



Mental health in the workplace

SAMPLE
Gaming Industry Employers' Toolkit



#LevelUpMentalHealth

<https://safeinourworld.org>



contents



Foreword 3

Introduction..... 4

Level 1 – Commitment

01 Reduce stigma and deepen insight.....8
#LevelUpMentalHealth pledge.....8
02 Mental health and wellbeing information.....9
03 Employee awareness of their legal entitlements..... 10
04 Organisational awareness and policy development regarding risks
of work related stress..... 11
05 Organisational commitment to genuine support..... 12

Level 2 – Achievement

06 Mental health training for managers..... 15
07 Individual performance review system in place.....16
08 Protocol in place for risk assessments.....17
09 Education and development opportunities for managers and staff.....18
10 Good internal communication avenues..... 19

Level 3 – Excellence

11 Mental health and wellbeing / stress prevention strategies..... 21
12 Mental health awareness training for all employees..... 22
13 Staff consultation / survey..... 23
14 Confidential support service in-house or external..... 24
15 Support in place to accompany change..... 25
16 Encourage and support social support groups..... 26

Resources

Case Study.....27
Support links.....28

Acknowledgements..... 29

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foreword

In May 2020, we take our first steps to grow the exposure and involvement of the videogames industry towards the improvement of the mental health of its participants. We launch this employers' toolkit as part of the Level Up Mental Health campaign; a push from within our industry carrying our intention to our players. They inspire us to create new and vibrant worlds, and in return, we should inspire them to join our industry and our cause.

In my life, mental health has always been a factor, affecting those around me, and unfortunately, I've lent my friends to this illness. This cannot continue.

Myself, and many of the trustees, ambassadors, patrons and partners of the charity have come together in an industry that's inclusive to push for positive change, and now is the time we begin.

As new surveys and statistics confirm that mental health is a major issue, we owe it to ourselves and our players to be better. To do more.

The need is now immense. The opportunity is here. Let's come together and change our industry for the better, improve the lives of our friends and colleagues and resonate the message outward to our players; it's time to talk. It's time to level up mental health.

Leo Zullo, Chairman, Safe In Our World.



Recent industry stats revealed 53% of game developers reported that crunch (exceeding 40 hours work per week over an extended period) is an expected part of their jobs.¹ But with crunch translating as emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and feelings of hopelessness, this does not bode well for the mental health of employees.

In fact, the UK Games Industry Census by Ukie revealed that anxiety and depression rates in games are higher than that of the general population.² Anxiety sufferers make up 25% of the industry, whilst those with depression are close behind at 21%. Adding to this, existing research suggests that rates of mental ill health are higher among LGBT+ people. With LGBTQ+ accounting for 10% of the industry workforce, casual mental health support is a potentially significant.

Similarly, the UK census revealed that the percentage of ethnic diversity was found to be above the average of the national working population. Additionally, non-UK nationals contribute significantly to both gender and ethnic diversity in games workplaces. But whilst 10% of people working in games are Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME), there is still a significant lack of BAME employees in senior roles.

Then there is the disparity between the percentage of males and that of females and non-binaries working in games. Whilst the latter two categories are gradually increasing in number, males still account for 70% of the workforce (females 28%, non-binaries 2%).

These statistics, showing the varying employee groups and issues of under-representation, make the need for mental health support even more apparent.

Over the last 50 years, Rethink Mental Illness has been at the forefront of changing attitudes to mental health and mental illness.

But still there is much work to do. Too many people still struggle to get the care and support they need. In part fuelled by the stigma of reaching out for help.

While we are making progress in both improving access to care and support and challenging stigma, we cannot be complacent. We still hear too often of the lost years of people's lives who delayed getting help and/or prioritising their mental health.

The videogames industry is a huge employer globally, and the best practice and advice that forms this toolkit will help any company regardless of their size. The implementation of policies, processes and support is of paramount importance.

We are delighted to assist in the production of this important document with *Safe in our World* and to support the Level Up Mental Health campaign, which will only grow over time. The industry has it within its power to become a beacon of good practice.

Brian Dow, Deputy Chief Executive,
Rethink Mental Illness



¹ Take This, 2019. State of the Industry 2019: Mental Health in the Game Industry.

https://www.takethis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/TakeThis_StateOfTheIndustry_2019.pdf

² UK Games Industry Census. Understanding diversity in the UK games industry workforce. Ukie. <https://ukie.org.uk/UK-games-industry-census-2020>



Introduction

This Toolkit was co-produced with Rethink Mental Illness and other stakeholders, including people with lived experience of mental illness and caring. It has been adopted by, and adapted for the games industry, by Safe In Our World.

Full acknowledgements are listed at the back of this document. While the data is sourced from the United Kingdom, the document can be utilised globally.

The function of this Employers' Toolkit is to assist organisations that wish to:

- Improve the wellbeing of their workforce and encourage a working environment and culture where mental health issues can be destigmatised and managed effectively;
- Or organisationally commit to the Workplace Wellbeing Charter, at Commitment, Achievement or Excellence Level, and who would like additional support and ideas as to how to meet the criteria for the Mental Health section of the Charter;
- Or both of the above.



Why is mental health in the workplace important?

In many countries, we work an average of 36 hours a week, meaning that a substantial portion of our lives is spent at work or with our work influencing the way we think, feel and behave.¹ Whether we attain great satisfaction and enjoyment from our jobs, or regularly find ourselves unhappy at work, statistics show that 1 in 3 working age adults had experienced a mental health problem whilst in employment.²

For employers, the costs of poorly managed mental health issues in the workplace can be frightening – with 70 million sick days in the UK, for example, attributable to poor mental health in the year of 2007 alone.³ When considering the impact of long term sickness and staff turnover related to mental ill health, as well as the impacts on productivity, morale, productivity, staff retention, customer service and organisational culture when mental health is not supported in the workplace, the business case for good mental health in the workplace is compelling.

Proactive mental health promotion initiatives, and the provision of support for people experiencing mental ill health, although sometimes requiring an investment of resources, can provide a clear return on investment when negative impacts in the workplace can be reduced. Many steps can also be taken to improve mental health in the workplace without any significant investment of resources, as this toolkit highlights. A growing body of evidence and awareness about mental health in the workplace underlines the urgent importance of addressing mental health as a priority for all employers.

What is the Workplace Wellbeing Charter?

The Charter is a set of standards for workplace health and wellbeing, which, when met lead to official accreditation and an award. Over 1000 organisations have already taken the Charter to improve workplace environments and staff satisfaction.

The benefits of committing to the Charter include an opportunity to address crucial issues within your business or organisation, such as staff sickness levels, satisfaction overall, and productivity within your workforce. You could also gain assistance with making positive changes to your working environment and attitudes within your workplace. Many organisations who have attained a Charter Award now benefit from an enhanced reputation as being employers who prioritise the wellbeing of their staff.

The Charter sets standards for the following areas:

- Leadership
- Absence management
- Health and safety
- Mental Health
- Smoking and tobacco
- Physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Alcohol and substance misuse

This toolkit is structured to give guidance in close alignment with the standards in the Mental Health and Wellbeing section of the Charter.

Mental health and wellbeing does not stand alone and is strongly linked to other elements of workplace wellbeing as set out in other sections of the Charter – for example, physical activity is very well known to support mental health and wellbeing. So by addressing other sections of the Charter, mental health and wellbeing will undoubtedly be positively affected. We would strongly encourage organisations to consider implementing the standards of the entire Charter, or if not using the Charter as a basis, then to address these areas through another mechanism.

1 <http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk>

2 https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/employee-outlook_2016-focus-on-mental-health-in-the-workplace_tcm18-10549.pdf

3 Time To Change Attitudes to Mental Illness 2013-14

How it works

As the Workplace Wellbeing Charter is split into three sections, similarly this Toolkit is structured into three sections which correlate with them. If you are an employer that is interested in accreditation by the Charter, you should identify the level of the Charter which is most appropriate for your organisation, and be mindful that in order to meet the requirements for the Charter, you need to fulfil and be able to evidence all points or 'standards' of that level and the levels before it where applicable. You can choose to fulfil standards and recommendations above the one you have achieved, but you cannot achieve a higher level without fulfilling all the standards on the levels below.

The 'How to go about doing this' recommendations for each individual standard of the charter are ideas and suggestions for how to ensure compliance with and evidence each standard, and as recommendations for best practice in their own right.

Please note adoption of these recommendations should not be taken as ensuring accreditation with the charter which requires formal assessment. It is not expected that an organisation would necessarily undertake all recommendations under an individual standard to be moving forward positively, but a selection of the most useful and feasible points.

Implementation

The feasibility of implementing recommendations and ideas will depend greatly on the size, context and nature of your organisation. If you are a small to medium sized organisation you will be doing well to implement the simpler elements of the commitment level. If you are a large organisation, it may be more possible for you to implement a number of the

recommendations up to achievement or excellence levels (if you are a large corporate organisation, and wish to discuss large scale implementations or corporate partnerships with Safe In Our World and Rethink Mental Illness, please see <https://www.safeinourworld.org/get-involved> or <https://www.rethink.org/get-involved/company-support>)

Whatever the size, scale and type of organisation you are, it's very likely that at least some of the recommendations are things you are already doing and that you will find useful new ideas to consider implementing. If practical in your organisation, we would suggest a good place to start in considering implementing these recommendations is to convene a group of relevant stakeholders to act as a Working Group on this topic (or to look at this document with an existing group).

Fitting your needs

If you are an organisation that does not wish to sign up to the Charter, you are welcome to 'pick and choose' from any of the standards and ideas contained, ignoring the levels.

We would recommend all employers aim to meet the Commitment level standards as a minimum whether you are pursuing accreditation by the Charter or not, to ensure a foundational level of mental and emotional information and support in your organisation and to ensure you are meeting your legal responsibilities to provide a healthy and safe working environment.

If you are using this toolkit, we would really like to hear from you to let us know if and how it has been useful to you – please contact us at: hello@safeinourworld.com

Key



Easy win – suggestions marked with this symbol are possible to complete in a relatively straightforward way, and are mostly possible for organisations of all sizes and types.



Cost implication – suggestions marked with this symbol may require some direct financial investment in order to be completed.



Rethink gold standard – suggestions marked with this symbol are our top picks for examples of best practice and can evidence that your organisation really wants to go the extra mile. They are likely to involve more energy and resource to complete than other recommendations listed.

Essential bell – suggestions marked with this symbol are either legally necessary or we consider them highly important. If you only do one thing for each standard point, these should be the points to focus on.

