



HS Broadcast – Mental Health First Aid

The Government has announced a new £15 million, three-year programme to help members of the public respond more effectively to mental health issues.

The programme, which is due to run from autumn 2018 to March 2021, will be delivered by Public Health England and their associated partners. This will be via an online learning module which will help participants assess their own mental wellbeing and learn proven techniques to reduce stress. It will also help learners to recognise and respond appropriately to signs of mental illness in others.

The government says that it hopes the programme will improve personal resilience and help participants to support others suffering from mental ill health.

The online course will be a very basic version of a tried and tested mental health first aid (MHFA) programme.

I have to be honest here and say I have not come across MHFA before and so I investigated further. It is simply the mental health equivalent of physical first aid. The course was first developed in Australia and is now followed in 22 countries with an estimated two million trained so far, including 200,000 in the UK.

Most full-length courses involve two days of classroom activity. After training in MHFA individuals can offer initial support by:

- recognising the warning signs of common mental health issues
- non-judgmental listening; and
- guiding towards the right support, whether that be through self-help or professional services.

If you are interested it may be worthwhile keeping an eye out for details of the different courses, including the two-day MHFAider course, the one-day MHFA Champion programme and the half-day MHFA Aware option. More information can be found on the MHFA England website.

The courses would appear to be good introduction to the subject for anyone who may have to deal with mental ill health at work, e.g. managers, HR and safety professionals.

Please remember that in employment legislation mental health is covered by the Equality Act 2010 (EA), which specifically deals with disability discrimination.

Managers should be aware that long-term mental health conditions may well constitute a disability. In addition, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require that risk (including stress) must be effectively controlled.



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I must point out that there is no legal requirement to appoint a MHFAider, however, doing so may help you to comply with the EA and health and safety legislation.

Those who will benefit most from this are organisations which have a problem with repeated occurrences of mental ill health amongst staff, students, etc. It will also be useful for large organisations where specialists such as HR and safety professionals can increase their awareness and improve the response to signs and symptoms.