

Fairness, inclusion and respect – Health, work and wellbeing

Reason	There is a higher risk of occupational disability within construction than in many other industries. Everyone needs to be aware of their legal responsibilities (the Equality Act) regarding protected characteristics, and of common health problems, supportive behaviours and actions to promote wellbeing at work.
Outline	This talk covers the Equality Act, protected characteristics, common health problems and the link between health, wellbeing and work.

Stress

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as the *adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them*.
2. Stress has been associated with anxiety and depression, heart disease, back pain and gastrointestinal illnesses.
3. Health and safety law expects an employer to assess and take measures to control risks from work-related stress.
4. In construction, stress could be caused by many triggers, especially the time constraints of projects and the need to get the job done. It can lead to you feeling more angry, or becoming tired and anxious.
5. Stress and time pressures could also lead to you taking more risks with your long-term health (for example, a two-minute job that may release silica dust and therefore requires you to wear respiratory protective equipment can easily turn into a 15-minute job if you have to go to the store to collect the necessary personal protective equipment).
6. You are responsible for talking to your manager about any factors outside the workplace that can turn otherwise normal pressures of work into excessive ones.

Other issues affecting health and wellbeing

1. Companies should have clear guidelines on the following, which can severely damage health and wellbeing.
 - **Drug and alcohol abuse.**
 - **Bullying and harassment.** Harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act.

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Scope of the Equality Act

1. Everyone in the company is protected by the Equality Act and has legal duties under the legislation.
2. Other provisions under health and safety legislation set out duties to control work-related health risks.

General provisions of the Equality Act

1. There are a number of protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Examples of protected characteristics are age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic origin and religion.
2. It is discrimination to treat a person with a disability unfavourably because of something connected with their disability (such as a tendency to make spelling mistakes arising from dyslexia) or discrimination by association (such as if someone has caring responsibilities for a person with a disability).
3. Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to working conditions or the workplace where that would help to accommodate a particular person with a disability.
4. One in five people in the UK has a disability.

Connection between health and work

1. The connection between physical hazards (such as noise, dust and chemical hazards) and health is well recognised amongst employers and employees. Less understood is the relationship between mental and physical wellbeing and the jobs we do.
2. Over two million people have reported an illness (such as stress, anxiety, back pain or depression) that they believe has been caused, or made worse, by their work.

Mental health

1. One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year.
2. By 2020, depression will rank second to heart disease as the leading cause of disability worldwide.
3. Mental health can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity or social group. The most common forms of mental ill health are anxiety, depression, phobic anxiety disorders and obsessive compulsive disorders.
4. It can be classed as a disability under the Equality Act, which makes it unlawful for an employer to treat anyone with a mental health problem less favourably, without a justifiable reason.



Who has responsibility for your health and wellbeing at work?

What examples can you give of protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act?

What reasonable adjustments could be made?

How can mental health be managed?

What is stress and who is responsible for managing it in the workplace?

What other issues can affect your health and wellbeing at work?