

MARCH 2021

FITNESS & ACTIVE LEISURE  
WORKFORCE

# State of Mind

———— 2021 SURVEY ————

## SUMMARY REPORT

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**WORKPLACE  
MENTAL WEALTH**  
*fitness & active leisure*

**fisikal<sup>®</sup>**

# Dear Colleague

We all have mental health in the same way that we all have physical health, but many of us find it harder to talk about mental health. This matters because it affects our ability to stay well or ask for help if we need it.

A passionate and committed workforce is the heartbeat of our sector. At Workplace Mental Wealth, our ambition is to normalise conversations and drive positive action around mental health for everyone working in fitness and active leisure.

Publishing this report is our first step towards that ambition. And it is timely. More than half of respondents reported they have experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months. Overall, more than two thirds report they have experienced a mental health issue at some point.

Before this piece of work, no sector-wide studies specifically exploring the mental health of the fitness and active leisure workforce existed. Our goal has been to create tailored research that explores both individual and organisational perspectives and experiences of mental health and draw out key themes. We wanted it to be accessible, simple to take part in, easy to understand and actionable. Much of what the sector can do to create mentally healthy workplaces is well within its gift.

This report is part of a broader conversation that needs further research and action so that, collectively, we can end the stigma around mental health, improve mental health literacy and create a sector-wide culture that drives happiness, health and prosperity. And so, although we launched the survey during the pandemic, we asked questions that go beyond its impact that will be repeated in our future research to track progress and improve understanding.

We were conscious that the pandemic and widespread furlough might affect people's opportunity to respond. We also recognised the stigma associated with mental health could be a barrier to participation even though the surveys were anonymous. But, many in the sector embraced this opportunity to speak.

We heard from 1,140 people and 81 organisations across a broad spectrum of contexts, with many sharing additional thoughts and experiences in their comments, some of which are quoted in this document. We would like to thank everyone who took part, shared the survey with their network, covered the story across their communication channels and sent messages of support. Every action has helped.

In particular, we would like to thank Tara Dillon, CEO, CIMSPA and Charlotte Anderson, CIMSPA's Communications and Marketing Manager, for promoting the survey to their members and for encouraging the work. We would also like to thank Emma Excell and Rob Lander at Fisikal for their kind support which has enabled us to publish this report. Finally, thanks to Nicky Jobson, Director at Pace PR, for being our social media superstar

Most importantly, this collective effort means we have these findings to share which shine a light on mental health in our sector, and will, we hope, ignite conversations and encourage action among a wide variety of stakeholders for the benefit of everyone. To that end, we offer four recommendations as well as the opportunity for employers to take decisive action and sign The Good Work Pledge to start meeting the challenge ahead.

*Lindsey Simpson & Katie Lewis*

Co-founders, Workplace Mental Wealth

[www.workplacementalwealth.com](http://www.workplacementalwealth.com)

March 2021

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**“** This is such an important piece of work for the wellbeing of the sector's workforce. We need to get to a point where mental health has parity with physical health. We're not there yet and we wholly support this research as part of the drive to make that happen. **”**

Emma Excell, Fisikal



**“**Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.**”**

**The World Health Organization**

# About the survey

The Fitness and Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Survey 2021 was open online from 18 January to 12 February 2021. We offered two survey options, one for individuals and one for employers. We invited participation from across the sector using a variety of channels such as the CIMSPA membership database, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and emails to our personal networks. Other industry bodies and the sector's press also shared the links.

Both surveys took around five minutes to complete, were anonymous and offered a free text option at the end so participants could add further information or comment. 140 respondents gave further comments, some of which are quoted in this report.

Throughout this report numbers have been rounded up or down to the nearest per cent.



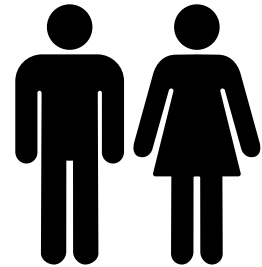
# Who we heard from

**1,140 individuals and 81 organisations**



*individuals...*

- 89% from England
- 8% from Scotland
- 3% from Wales
- 1% from Northern Ireland



**36% 63%**

**60%** work  
full time

**34%** work  
part time

**6%**  
seasonally  
/ad hoc

**50%**  
teachers and  
instructors

We had respondents from the board to apprentices. The largest groups were those that worked independently direct with their clients (29%), those who work freelance for one or more organisations (18%) and senior managers (17%).

We heard from people working in a broad range of contexts. The largest groups were sole traders or micro businesses (18%), local authorities (12%) and those who worked for a large chain of private clubs (11%).

- 89% of people identified as heterosexual/straight
- 4% considered themselves to have a disability
- 60% of organisations that responded had less than 100 employees

The largest employer groups were Charitable Trusts (19%), equipment or service suppliers (17%) education and training providers (12%) and large chains of private clubs (6%).

# Key findings

**53%** of respondents – more than half – said they have experienced a mental issue in the last 12 months

**69%** of respondents – more than two thirds – said they have experienced a mental health issue at some point

**58%** of women said they had experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months compared to 43% of men

**78%** of those with a line manager felt this manager cares about their mental wellbeing, but only 19% of employees said someone regularly checks in on their mental health at work

**42%** of employees would not be honest with an employer if they felt they needed time off work because of a mental health issue

**56%** of those working independently felt it is better for their mental health

**79%** of all respondents said that if a colleague approached them about a mental health issue they were experiencing, they felt effectively equipped to support them directly or signpost to appropriate support

**40%** of employers said they have a wellbeing strategy they communicate to all employees

**By far, the single biggest impact on respondent's wellbeing was if they felt their work had purpose and if they felt valued**







# CIMSPA

**“** CIMSPA welcomes the findings of this insightful report, which is the first significant move to shed light on the mental health of professionals working in fitness and active leisure. It shares experiences of those at the frontline of our sector and will be a useful tool as we continue to work hard to support the mental health of our industry’s workforce through our partner network. **”**

**Tara Dillon, CEO, CIMSPA**

# The big picture

We all have mental, physical and social health. Each facet is on a continuum that varies over our lifetime. In this survey, 69% of respondents said they have experienced a mental health issue at some point, making it a common experience among our workforce.

Factors inside and outside the workplace affect mental health at work. The key is how the sector and employers understand the elements they can affect proactively and when people need help. People experiencing a period of mental ill health, even a serious one, can still thrive at work with the right support.

Respondents rated their current health in three ways:



In this survey, age is the single most influential demographic characteristic in how the workforce rated their current overall wellbeing across the three health categories. Those aged 45 and over rated themselves highest in every health category.

## POSITIONAL POWER

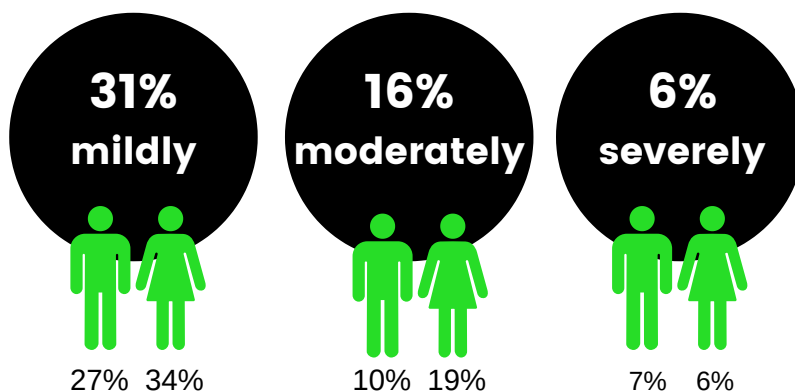
Our survey suggests that groups who traditionally have more positional power (those aged 45 and over, men and senior leaders) are experiencing better overall health. Those in these groups should be mindful of the biases that may be influencing their experiences, views and actions. This may affect their views on supporting their colleagues and teams, and their perception of the need for action.

“During this last lockdown we have had very little contact from the company apart from asking us to take holiday and to help them.”

# The effects of the pandemic

5% of people said the pandemic had made their mental health better, 37% said it has had little effect and 58% of people said the pandemic had made their mental health worse. Of the 'made it worse' group, 69% said they had experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months.

Overall, 53% of survey respondents said they had experienced a mental issue in the last 12 months. Of that group:



## WHAT CAN WE ALL DO?

While there are trends in the data, there is no universal experience of the pandemic. We should recognise this and be aware that what we have experienced may be very different to others.

8% of respondents to the survey weren't sure if they had experienced a mental health issue in the last 12 months

“We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar.”

Damian Barr, poet, April 2020



Stigma is disgrace and shame associated with a circumstance, quality or person. Both self-stigma and social stigma can affect a person's willingness to acknowledge their own mental distress. It can also affect willingness to ask for and access help.

# Talking about mental health

Our survey suggests we are more comfortable listening to others than we are talking about our own concerns. Despite caring line managers, there is much more to do to systematically engage with employees and to end the stigma. Our survey highlights significant levels of both self and social stigma.



**79%**

of all respondents said that if a colleague approached them about a mental health issue they were experiencing, they felt effectively equipped to support them directly or signpost them to appropriate support, at work or otherwise.



**55%**

of the survey group said they had a line manager. Of that group, 78% said they felt their line manager cared about their mental wellbeing, but only 19% said someone regularly checked in on their mental health at work.



**42%**

of employees said they would not be honest with their employer if they felt they needed time off for a mental health issue. Of that group, the majority would say nothing and continue to work anyway. Seniority is a broadly correlating factor with 23% of leaders who answered saying they would not be honest compared with 61% of those in entry level jobs.

# Talking about mental health

If respondents felt they needed time off work because of a mental health issue:

**58% said they would be honest and explain to their employer why they needed time off**

- 8% said they would avoid the truth and give their employer another reason for needing time off
- 31% said they would say nothing and work anyway
- 3% reported they would say nothing but only do essential work

**The top four reasons given for avoiding talking to their employer about a mental health concern are:**

**29%**

worry it would negatively affect their career

**24%**

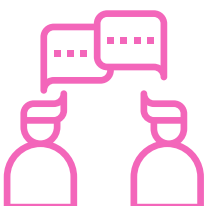
would find it difficult to talk about a personal mental health issue

**18%**

would worry about negatively being thought of by others

**15%**

thought it wouldn't help them



77% would prefer to have conversations about their mental health face to face. Video call is the least preferred option. Only 5% of people said a conversation over video would be their preference.



## *Need help now?*

Help and support is available right now if you are feeling suicidal. You do not have to struggle with difficult feelings alone. You can call the Samaritans on 116 123 from any UK phone, or call 999 if your life is in danger.

For non-urgent information, see NHS Choices for support available to you through the NHS and other charities and groups. For details of local and national service providers near you, visit [hubofhope.co.uk](https://hubofhope.co.uk) and enter your postcode.

# Organisational approaches

Overall, 60\* of 81 employers rated their approach to employee mental wellbeing. Where 100 is the highest score, they gave an average rating of 61/100. The scores ranged from 0 to 100, with a modal rating of 50 and a median rating of 65.

Overall, on average, these same employers rated employee mental health as 71/100 in term of their priorities for 2021. The ratings ranged from 0 to 100, with a modal rating of 80 and a median of 75.

## \*WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

26% of employers who started the survey opted out when asked about their approach to employee mental health. We don't know why. There was no pattern in terms of the type of organisation, number of employees, region or job role of the representatives who dropped out. This needs further understanding.



“I have an exceptionally good employer now, it's made a huge difference to my wellbeing after leaving a company that was poor at supporting their employees.”

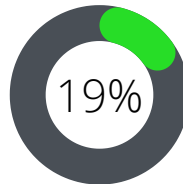
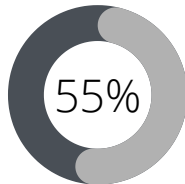


# Organisational approaches

*Employers said they...*

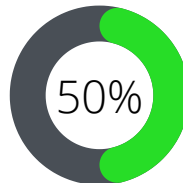
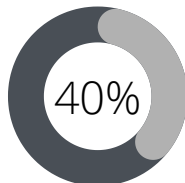
*Employees said...*

have a process for  
checking in on  
employee mental health



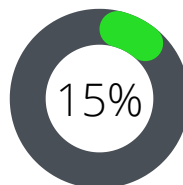
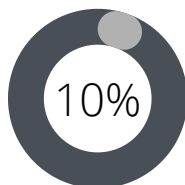
someone regularly  
checks in on my  
mental health

have a wellbeing  
strategy they  
communicate to all  
employees



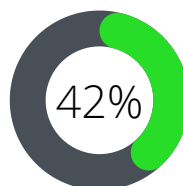
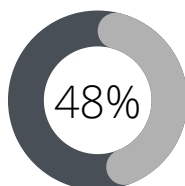
said this was true  
of their employer

do not have in place any  
of the plans or  
mechanisms we asked  
about



said this was true  
of their employer

said they offer mental  
health awareness  
training to everyone



said they can access  
this training

“

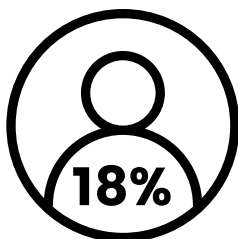
As a business owner there are many plates to spin.  
We have tried a number of mental health strategies,  
but they have not been engaged with so far.

”

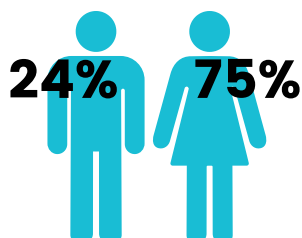
# Independents & freelancers



independent – I work for myself direct with clients



freelance – I work with one or more organisations



1% preferred not to say



said teaching & instructing is their main work, 8% said education & training

**43% work full-time, 47% work part-time**  
**10% have no regular pattern**

37% of the total sample in work did not have an employer. We asked them how, generally, working independently affected their mental health.

**56%**

said it's better for me

**33%**

said it makes no difference to me

**11%**

said it's worse for me

Of this group, 43% had experienced a mental health issue since working independently.

**30%**

mild mental health issue

**10%**

moderate mental health issue

**3%**

severe mental health issue

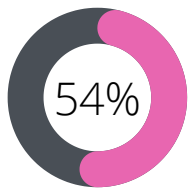
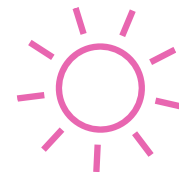
**“** I became fully self-employed just under a year ago, after a couple of years both employed and self-employed. Overall, I would say my job has been a positive impact on my mental health and when I am able to work, I feel great. But the pandemic and the lack of support from the government has been a very negative factor. **”**

# Influences on mental health

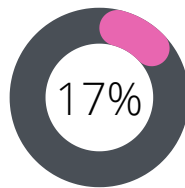
*Top 3*

most positive influences

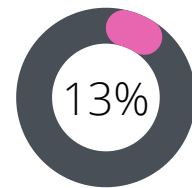
independent & freelance workers



said feeling that my work has purpose and I'm valued



said having good relationships with clients & partners

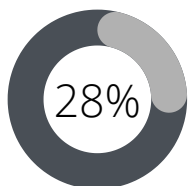


said being in control of how and when I work

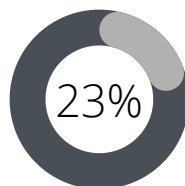
*Top 3*

most negative influences

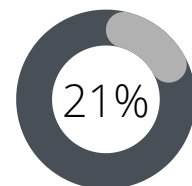
independent & freelance workers



said finding it hard to get work



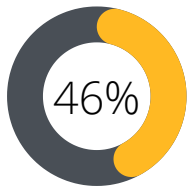
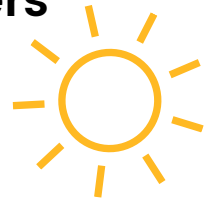
said having responsibility for everything



said poor work-life balance

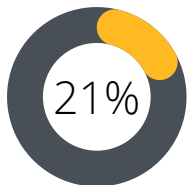
# Influences on mental health

## Top 3 most positive influences employed workers



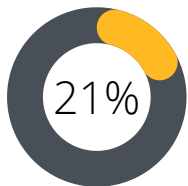
46%

said feeling that my work has purpose and I'm valued



21%

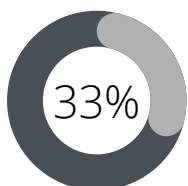
said having good relationships with colleagues and clients



21%

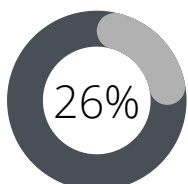
said good work-life balance

## Top 3 most negative influences employed workers



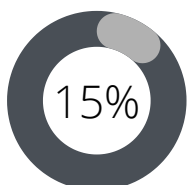
33%

said feeling that my work has no purpose and I'm not valued



26%

said poor work-life balance



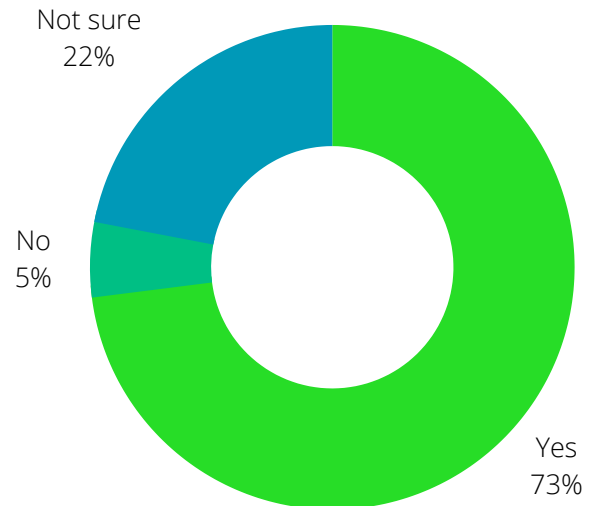
15%

said poor working conditions such as workload and hours, pay, holiday and benefits

# Support from an industry body

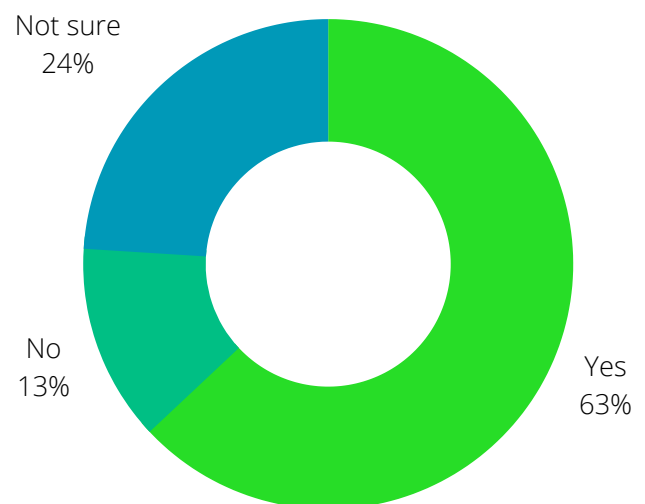
## Individuals

73% of individual respondents would value an industry body providing 'resources and support for professionals like you' around mental health and wellbeing.



## Organisations

63% of organisations said they would value support and advice from an industry body to help shape their approach to employee mental wellbeing and share best practice.



“

I am a self-employed fitness instructor, I work for myself, mostly outdoors for the general public, and in schools and community centres for specialist populations. I lost a lot of that income upon lockdown and one of the hardest things to deal with is that, for all the government support schemes, I am one of 3 million who didn't meet the eligibility criteria for any of them. So, no support at all since last March. That's been the biggest hurdle, financially and mentally.

”

“The fitness industry needs to step up and work to improve working conditions. The precarious conditions given to personal trainers (mainly the ones working with the big chains) are absolutely shocking. The state of mind on this issue has been the same, regardless of the pandemic.”

2021 survey respondent

# Where now?

These findings shine a light on broad variations in organisational approaches to managing employee's mental wellbeing and diverse personal experiences among the workforce.

They also reveal the high reported prevalence of mental ill health, particularly in the last 12 months, and significant evidence of self and social stigma. In our view, these findings are a strong call to action for the industry to acknowledge that, collectively, the sector faces a significant mental health challenge.

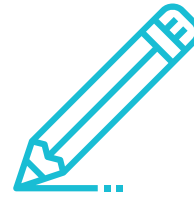
It's time to act.

On the next page we give our four primary recommendations. We also offer employers the opportunity to take action now by signing The Good Work Pledge – details on page 25.



“Mental Health support is as important as ever, if not more. I would like to have more help and support as a manager to support colleagues and to offer direct reports and those below some training in this area also.”

# Recommendations



## 1 Improving awareness & education

To progress in a capable and confident way, we need to focus on improving awareness and understanding of mental health at both an organisational and personal level – it's a shared responsibility.

## 2 Supporting the return to work

Employers should proactively seek to understand and support their employees' mental health as the sector navigates the return to work and longer term. Signing The Good Work Pledge – see page 25 – is a great place to start.

## 3 Sector leadership

Systematic development is needed. We suggest this includes:

- Recognising the role of sector bodies and employers in creating sustainable healthy workplace cultures
- Helping employers understand the compelling business case for investing in employee mental health and their duty of care
- Collaborating with those who do not have an employer to explore what would be helpful in terms of providing mental health advice and support.

## 4 Embrace the conversation

What we focus on will shape how the sector develops. We need to put workforce mental health firmly on the agenda in workplaces, at industry events and conferences, in networking groups and through further research, discussion and sharing best practice. The wellbeing of our workforce is as important as the wellbeing of our customers.



# Take action now

## Sign the Good Work Pledge

In response to our findings and to unite the sector under a single ambition to make sector-wide progress on mental health, we're launching The Good Work Pledge. The pledge enables employers to publically declare a commitment to supporting employee mental health and working towards achieving the government-backed Thriving at Work\* Six Mental Health Core Standards for employers.

It's backed by CIMSPA, good for businesses, good for the sector's workforce and good for the people we serve.

The pledge includes:

- An Action Planning Guide
- A Diagnostic Tool
- Use of The Good Work Pledge logo to promote your commitment
- A listing on our website as a pledge signatory



To find out more and take the pledge visit [workplacementalwealth.com/pledge](https://workplacementalwealth.com/pledge). and join our subscriber list at [workplacementalwealth.com](https://workplacementalwealth.com) to stay up to date with what we're doing. Please get in touch if you would like to talk to us about how we can help your organisation to thrive.

Contact us at [hello@workplacementalwealth.com](mailto:hello@workplacementalwealth.com).

*Lindsey Simpson & Katie Lewis*

\*Thriving at Work: The Independent Review of Mental Health and Employers (2017), authored by mental health campaigner Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, chief executive at Mind and chair of the National Health Service (NHS) Mental Health Taskforce.

# About

## What is a Workplace Mental Wealth?

Lindsey Simpson and Katie Lewis created Workplace Mental Wealth in 2020 with an ambition to normalise conversations and drive positive action around mental health for everyone working in fitness & active leisure. Their goal is to shine a light on the UK workforce's current mental health, help ditch the stigma and shift the culture for a healthier, happier, more productive workforce.

The team's first project was this nation-wide, sector specific survey which will be conducted annually. More projects to support the sector are coming soon.



**We also offer a range of workplace mental health consultancy & training services:**

- Online consultations and calls for when you need advice, a sounding board or to solve a problem
- Bespoke consultancy for more in-depth support
- Mental health awareness training
- Speaking at your event, to your board, senior leaders or your wider team



**Visit [workplacementalwealth.com](https://workplacementalwealth.com) to find out more and subscribe to keep up to date**

# Meet the team



in

*Lindsey Simpson*

## **Co-founder Workplace Mental Wealth**

Workforce advocate focused on culture, performance, research and wellbeing

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications & engagement specialist, facilitator, trainer, speaker, 5 Voices leadership coach, 25 years experience in-house, agency & consultancy

Fitness industry roles including swim coaching, PT & operations, PR (Promote PR) and as the FIA's first membership liaison manager

Award-winning culture change work

Director at Spark Team  
Communications

Degree in Sport & Recreation  
(BA Hons)



in

*Katie Lewis*

## **Co-founder Workplace Mental Wealth**

Passionate about making mental health part of every day 'chatter' and helping organisations create emotionally supportive environments

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications specialist in the physical activity & sport sector for more than 17 years

10 years operational experience in the leisure sector

Director at Brand Chatter

Degree in Human Movement Studies  
(BA Hons)