



Briefing from Council meeting held on 24 September 2013

The meeting was Chaired by Diana Kloss and the following items discussed:

- **Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) / Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) proposed single organisation**

Presentation by Dr Richard Heron, President-Elect, Faculty of Occupational Medicine

It was noted that the FOM / SOM were exploring the possibility of creating a single organisation. The purpose was to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the working age population, employers and occupational health providers and to create a single voice for occupational health in the UK and internationally.

Consultation with both organisations' members was on-going and voting would take place in August 2014. If a majority were in agreement, implementation would take place in 2015. Further information on the single organisation could be found on the following website:

<http://singleorg.co.uk>

- **Proposed Health and Work Service, Department for Work and Pensions**

Presentation by Dr Bill Gunnyeon, Chief Medical Adviser, DWP

It was noted that on 17 January 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions published "Fitness for Work – The Government response to "Health at Work – an independent review of sickness absence". The following key measures were proposed:

- A state-funded health and work assessment and advisory service from 2014 to be funded through the abolition of the Percentage Threshold Scheme
- Access to Universal Job Match for those requiring job changes
- Retention of tax relief on Employee Assistance Programmes
- Creation of tax incentives for employer funded health interventions recommended by the Health and Work Service, capped at £500 per employee per annum
- The abolition of SSP record keeping requirements
- Publication of revised fit note guidance

The benefits of the new approach, and early assessment, would be to reduce the numbers falling onto long term welfare benefits, improving their long-term health and financial outcomes and saving the taxpayer £50m per annum. Helping employees to return to work more quickly would save employers up to £160m per year and boost economic output by up to £900m per annum.

Work currently in progress is to ensure that this novel approach was delivered correctly. Assessment for most would be via telephone, with face-to-face meetings for complex cases. It would be necessary to sort out work and health issues in parallel with a return to work plan. Advice would come from all categories of occupational health practitioners and it was hoped that the service

would be introduced by the end of 2014. It was noted that funding for the existing telephone advice line had been extended until the new service was operational.

- **Council strategy and business plan**

It was noted that the business plan had been discussed at length at the Board Meeting prior to the Council meeting and would be submitted to the Council meeting in February 2014.

- **Governance Policy**

A draft governance policy had been circulated to Council and approved by Council.

- **Conflict of interest policy**

A conflict of interest policy had been circulated to Council, which was approved. It was also agreed that Board Members would be asked sign and submit the Conflict of Interest form to the secretariat.

- **Financial report**

A financial report had been circulated to Council. It was noted that an accountant would be approached with the view that they may be able to provide accountancy services to the Council.

Financial contributions from member organisations were discussed. It was noted that some organisations had, following the request for donations, kindly made donations to the Council for Work and Health, and the Chair extended thanks to those organisations on behalf of the Council.

Consideration was given to the fact that there might be a need for an annual subscription from members and this would be discussed further at the next meeting.

- **Update on Council projects**

- **To consider a College for Work and Health**

No further meetings / teleconferences had taken place. Further details would follow in due course.

- **Occupational Health workforce planning group**

A draft paper had been submitted to Council in May 2013 with a request for comments, which had been received and reviewed.

The working group had requested the following:

- Council is asked to note progress to date and the plans for the next 15 months.
- Council members are invited to ensure that the project is given the widest possible publicity amongst stakeholders.
- Significant pledges have been made by individual organisations to the project budget, including Council members and non-members. Further pledges to bridge the funding gap from Council members would be valued. In the absence of monetary pledges, Council members may be able to pledge time or premises as a resource.

It was noted that the estimated cost of this part of the project was £18k and £13k had so far been received.

- **Training and Qualifications for allied health professionals**

It was reported that the AHP Advisory Fitness for Work Report would be launched in Scotland on 2 October 2013. Congratulations were extended to all involved with the project for the work they had put into the report.

- **Communications update**

It was noted that following a request to all member organisations for a voluntary donation, the total pledged now stood at £5500. Thanks were extended to those organisations and it was noted that Council funding would be considered at the next meet.

- **Website report**

It was noted that the website was being updated in real time as corrections and updates were received from members.

It was agreed that the Council would not publicise external events on the website, but only events organised by member organisations. However, if the event may be of possible interest to Council members, information would be circulated to the Council members.

- **NICE Working Group on Workplace policy and management practices to improve the health of employees**

It was noted that the Chair of Council was a member of the above working group. NICE had been asked by the Department of Health to develop public health guidance on 'Workplace policy and management practices to improve the health of employees'. A series of evidence reviews and an economic analysis were being conducted to address the key questions set out in the scope. Members of Council were asked to respond to NICE's call for evidence.

- **Evaluation of the Fit Note project (Rob Hampton)**

Council was informed that the project currently taking place in Leicestershire, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Fit Note, hoped to submit a final report at the end of 2013. Feedback received to date indicated that three out of four organisations approached to participate had opted out of the project, however they had managed to recruit 20 organisations, which was sufficient. It was also noted that the two guidance letters, currently on the Council's website, had not been deemed by most organisations to be of significant assistance.