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WORKFORCE RISK BRIEFING · WEEK COMMENCING 26 OCTOBER 2026 · KEEP BRITAIN WORKING

Keep Britain Working and the questions boards should ask now

An absence total tells a board how much working time has been lost. It cannot, on its own, explain whether employees received timely support or whether a return to work lasted.

A practical follow-up to our October Topical Brief, *Workforce health: what boards should measure next*: how leadership teams can test their own support arrangements against the direction set by the September Keep Britain Working update.

WHAT THIS BRIEFING COVERS

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| 01 What the update says | 02 The SWS perspective | 03 Five questions |
| 04 Biological measurement | 05 A practical next step | 06 Sources |

1 pathway

TO REVIEW FROM THE
EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE

6 months

PROPOSED POINT FOR
MEASURING SUSTAINED RETURN

5 questions

FOR THE NEXT
LEADERSHIP MEETING



SECTION 01 · WHAT THE UPDATE SAYS

Reading the September update

That distinction should shape how leaders read the September Keep Britain Working update. For SWS, the practical question is whether workforce reporting gives decision-makers enough information to improve support before problems become prolonged.

Published on 23 September 2026 by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business and Trade and the Department of Health and Social Care, the update describes a proposed Workplace Health System with three connected elements: better, more inclusive workplaces; accessible workplace health provision; and trusted intelligence. Vanguard employers, providers and places are developing and testing the approach. It is a programme under development, rather than evidence of a completed national rollout.^[1, 2]

The report places emphasis on keeping people in work, coordinating support and assessing sustained return, which it proposes to measure at six months rather than on the first day back. Its national economic estimates should not be treated as a forecast of savings for an individual employer.^[2]

SECTION 02 · THE SWS PERSPECTIVE

Start with the decisions, then test the reporting

Our recommendation is to begin with the decisions a board needs to make, then examine whether existing reporting can support those decisions.

A useful review would follow an employee's route through support. How is a concern raised? Who responds? Can a manager arrange appropriate help? When several services are involved, who checks that the handovers work?

KEY INSIGHT

An employer may have occupational health, an employee assistance programme and a wellbeing calendar, yet still be unable to answer those questions.

Reviewing the connections between services is a practical starting point.



SECTION 03 · FIVE QUESTIONS

Five questions for the next leadership meeting

- 01 Can employees raise health-related barriers with confidence that the response will be supportive?
- 02 How long does it take to move from a concern to appropriate support?
- 03 Who coordinates agreed adjustments and checks whether they are helping?
- 04 Do we know whether people remain successfully in work after returning?
- 05 What action has changed because of the information we collect?

These are SWS recommendations for discussion. They are not a new statutory checklist.

SECTION 04 · WHERE BIOLOGICAL MEASUREMENT FITS

Measurement with a clear purpose

SWS combines structured self-reporting with selected biological measurements to support informed review and ongoing monitoring. The purpose is to support informed questions and proportionate action, alongside attention to workload, management practice and workplace adjustments. Any measurement must have a clear purpose, appropriate consent and evidence that supports its interpretation.

Individual health information remains confidential; organisations may receive appropriately anonymised or aggregated workforce-level insights, subject to suitable privacy safeguards. Those safeguards include care to avoid identifying individuals in small teams.

Established by the source

A proposed three-part Workplace Health System, developed and tested with Vanguards, with sustained return measured at six months.

Not addressed

The update does not mention biological measurement. It does not validate SWS tools or establish a government partnership.

Still to test

No source here shows that biological testing predicts absence or burnout. Any pilot should test added value against current practice.



SECTION 05 · A PRACTICAL NEXT STEP

Review one support pathway

Choose one existing support pathway and review it from the employee's perspective. Identify the delays, unclear responsibilities and information gaps. Agree what improvement would look like before adding another service or measure.

SECTION 06 · SOURCES

Original sources

- [1] Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Business and Trade and Department of Health and Social Care. *Keep Britain Working review update: a national growth opportunity, September 2026*. GOV.UK publication page. Published 23 September 2026; last updated 9 October 2026 (English audio, BSL and Easy Read versions added). gov.uk/government/publications/keep-britain-working-review-update-a-national-growth-opportunity-september-2026
- [2] *Keep Britain Working: a national growth opportunity, September 2026*. Full report (HTML). gov.uk/.../keep-britain-working-a-national-growth-opportunity-september-2026

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Discuss your workforce reporting with SWS

Book a 45-minute discovery call about what your organisation's reporting can and cannot show.

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calendly.com/jay-strategic-wellness/45min