Benchmarking against the Thriving at Work standards for mental health provision
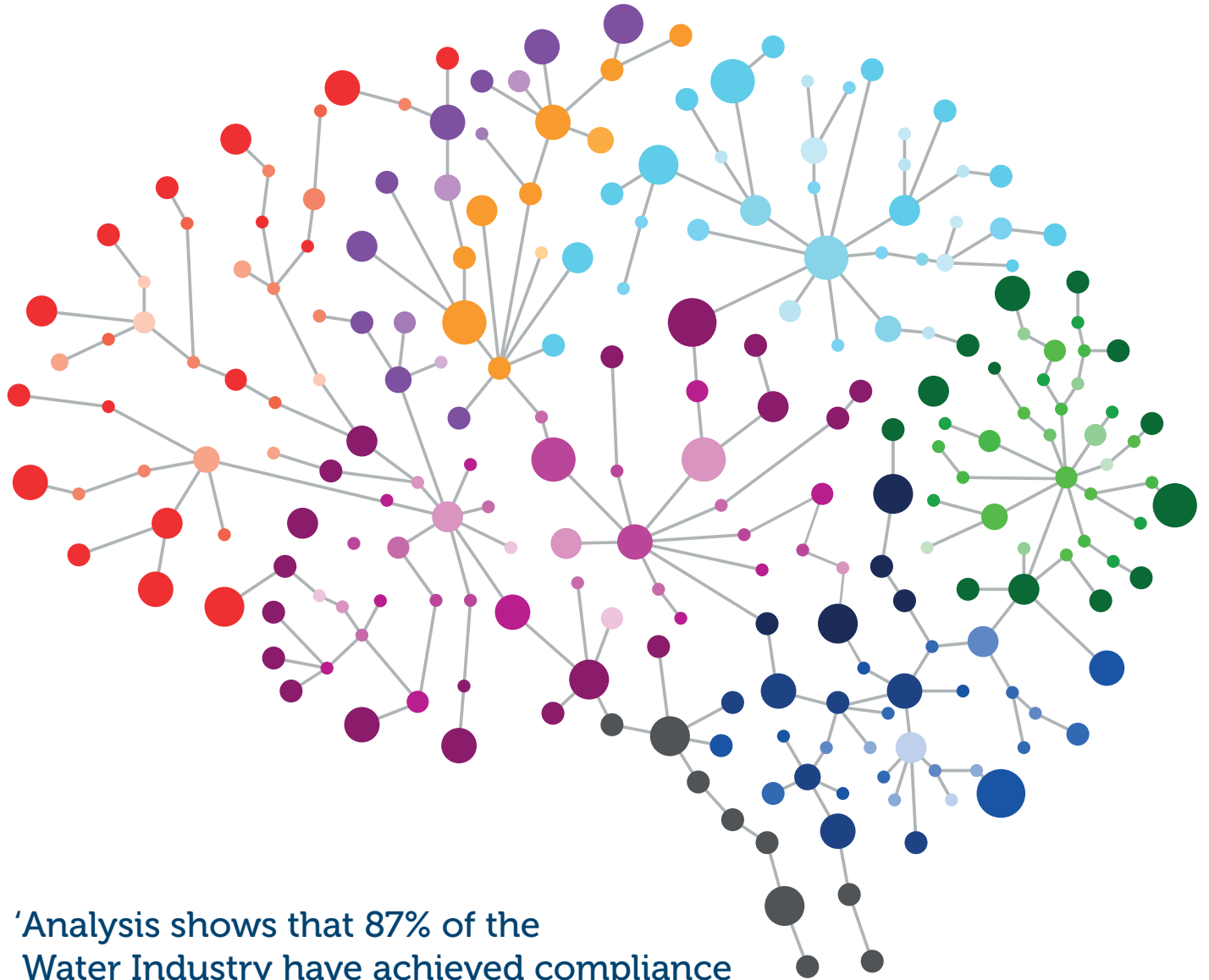
Water Industry

Water UK Health & Safety Leads at the 'Thriving at Work Standards' survey results presentation Edinburgh, October 2019

'Analysis shows that 87% of the
Water Industry have achieved compliance
against the core standards and 68%
have gone further and achieved compliance
against both the core and enhanced standards'

Contents

Introduction

Mental health is the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK (CMO, 2013) with the annual cost of poor mental health to employers estimated to be between £33billion and £44billion. Costs arise from both sickness absence and from presenteeism when individuals are at work but less productive due to poor mental health. The statistics around the impact of poor mental health in the workplace are staggering and employers are now starting to change how they support the mental wellbeing of their employees.

Thriving at Work is an independent review of mental health commissioned by Government and led by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer CBE, Chief Executive of Mind. Through evidence and best practice, the review sets out six mental health core standards for employers. There are also several more ambitious or enhanced standards for larger employers who should lead the way in mental health provision. It's aim being that all organisations, regardless of size, will have the necessary tools and awareness to acknowledge and prevent mental ill health caused or worsened by work. Employees with a mental health condition will be given the support to thrive in the workplace and the number of employees leaving employment with a long-term mental health condition will be reduced.

In July 2019, the first utilities sector benchmarking exercise was undertaken against the Thriving at Work standards. The aim of the benchmarking survey was to assess mental health provision across the Water industry.

The question set was based upon the ten 'Core & Enhanced' standards set out by the Prime Ministers Thriving at Work report. The exercise was not only designed to benchmark but also to direct organisations to the relevant guidance to improve mental health provision in the workplace.

The aim of the benchmarking survey was to assess the mental health provision across the industry. The question set was based upon the ten standards set out by the Thriving at Work report and was designed to enable all employers in a simple and meaningful way to undertake a self-assessment of their compliance position. However, it was also designed to educate all via steering those responding towards advice and guidance on how to implement each standard effectively. Following survey date closure, all submissions were analysed to identify trends and validate the evidence given. A final report was produced by Karl Simons and Aimee Cain, to ascertain the collective benchmark status of the sector.

Karl Simons
MSc CMIOSH MIOD
Chief Health,
Safety & Security Officer
Thames Water

Aimee Cain
BNURS MSc SCPHN (OH)
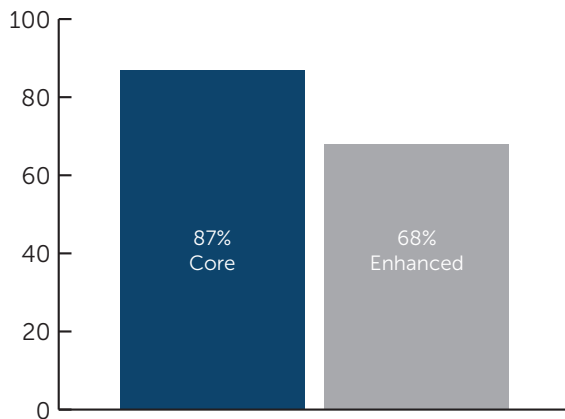Health & Wellbeing Manager
Thames Water

Results Summary

Since the launch in July 2019, 15 water companies have completed the benchmarking survey. Overall as a sector, the Water industry is making great progress towards supporting mental health at work. It is encouraging to read all the mental health initiatives already being implemented and to see all organisations are meeting at least one of the ten standards for employers.

It is apparent within the survey analysis that the Water industry in the UK recognises the importance of mental health provision for employees. Analysis shows that 87% of the Water Industry have achieved compliance against the core standards and 68% have gone further and achieved compliance against both the core and enhanced standards.
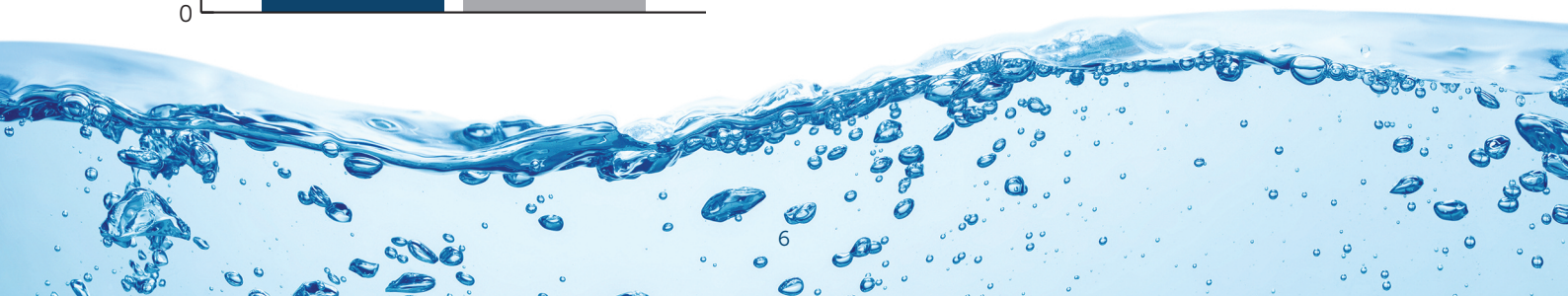
All organisations are meeting at minimum two of the ten standards and six organisations are meeting all ten. It is hoped that the benchmarking survey has highlighted to the organisations who meet the fewest standards what they should be looking at introducing for their employees and has directed them to resources available to them as employers.

Enhanced standard one expects organisations to report on health and wellbeing; specifically impact and outcomes. Of the ten standards this one was the least compliant at only 53% of respondents demonstrating how they meet this.
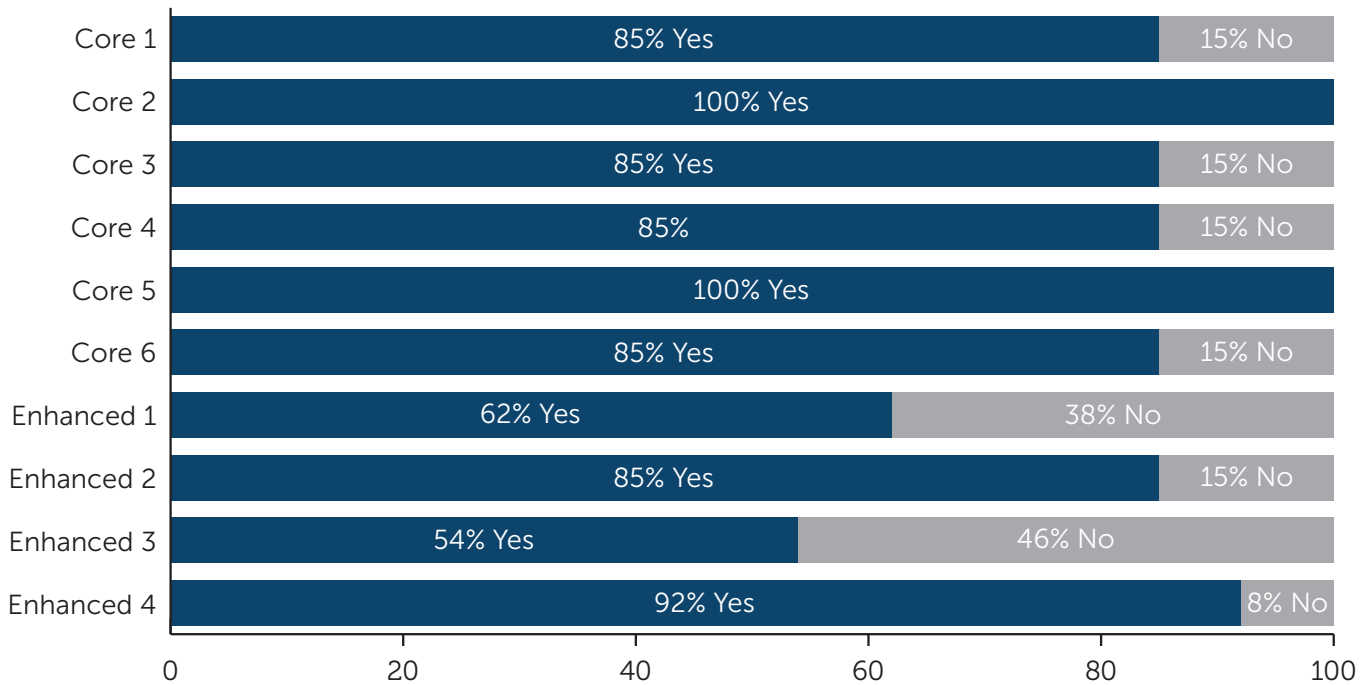
In contrast, core standard two highlights that organisations are required to develop mental health awareness among employees. It is empowering to identify that 100% of all respondents have introduced initiatives to enhance employee awareness around mental health at work.

Overall, it is clear that organisations within the Water industry are acknowledging their role in supporting mental health in the workplace. Through deeper analysis of the responses, it appears that a number of organisations are doing several initiatives but are not building these into a wider strategy or plan on mental health.

Thriving at Work - Overall Compliance

Bar chart showing Core at 87% and Enhanced at 68%, with a vertical axis scaled 0 to 100.

Thriving at Work is designed to steer organisations to the areas where they are not compliant identifying suggested resources available to build strength in those specific areas. Feedback from respondents has been encouraging in that this benchmarking exercise has been able to support those who are not fully compliant with guidance on implementation of the standards.

A further analysis of the responses generated from all ten questions follows.

| Question	Yes	No
Core 1	85% Yes	15% No
Core 2	100% Yes	
Core 3	85% Yes	15% No
Core 4	85%	15% No
Core 5	100% Yes	
Core 6	85% Yes	15% No
Enhanced 1	62% Yes	38% No
Enhanced 2	85% Yes	15% No
Enhanced 3	54% Yes	46% No
Enhanced 4	92% Yes	8% No

Core Standard 1

Does your organisation produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan?

Core standard one expects organisations to have a strategy document or pledge to support mental health at work. It should include how senior leaders are involved, how awareness is raised and how staff are involved in dialogue and decision making to create a culture of openness and trust. It should also cover how organisations promote a healthy work life balance and how opportunities for learning and development are created.

Of the 15 responses, 73% have revealed they have a mental health strategy in place. As the primary core standard of the Thriving at Work report it is concerning that 27% of the organisations responding still do not have a specific mental health strategy in place.

The responses from those who have a strategy have similar themes running throughout. The links between mental health and safety are frequently discussed, with strategies and polices linked to a wider health & safety system. Health awareness campaigns and the use of communications channels were key trends. Several organisations have signed the Mind 'Time to Change' pledge to demonstrate their commitment to removing the stigma around mental health at work. It is empowering to read of the many internal mental health campaigns launched and the initiatives included within these; many with equal standing against physical health campaigns.

Those with the mental health strategy appear to have more focussed and specific initiatives including mental health first aiders, mental health awareness days, mental health champions and EAP provision. We would urge any organisation here to ensure there is a mental health strategy in place that covers what you are doing collectively to support mental health in the workplace.

26.67% No	73.33% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
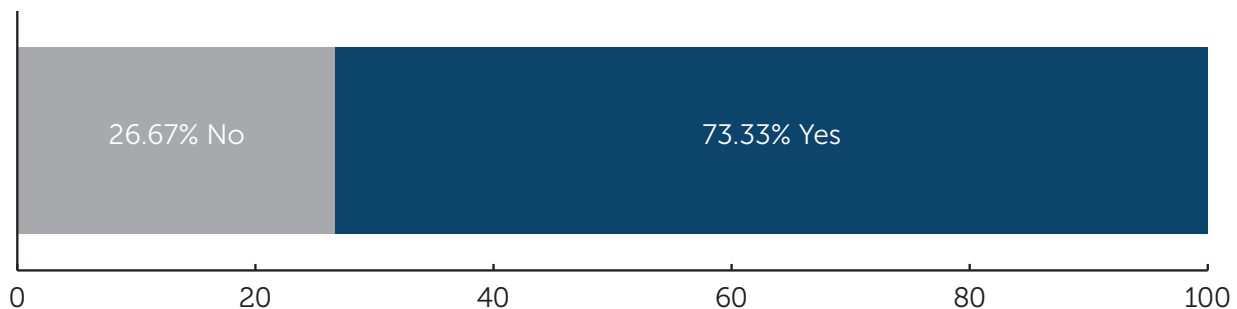
Core Standard 2

Has your organisation started to develop mental health awareness among employees?

Core standard two includes embedding mental health in induction and training, ensuring employees are given information on how best to manage mental health and what support is available. Consideration should be given to raising the profile of mental health through innovative ways; using a speaker on mental health or having a senior leader talk about their experience to help break down the stigma are good examples of best practice. It is expected that many channels of communication are used to raise awareness, including discussion groups, social media, blogs, and factsheets for managers and useful external resources.

Although only 73% of respondents reveal having a mental health strategy in place, it is encouraging to learn that all 15 Client organisations completing the survey have started to develop mental health awareness for employees. The Thriving at Work guidance recommends mental health training for employees and at induction for new starters, with the aim of ensuring employees are given information on how best to manage mental health. Most of the responses include references to mental health first aiders, mental health awareness training, mental health campaigns and EAP provision. There was some reference to the use of internal social media channels however it was disappointing to see these were not frequently mentioned. It was positive to see such a high level of senior leadership involvement amongst the responses with leadership exercises and 'telling my story' events implemented to raise the profile of mental health across the organisation.

100% Yes

| 0 | 20 | 40 | 60 | 80 | 100 |
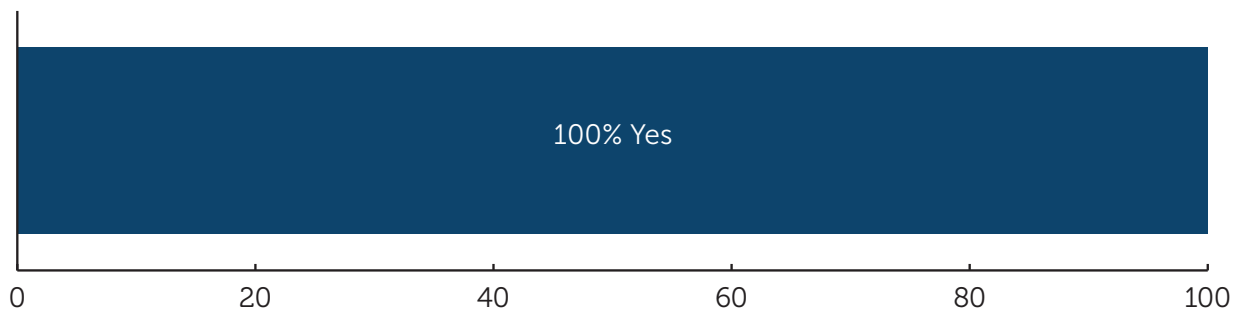
Core Standard 3

Does your organisation encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling?

Disclosure and open conversation around mental health will support a wider cultural change around workplace mental health. This should include a commitment to equal opportunities during recruitment. It is expected that open conversations will include details of mental health support for employees. It is empowering to identify that 87% of respondents believe they encourage conversations around mental health and commit to ensure employees are not discriminated against. Many of the responses identify mental health first aiders, managers and Occupational Health specialists when looking at generating conversations around mental health. However, on further analysis it appears organisations are confusing open conversations around mental health with manager discussions. Few respondents reference specific open engagement or discussion groups.   There is reference to the consideration around equal opportunities and discrimination aspects of the standard.

13.33% No	86.67% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
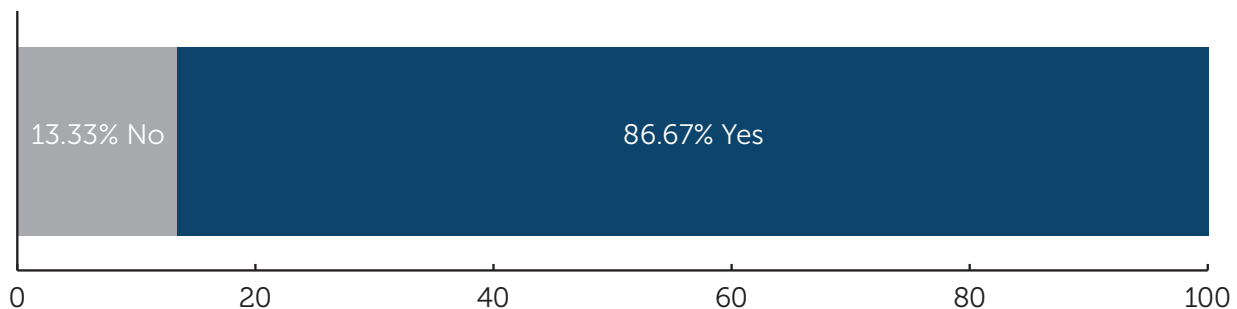
Core Standard 4

Does your organisation provide your employees with good working conditions and ensure they have a healthy work life balance and opportunities for development?

Core standard four focusses on providing employees with good working conditions to support positive mental health through a healthy work life balance. It is expected that organisations will encourage a culture where people have some autonomy over their work, be able to build social networks and have opportunities for development. Effective and trained managers have been identified as a key part of generating a healthy working life.

Of our 15 respondents in the Water industry, 87% believe they were able to meet this standard based upon their organisations polices and strategies. The responses were detailed and included many references to flexible and home working with the support of flexible working policies and agile working arrangements.

One respondent identified that their focus was thinking about work as 'what you do, not where you do it' which is a great commitment to this standard. The allocation of annual leave was also a common theme running through the responses with some organisations offering flexible benefits to support employees in different parts of their life. The use of stress audits, wellness action plans and career progression plans were all discussed in the responses. There was only some reference to effective manager training and the impact of competent managers when looking at supporting health and work.

13.33% No	86.67% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
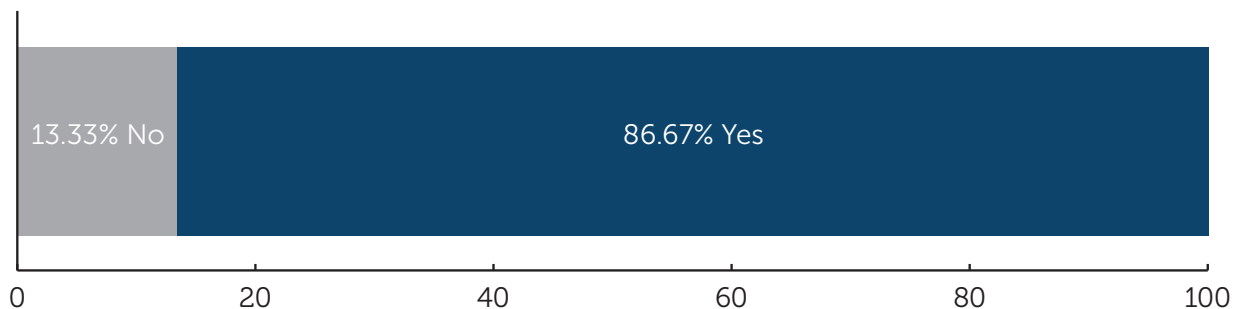
Core Standard 5

Does your organisation promote effective people management through line managers and supervisors?

Manager training is considered effective in generating a positive work life balance and is discussed within core standard four. Core standard five specifically references manager training to ensure line managers will be competent in managing common health problems within their team. Managers should be trained in having active conversations and know where to refer employees for additional support. Training managers to take simple steps to support their staff; encouraging open conversations about mental health through team meetings and regular catch-ups are all key activities expected of those organisations who believe they meet this standard.

The analysis has identified that 100% of the respondents to the survey believe they offer sufficient manager training to meet the core standard. However, on deeper analysis of the results the organisations differ significantly in the type of training offered. Some organisations offer extensive manager training, as well as specific mental health training for managers and for some organisations this is mandatory. There is also reference to manager support lines from Occupational Health and Human Resources which are designed to offer further guidance for managers when managing mental health amongst their teams.

For other organisations, there are no specific manager training courses although they identify return to work processes, team talks and general mental health awareness training as examples of how they meet this standard. There was only minimal reference to personal development processes or success pathways.

Whilst the core standard specifies manager training, several of the organisations believe that mental health first aid or mental health awareness training is all that is required to develop an effective manager. People management is a skill that needs to be learnt and training should cover all areas of management including development planning, managing capability and performance monitoring alongside health management.

100% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
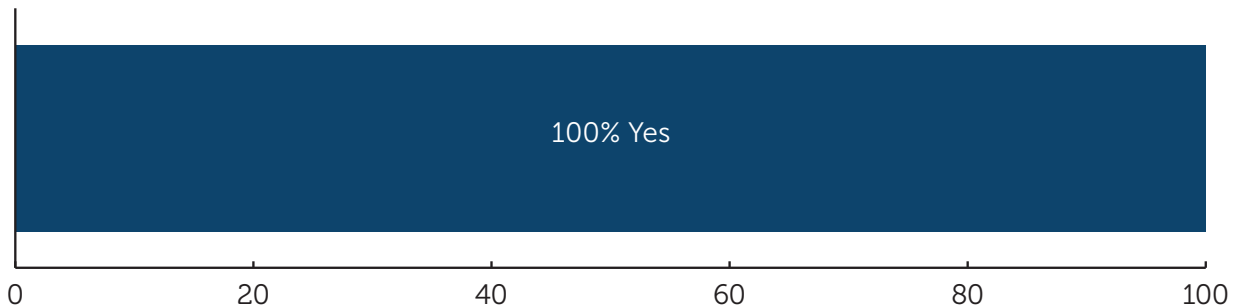
Core Standard 6

Does your organisation routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing?

Developing a clear picture of the mental health of an organisation helps generate an understanding of what affects employee mental wellbeing and how well they are being supported. Within core standard six, organisations are expected to undertake staff surveys and audits to ask about employee perception of health, wellbeing and mental health.

Of all respondents, 73% believe their organisation meets this standard. Through the analysis of the responses, many organisations complete staff surveys although no organisation references a specific mental health related survey. The Workplace Wellbeing Index and Britain Healthiest Workplace are effective surveys in assessing the health of an organisation, however these were rarely mentioned. Many organisations use Occupational Health data, sickness absence data and Employee Assistance reports as a means of monitoring employee health and wellbeing. There is little reference however as to what organisations then do with or how they respond to the data generated.

26.67% No	73.33% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
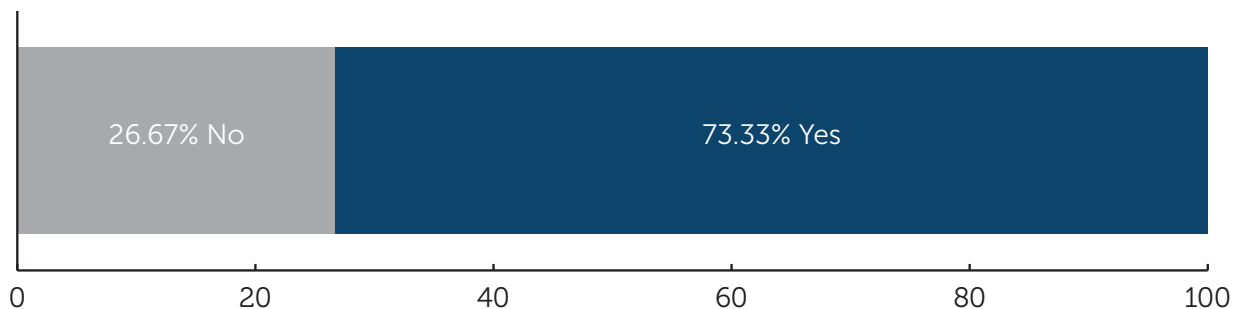
Enhanced Standard 1

Does your organisation report on health and wellbeing; specifically impact and outcomes?

The Thriving at Work Enhanced Standards are designed for organisations of over 250 employees. Large employers should be leading the way on mental health provision in the work place and as a source of guidance for smaller organisations. For organisations to meet this standard it is expected that they will understand the impact of mental health on the organisation through various forms of data including sickness absence records, Occupational Health referral data, staff surveys, appraisals and mental health indexes. Mental health should be monitored and measured on a monthly and annual basis to review the impact of the mental health plan (core standard 1) and the associated costs to the business. It is an expectation that organisations will participate in an annual survey or report.

Within the Water industry, 53% consider they meet Enhanced standard one. Through analysis of the results it appears Occupational Health data, sickness absence trends and Employee Assistance reports help to guide a wider company understanding of mental health within the organisation. A few respondents who answered yes to this question were still in the process of starting to monitor data so did no fulfil the criteria required and were scored down. Some organisations report annually or quarterly rather than monthly. There were links into reporting health data alongside the reporting of safety standards.

46.67% No	53.33% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
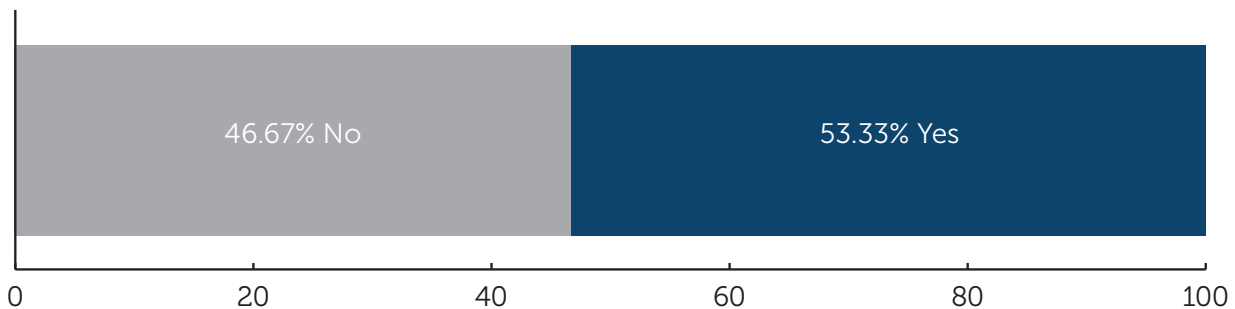
Enhanced Standard 2

Does your organisation have a health and wellbeing lead at Board or Senior Leadership level, with clear reporting duties and responsibilities?

Having a senior manager accountable for leading mental health in the business is critical for large organisations. To meet this standard, it is expected that a member of the senior leadership team will be accountable for leading on the mental health plan for the business. Senior leaders should all be accountable for adopting the mental health core and enhanced standards in their teams and be measured on sickness absence, Occupational Health referrals and take-up of Employee Assistance Programmes.

It is encouraging to see that 80% of the Water industry consider they have a senior leader accountable for mental health in their organisation. Through analysis of the responses it is apparent senior leaders and executives & board members are becoming key drivers in mental health in the workplace. As we have found throughout the analysis of this survey, there are direct links with safety. It appears that in the Water Industry, linking mental health to safety allows greater access at leadership and board level and facilitates the reporting of mental health in company performance reports. With larger organisations setting this standard it is hoped many smaller organisations will be able to generate the same level of leadership around mental health. Many responses reference leaders as those who have spoken out about their personal experiences of mental health and leaders who have completed mental health awareness training.

20% No	80% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
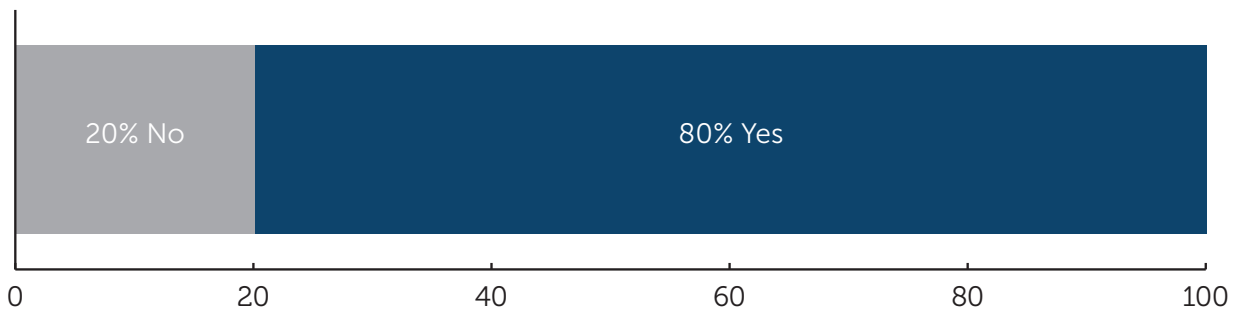
Enhanced Standard 3

Does your organisation encourage openness around health during recruitment, emphasising why information is required and having support in place to facilitate a good response following disclosure?

Core standard three emphasises that it is important to be open about mental health. Enhanced standard three is more specific and it expects organisations to build employee confidence around how information they share will be used when talking about their mental health; policies must be clear and fair and enable sensitive issues to be carefully managed to avoid discouraging employees speaking up. To meet this standard, organisations are expected to explain why people are being asked to share information about mental health problems and what will happen with that information. They should be able to demonstrate a clear process for employees being able to request any personal and medical information the organisation holds on them.

Over half of those who completed the survey consider they meet this standard (53%). The responses discuss recruitment processes, pre-employment screening, company values and commitments and data protection policies.   Many organisations have also referenced equal opportunities and the accommodation of reasonable adjustments during the on boarding process. Considering the Equality Act 2010, it is disappointing that 47% of those who completed this survey do not explain why they ask about employee health during the recruitment process.

20% No	80% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
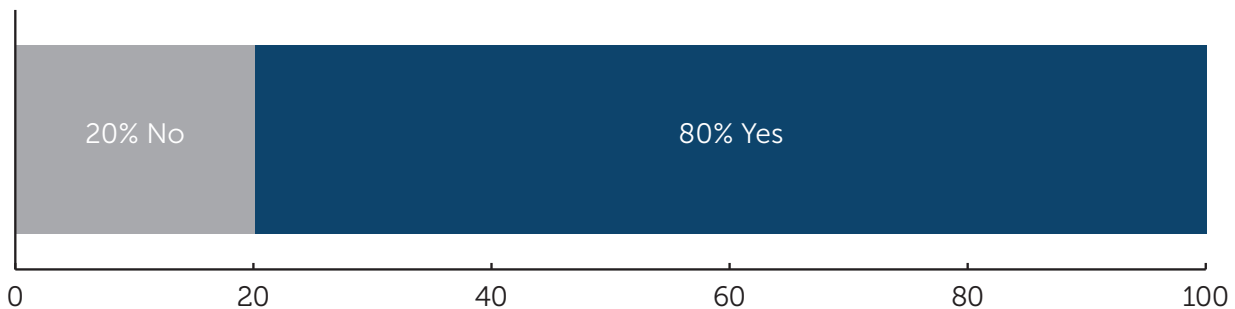
Enhanced Standard 4

Does your organisation provide tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help including Mental Health First Aiders, Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programmes?

 Interestingly only 73% of respondents consider they have a mental health at work plan (core standard one) within their organisation. One of the key elements of the mental health at work plan will be an explanation of what internal and external support is available for employees with mental health concerns. Enhanced standard four asks respondents to confirm if they provide tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help. The types of support available could include access to counselling through Access to Work, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programmes and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy as well as other tailored mental health and wellbeing support. Larger employers are expected to extend support to smaller organisations in their supply chain to help them improve the mental health of their employees. It is expected that managers and Mental Health First Aiders will have suitable resources to sign post those with mental health concerns to the relevant support services.

It is empowering to find that 87% of the Water industry offer a range of mental health support to their employees. Services are wide ranging and include counselling, Employee Assistance Programmes, Mental Health First Aiders, Occupational Health, wellbeing practitioners, and support lines. Few of the responses include how organisations offer services to their supply chain; some organisations appear to provide support to some of the supply chain but not all. For those who are unable to offer a wider range of support services there is reference to tailoring support and solutions to individuals, this is more prevalent in the smaller organisations.

13.33% No	86.67% Yes

0   20   40   60   80   100
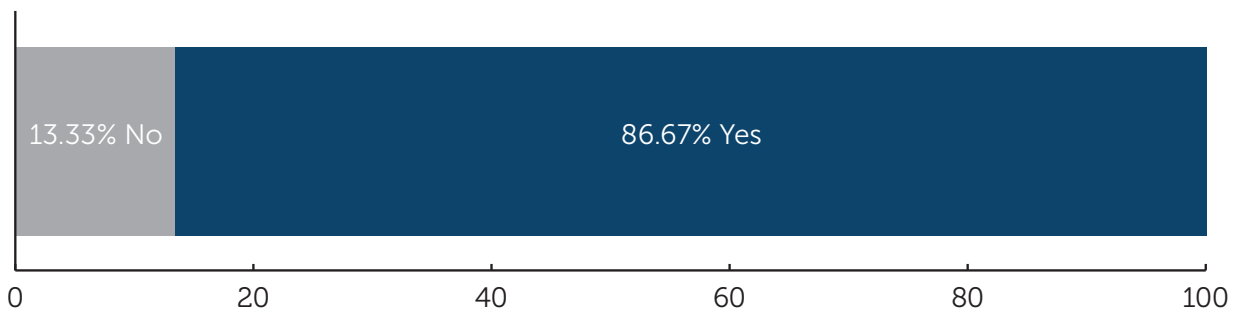
Report Authors

Karl Simons
MSc CMIOSH MIOD

Karl is the Chief Health, Safety & Security Officer at Thames Water. He has 30 years of experience in industry, having worked across all continents and numerous safety critical industries including oil, gas, minerals, rail, roads, construction and water. He is an Electrical & Mechanical Engineer, holds a Post Graduate Masters Degree in Environmental Management, Safety & Health, is a Chartered Occupational Safety & Health Practitioner and Member of the Institute of Directors. Karl's advice is regularly sought by Government and he is a lecturer at the University of Cambridge. He also holds a position as Non-Executive Director on the Board of the global organisation 'Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor'.

Aimee Cain
BNURS MSc SCPHN (OH)

Aimee is the Occupational Health & Wellbeing Manager at Thames Water. Over the last three years Aimee and her team have strived to remove the stigma around mental health at work for which they have recently won the This Can Happen mental health award in 2018 for their work in this field. Aimee gained a Nursing degree in 2004 and went on to work in Accident & Emergency before moving into Occupational Health at the Ministry of Defence in 2007. In 2010 Aimee gained a Masters with Distinction with her work on returning to work after Breast Cancer from Brunel University. Aimee joined Thames water in 2015 and took on the role of Occupational Health & Wellbeing Manager in 2016. She manages a team of four Occupational Health Advisors supporting the business with health surveillance, case management and wellbeing initiatives. Aimee has a keen interest in nutrition and physical fitness.

References:
CIPD (2012) - CIPD in partnership with SimplyHealth. (2012). Absence Management Annual Survey Report. CIPD.
CMO (2013) - Chief Medical Officer. (2013). Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2013.
Public Mental Health Priorities: Investing in the Evidence. Department of Health and Social Care.