



UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association

**The evolution of employee  
assistance: investigating the  
use, impact and reach of  
EAPs in today's organisations**

## Foreword

Whether we choose to look at research from the CIPD, CBI or the TUC, the evidence is clear: mental health issues are a major cause of sickness absence among the UK's workforce.

Add to this the impact of presenteeism as a result of mental ill health, where individuals are prepared to come into the workplace even though they're not mentally fit to work, and the threat to performance and productivity in today's workplaces becomes even clearer.

Many organisations have already recognised that one of the most effective ways to respond to this threat is through the implementation of an employee counselling service or an employee assistance programme (EAP). Solutions such as this have been proven to help people identify and cope with the personal or work-related issues that are at the root of their distress, as has been evidenced in studies from the Health & Safety Executive. Here, EAPs have been a key factor in reducing sickness absence, helped to improve mental wellbeing and contributed to the bottom line in terms of organisational productivity.

This new research from the UK Employee Assistance Professional Association in partnership with Lancaster University's The Work Foundation further highlights the importance of EAPs in delivering a personal and professional source of support that is independent from the organisation and can effectively support an employer's wider health and wellbeing strategy.

The evidence is that EAPs work. Yet to become more effective, particularly in the turbulent and uncertain political and economic environment we live and work in today, EAP providers have a huge opportunity to become a more effective wellbeing partner by addressing the cultural and structural workplace issues that contribute to sickness absence and presenteeism.

EAPs should look to change their approach and take a more in-depth look at an organisation's culture and the factors that are affecting mental health and wellbeing, enabling employers to accurately identify the problems in their workplace and take steps to prevent them.

Although EAPs are already successfully helping individuals to cope, they need to proactively support the organisation, whether it's tackling a culture of long hours, the glass ceiling or a hotspot of bullying and harassment, and give employers the data, resources and support to bring down these barriers to performance and productivity.

### Professor Sir Cary Cooper, CBE

50th Anniversary Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Manchester Business School, President of the CIPD, President of the British Academy of Management, President of RELATE, President of the Institute of Welfare and Honorary Member of the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association



## Introduction

We can all agree that working lives have changed dramatically over the past 10 years. The question is, has the understanding and support from employers kept up with the pace?

Digitally-enhanced working is faster, more connected, mobile and flexible. And also more demanding, more changeable and more dependent on resilient employees.

Any disruption to the slick, high-speed flow of operations is felt more keenly than ever before by both employer and employee. If we're not plugged in and not in the loop, then we're suddenly an obstacle.

So all the blips of everyday life, the illnesses, financial worries, relationship fall-outs, workplace problems, family duties - let alone the potential for personal tragedy - are much harder to deal with, lead to more intense stress and sense of a loss of control.

Every employee needs a release valve for the pressure of this situation. Which is why Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), the provision of confidential, professional and independent advice, is gaining in significance as a standard part of workplace life.

Or is it? The UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association wanted to find out how the use of EAPs among UK organisations is evolving. Why are EAPs being used and how? Do organisations know how to get the most from their EAP?

This report provides a summary of the research findings. More detailed findings and discussion of the study conducted by Lancaster University's The Work Foundation, is available in the full report, *Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs): Supporting good work for UK employers?*

A major finding, from our perspective, is that EAPs are typically being used in a limited way - as the fallback option for staff who have a crisis. EAPs should be a major platform for supporting wellbeing and resilience in our new world of work, coaching people to feel better able to cope, to be happier and more productive.

As with health and wellbeing initiatives in general, employers are at a crossroads. Some will limit themselves to token offerings which provide the necessary 'hygiene factor'. Others will see the real organisational benefits - in performance, engagement and productivity - from a commitment to employee wellbeing by looking closely at the hard evidence and return-on-investment from a proactive use of EAPs and related initiatives.

**Andrew Kinder, UK EAPA Chair**  
**Paul Roberts, UK EAPA Board Member and Project Lead**

## Summary of key findings

- EAPs are most commonly being used by employers for 'soft' business reasons, as part of broader health and wellbeing offerings, and in order to be perceived as a 'good' employer.
- Just 9% of HR manager respondents in the research had attempted to make a 'hard' evaluation of implementing an EAP in terms of a cost utility benefit or return on investment via the impact on sickness absence, productivity, performance or engagement. The most common reason for this was a lack of pressure from senior executives, with the EAP considered to be simply be the 'right thing' to offer. There is a fundamental perception of EAPs as a 'cost-effective' or 'far less expensive' option than other wellbeing improvement schemes.
- 67% say they use an EAP as part of the organisation's health and wellbeing plan. Around half of HR managers say an EAP had been introduced as a way to reduce organisational sickness absence; 48% to provide staff with support for particular issues such as debt or relationship issues; 33% to improve productivity.
- EAPs are perceived as important in delivering a personal and professional source of support that, crucially, is independent from the organisation and can be relied on to be confidential.
- The most frequent method of contacting an EAP is through telephone helplines (84%); 16% access the EAP online.
- The average usage of EAP services by employees is 5%. 22% of HR managers say EAP utilisation had increased according to their reports; 6% say levels have decreased; 72% that use hasn't really changed.
- HR managers believe there continues to be a stigma associated with the EAP, as a counselling service primarily for staff with mental health issues, and this limits the use of the wider EAP service and taints attitudes to its uses and role.
- Low-level promotion of EAPs and the scope of services available is thought to be restricting use of services for anything other than crises and situations which have already reached a serious stage - limiting the full value and effectiveness of the service to the organisation.
- Managers say there should be more regular and proactive promotion of the EAP and more prominence in team meetings, not solely through the one-off staff induction, reactively in return-to-work letters or via posters.
- 31% admitted there had been no attempt to evaluate the quality or impact of the EAP (9% didn't know whether there was any evaluation). The majority of evaluation is being carried out through quarterly review meetings with the EAP provider and staff survey responses.
- Among organisations that don't use an EAP, the main reasons are a lack of information on the services (44%), the use of other wellbeing initiatives instead (33%) and because of cost (22%). Evidence of cost-effectiveness and impact on wellbeing were said to be the most important factors in encouraging these employers to implement an EAP in future.
- The most common uses of an EAP among the surveyed organisations are for depression (57%), and coping with family events (56%). Workplace issues are less reported - difficulties with line managers (20%), workplace restructure (15%), bullying (6%).
- EAPs are an important resource for managers looking for support. In the research, 68% say it's being used by managers asking for support on how to manage workplace issues, for management consultation (49%) and management information on employee and organisational interventions (44%).
- HR managers point to the need for a future UK benchmark of EAP providers to help their organisation make more informed judgments of EAP value and quality.

## Research background

In 2016 the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association commissioned Lancaster University's The Work Foundation (TWF) to conduct a study into the EAP market in the UK, with the aim of understanding the reach of the market and trends within it, as well as investigating the return on investment (ROI) for EAPs. The research survey and interviews were conducted in August and September 2016.

The research was conducted via an online survey of 78 HR managers and industry professionals to determine the use, utility and value of EAPs, as well as the barriers to take-up of those organisations that do not have a programme in place. The online survey investigated the services provided by EAPs, why organisations invested in them (and in a particular provider) as well as the most common reasons for EAP use. It also asked questions regarding EAP promotion, how and if they measure the quality of EAP services, and whether any financial calculations of cost-effectiveness or return if investment are undertaken.

In-depth telephone interviews were also conducted with 10 HR managers on their experience and perspectives of EAPs, collecting their views on the current utilisation and value of EAPs, if and how they measure their EAP (employee wellbeing and financial ROI) and how they think use of their EAP can be improved.

## Why invest in an EAP?

Of the organisations participating in the online survey, 88% (69) used an EAP. But when it comes to the reasons why they invested in an EAP, the responses were varied:

- Part of our organisation's health and wellbeing plan (67%)
- A way to reduce sickness absence (49%)
- A way to support staff with particular issues (48%)
- To improve productivity (33%)



It is also about us being a caring organisation, we do care about our staff in the organisation, we care about their wellbeing and we want to be able to support them with the issues that they may be facing in their day to day lives.

According to the HR managers interviewed as part of this study, many considered an EAP to be 'good employment practice' to respond to the concerns, worries or questions that an employer may not be able to answer, or which an employee may not want to share with their employer.



I think the word on the street is and always has been is that you really have to have one. If you don't then your organisation will be in trouble.

Many also highlighted that an EAP was part of a wellbeing strategy that organisations were implementing. However, it is important to note that EAPs are often one component of an organisation's health and wellbeing strategy, being implemented alongside, for example, healthy eating initiatives, resilience training, and equality, diversity and inclusion practices.

EAPs' role in sickness absence prevention or reduction was discussed by a majority of interviewees. Managers explained their concerns about levels of sickness absence rates and referred to examples of good practice where EAPs had been implemented to help reduce this.



Sometimes staff do not want to discuss their personal matters internally, so the EAP gives them that service, that place to go, where they can be anonymous and discuss their problems.

Other reasons to invest in an EAP include as a result of structural change occurring in an organisation, with the EAP offering employees access to an external service to discuss concerns that may impact on their health and wellbeing. One participant cited their EAP investment was a result of input from their Trade Union that suggested EAPs would be a valuable support mechanism for staff, and a number of organisations insisted that, as a service, EAPs were so valuable that organisations would be in trouble if they did not offer one.

## EAP value to the organisation



HR managers were asked about their opinion of the value and benefit of the EAP to employees. The most common response here was that an EAP offered an independent and confidential source of support, something that was external to HR and other managers, and that staff could receive high quality personal and professional support that those internal to the organisation may not be able to offer.

You never know that you really need it until the time comes that you need it... It is probably one of the best wellbeing programmes that we have, but whether anybody else feel like that depends on whether they have needed to use it I guess.

There was a perception among respondents that employees saw the EAP as an 'insurance policy' or a 'back-up' for when an issue arose, and would use it if they knew it was there. In this sense, managers reported that they thought, for the majority of employees, an EAP was of little perceived importance. However, anecdotal feedback suggested that once the service had been used, it was of great value.



Some HR managers reported value in the sense of the different modes of service delivery provided by EAPs because not all employees were comfortable using the phone, resulting in the website or online discussions being extremely valuable.

I think that if you look across the staff as a whole and come up with an average view of the importance of an EAP, then I would think that is quite low. But I think for those individuals who need support, but for that smaller group, then I think it has been vitally important, especially for those who have needed signposting to further professional resources.

## EAP service provision

The majority of organisations surveyed (84%) have 'comprehensive' EAPs in place, which include telephone services, on-line services and face-to-face counselling. One-quarter (23%) have an EAP telephone helpline and online services in place, with a number of respondents confirming they have the option to pay for additional face-to-face counselling, if it was required.

A small number of organisations opted solely for telephone counselling (14%) and even fewer (6%) had an EAP as part of their insurance policy. The most frequent methods of contacting an EAP are through telephone helplines (84%), with 16% accessing the EAP online.

When it comes to specific services available as part of their EAP, respondents reported: face-to-face counselling (92%), structured telephone counselling (83%), and online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) (34%). Other information and guidance was also provided by a majority of EAPs, including: emotional, work-life and workplace issues (93%); money and debt advice (92%); legal information/guidance (86%); health advice (80%) and child and elderly care information (76%).



The beauty of the service is that we have an online facility, so if you are in the office and you can't pick up the phone you can do an online chat which is completely confidential, and they have strengthened this in the course of our contract... you can do that online with the counsellor, nobody around you knows what is going on, and you are getting some immediate support.

Many reasons were provided for why different types of EAPs were chosen, and why there may be different methods of EAP contact. Most organisations chose their provision option on the ability to access services in a range of ways, especially as employees in some organisations, for example, may not always have a regular digital connection. Offering a wide-range of services and channels to access them was viewed as providing the 'best support' to employees. Respondents also commented on the immediacy of the response provided due to having a range of service options, highlighting that the ability to speak to a qualified professional at any time of the day as a key decision maker when selecting an EAP provider.

Interviews also indicated that the different modes of service provision could also serve different purposes; a number of respondents commented that their online services were focussed on the health and wellbeing aspects of the EAP, whereas the telephone service could cover a range of topics.

### EAP usage rates



We have no evidence or correlation to say that just because the service use is higher, it doesn't mean that you have lots of issues in your organisation, which is what I originally thought, but it could mean that people are aware that the service is there and so are using it.

Respondents reported a large degree of difference when it comes to EAP usage, with levels ranging between 2.5% and 16%. A number of respondents acknowledged that this may not reflect true usage, as in some cases there were known incidents when an employee had used the service more than once.

Many managers were concerned their EAP was not used enough, and organisations where the use was higher highlighted the importance of having an EAP, as it was evidently filling a wellbeing gap.

Respondents were asked how their current EAP usage compared to previous years; 6% indicated that EAP use had reduced, 22% reported that EAP had increased and 72% highlighted that their usage levels had not really changed.

Reasons behind changes in EAP usage occur for a number of reasons. Most respondents cited that because you can never know exactly what is happening in an employee's personal life, you can never predict usage. A number of managers also noted that EAP use naturally changes when a new programme has been introduced which correlates to an increase in service promotion. Interviewees also speculated why employees did not use the EAP, believing that employees either don't have issues they want to discuss or confide to anyone in or they did not know they actually needed the service.



## Why some companies choose not to invest in EAPs

12% of organisations surveyed admitted to not investing in an EAP. The most common reason for this was a lack of information about EAPs (44%), followed by the organisations already using other wellbeing practices or initiatives (33%). One in five respondents (22%) cited cost as a reason for not having an EAP and when asked what might persuade them to implement a programme, respondents reported that evidence of their effectiveness was clearly needed, that is their financial cost-effectiveness (33%) and evidence that they improve wellbeing and productivity (33%).

## EAP presenting issues

EAPs are workplace programmes that support employees to address work or non-work related issues that can have an impact on organisational and employee productivity. When the research questioned HR managers what the top issues are that cause their employees to contact their EAP, workplace stress was the most common (70%). Other presenting issues included depression (57%), family events (56%), difficulties with line managers (20%), workplace restructure (15%) and bullying (6%).

Managers commented that reporting the top presenting issue is challenging because the issues are dependent on what is happening at the organisation or in the individual's private life. Additionally, an employee may contact their EAP without knowing the key issue they require support with, or they may be focussing on the wrong problem causing their underlying anxiety.

When it comes to reporting on presenting issues, some managers explained that they label all non-work issues as personal, whereas others broke down this category into individual issues, with the most frequently reported as bereavement, divorce, relationship problems and concerns with child management. This can be further clouded as these issues could come under the umbrella of 'personal stress', another category for contacting the EAP.



Reporting the top three issues can be misleading, because some people will say right up-front that the issue is work related, when in fact when it is uncovered it actually turns out to be a relationship issue, maybe sort of socially or you know relationships within the family...

## EAPs and Occupational Health

Occupational Health (OH) was identified by many respondents as another service to help organisations improve wellbeing. In the online survey and in-depth interviews, there was a mixed reaction regarding the relationship between OH and EAPs.

For some there was a good relationship, where both services would refer clients to the other, if they believed it would be beneficial to the individual, and in some organisations, all the different services that have been implemented to promote wellbeing meet to discuss how their profile could be improved, highlighting a proactive approach to service delivery.

The managers interviewed as part of the study were often keen to highlight that EAPs offer something more distinct than OH, which is why they could justify having both.

EAPs provided the confidential help for work and non-work issues, and the service was instant, whereas during the research interviews, OH was often cited as a managerial referral service to help those on long-term sickness absence to discuss returning to work, workplace adjustments and fitness for work tests.

## The role of line managers in EAP provision



There is also a specific area, a dedicated part for managers, so if there is a manager and they are dealing with a tricky situation, so for example, they are dealing with a redundancy or dealing with a member of staff who is suffering with mental health issues, there is a dedicated management support section which they can access as well.



There is absolutely a role that line managers can play, and we are finding that to be increasingly important. It can still get better, and there is still room for improvement...

Line managers have an important role in organisations to develop a positive employment relationship with those who report to them, to assist in employee personal development and to be aware of the health and wellbeing of those they manage. As part of this role, it pays for managers to be aware of their EAP.

The research indicated that EAPs are an important resource for managerial information, where managers can contact an EAP to ask for support regarding how to manage issues in the workplace (68%), management consultation (49%) and management information on employee and organisational interventions (44%).

This specific manager service was highlighted as a welcome attribute to EAP services and in some cases the EAP provider also came into the organisation to provide specific training for managers in relation to, for example, managing employees with mental health issues.

Managers also identified line managers as an important channel to promote the EAP because of their working relationship with employees, as well as the opportunity they have to recognise that there is an issue which enables them to communicate the EAP to their employee.

As valuable as line managers are to promote the EAP, HR managers did note the limitations of this. In one instance a line manager was asked to hand out leaflets to team members, but instead these were left on a table for employees to take, if they wanted. Another participant highlighted that although line managers were in the prime position for promotion, they had extensive workloads and that adding an extra task was not ideal, especially if they are not familiar with the latest EAP services on offer or have not had line management training to recognise when employees may be in need of help.

## EAP promotion and employee communication

One of the commonly cited reasons why employees did not utilise their EAP was due, in some way, to service promotion, particularly when employees were not aware of the EAP or the scope of services and support on offer.

Respondents observed that the value of EAPs could be improved and strengthened if EAPs were better promoted and communicated across organisations. Where managers reported their usage was low, a major component of this was an employee's knowledge of what an EAP is. Some managers saw this as a two-way process, however, recognising that even where EAPs are promoted, staff may not read communications or, in some cases, might misunderstand them.

There are a number of ways EAP services are promoted within organisations. 80% of respondents indicated that the intranet and HR were the two main approaches taken to promote the EAP. Posters (67%) and during new staff inductions (63%) were also common, with promotion through staff newsletters (45%) and the Trade Union (29%) being the least utilised approaches to promotion. Other methods suggested by survey respondents included promotion via podcasts and webinars, leaflets, wallet cards and provider presentations. Managers noted the importance of ensuring that EAP information is not hidden behind many other internal screens on intranet sites and should be made more prominent.

The survey and interview data highlights that employers need EAP providers to take a more proactive role in promoting the service in organisations. HR managers suggests this could occur through presentations at health and wellbeing days, delivering roadshows to promote the EAP services to new and different audiences. It was clear that managers wanted more out of their EAP providers in terms of promotion, but they also wanted the 'right' people to promote it – providers who are engaging and can inspire people to use the service.



There really is a joint responsibility between the employer and the EAP to promote it. The employer commissions the service and if they want to get the best value from it then they do need to promote it. But equally the EAP need to promote it, to justify their existence.



...for me the EAP is more than just purely counselling. I do think that the EAP can be tarnished with a counselling brush, and I do think that is to do with how the service is promoted. So I do my absolute utmost to ensure the employees know that there are distinct aspects to EAPs and that it is not purely about counselling.

HR managers also highlighted difficulties in positioning EAPs as more than a support line for those with mental health issues and offering solely counselling solutions. They acknowledged that the strong connection between EAPs and mental health was evident, with HR managers inferring that the EAP was often mentioned when employees were about to take 'sick-time off', and realised that they 'may not get to promote the other services as much as they would like'.

Ideas for improving EAP promotion included regularly and proactively promoting the service, rather than being purely reactive. For example, managers highlighted that the EAP number was in return to work letters after a period of sickness absence, but recognised that more should be done before an employee was absent, reminding employees of the EAP regularly rather than as a one-off at staff inductions. They recommend that EAPs should be given more prominence in team meetings and talked about instead of simply displaying posters around the building.

The regularity of reminders was often discussed, with one HR Manager observing she now has the EAP number and a short blurb around EAP service provision in her email signature. One interviewee discussed the role of 'wellbeing champions' – members of staff interested in wellbeing to promote wellbeing initiatives across the organisational service areas – to improve the promotion of EAPs. Respondents also acknowledged that the EAP 'message' had to be accessible for 'harder to reach staff', including those who hot-desk, work flexible hours, who do not work in an office and those who work from home, but who are still eligible for support from an EAP.

## EAP Evaluation



We probably don't evaluate our EAP properly, we do monitor the usage, but this really isn't an evaluation... We can only measure how important and how good the service is to our employees by our usage figures, and I get these from my provider monthly... and when people want to know what the usage is then I can tell them. They give me everything that I ask for.

60% of respondents admitted they evaluate the impact of their EAP, 31% indicated they did not measure the quality, and 9% did not know. There were a number of methods through which organisational measured service quality, the most common being staff ratings (59%), the number of closed cases (56%) and sickness absence (37%).

Other methods of EAP evaluation include quarterly meetings with providers to discuss performance and programme improvements, reviewing usage reports across different modes of service provision (face-to-face, telephone and website use). One organisation even measured the retention of staff who had used the service.

The majority of those interviewed as part of the research reported that any evaluation was probably more 'ad-hoc' in its approach, and was heavily reliant in the quarterly feedback forms and meetings that they had with their service provider. HR managers indicated that usage reports could be tailored to individual organisations on request of specific information, which usually included statistics on service use, mode of use (for example, if the EAP was accessed from the intranet, the area of the website they had used, or the areas of the website accessed most frequently), gender, age, organisational division and whether follow-ups were necessary.

The EAP was also evaluated by the feedback forms that providers ask service users to complete after an intervention, but there is a question regarding how reliably participants would answer these questions.

When asked whether organisations had considered undertaking their own evaluation, HR managers said that although it would be helpful to see what employees thought of the service and whether it could be improved, asking employees to evaluate the service was difficult because the topic was sensitive in its nature, and there could be a breach in the confidential nature of the service as only those who have used the services would be able to answer.

Anecdotal feedback was the main way through which HR managers were able to find out what employees thought of the EAP service and this was offered as some form of organisational evaluation. Managers found that users were often happy to report when they had experienced a positive service from the EAP, which often happened through day-to-day conversations. In some cases, knowing that employees had had a positive experience was a helpful way to promote the service to others.



There are a number of specific questions that they (the EAP) ask those who have used the service. These include, did the EAP help you? Did you feel better at the end of the sessions? Do you feel better enough to carry on working? Did using the EAP enable you to carry on working without going off sick? So we get a lot of evidence from these questions which are self-reported from those who use it.



We have some anecdotal feedback from people who have actually accessed the programme, so if they have had a good experience, then occasionally they would come to us and say that they have found this really good and useful. We certainly encourage this because it helps us to know that the EAP is providing the right service, and what the staff need from the programme.

## Assessing the return on investment of EAPs

Only 9% of respondents admitted to conducting a return on investment analysis of their EAP. 86% had not and 5% did not know.



No we don't do financial evaluations. We don't have to justify the EAP usage as everybody sees it as something, as a benefit if you like for staff to access, and it has never really been questioned at all since it has been here...the EAP is seen as an essential commodity for staff...it's a question of the value for the people that use it.



Do we check that we are getting an ROI? No. Because I think that you will find that if you speak to anybody, finding an ROI for wellbeing programmes is very difficult. You can resort to the method that if you have certain things in place then theoretically you are saving x amount of money from people not going off sick, but that is a very difficult thing to do... I would love to say what an ROI is, but there is no real way to be able to measure that at the moment that is robust enough to be meaningful.

Interviews with HR managers provided greater insight into the importance – or seemingly lack of importance – of conducting an economic evaluation of EAPs in organisations. None of those interviewed conducted any financial evaluation, and there were a variety of responses as to why this was the case. The most common reason was that managers were under no pressure by their senior managers or finance directors to provide evidence of cost-effectiveness of return on investment. In many cases having an EAP was seen as the 'right thing to do', and cost was therefore not a point of interest.

For some HR managers the difficulties in identifying a robust and meaningful methodology to measure return on investment were acknowledged.

If assumptions regarding return on investment needed to be made, HR managers frequently spoke about using sickness absence data as an indication of improved health and wellbeing, alongside engagement survey findings. One manager described how feedback from their provider indicated that savings had been made as they would have reported in their usage reports 'x number of staff used this service, and x said that they would not have to take sickness absence because they had used the service'.

Although the organisations did not conduct any financial evaluations, phrases such as 'we use EAPs because they are cost-effective', or 'EAPs are cheap' were often cited as benefits to the service. When questioned how this could be when no financial evaluation had been undertaken, responses included:

- EAPs are cheaper in comparison to other talking therapies the organisation considered: "If we were going to provide this talking therapy differently, it would cost a lot more, and that is how I can say it is cost-effective. So it is not about how much we could have saved in sickness absence, it is more about thinking how we could have provided the service differently, and I see it as cost-effective in that way."

- HR Managers had negotiated a cheaper contract price in their latest round of EAP procurement: "I think for me, because I have now secured for our future contract something that is £7000 cheaper from what we had in the previous three years, with additional services added (it is cost-effective). I am happy that we have got really good value for money for the next season of the contract."

- The EAP is cheaper than the services that organisations had for wellbeing improvement previously: "I think it is actually a really cheap service. If you compare it to what we had in place previously then this is actually far less expensive."

- The costs of EAPs are actually very minimal per employee for the level of service they provide: "I see it as an essential commodity, and you know, it's not going to be stupid money. The per head cost is minimal for the service that is provided. And therefore it is not really a question about money, but the value for the staff that use it."



Obviously sickness absence has reduced, but we can't just attribute that to an EAP. We can lump it in with all our strategies... but it is very difficult to pin something down to one specific area.

Some HR managers argued that return on investment could not be calculated because there was no real way of knowing that any changes in sickness absence, wellbeing or engagement scores that had been captured by any EAP provider data or internal staff data collection methods. In many cases, the EAP was one of a number of measures introduced to improve employee wellbeing so any correlations may not be truly representative of the role of the EAP.

When questioned about financial evaluation, a number of HR managers indicated this was something that could be done, or should be done in the future, especially as other organisational programmes were more comprehensively evaluated. One manager, for example, recognised that conducting a cost-benefit analysis would make a stronger business case for EAPs and help their organisation consider other EAP providers. However, they acknowledged that even if that happened, the CEO would still insist that having an EAP was not data or financially driven, but a service that was needed to help staff when they wanted to use it.

## The future for EAPs in today's organisations

HR managers were asked to consider their future use of EAPs, in terms of whether they may change their EAP service provider and whether they have considered cancelling their EAP altogether.

Nearly half (44%) of respondents admitted they had considered changing EAP provider although a slightly higher number (49%) reported they would not want to change their provider.

Reasons why organisations may want to change providers focus on value for money. Managers insisted this was not purely based on the cost of the service and also included the level and quality of service received.

The HR manager's relationship with their account manager was critical in ensuring positive service delivery. Just under two-thirds (63%) of respondents had regular contact with their account manager (63%) and the remaining one-third (29%) did not. Interviewees highlighted that if account managers have too many clients to cover then service quality is reduced and contact with the EAP will become more difficult.

When discussing whether an organisation had ever considered cancelling their EAP service, 16% indicated they would, 79% wanted to keep the service, while 5% did not know. The most common response for considering cancelling the EAP was as a result of limited utilisation.

Whilst all interviewees indicated they were likely to keep their EAP in the future, respondents reiterated the importance that the service was cost-effective, provided value for money, and that there was a strong business case for having one. Others commented that providing the service in the future indicates that the organisation has a strong well-being component and that they can be viewed as a 'good employer'.

A few managers also described that if the EAP was taken away, there would be a gap in the organisation's responsibility to help maintain an employee wellbeing and another service would have to be implemented to provide a similar service. ■

For more information on UK EAPA or this research study, please contact:

UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association,  
PO Box 7966  
Derby DE1 0XP

info@eapa.org.uk  
www.eapa.org.uk  
@uk\_eapa

The UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association is the body that represents the interests of professionals concerned with employee assistance, psychological health and wellbeing in the UK. We work to promote the highest standards of EAP practice and the continuing development of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and services in the UK.

There are lots of EAP resources to download free-of-charge at [www.eapa.org.uk](http://www.eapa.org.uk), including:

- **UK EAPA Standards Framework** – a resource for EAP providers and clients
- **Counsellors' Guide to working with EAPs** – discusses the clinical and commercial aspects of working with EAPs
- **EAP Buyers' Guide** – advice for those commissioning a new or reviewing their existing EAP
- **EAP Guidelines** – comprehensive information on EAP commissioning, delivery and evaluation
- **Research Summary**: the effectiveness of EAP counselling interventions – key findings from EAPA research commissioned from CORE-IMS

You can also download issues of the UK EAPA newsletters and see the latest Association news.