing.

**46%**

48% in 2022, 42% in 2021

of employees would not be honest with an employer if they felt they needed time off work because of a mental health issue.

**8%**

11% in 2022, 19% in 2021

of employees said someone regularly checks in on their mental health at work.

**49%**

42% in 2022, 40% in 2021

of employers said they have a wellbeing strategy they communicate to all employees. 41% of employees say they see this.

**71%**

77% in 2022, 63% in 2021

of organisations said they would value support and advice from an industry body to help shape their approach to employee mental wellbeing and share best practice.

**It's time to take action.**



# Did you know?

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

The World Health Organisation

# About the 2023 survey

The Fitness and Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Survey was open online from 16 January to 10 February 2023. We offered two survey options, one for individuals and one for employers.

We invited participation from across the sector using a variety of channels such as the CIMSPA membership database, our database, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. Our research sponsors Active IQ, Alliance Leisure, Les Mills UK and Myzone also shared the links as did other employers and industry bodies such as ukactive, CLUK, EMD UK and Fitpro. The sector's press also widely shared the story, survey links and how to take part, along with network groups like MHI, Independent Gyms UK & Ireland and The Scottish Leisure Network Group.

We provided employers and influencers with a range of marketing materials to share news of the survey with instructions on how people could take part. We highlighted that the survey was anonymous. The materials were available to download for free from our website.

Both surveys took around five minutes to complete, were anonymous and offered a free text option at the end so participants could add further information or comment, some of which are quoted in this report.

**Throughout this report numbers have been rounded up or down to the nearest per cent.**



# Who we heard from in 2023\*

## 918 UK individuals and 68 organisations

### Individuals...

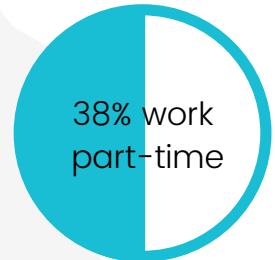
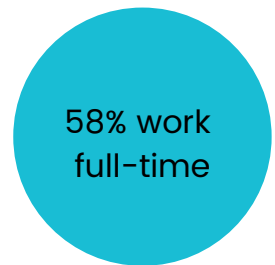
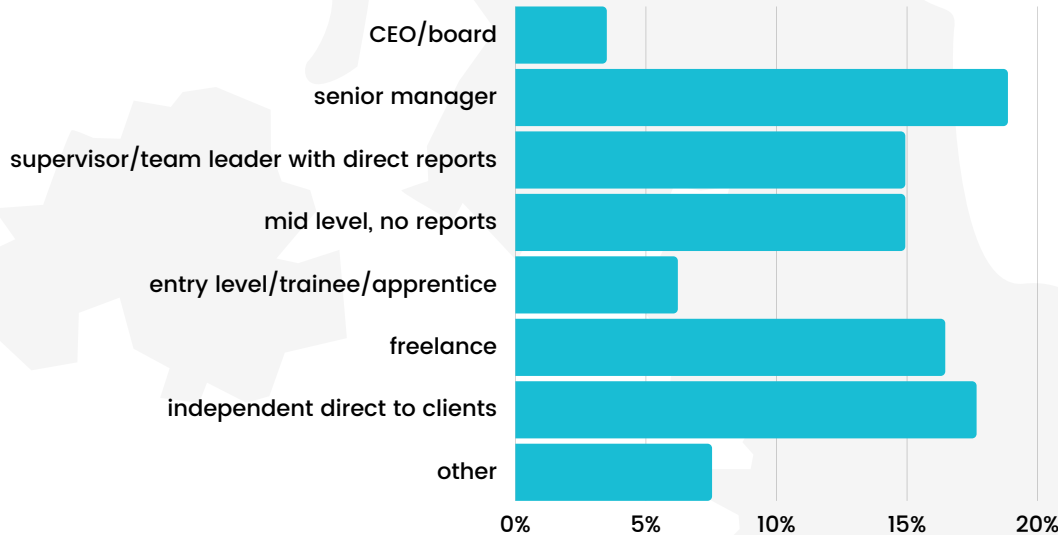
- 84% from England
- 11% from Scotland
- 4% from Wales
- 1% from Northern Ireland

**94%**  
completion rate

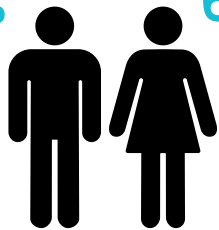
### HO base of employers

- 88% in England
- 7% in Scotland
- 4% in Wales
- 0% in Northern Ireland

**72%**  
completion rate



**31%**

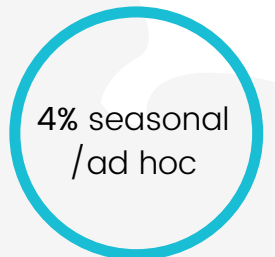


2% preferred to self-describe or not to say

**68%**

**40%**

have caring responsibilities for school-age children, relatives or friends



44% of employers have less than 100 employees



35% of employers have 101-500 employees



21% of employers have 500+ employees

\*Throughout this report numbers have been rounded up or down to the nearest per cent.



# Did you know?

Whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to help their employees.

Work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk to staff. Where a risk is identified, steps must be taken to remove it or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.

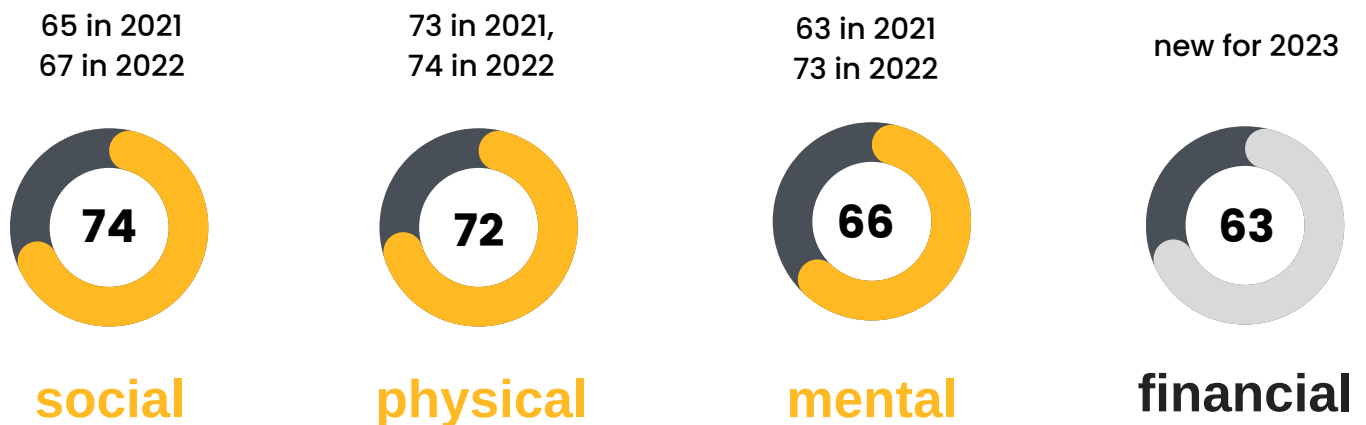
The Health & Safety Executive (UK regulator)

# The workforce 'snapshot'

Our health is made up of a variety of dimensions including our physical, social and mental health. This year, we introduced a new dimension to the survey - financial health. This is increasingly recognised as an important part of our 'total health' and can be described as 'feeling secure and in control of your finances'.

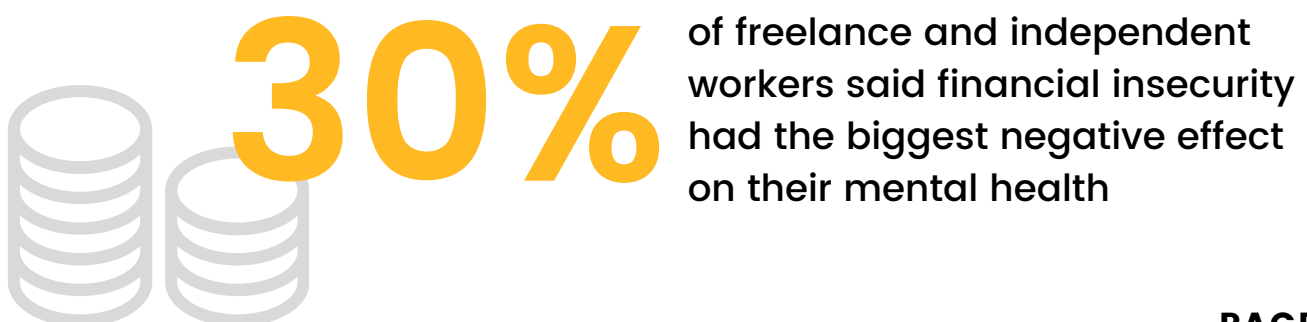
We first surveyed the sector in 2021 and asked respondents to rate their 'current' physical, social and mental health out of 100. You can see the average score for each of these original three dimensions across the three years of the survey below. You can also see how respondents rated financial health this year, as well as the 2023 overall average of 69.

## ●●●●● 2023 'current total health' score = 69 ●●●●●



In this current snapshot, compared to 2022, we see a 7-point decrease in mental health and a 2-point decrease in physical health ratings. There is a 7-point increase in social health. Current mental health is now much lower than the current social and physical measures, and financial health is scoring at 63, the lowest of all four scores.

Financial insecurity also came out as the top negative effect for those without an employer. 30% of workers who work in a freelance or independent capacity said this, with 'having responsibility for everything (from admin to delivery)' second at 22%.



# Other workforce perspectives

Mental health is a complex subject and there are lots of ways to explore it. The snapshot on page 10 tells one part of the story, but we also take a longer term view, asking about mental health issues in the last year, and at any point.

**54%**

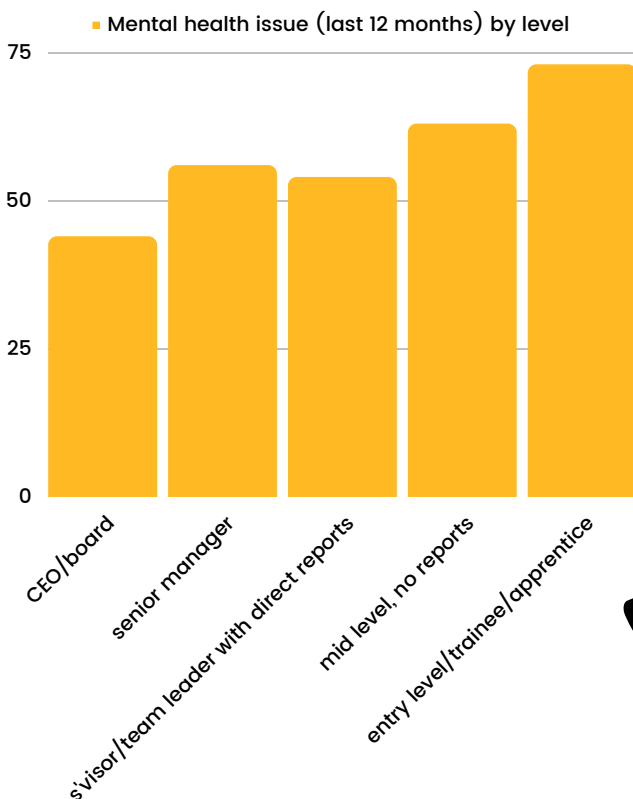
of respondents said they have experienced a mental health issue in the past year

- 57% in 2022
- 53% in 2021

**73%**

of respondents said they have experienced a mental health issue 'at some point'

- 73% in 2022
- 69% in 2021



However, these figures mask some large variations. For employed respondents, level of seniority is the factor most correlated to reported levels of a mental health issue, especially over the last 12 months.

For example, 44% of CEO/board respondents report experiencing a mental health issue in the last 12 months, compared to 73% of entry level workers.



# Need help now?

Help and support is available right now if you are feeling suicidal. You do not have to struggle with difficult feelings alone. You can call the Samaritans on 116 123 from any UK phone, or call 999 if your life is in danger.

For non-urgent information, see NHS Choices for support available to you through the NHS and other charities and groups. For details of local and national service providers near you, visit [hubofhope.co.uk](http://hubofhope.co.uk) and enter your postcode.

# The employer 'snapshot'

Employer approaches are fundamental to the wellbeing of the sector's workforce. There are three main reasons why employers should be taking action around workplace mental health and safety in the same way they do physical health and safety.

**Legal** it's a legal requirement covered by a number of pieces of legislation, most notably the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) and The Equality Act (2010).

**Commercial** it has many commercial benefits. Happier, healthier workers are safer and more productive. They are also less likely to bring legal action against their employer.

**Ethical** treating workers well is the right thing to do, especially in a sector that is all about health and wellbeing.

We asked how workforce mental health featured in employers' priorities for 2023 as well as how employers rated their own organisation's approach.



Employers rated employee mental health as 58/100 in their organisational priorities, a huge 14-point reduction on 2022's figure which was 72/100. This year's ratings ranged from 0 to 100, with a modal rating of 50 (the mode was 100 in 2022), and a median of 50 (it was 80 in 2022).



Employers rated their approach to employee mental wellbeing at 61/100; it was 62/100 in 2022. Despite a similar score to last year, there was a different pattern to this year's ratings. This year's range was 0-100, the median was 63, but the mode was 80 (up from 50 last year).

# Employer maturity\*

\*Percentages from the 78% of employer respondents who answered these questions.

## 78%

87% in 2022

of respondents say they think their senior leadership understands that their organisation has a duty of care in relation to employees' mental health as well as physical health. This matters because the law requires employers to act.

## 30%

new question  
for 2023

of employers say they have a risk register with 19% having workforce mental health risks on their risk register. This matters because employers should be taking action on key foreseeable risks, and a register plays an important role in that process.

## 60%

56% in 2022

of employers have an employee survey process and 29% have an employee steering group. Both are useful sources for identifying workforce psychological risks and mitigations, and indicate a consultative approach.

## 19%

new for 2023

of employers say mental health and safety is embedded in their management systems, a strong indicator that employee wellbeing is being strategically monitored and managed.

## 6%

new question for 2023

have a workforce wellbeing dashboard with Key Performance Indicators, and 6% say their board sees monthly reports on employee wellbeing. Gathering meaningful data, which is appropriately shared and acted on, indicates organisational competency and a strategic approach to managing workplace health and safety.

# Are the basics in place?

Having a robust approach to workplace mental health and safety is essentially about being a good employer. This means taking reasonable steps to make sure people have what they need to do their jobs, and taking a proactive, systematic approach to health and safety - both physical and mental. This survey is anonymous, so we can't say which employee respondents work for which employers. But, we offer these insights as a way of illustrating what people say is happening across the sector. The data suggests many of the basics are not routinely in place.

## Employers say

**49%**

my organisation has a wellbeing strategy

**36%**

our workforce induction includes information on mental health management & support

**30%**

people managers have their team's wellbeing in their yearly objectives

*In 2021, this was 55%*

**28%**

we have a process for regularly checking in on our people's mental health

## Employees say

**41%**

my organisation has a wellbeing strategy

**12%**

had a well-structured and useful induction when they started

**32%**

have regular conversations with my manager to do my job well

**8%**

someone regularly checks on my mental health

# What's it costing?

Deloitte estimates poor mental health at work costs private leisure employers £702 – £769 per employee per year.

For a workforce of 30, that's  
at least £21,060 a year

For a workforce of 100 that's  
at least £70,200 a year.

For a workforce of 1,500 that's  
at least £1,053,000 a year

Source: Mental health and employers:  
refreshing the case for investment (2020)



# Caring is vital, but not enough

**72%**

75% in 2022  
78% in 2021

of all respondents with a manager said they feel their current line manager cares about their mental wellbeing. However, caring managers are not enough to counteract the strong sense of stigma respondents still report around mental health.

**46%**

48% in 2022  
42% in 2021

of respondents said they would NOT be honest and explain to their employer why they needed time off due to a mental health issue, even though 63% of this group also say they feel their manager cares about their wellbeing.

There is stigma at all levels of the workforce, but significant variations show up, by level of seniority, in the data. CEOs and board members are the most likely to speak up, yet nearly a third (32%) report they would not give the real reason for needing time off if due to a mental health issue. Those feeling the least safe to speak up are:

- supervisors/team leaders with reports (50% would not be honest)
- entry level workers (57% would not be honest)

## What does stigma look like?

The top four reasons people gave for not feeling safe to speak up are:

**26%**

worry it would negatively affect their career



**24%**

would find it difficult to talk about a personal mental health issue



**20%**

thought it wouldn't help them



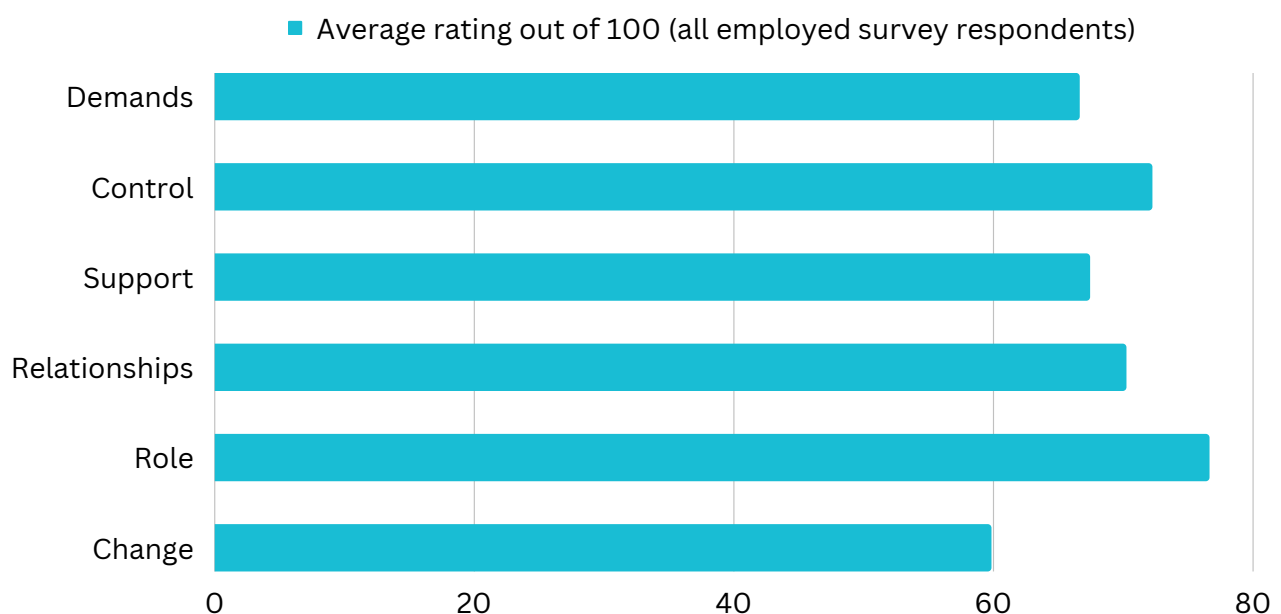
**14%**

worry about negatively being thought of by others

# How work is organised affects mental health

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) highlights six key areas of work design that, if not appropriately managed, are allied with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates. It makes sound legal, commercial and ethical sense for employers to understand and act in these areas. The six areas are:

- **Demands** includes workload, work patterns and work environment
- **Control** is how much say you have in the way you do your work
- **Support** includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided
- **Relationships** includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** is understanding your role and that it doesn't conflict with others' roles
- **Change** concerns how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated internally



We asked employed workers to tell us how their work is organised by rating each headline factor. You can see the overall scores in the graph above. But this isn't the full story. By far, the most predictive characteristic in rating patterns for this data was the level at which people work. We explore this over the page.

# Work design: highs and lows

We see distinct differences in how work is organised across the workforce. You can see each of the survey level's overall rankings (across the six areas of work design) in the circles to the right.

- As a group, CEOs and board members have the highest scores by far across all six areas of work design. This suggests they typically have more control and feel more supported. Overall, they also feel more strongly that work is designed to avoid conflict and that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with.
- The ratings from supervisors and team leaders with direct reports are, on average, 19 points lower than CEO and board-level respondents. Work demands are a particular issue for this group.
- Entry-level respondents gave the lowest overall average score. They scored the lowest on control, support, relationships and role suggesting those coming into the industry may not be receiving the on-boarding and longer-term environment they need to thrive.

This data suggests that there is a significant gap between the experiences of the most senior leaders in the sector and the majority of employees. Employers need to be open to recognising this gap, and proactively understanding and addressing areas of poor work design in their organisations through consultation. When you genuinely ask, most people know what needs to change for them to be able to do their jobs better. And the really good news? Often simple changes can make a big difference.

All organisations are unique, but we can see sector-wide red flags around 'demands' and 'change'. There are also widespread challenges for mid-level people managers who often get pressure from above and below, and those at entry levels.

CEOs/board

85

Senior managers

72

Supervisor/  
team leader with  
direct reports

66

Mid level,  
no reports

67

Entry level

64

# The stories behind the numbers

Things need to be done to protect staff members in the gyms from getting verbal abuse and hate from members. Doctors, hospitals, dentists, bus drivers, shops have zero tolerance to abusive behaviour; why don't we have it in the fitness industry

It is the Heads of Service / CEOs that are putting too much pressure on staff to fully recover after COVID - that is what is causing the most mental health issues. Senior managers are much more realistic about the expectations

Lifeguards need more mental health support when they make rescues, no matter how small or major the rescue is as they are very traumatic and I don't think lifeguards get the support they deserve

Receptionists are not respected or treated fairly I don't think, and [we're] also paid less. We do not get paid enough with all the things we have to deal with on a day to day basis

My employer makes the right noises about mental health, but then implements policies and actions that make things worse

Most of the pressure on the state of mind of myself and colleagues at present seems to come from lack of understanding from customers and politicians about the state of our industry and the pressures it faces post-pandemic (staffing shortages, recruitment challenges, increased costs, less people to do more work, dated systems and software etc)

Whilst organisations have mental health and wellbeing policies in place they can be seen as a tick box exercise. In my experience my line manager hasn't followed policy, it is up to me to drive. Listening but not hearing the issues that eventually caused me to take time off

I hope a shift in the leisure industry will start to protect & support all that choose to work in the industry. Salaries qualifications & costings now are making more leave

# Did you know?

In Great Britain in 2021/22 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 51% of all work-related ill health cases and 55% of all working days lost due to work-related ill health.

Source: Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2022

# Independents & freelancers

34% of this year's respondents say they work primarily on a freelance or independent basis, up from 28% in 2022.



## independent

I work for myself  
direct with clients

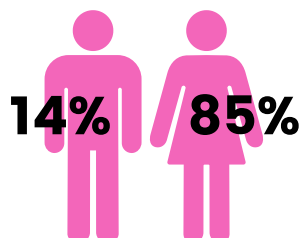
15% in 2022  
29% in 2021



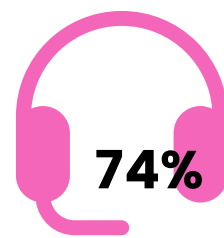
## freelance

I work with one or more  
organisations

13% in 2022  
18% in 2021



1% preferred  
not to say



said teaching &  
instructing is their  
main work, 15% said  
personal training

This year we have heard from many more women in the freelance and independent group, up from 75% in 2022. We don't know why this is. It could be that there are less men in this section of the workforce, that they are deciding not to take part, a combination of these - or something else.

## 32% work full-time, 65% work part-time 4% work seasonally or have no regular pattern

We asked how working independently affected this group's mental health - there was little variation in the scores compared to last year.

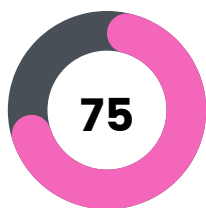


- 57% said it's better for me (same as 2022)
- 29% said it makes no difference to me (-4 on 2022)
- 14% said it's worse for me (+4 on 2022)

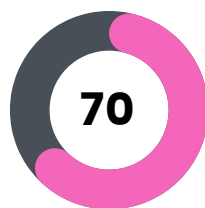
49% have experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months, with 73% 'ever having experienced a mental health issue'. Current ratings across the four dimensions of health are below, with financial health, a new measure for this year's survey, coming in at 61, far lower than the other three measures.



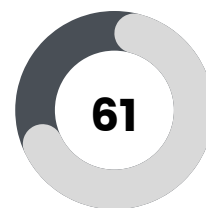
social



physical



mental

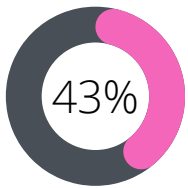


financial

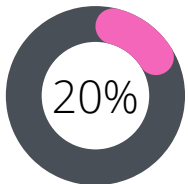
# Those without an employer...

25% of survey respondents don't have an employer. We asked them what most positively and negatively affects their mental health at work. They could choose one option for each question.

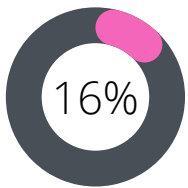
## Top 3 most positive influences



said feeling that my work has purpose and I'm valued  
(#1 last year too)

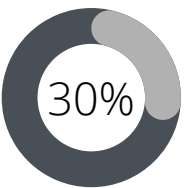


said having good relationships with clients and partners  
(#3 last year)

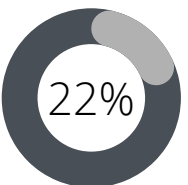


said good work-life balance  
(#2 last year)

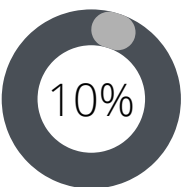
## Top 3 most negative influences



said financial insecurity - this was  
a new answer option for this year



said having responsibility for  
everything from admin to  
delivery (#2 last year as well)



poor work-life balance, this was the  
#1 answer last year

I have been a self employed PT for 6 years and now moving towards an organisation to continue my practise in so I can be a part of a community instead of heading my own small business (loneliness, stress, financial worry)

# Pay & conditions

Respondents can leave a comment on some questions and at the end of the survey. 2021's comments focused around the challenges and uncertainty the pandemic was causing. In 2022, pay was a prominent issue, especially for those that teach or instruct. Pay and conditions for this group is a strong theme again this year. Industrial action in other UK sectors may be strengthening the call for union support to help workers address their concerns. A selection of verbatim comments is below.

Stress is worse because we have been on the same hourly fee for over 10 years. There is no body that helps us

I think gyms have always been terrible in how they treat staff. I feel for the responsibility I have at work I should be paid more than minimum wage! The industry is a joke, nobody to look after or speak up for individuals working in gyms. Staff turnover ridiculously high, because there's no future

Freelance fitness professionals have very little support in the fitness industry. Big chains can fix wages, and contracts are not worth the paper they are written on as you can be removed at will. Not great for mental wellbeing

The feeling of general undervalue for my work as represented by the terrible pay in the fitness industry is a constant theme in my life

I enjoy my job and love getting the positive feedback from clients; unfortunately it's often the employers that are the negative part of this work - not feeling valued (no assistance looking for class cover, poor pay rates). Not all gyms of course, some are very supportive and appreciate the hard work

We need a union to support hourly rates which have decreased



# Diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging

There is a lack of detailed data about who actually works in the sector, and so last year we shared our numbers around the characteristics of those who responded to the survey. Whilst not definitive, we offer this again as a way of encouraging more research, conversation and action in this vital area. Our data suggests that the sector needs to be doing much more to systematically address the lack of diversity in our workforce.

Why does this lack of diversity matter? If we are to encourage and support people from all walks of life to be active, our workforce should reflect the shape and needs of the communities we serve and those we must better reach. This means representation in areas such as sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age and ethnicity to authentically do this. We must also think about how intersectionality of these, and other characteristics, can further increase marginalisation and discourage people from being part of the workforce or using our services.

New for 2023, we added a question around neurodiversity as well as asking about 'belonging'. Belonging means that a person feels safe and accepted at work for who they are and can realise their potential. It impacts both mental and physical wellbeing, and how people perform at work.

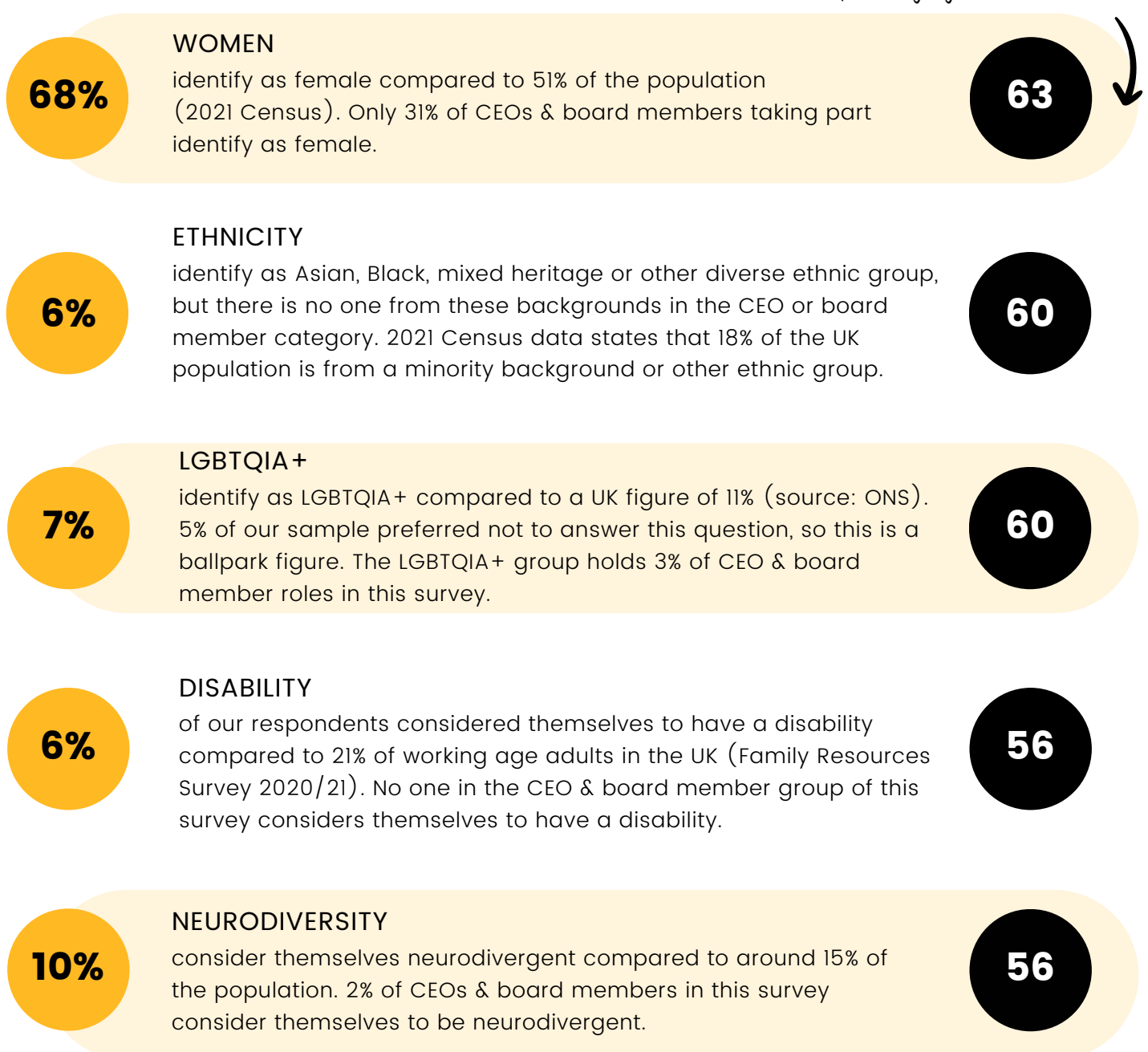
**"Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance and belonging is dancing like nobody's watching, because that's how free you feel to be yourself."**

Tony Bond, Great Place to Work

# Representation & belonging

The representation data below shows how our survey respondents compare to national statistics for groups that systematically experience prejudice and discrimination, although we're not able to show intersectional data here. 'Belonging' scores for each group are also shown in the black circles which can be compared against the overall survey average of 63, and the highest group score of 84 for the CEO/board level. C-suite representation for each group is also shown as senior leaders are vital to shaping the culture and context of the workforce. The more representative our leadership, the more likely we'll create truly inclusive organisations where the workforce and customers feel they belong.

*'sense of belonging at work' scores*



# A mandate for action

## Individuals

71% of individual respondents would value an industry body providing 'resources and support for professionals like you' around mental health and wellbeing.

71%

## Organisations

71% of organisations also said they would value support and advice from an industry body to help shape their approach to employee mental wellbeing and share best practice.

**22%** of employer respondents feel they are knowledgeable and can act with confidence

Just reading these questions has made me realise how 'behind the times' we are as a charity

We asked employers what, if anything, affects their organisation making more progress around employee mental health - 73% answered this question. Of them, 42% feel they're making progress and on track, and 81% who said this report having a wellbeing strategy. That said, only 5% in the 'strategy' group have a wellbeing dashboard, and only a third conduct stress risk assessments. The top 4 things employers said affect them making more progress on employee mental health are:

**14%** we don't feel we have a problem

**20%** said lack of knowledge on how to design and implement a strategy

**22%** said lack of resource - no one with the time or skills to do it

**28%** said lack of budget - we have no funding for this

# Where now?

In the third year of this survey, we see three key themes:

## 1: Consistent levels of distress

- Levels of mental distress are consistently showing up at just over half of our respondents in a given year, with around three-quarters experiencing a mental health issue 'at some point' in their lives.
- Bottom line? Many of us are experiencing periods of poor mental health each year. Mental health is a complex matter, and factors influencing mental distress and ill health can be equally complex – one of the reasons we don't ask respondents about the causes of their distress. But the HSE says that whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to help their employees. Of course, they also have a legal duty not to create harm.

## 2: Reduced employer focus on workplace mental health

- After the spotlight on workforce wellbeing during the pandemic, many employers have now reduced their attention on the workforce.
- There are many demands on employers as they try and navigate turbulent economic times and the energy crisis. However, issues currently front of mind for the sector such as staff turnover, absenteeism, recruitment issues and cost management are intimately linked to workplace mental health. Ignoring the causes will not stop the effects gnawing away.

## 3: Pockets of good practice emerging

- A small and innovative group of employers are leading the way in creating 'good work' cultures, embedding mental health and safety management into their organisations in consultation with their workforce.
- The most successful are focusing on prevention and protection, not just support. They know that workplace mental health and safety is on the same trajectory taken by physical health and safety.
- They also see the significant business benefits and credibility gained from taking action, especially in a sector that promotes good health. We applaud them and the work they are doing.

Workforce wellbeing is a world-wide concern. All sectors face challenges. Globally, leaders are starting to realise what is required, prompted by significant shifts in the landscape which include the launch of ISO 45003 in 2021, an international standard concerned with psychological health and safety at work. Practical and specific, ISO 45003 arguably put into black and white, for the first time, a consensus around what good looks like on the ground.

In the UK, the HSE is increasing its activity in this area and at the time of writing, we are seeing a bill being debated in parliament around making mental health first aid a legal requirement in workplaces. A contentious idea due to the unintended consequences it might create, it still speaks to this shift in the landscape and the role of the state and employers.

Change is happening.

The question is how quickly our sector can recognise and systematically address it. The good news is that the benefits of doing so are legal, commercial and human. Both employers and individuals have a role to play in managing workplace health and safety, but the onus is on employers to create healthy cultures so that the workforce can, as a minimum, be safe at work, and at best, thrive. This means the change the sector needs to see will be employer led. It's encouraging then, that again this year, we see that a large majority of our survey respondents want help to make these changes and that action from the sector's leadership would be welcomed.

Research like this is helping to map the landscape, but it's not a substitute for action. We launched the Good Work Pledge in 2021 as a result of our first survey to provide a way for all employers who wanted to to make improvements in their organisation's approach. We've also asked, so far unsuccessfully, for funding to do more. But, with three years' data now available and an overall decrease in employer activity around workplace mental health and safety, the case for resourced sector-level action is stronger than ever. That's why we're calling for an industry-wide programme to help employers get up to speed and in good shape. We believe there are many organisations and individuals that need to be involved to make sure the needs of all types of employers and workers are understood and met.

## What areas specifically need attention?

### A focus on prevention and protection

- One of the characteristics that we see in our data is that people are mistaking providing support services as tackling workplace mental health. Offerings like employee assistance programmes and counselling are really valuable support options, but they don't address systemic root causes which employers must assess and control. Solely providing Mental Health First Aiders, a relatively popular route, is also inadequate as a response. It does not abdicate an employer from their legal duty of care to their workforce and may actually introduce a range of new risks to a business.
- What's needed is an intentional focus on creating a healthy culture with risk management at its core. This means identifying key foreseeable risks, eliminating them when possible and putting in place protection from those that are unavoidable. Providing appropriate signposting and support completes the strategic picture. Employers are already doing this with physical health and safety. It's time to bring the same principles to mental health and safety.
- Consulting with employees to create a workplace wellbeing plan is the best way to approach this. Team members already know where the main pressure points are - they probably know how to fix many of them too. Less than half the employers in our survey have a wellbeing plan, so it's a clear area for action.

### Director level leadership

We can also see a clear gap between the work experiences of those at the most senior levels in the sector and the majority of the rest of the workforce. This matters because it seems to be muting the call for change coming from the wider workforce which we're shining a light on in this survey.

- To be effective, boards and senior leadership teams need to know what's going on in their organisations. Yet, overall, there seems to be a general lack of management attention on the workforce and how their work is organised.
- Boards should be asking to see wellbeing plans and interrogating workforce data on a regular basis. Senior leadership teams should be acting strategically too. Most organisations already collect data that can be used to start shaping this work such as recruitment, on-boarding and staff turnover data, complaint and health & safety records, absence records, employee surveys and feedback from employee forums.

Our findings suggest education and support is needed to help organisations do this foundational work. Critically, just as with physical health and safety, one size does not fit all. Employers need to understand the specifics of their organisation and the needs of their people.

## The needs of workers without an employer

We also need to consider those in the workforce that do not have an employer – this group make up a significant part of the workforce, offering expertise and specialist skills on a flexible basis. Pay and conditions remain problematic for many freelance and independent workers, and there is a clear opportunity for organisations to distinguish themselves in how they work with them. How people are treated matters and freelance workers will vote with their feet if treated poorly. They'll also talk to others about their experiences. In the battle for talent, freelance workers will go where they are most valued, not only instructors, but consultants who provide specialist services too.

In the last year, we have been encouraged to see EMD UK engage with their members on this topic to understand what matters to this group and how better to support them. We encourage other member organisations to do the same and act on what they find.

## What now?

Three years into this work, we urge the sector to start taking workplace mental health and safety more seriously. It's not just a pandemic issue or a fad. It's realising that our mental health is as much a part of us as our physical health. We all have it, and it varies over time. The law says harming someone mentally at work, for example through a consistently unreasonable workload or bullying, is on par with harming them physically at work. Damage is damage and reasonable steps must be taken to protect workers' health.

This report and our recommendations are about addressing the systematic mental health issues that prevent the sector from being a great place to work for many. It's about being known as an industry that values its people so that we can attract and retain the best talent and run commercially successful organisations that deliver our incredible collective mission to get the nation active and healthier.

Let's make sure the people delivering this mission thrive too.

# 2023 Recommendations

1

## Director level action

Employers have a legal duty of care to their employees. We need director-level attention and action in every organisation around workplace mental health and safety. This means putting in place plans and risk-management systems that align with business strategy and integrate with each organisation's physical health and safety approach. One size won't fit all - the form and scale of action needed will vary depending on the size and type of organisation. The Good Work Pledge is a great place to start for those new to this work. See how to join on page 34.

2

## Sector level action

Sector-wide commitment and action is needed to educate and support employers to meet minimum requirements around workplace mental health and safety and create 'good work'. This should be a win-win, helping workers and organisations to profitably thrive. This should be backed by changes to sector governance that reward good practice and encourage those not meeting requirements to remedy this. It should be aligned to other workforce wellbeing strategies and we suggest a pan-sector approach, properly funded and resourced, to be successful.

3

## Supporting individual workers

Renewing the recommendation we made last year, there is a role for the sector's membership organisations to further explore, within their remit, what their membership would value in terms of promoting and supporting their mental health at work. It may be different for role types and levels. This could include conference sessions and webinars, resources, signposting support, HR or legal advice and training. We have seen some activity in the last 12 months and would applaud more action in this area.



# Take action now

## Sign the Good Work Pledge

In response to our 2021 findings and to unite the sector under a single ambition to make sector-wide progress on mental health, we launched The Good Work Pledge. The pledge enables employers to publically declare a commitment to supporting employee mental health and working towards achieving the government-backed Thriving at Work\* Six Mental Health Core Standards for employers.

It's backed by CIMSPA, good for businesses, good for the sector's workforce and good for the people we serve.

The pledge includes:

- An Action Planning Guide
- A Diagnostic Tool
- Use of The Good Work Pledge logo to promote your commitment
- A listing on our website as a pledge signatory



To see which employers have already signed up, and to take the pledge, visit [workplacementalwealth.com/pledge](https://workplacementalwealth.com/pledge). Join our subscriber list at [workplacementalwealth.com](https://workplacementalwealth.com) to stay up to date with what we're doing and get in touch if you would like to talk to us about how we can help your organisation to thrive.

Contact us at [hello@workplacementalwealth.com](mailto:hello@workplacementalwealth.com).

\*Thriving at Work: The Independent Review of Mental Health and Employers (2017), authored by mental health campaigner Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, chief executive at Mind and chair of the National Health Service (NHS) Mental Health Taskforce.

# Meet the team

**Lindsey & Katie are co-founders of Workplace Mental Wealth and The Good Work Pledge, and co-authors of the Fitness & Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Survey**



## Lindsey Simpson

### Research & Training Lead

Workforce advocate focused on culture, performance, research and wellbeing

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications & engagement specialist, facilitator, trainer, speaker, 5 Voices leadership coach, 25 years experience in-house, agency & consultancy

Fitness industry roles including swim coaching, PT & operations, PR (Promote PR) and as the FIA's first membership liaison manager

Award-winning culture change work

Director at Spark Team Communications

Degree in Sport & Recreation (BA Hons)

Masters' student in Workplace Health & Wellbeing



## Katie Lewis

### Communications & Partnerships Lead

Passionate about making mental health part of every day 'chatter' and helping organisations create emotionally supportive environments

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications specialist in the physical activity & sport sector for more than 17 years

10 years operational experience in the leisure sector

Director at Brand Chatter

Degree in Human Movement Studies (BA Hons)

# Need help?

## Ask us to work with you

Not sure where to start? Need help getting to the next stage? We are Lindsey Simpson and Katie Lewis and we created Workplace Mental Wealth in 2020 with an ambition to normalise conversations and drive positive action around mental health for everyone working in fitness & active leisure. Our goal is to shine a light on the UK workforce's current mental health, help ditch the stigma and shift the culture for a healthier, happier, more productive workforce.



We offer a range of workplace mental health services:

- Helping you build a business case for change
- Research and benchmarking
- Developing and implementing a wellbeing strategy



- Speaking at your event, to your board, senior leaders or your wider team
- Mental health awareness training
- Speed mentoring and 'power hour' calls to help you explore or sense-check a decision or idea



Get in touch at [hello@workplacementalwealth.com](mailto:hello@workplacementalwealth.com).

[workplacementalwealth.com](https://workplacementalwealth.com)

**WORKPLACE  
MENTAL WEALTH**  
*fitness & active leisure*

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