

No. 661/2018

21 November 2018

Our Ref: P26/18

MHFA England Open Letter To Prime Minister And Government To Amend Health and Safety Legislation To Put Mental and Physical First Aid On An Equal Footing:

To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

Branches may have seen reports published in the media that business leaders had joined Mental Health First Aid England in a collective call for the UK Government to update health and safety legislation to protect mental health in the workplace.

On Monday 19 November 2018, an open letter to the Prime Minister signed by 50 leaders of Britain's biggest employers including Royal Mail, PWC, W.H.Smith, Thames Water, Ford, MACE, Channel 4 etc., was delivered to 10 Downing Street calling on the Government to prioritise its manifesto pledge to amend health and safety legislation to put mental and physical first aid on an equal footing.

In a statement announcing the 'Open Letter' to the PM, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England said that the letter signed by industry leaders from across business, education and mental health, comes at a time when **one in six people** of working age will experience mental ill health including depression, anxiety or issues relating to stress. With over 28 million people in work in England, this represents nearly **5 million people**. Mental health issues are also estimated to cost the UK economy almost **£35 billion every year** and 15.4 million working days are lost to work-related stress, depression or anxiety. The open letter shows that business leaders clearly recognise the need to support their employees' mental health in the same way they do their physical health.

The change in legislation being called for would establish a baseline for protecting mental health in the workplace, ensuring no one is left behind. This is just one part of improving approaches to workplace mental health, but it represents an important step forward. Ensuring that first aid support is there for the millions of people who struggle with their mental health every year would make a big difference to people and get them to think about their health as a whole.

The impact of neglecting mental ill health in the workplace is two-fold: with an economic and human cost which should be alleviated.

By investing in the physical and mental health of the workforce it will not only unlock human potential in the workplace, it will reduce the human cost as well as the astronomical costs to the UK economy.

It is imperative the Government takes notice of UK employers, Trade Unions and the public who are standing up and calling for change.

The Open Letter follows the delivery of a petition of over 200,000 public signatures to 10 Downing Street as part of a mental health campaign called 'Where's Your Head At?' founded by Natasha Devon MBE of MHFA England which has received cross-party backing from MPs from across the political spectrum. MPs had originally showed their support for the issue by signing an [Early Day Motion](#) tabled by Norman Lamb MP in October 2016.

As part of their 5-Year Mental Health Strategy 'Because Healthy Minds Matter', launched in October 2017, Royal Mail Group signed an agreement with the CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department recently which commits the Company to have the same number of Mental Health First Aiders across our business as they do physical health First Aiders with the new national training programme of circa 5,500 First Aiders and all CWU Area Health and Safety Reps commencing in April 2019. 1,350 RMG employees, mainly managers but also a number of Union Reps and Mental Health Ambassadors, have so far been trained in MHFA across 1,800 sites, 96% of whom said they felt it helped them develop a better understanding of mental health symptoms and wellbeing.

The CWU has continued to campaign on Mental Health and has supported both the petition and the open letter as we firmly believe that everyone should have access to first aid support for their mental health regardless of where they work.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England is a community interest company (CIC), established in 2009. MHFA is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training and provides participants with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and effectively guide a person towards the right support, be that self-help or professional services. To date over 300,000 people in England have been trained in MHFA skills. The core principles of MHFA include: spotting the signs of a mental health issue, helping to prevent issues from getting worse and giving confidence in helping someone who is experiencing an issue. As well as the Adult MHFA course, the organisation runs a number of tailored courses including Youth MHFA, Higher Education MHFA, Armed Forces MHFA and Workplace MHFA. MHFA England has a vision to normalise society's attitudes and behaviours around mental health by developing the skills needed to look after our own and other's wellbeing. More information about the MHFA England organisation and MHFA courses can be found at www.mhfaengland.org

Attachment:

- Royal Mail Case Study Issued on 19 November by RMG supporting the Open Letter to the PM

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer