

Ensuring mental health in the workplace

Skipton Building Society

Ensuring employees' mental health takes more than just a once and done, tick box exercise. Embedding a culture of wellbeing takes considerable time and investment, along with a commitment to providing a suite of support tools that are appropriate, accessible and sustainable. Here's how one organisation enhanced and complemented their existing wellbeing offering to provide their people with a comprehensive mental health strategy.



The business

Skipton is the UK's fourth largest building society, with over one million customers and a national presence represented by its network of 88 branches. Skipton employs around 2,400 colleagues.

Ensuring that the Society is a place where people aspire to work is ingrained in the company's ethos. In 2020, Skipton was 8th in the Sunday Times 25 Best Big Companies To Work For. Skipton is also Investors in People Platinum (IIP) accredited, joining the elite 2% of IIP accredited organisations in achieving platinum status.

Along with a commitment to diversity and inclusion, Skipton encourages personal development, and regularly rewards and recognises people for their achievements. Importantly, the Society also understands how vital it is to look after the physical and mental health of its employees.



The issue

Skipton is passionate about positioning themselves as an employer of choice. To maintain levels of engagement, the Society continuously looks at areas where they can improve and put a focus on this. One example was understanding the drivers behind absence levels and how to increase proactivity in tackling the issues, giving particular emphasis to mental health.

The strategy

The Society understands that to ensure people want to work for them – and stay working for them – **employee engagement and wellbeing must be embedded within their cultural strategy**. Initially, Skipton relied largely on their Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which provided third-party advice and **support on a range of work/life issues such as family, relationships and money**.

However, the organisation also recognised the need to be more proactive in **helping their people to become more resilient**. To this end, they created a suite of wellbeing workshops that encouraged their staff to be **more self-aware of their health**, and take steps to maintain and improve it.

Skipton also ran an open forum where managers could freely discuss problems when dealing with sickness absence and **identify any gaps in the available support**. The Society also recognised the benefits of further education and best practice around **addressing mental ill-health**, along with other causes of sickness absence – provided by an experienced third party.

How Unum helped

While Skipton had worked hard to provide their employees with health and wellbeing support, the business wanted to push their offering further, while complementing what they already had in place.

Working in partnership with Skipton and their broker, 1825, we created a service-led proposition and embedded a process where the Society could access the available support as simply and as quickly as possible.

Together with Skipton's wellbeing team, our Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant, Yvonne Roberts, suggested and helped Skipton roll out new initiatives, designed to provide an all-round approach. These included:

1 The Mental Health and Wellbeing Audit

As part and parcel of our Mental Health Pathway, our Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant, Karen Curtis, introduced our tailored **Mental Health and Wellbeing Audit**. The audit is designed to bring all the components of a workplace mental health strategy together and help employers to deliver it effectively. It also focuses on **building resilience and encouraging people to look for support** before a problem feels too big.

Skipton found Karen's audit and plan extremely useful, and used it as an external diagnostic tool that enabled them to **break down any gaps in their mental health offering** into immediate actions and longer-term goals. They also employed a **Wellbeing Specialist** to act on its findings step-by-step. As well as suggesting where they could do more, Skipton were also pleased and encouraged by the actions already in place that the plan both highlighted and complemented.

2 Return to work assistance

Skipton's Group Income Protection policy has **vocational rehabilitation services built-in**. As well as helping ill or injured employees get back to work, whether through one-off support or advice, or a longer-term graduated return to work plan, **our VRCs can also intervene early** when the Society spots someone who may be struggling with a health issue.

3 On Course workshops

Skipton is aware that as not all of their people have Group Income Protection cover, some lacked the support available to those that have. While they look to address the issue of cover, they wanted to ensure all staff have **access to tools to aid resilience**.

To complement Skipton's own education support, we ran our On Course workshops as part of their strategic approach to further workplace wellbeing. These included **Stress Awareness**, designed to help managers **recognise the signs of stress and reduce key triggers**, and our employee-focused U-First course, which helps employees review their own reactions to stress. U-First also suggests strategies to improve their resilience and steps they can take to **improve their wellbeing** at work and at home.

On Course workshops also cover help on dealing with cancer in the workplace, gender-specific issues, fluctuating conditions such as asthma, arthritis etc. and musculoskeletal disorders, such as RSI and back pain.



Other resources

Outside of this strategy, Skipton have also taken advantage of other added value support that comes built-in to a number of Unum's policies, including among others, ongoing cancer support from Reframe, discounted mental health first aid training and dyslexia assessments.

Conclusion

The business has seen a reduction in claims since 2017, which as well as helping productivity through people staying in, and returning to, work, has also shown employees that the business is proactive in recognising and tackling problems. It also helps cement Skipton's position of an employer who genuinely cares for their people. In addition, our expertise in this field has helped the Society gain knowledge required to help staff without having to call on us.

Skipton said:

“ We have worked really closely with Unum and have seen a benefit in the way we manage longer absences and support colleagues back into work. The rehab service has been invaluable for many colleagues who were off work and needed that additional support and structure to help them get back. ”

The issue of employee wellbeing continues to gain greater awareness. And with reports showing employers are seeing mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, increasing among employees¹ – it also takes on greater significance.

Those employers who promote and enable a culture of wellbeing throughout the business, and who draw on the expertise and experience of providers, not only help ensure the health of their employees, but that of the business itself.

¹ CIPD health and well-being report – May 2019