



Wellbeing at the Bar

Project Summary

Wellbeing (and mental health more generally) within the legal profession is rarely spoken about publicly, yet within the Bar's relatively small community everyone can be affected by their own/colleagues' poor mental health. The stresses of practice can lead to substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), the breakdown of relationships and, in more extreme cases, suicide. Given the increased pressures on the publicly-funded Bar of late, and the conspicuous absence of wellbeing from legal education, there has never been a more important time to give the issue the recognition it deserves.

To address this pressing need, the Bar Council proposes to devise, develop and implement an innovative programme of education work to assist all barristers (including those entering the profession) to develop the resilience necessary to thrive in this demanding environment.

Our project involves research into the unique aspects of a barrister's working environment, alongside the design and delivery of support/solutions once the risks to psychological health and wellbeing that arise in this environment have been identified.

Ways in which members of the Bar may support this programme

- **Identifying champions from all areas of the Bar to support this programme**
- **Volunteering as a champion to support the programme**
- **Encouraging barristers/members of chambers to participate in the research (anonymously)**

Project Definition

This project involves:

- a) Research into the unique aspects of a Barristers' working environment (and individual characteristics) that risk psychological health and wellbeing (the stresses and strains of being a self-employed barrister); and
- b) The design/delivery of psychological health and wellbeing support/solutions for (i) intermediaries (i.e. EDOs, Head of Chambers, Practice Managers, Clerks) and (ii) individual barristers.

It includes:

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| 1. Research (the development of a Diagnostic Tool to identify risks within the profession) | Design and delivery of a diagnostic tool (survey + analysis/report) to identify the 'individual' and 'environmental' workplace risk factors that will impact on performance and directly support or impinge on a barrister's professional practice. |
| 2. Training for EDOs/Others (on how to support colleagues in Chambers) | Creation of an on-demand webinar (and guide) for EDOs/others in Chambers/the Inns seeking to support individual barristers' psychological wellbeing. |
| 3. Modules (and Exercises) for individual barristers to support 'sustainable performance at the Bar' | Live/On Line Modules (tools and techniques) for managing/sustaining individual performance / maintaining psychological wellbeing |

The project will be led by Bar Council, chaired by Rachel Spearing. It is hoped the project will be managed by a stakeholder management group including:

- Bar Council
- The Inns (COIC)
- The Charlie Waller Trust (CWMT)
- Law Care
- MIND
- Specialist Bar Associations

Seed funding will be provided Bar Council, hopefully to be matched by the Inns, CWMT and others.

Background

Psychological wellbeing within the profession (and mental health more generally) is rarely spoken about publically, yet within the Bar's relatively small community everyone is affected by their own/colleagues' poor mental health; be it substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) associated with stress; the breakdown of relationships and in more extreme cases, suicide. There is also obvious links to Fitness to Practice. Legal Aid cuts have served to place further pressure on those in the profession.

Yet we remain in a profession where it is perceived to be 'fatal' to reveal any weakness; admitting to a mental health problem is perceived as 'career threatening' which perhaps explains low reporting and the extent to which practitioners go to hide symptoms.

We need to take a fresh and positive approach to mental health adopting proven strategies that have worked amongst high achieving solicitors, consultants, doctors and other professionals. Such strategies have involved 'normalising' mental health, positioning wellbeing as managing your own talent, your capacity and capability and as being essentially about 'sustaining performance'.

As the representative body Bar Council is well placed to coordinate support on this agenda and in doing so deliver real value to the Inns and profession. Improving understanding within the profession and providing tools to support everyone will support retention of talent at the Bar and meet a real need.

Project objectives

This project will develop wellbeing/sustainable performance support for the Bar.

The objectives are:

- To identify and articulate the 'individual' and 'environmental' workplace risk factors that impact on Barristers' psychological wellbeing and performance and that directly support or impinge on a barrister's professional practice (diagnostic tool: survey + analysis)
- To create an on-demand webinar (and guide) to enable EDOs/others in Chambers/the Inns to support individual barristers' psychological wellbeing
- To design Live/On Line Modules (tools and techniques) for managing individual performance / maintaining psychological wellbeing (which might be delivered via BC, Inns, BPTC training providers, specialist bar associations, individual chambers etc.).

Desired outcomes

- To normalise the recognition of and investment in 'psychological wellbeing' as being central to sustaining performance as a Barrister.
- To equip EDOs/and others to support colleagues.
- To equip individuals to recognise and address risky behaviours which impact on their performance.

Project scope and exclusions

The scope of this pilot project is over a 3 year period (April 2014 – March 2017) and includes the design, development and marketing of the research, training (webinars) and sustainable performance modules for the Bar. Impact will be evaluated.

Project Approach

Expert Input

We will work with specialist consultancy Positive Group <http://positivegroup.org> to provide intellectual capital for the project.

Marketing

We will work closely with the BC communications team to identify the best routes for marketing the project outputs to the profession. This is likely to include a leaflet, inclusion in Counsel Magazine, inclusion in email communications and engaging the Circuits/Inns/Specialist Bar Associations in promoting the initiative

Evaluation

Impact evaluation will be built into the contract with Positive Group so we can confidently talk about its impact.

Proposed Timeline

ACTIVITY	2014/15				2015/16				2016+
	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	
Research									
Develop webinar/training for EDOs/intermediaries									
Distribute intermediary materials									
Develop online resources for barristers/students									
Distribute and publicise online resources									
Evaluate impact									
Review and Revise materials (as required)									

Appendix 1: Definitions

Mental Health

Mental health (like physical health) changes throughout our lives, and like our bodies, minds can become unwell. One in four will be affected by mental illness in any year. The effects can be as real as a broken arm. Mental health problems are common - nearly nine out of ten people who experience mental health problems say they face stigma and discrimination as a result.

Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. More resilient people are able to 'roll with the punches' and adapt to adversity without lasting difficulties; but some people have a harder time with stress and life changes, both major and minor.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a more general term for the condition of an individual or group, and includes for example their social, economic, psychological, spiritual or medical state; high well-being means that the individual/group's experience is positive, while low well-being is associated with negative happenings.

Sustainable Performance

Sustainable Performance is a potentially 'positive' way to talk about mental health support, and strategies to build 'wellbeing' and 'emotional resilience'. It is an approach adopted by many FTSE 100 organisations, including Magic Circle law firms that could be easily adapted to the unique character of the Bar.