

Keep Britain Working: How Counsellors & Psychotherapists can Support the Workforce

A briefing for commissioners, policymakers, and employers

Overview

- Background on “Keep Britain Working”: The Government's final report on how to resolve the economic crisis stemming from work absences
- How counsellors and psychotherapists can support the preliminary Vanguard Phase of the new seven-year scheme
- Call to Action for Commissioners

Background

In November 2025, the UK Government addressed the prevalent issue of economic inactivity, suggesting that its main driving force was the issues of ill health and ability barriers within the workforce. To tackle this issue, they proposed a three-phase seven-year programme to “Keep Britain Working”, which has recently entered the preliminary Vanguard Phase, aiming to improve working lifestyle, workplace health provision and collate evidence that can underpin an effective approach to get more people into employment. Research suggests that mental-health practitioners, such as counsellors and psychotherapists could play a vital role in this new scheme, acting as a more stable source of support not only for those permanently out of work, or newly returning employees.

The NHS Confed cites that the cost of economic inactivity due to ill health is £212 billion per year, with over £2 billion of this cost falling on health services. This alarming cost has led the government to act, producing a seven-year programme,

consisting of three phases that aim to assist people in staying in and returning to work whilst facing health adversity. The programme has currently entered the Vanguard phase, which calls to: Create a healthy working lifestyle that reduced absences, provide better workplace health provisions and Collate Evidence through a work and health improvement unit (WHIU). Research suggests that mental health practitioners could be a vital resource in completing a successful vanguard phase, and with approx. 75,000 trained practitioners on accredited registers, it is clear that there is an untapped national asset which should be integrated into the current workforce model.

Where counsellors and psychotherapists could help

Collation of Evidence: Adding mental health practitioners into the WHIU

The final vanguard stage emphasises the need for supporting research that underpins the need for change in the workforce, acting as an incentive for employers to change, and employees to partake in the programme. Research shows that using accredited bodies in research allows for in-depth and well-branched data, with data collections that use clinical bodies proven to provide more accurate and generalisable data (Hornung et al., 2021).

NCPS members could play a leading role in providing a more accredited workforce, by being included in the WHIU, ensuring that data collected reflects the full capacity that a mental health workforce could provide. NCPS members have a well-rounded knowledge of how clinical work is undertaken and could better assess effectiveness of specific approaches used in earlier stages, providing data with higher validity than that produced with non-accredited bodies.

Healthy Working Lifestyle–First Aspect of the Vanguard Phase

The vanguard phase highlights that creating a healthy working lifestyle is paramount to the success of the “keep Britain working” campaign, placing emphasis on the need for increased access, and reducing wait times for employees to receive support, as well as a better relationship between employers and service providers. Research shows that wellbeing practices can be highly effective in creating a healthy working lifestyle, in particular the use of talking therapies is shown to facilitate the implementation of open conversation about work-life balance, and common stressors (Bajorek & Bevan, 2020).

Counsellors and psychotherapists could forefront the delivery of knowledge around wellbeing practices, by aiding the preliminary phase of design. If the NCPS was engaged as a partner in the design of guidance for workplace mental health, the information is ensured to be research backed and well-accredited. In the later stages, practitioners could be called to further action in the delivery of this information, whether this be through online workshops or wider-scope information briefings, emphasising the large scope that counsellors and psychotherapists have within building a healthy working lifestyle.

Better Workplace Provisions: Mental Health Support

It is apparent that the UK is facing a crisis of poor mental health, which has a lasting impact on our workforce. Wait times have a significant impact, with 4 in 5 people reporting their conditions worsening whilst waiting for treatment (Rethink Mental Illness, 2025), however it is clear that through the NCPS Direct Access to Counselling Model, these waiting times could be reduced, creating a direct referral approach that could greatly contribute to an increase in better workplace provision for those suffering with mental health conditions. Research suggests that counselling can be a key factor in maintaining this healthy working lifestyle, in particular those that focus on work-related stressors can aid increased workplace

productivity and engagement (Slater et al., 2023). This support could even act in the short-term, with person-centred sessions emphasised to be just as effective in clinical outcomes to longer NHS-based intervention (Pybis et al., 2017).

Counsellors & psychotherapists could support the improvement of workplace provisions by applying the earlier mentioned counselling model as a pilot within a workplace setting, drawing on the prevalent existing base of trained professionals rather than building a new separate infrastructure. This process would be greatly benefited by having a government recognition of accredited practitioners in the WHP framework.

Calls to Action

This Briefing Paper has provided an overview of the Keep Britain Working: Final Report, and how Counsellors and Psychotherapists could best aid in the preliminary Vanguard Phase. The three stages of the vanguard phase were shown to be areas that NCPS members could provide expertise and assistance, summarised by this main call to actions of that commissioners can begin to consider:

1. Engage NCPS as a formal partner in designing workplace mental health guidance within the Vanguard Phase
2. Include NCPS and accredited practitioners in the data collection process via the WHIU, to ensure findings align with both capacity and expectation of a mental health-based workforce.
3. Commission counsellors and psychotherapists within the Workplace Health Provision framework, to better the access to mental health support with reduced wait times, drawing on the existing 75,000-strong workforce rather than building new infrastructure from scratch
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Created by Willow Forester, Research Officer

If you have any questions, please email engage@ncps.com.