

Briefing document for Communication Teams and Occupational Teams to brief staff and volunteers: How to support your health and wellbeing across your career

Briefing written by Nottingham Trent University as part of Mapping the Health and Wellbeing Across the Firefighting Career and Assessing the Current Demands project

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March 2023



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NFCC
National Fire
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Details

Commissioned and funded by: the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Fire Fighters Charity. Grant funding from the Home Office was used to facilitate the delivery of parts of this project.

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To cite this document: Hill, R., Pickford, R., Abdelmalak, E., Afolayan, S., Nadeem, L., Stock, C. (2023). Briefing document for Communication Teams and Occupational Teams to brief staff and volunteers: How to support your health and wellbeing across your career . Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University.

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Thank you

We would like to thank all those who have taken part in this programme of work, the participants, the organisations, the steering group and the research team.

Report Designed and Typeset by  Nottingham Civic Exchange

Overview

This briefing sheet provides key messages for communication and occupational health teams to brief out to staff and volunteers across your fire service.

One priority area to note is that volunteers, on-call firefighters and part time staff often report not receiving communications or information. In addition, they also report not knowing whether they can access all the support opportunities. We hope you can ensure that communications reach these groups as well as full time staff.

Key Messages

The main key change is for every employee to aid the delivery of a **positive environment to work in that promotes health and wellbeing, that supports all our people to be healthy in all domains of their life, throughout their life.**

It is essential that everyone has access to and reassurance from the very best health and wellbeing support which will enable them to be safe, healthy, and protected in their role. Now is the time to act to invest in and grow the health and wellbeing of all Fire and Rescue staff and volunteers. This highlights **how everyone can play a role in that important priority work.**

Message 1: Supporting you to own your own wellbeing

Supporting the health and wellbeing of both you and those around you is a key capability and quality. The 'what works' evidence supports role-modelling of self-awareness, self-care, and emotional literacy. This means that you broadly understand and monitor your own levels of wellbeing and know how to maintain those levels. It also means that you have the ability to seek support should anything change relating to either your employment or personal situation, at the time when you recognise that you may need support. This ability to know your own wellbeing should be operating at all levels in every organisation across the fire sector through open, strong and supportive leadership with clear boundaries. Having clear boundaries facilitates relationships in all contexts and is an important aspect of good support provision. It is the balance between providing supportive leadership or supervision whilst respecting the edges of appropriate practice, reflecting the procedural (policies and procedures) and relational dynamics (professional relationship between the staff member and supervisor); it also involves the assessment of risk.

Message 2: The holistic approach from new starter through career and into retirement

Providing the support for everyone to have the knowledge and understanding to support their own wellbeing and for every supervisor to be supportive as a starting point, will create an inclusive and supportive environment. In your thinking and interactions about health and wellbeing it is helpful to the wider culture if you discontinue the outdated and staged approach to 'fixing people' or relying on process orientated top-down strategies. Instead, **everyone in the sector can help build an environment that will support our people to live and work to their highest attainable levels of health and wellbeing** from when they join our community, throughout their career, and into their retirement or new sector. Your service and the Fire Fighters Charity (of whom you are likely to be a beneficiary), will continue to work collaboratively and coherently to map the offers of support to you when you need them. You and your service need to ensure you know where to find support should you need it.

By understanding when you may experience extra strain, we can **make a judgement** as to whether we feel our experience feels like our normal reaction to a temporary heavy load, compared to a significant strain. We can then **use this knowledge to seek the most appropriate support** to move through these experiences in the best way for you.

Message 3: Getting to know your wellbeing needs

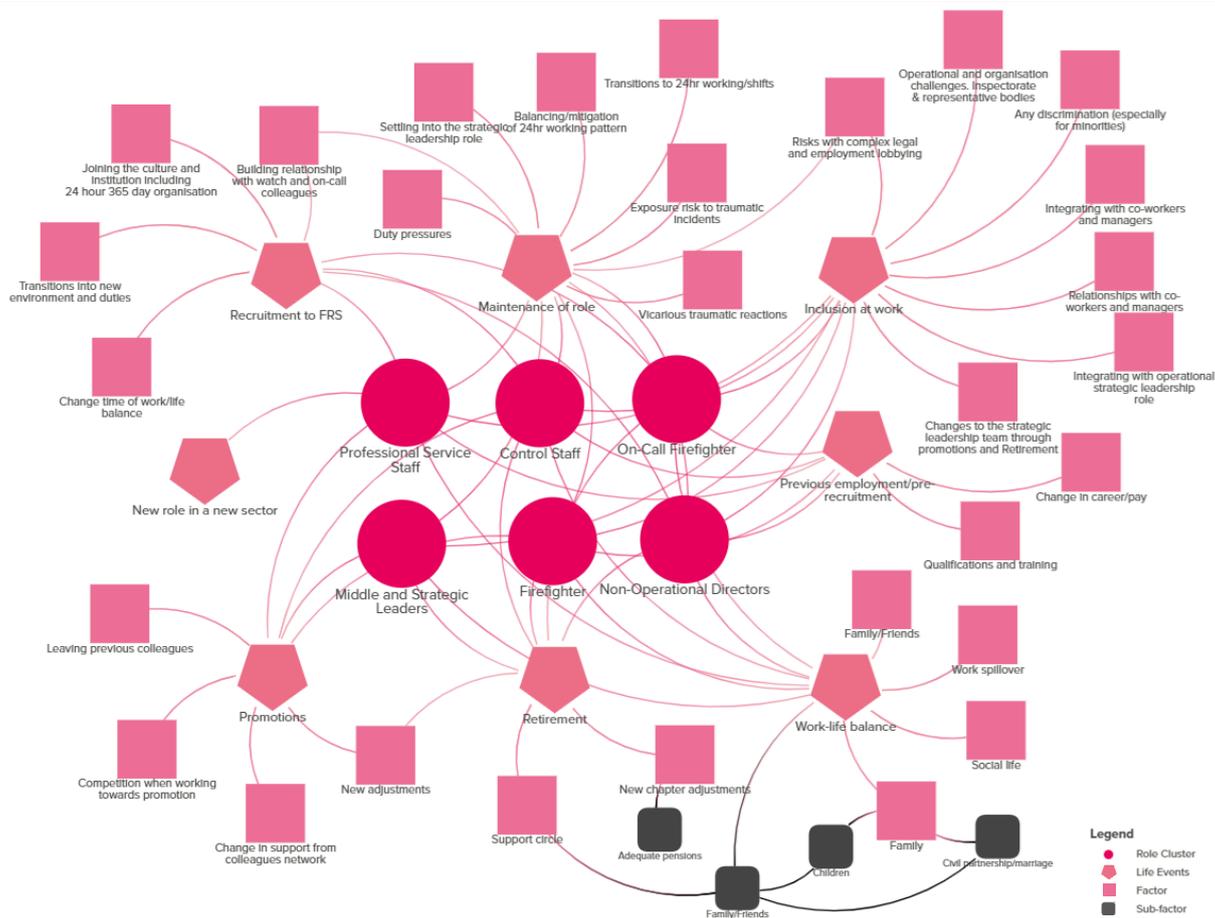
The expert led research recognised the varied experiences of those working within the FRS, including volunteers, and grey and green book staff, and the need to ensure that wellbeing support understands the three types of key stressors that can impact on staff and volunteers.

These stressors are:

- General life stressors
- Fire and rescue service stressors
- Role specific stressors

We all experience these stressors at different points in our lives, and they are often heightened by life transitions at work or at home. Taking some time to understand when stressors are likely to occur should support you to be aware of any changes within yourself or your colleagues.

This diagram (overleaf) maps out the different transition points and potential stressors in an individual's life.



Message 4: Knowing what support is available to all employees

This includes (dependent on service provision):

- Employee assistance programs (EAPs)
- Health promotion
- Peer and social support
- Support for transitioning into the sector during recruitment and training
- Support for personal development and role maintenance
- Support for traumatic reactions
- Support for transition into retirement and retirement planning

Message 5: Where to find help?

The Fire Fighters Charity's offer

The offer of support from the charity is available to all green and grey book staff, and their dependents, including those retired from fire service employment. The charity is there to support you to take a proactive approach to your health and wellbeing at important life stages. Their offer is bespoke and ranges from financial advice, wellbeing workshops and coaching, rehabilitation after a sprained ankle, mental health support following bereavement, through to nursing beds for support to family members/dependents after a significant injury. They also offer whole-family interventions or respite

as well as a helpline and MyFFC which is an online support tool to help those enquiring about support to navigate to the right source of support.

Within your service

There will be a range of services and processes (both formal and informal) to support you to manage your wellbeing. The first step is recognising any individual or team needs whilst also exploring and understanding what is in place locally to you.

Within your peer and social support system

This research report continues to highlight the benefits of engaging with your peers and social networks to help you manage your wellbeing especially during periods of stress and transition.

Contact Rowena Hill for further information on this briefing: rowena.hill@ntu.ac.uk

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March 2023