



# Health And Social Care Workforce Study: A HR/OD Perspective for Translating Workforce Wellbeing Policies to Practice

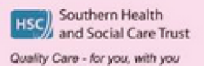
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## Executive Summary

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The UK-wide 'Health and Social Care Workforce Research Study' (May 2020 – March 2023) examined workforce wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, the HSC Workforce Study team are delighted to present findings from a subsequent research engagement workshop (Nov 2023) that explored insights from HR and OD practitioners regarding the design and implementation of wellbeing-related policies and practices and their outcomes for the HSC workforce in NI. Using evidence-based scenarios and drawing from the findings of the HSC workforce study, the workshop activities garnered insights about potential gaps in wellbeing-related policy and practice. Overall, the aim of this report is to inform the ongoing development of the Northern Ireland Regional HSC Workforce Health and Wellbeing Framework and its implementation.

#### Key Components:

Using evidence-based wellbeing scenarios, the research engagement activities aimed to examine the insights of HR/OD and other Workforce Wellbeing Champions regarding workforce wellbeing policy design and implementation.

## **Findings:**

Preventative measures should be adopted to protect workforce wellbeing and to minimise the escalation of wellbeing-related issues, however emphasis must also be placed on the specific interventions and the problem-solving actions that are needed to resolve acute wellbeing issues when operating under pressurised conditions

### **1. Policies, Practices, and Procedures:**

Insights emphasised that both formal and informal approaches should be considered when addressing wellbeing issues. To ensure consistent approaches, the alignment of established HR policies with the overall principles of a wellbeing framework was deemed crucial. Furthermore, the range of HR policies must align and support the principles of one another. Education about the intention underpinning current HR policies, the scope for line managers and HR advisors to apply discretion and flexibility, and when best to evoke relevant HR policies was considered important for approaching wellbeing issues in a holistic manner.

### **2. Structure and Roles:**

The important role of Line Management as “Wellbeing Gate-openers” was identified. Line managers must be empowered, supported, and recognised when undertaking this role, not only in terms of resource and time but also ensuring appropriate access to holistic HR and Wellbeing Advice. More integrated resourcing of HR/OD would aid in providing consistent and aligned advice and approaches to line managers. The structure and functioning of teams and support for team development was also understood as important, alongside the appropriate communication and evaluation of wellbeing resources.

### **3. Behaviour and Skills:**

Proficiency in inter-personal and people management skills are crucial for addressing workforce wellbeing issues. To ensure appropriate line management competences are in place, it may be necessary to revise job descriptions, codes of conduct, Induction and training. A key skill for managing workforce wellbeing is understanding, evaluating, and managing risk and being trauma-aware, not only to mitigate burnout risks, but also to address retention issues more generally. Participants agreed that fact finding and understanding the wider context relating to wellbeing issues are critical for addressing the root cause of wellbeing issues that are ongoing. ‘Triaging’ of wellbeing issues and assessing the wellbeing “climate” is identified as an important skill which should be supported by access to metrics, organizational, team and survey data. Advocacy skills, collaborative problem solving, negotiation, consensus and communication skills are also identified as important.

### **4. Values and Attitudes:**

Organisational commitment to a supportive approach, as opposed to a punitive approach is important for improving wellbeing outcomes across the HSC workforce. Important values for addressing workforce wellbeing include a willingness and openness to discuss wellbeing, authenticity of support, team camaraderie and cohesiveness, civility, tolerance, empathy and respect for others and their challenges (e.g. international staff). Building more positive narratives, supported by the celebration of achievements and successes, and promoting pride in services and staff was also deemed an opportunity to enhance the wellbeing climate of the HSC workforce, and establish the belief that resourcing and funding challenges can be addressed.

## **Recommendations:**

Below are the recommendations emanating from the Research Engagement Workshop with HR/OD practitioners and workforce wellbeing champions. These recommendations relate to the content and implementation of the Regional Health and Wellbeing Framework but should be considered alongside the wider recommendations outlined in the reports from the HSC Workforce Study.

### **Policies, Practices and Procedures**

1. Integration of wellbeing 'transversal' across all HR policies and practices.
2. Review all HR policies through a 'wellbeing lens' to ensure alignment and consistency with wellbeing policy.
3. Advise on the degree of discretion and flexibility permitted within HR policies.
4. Update the training provided to all line managers and HR advisors on HR policies and practices to ensure the appropriate wellbeing approach is considered.
5. Design appropriate wellbeing metrics and indicators, and ensure appropriate data is sought and accumulated.

### **Structure and Roles**

1. Ensure wellbeing responsibilities are reflected in line management job descriptions.
2. Ensure Line managers have time and resources to address wellbeing issues.
3. Ensure universal line management access to wellbeing advisors/ champions that have holistic remits.
4. Ensure appropriate workforce planning.

### **Behaviour and Skills**

1. Ensure appropriate line management induction and training on the range of wellbeing issues and how they relate.
2. Ensure appropriate HR advisor training on the range of wellbeing scenarios that emerge.
3. Review people management competences and leadership training to ensure it covers workforce wellbeing and how it should be addressed.
4. Exemplify positive wellbeing approaches and interventions.
5. Skills required: Communication, burnout risk assessment, data driven assessment of risk, fact finding skills, systems thinking, using discretion, problem solving, advocacy, consensus building, appreciation of context in decision making etc.

### **Values and Attitudes**

1. Communicating commitment to workforce wellbeing should be underpinned by compassionate values and attitudes.
2. Wellbeing approach should be recognized as a key leadership competence drawing on compassionate values and attitudes and a consultative, rather than commanding approach.
3. Promote values such as team camaraderie, authenticity, openness and transparency.

## **Conclusion:**

Although the responsibility of workforce wellbeing is organisation-wide, this report focuses on the opportunities and challenges that HR/OD Directorates are faced with when supporting workforce wellbeing. The report provides insights and recommendations for organisations navigating wellbeing challenges and offers an evidence-based assessment for how the health and wellbeing of the Health and Social Care workforce can be supported.