



UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association

Employee Assistance Programmes: **a buyer's guide**

1.0 Foreword

A number of factors can support or sabotage the ability of employees to work at their full potential. Personal and family relationship issues, conflict among colleagues, difficulties with managers, depression and other psychological conditions, substance abuse, financial issues, legal problems, and child or elder care needs are just some of the factors that people need to deal with on a daily basis.

So, as the line between an individual's personal and professional lives becomes increasingly blurred, organisations have accepted and acknowledged their role in working with employees to help them address, discuss and resolve personal and professional issues that may affect their performance at work. After all, for many employers, a happy worker is a productive worker and, based on this, it is worthwhile investing in an employee's health and wellbeing.

Since they were first introduced to the UK in the 1980s, employee assistance programmes (EAPs) have become an effective way for employers to improve or maintain the healthy functioning of the workplace. Over the years EAPs have become an integral tool in an organisation's attempts to engage its workforce and support the health and wellbeing of its people. In fact, the latest independent research commissioned by EAPA UK (2008) reveals that 5,200 organisations – representing over 8.2 million employees – now enjoy the services of an EAP.

So what is an EAP? In essence it is a workplace programme that is designed to assist productivity and attendance issues within the workplace, and support employees to identify and resolve personal concerns that may affect job performance. These issues might include health, relationship, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress, or other personal issues.

The EAP market in the UK is a significant one – with organisations' spending on them estimated by EAPA UK research in 2008 at over £50 million per annum. Given this significant spend it is not surprising that procurement of an EAP is something that needs to be undertaken with appropriate planning, research and investigation.

This buyer's guide has been prepared to help those organisations looking to commission a new EAP or review an existing one. Whilst it is true that every organisation has its own unique issues and concerns, when it comes to employee assistance, there is much information on issues, trends and solutions that can be shared and which is contained here.

This resource brings together an array of information on the type, format and remit of EAPs. By bringing together the knowledge and experience of UK EAPA member organisations in this way, the procurement and provision of your EAP can be a straightforward and engaging one that will have lasting positive results for your organisation and your workforce.

David Smith, Chair, UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association



An EAP is a workplace programme that assists productivity and attendance issues, and supports employees to identify and resolve personal concerns that may affect job performance

About the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association

The UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA UK) is the professional body for Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) in the UK. The organisation represents the interests of professionals concerned with employee assistance, psychological health and wellbeing and its members include internal and external EAP providers, purchasers of EAPs, counsellors, therapists, consultants and trainers.

EAPA UK is a branch of the global Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA), the world's largest, oldest and most respected membership organisation for employee assistance professionals. With members in over 35 countries and around the globe, it is the world's most relied upon source of information and support for the employee assistance profession.

EAPA publishes the *Journal of Employee Assistance*, hosts professional conferences and offers training and other resources. Its mission is to promote the highest standards of employee assistance practice and the continuing development of employee assistance professionals, programmes and services.

For more information on EAPA UK, visit www.eapa.org.uk. Further details about EAPA can be found at www.eapassn.org.

2.0 What to look for in an EAP

The most essential function of a successful EAP is, arguably, its ability to provide confidential support services, on demand, when they are needed, and free of charge to employees.

In essence, EAPs act as a gateway to a wide range of services and support functions. The use of an EAP service by an employee is voluntary and the vast majority of employees who use EAP services do so through self-referrals.

Alongside this self-referral group an EAP must also be able to accept referrals from other organisational parties, including union representatives, HR professionals and line managers. The mechanism for how these referrals are managed should be discussed with your EAP provider at the contracting and implementation stage of your EAP and should always take into account your policies, measures to accommodate data protection, and employee confidentiality.

Regardless of the way in which EAP services are accessed, the support services it can offer will generally consist of a blend of the following:

- Short-term psychological services, such as counselling.
- Money advice and debt management.
- Child and elder care information services.
- Legal information and guidance.
- Information on emotional, work-life and workplace issues.
- Assessment, support, short-term counselling and referral for employee issues.
- Management referrals and support.
- Management of all ongoing cases to ensure the assessment, treatment and support requirements are carried out to EAPA quality standards.
- Utilisation reporting.
- Management information on employee and organisational interventions, including consultation to management on behavioural aspects of the workplace.
- Working to the confidentiality and ethical standards promoted by EAPA.
- An EAP website with interactive content and information.

When it comes to procuring an EAP there are a number of options that an organisation can choose from. These options are discussed in section 3.0, but regardless of the EAP format that you decide is right for your organisation, it is important to appreciate the key factors and merits you will find in a quality EAP provider:

- Consultation and training for managers and supervisors within your organisation, enabling them to better help and manage troubled employees, thereby seeking to assist in the improvement of job performance.



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- Provision of confidential and speedy problem assessment and identification services to employees with personal issues that affect their performance at work.
- Referral of employees for assessment, treatment and assistance with case management and follow-up services.
- Measurement of the effectiveness of EAP services on the organisation, employee and job performance by both user feedback and formal outcome measurement.
- Staff who are experienced in the delivery of short-term interventions and who are able to work effectively with the dual relationship between the employer or corporate client and the employee.

No matter what the specific format or focus of your chosen or preferred EAP, it is important to remember that what ultimately distinguishes an EAP from any other form of mental health counselling, coaching or private counselling, is that an EAP emphasises employee work performance as a central theme that guides all programme practices and services.

International capability

Many EAP providers operate beyond the UK. Some have operations in other countries, while others may partner with other in-country providers. When commissioning EAP services it is important to understand what cross-border capability your provider has and how the service is delivered. Equally, it is important to appreciate that many countries outside the UK do not have the same services and capabilities, and therefore provision is likely to vary from country to country. To address this, ask how calls will be handled and by whom, as well as whether the service will be available around the clock.

3.0 Understanding EAP models

There are a number of delivery models of EAPs and within each model type there are variations. It is important to understand the different types and each is discussed here.

3.1 Full EAP service

This model of EAP often has the highest level of utilisation by employees and managers. It will provide all the services listed in section 2.0, although the level of information services available to users will vary between providers.

The key elements of a full EAP service can be summarised as:

- 24-hour telephone support, assessment and counselling services.
- Assessment of needs.
- Structured short-term psychological interventions delivered both face to face and by telephone.
- Case management and management information.
- Management consultations.
- Website information and services to support the EAP with interactive content, fact sheets and online services.

3.2 Telephone and online services

Some EAP suppliers provide the same types of service as the full EAP but only provide these by telephone or online. In this model there is no access to face-to-face assessment or counselling.

The key elements of a telephone or online EAP service can be summarised as:

- 24-hour support and telephone counselling service.
- Structured short-term telephone or web-based/online counselling.
- Case management and management information.
- Management consultations.
- Website information and services to support the EAP with interactive content, fact sheets and online services.



What distinguishes an EAP from any other form of counselling or coaching, is that an EAP emphasises employee work performance as a central theme that guides all programme practices and services

Web-based services have enabled many employees to become more familiar with the purpose of EAPs. EAP-focused websites are becoming more elaborate and offer users access to provider lists, tip sheets, and online health and wellness presentations, as well as a range of self-assessment tools.

One advantage of a web-based approach is the way it can reduce people's reluctance to access EAP services. Offering EAP services over the phone or online, where they can be accessed at any time with relative anonymity and complete privacy, may also reduce the stigma commonly associated with confidential problems.

3.3 The embedded EAP

An embedded EAP is provided alongside another service or insurance policy such as Group Income Protection. In this model the cost of the service is presented as being 'free' to the client organisation but in fact its operating costs are embedded in the fees paid for other products purchased by the client from the provider of a package deal.

The services provided in an embedded EAP may differ from other EAPs in terms of face-to-face session model, promotional materials, account management and management information. In addition, the holistic case management is likely to be reduced when compared with, for example, the full EAP. As with any provider, please check the scope of services offered and who will provide these to your employees.

Additional EAP services

Many EAP providers can offer a range of specialist services to organisations alongside their EAP provision. These services are usually available at additional cost and may include any of the following:

- Management training.
- Stress training to assist line managers, for example, in identification and management of stressed employees.
- Trauma support and design of critical incident plans.
- Stress audit, of individual teams or the organisation as a whole.
- Coaching.
- Consultancy services, for example on health and wellbeing strategy.
- Wellbeing initiatives, including their design and implementation.
- Mediation.
- Specialist psychologist or psychiatric assessments.

4.0 EAP counselling

EAP services provide short-term therapy that aims to assist clients who are in crisis or who are facing changes in their lives. Most EAPs in the UK provide evaluation and assessment over the telephone by counsellors, supplemented with short-term interventions by counsellors or psychologists on a face-to-face basis or over the phone. Regardless of the way in which therapy is delivered, it is important that it is done so by professionals who work to recognised standards.

All clinicians should be recognised or accredited by their professional bodies. As part of this they will be expected to receive regular supervision of their practice and have training in working within the dual relationship that exists with the client (the employee) and the employer/EAP provider.

Quality providers manage a network of affiliates who can see employees close to either their home or workplace. It is important to choose an EAP where affiliates have their credentials and individual professional accreditation checked, where supervisor references are taken up, and where case management is in place to ensure the clinical safety of the client. These factors are more important than selecting a therapist on the basis of geographical location, for example.

Some providers may require Criminal Records Bureau checks on counsellors. However, this is not a mandatory requirement for providers who are members of the UK EAPA.



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4.1 Counselling sessions

When it comes to counselling sessions, a number of different models are available, some of which are required by the organisation as part of the contract, while others depend on the standard put in place by the provider. In most cases an EAP provider will offer anything from three to eight sessions of face-to-face counselling; the exact number will depend on the individual EAP provider and the terms of your EAP.

Regardless of the specific number of face-to-face counselling sessions, it is important for employees and employers to appreciate that this is a very brief therapeutic intervention and is focused on the presenting problem.

Before counselling services are offered, an assessment of risk and need must be undertaken. This assessment must take into account the client's history, previous psychological treatment, current treatment and prevalent risks. The assessment must be undertaken by an EAP clinician, whether this is a counsellor or psychologist.

Prospective EAP purchasers should take time to understand the counselling model in place and how it is priced. Providers' pricing will take into account the level of usage of counselling and the average number of sessions taken. This is important when comparing one provider with another.



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Which type of counselling is best?

Face-to-face counselling is typically provided through a nationwide network of affiliates; in most instances the EAP provider will ask the employee if they wish to have counselling near to where they work or live. What happens from this point onwards depends on the specific EAP provider. Some will make all the necessary arrangements, including billing, directly with the counsellor. Others will do some of the set-up work and then provide the employee with the counsellor's phone number and expect them to make the appointment themselves, as they feel this ensures commitment by the employee.

Web-based counselling is offered by a number of EAP providers, for example in a live 'chat room' where both parties interact using a text dialogue. Web-based counselling can also refer to video conferencing, or a 'virtual world' environment where the client and therapist interact through avatar representations. It is important to check availability and security encryption to ensure any web-based method is appropriate for your employees.

5.0 EAP account management

The level of EAP account management varies and you should investigate the structure of account management within a particular provider organisation so that you know what to expect. Some providers may offer regular monthly meetings to review management information, whereas others may prefer quarterly or bi-annual meetings. The frequency is likely to affect the EAP pricing, so be sure to check.

Your account manager may become a trusted advisor and be the first port of call to support your organisation through change, redundancy and crisis. As such, they should be experienced in understanding the delivery of EAP services and, perhaps more importantly, they should appreciate the strategic aims of an EAP within an organisational context. They may offer a very consultative approach as part of the management information review, and work with you to manage and develop the EAP within your organisation.

6.0 Implementing and marketing your EAP

One of the main factors influencing the success of an EAP is designing and pulling off an effective programme launch. This should be planned well in advance and ideally should involve senior managers from across your business.

Some ideas for the successful implementation of your EAP include:

- Make full use of pre-launch 'teasers' to generate interest in the programme.
- Secure senior management support: it is essential to show employees that the business is serious about their health and wellbeing.
- Create a positioning statement for the EAP to define how it sits within the business.
- Utilise a wide range of media and communication routes – review the options already available to 'talk' to employees via printed material, online or face to face.
- Make sure your EAP marketing efforts are continuous and varied and that they don't always focus on negative messages or issues.

It is good practice to develop an implementation plan with your EAP supplier ahead of the launch date. Most providers will have a template that you can adapt to suit the individual needs of your organisation.

7.0 EAP return on investment

EAPs typically achieve high levels of satisfaction from users. Most providers undertake user satisfaction surveys – by written questionnaire, electronically or web-based – and the results are usually presented with EAP management information.

The business impact of an EAP will be determined largely by the success of the initial implementation and ongoing promotion of the programme, and the resources available to users. EAPs that work closely with the organisation and other employee-focused welfare and information programmes, are often able to increase the awareness and understanding of their services and, as such, are well positioned to deliver good return on investment.

How often an EAP is used for various kinds of individual and organisational services can be assessed as an indirect measure of value of the programme. However, just how this utilisation is counted varies between EAP providers and is a significant point of difference. As such, organisations should be wary when evaluating a programme.

Alongside usage figures it is possible to review the outcome of clinical cases. This type of evaluation may use a specific measure designed by the organisation or provider. Alternatively the provider may use a specific validated tool specially designed for counselling. For example, one national study used an independent firm and random sampling techniques to conduct follow-up interviews of over 1,300 cases, and it found that 95 per cent of EAP users reported being satisfied with the service.

Many EAPs use outcome questionnaires, such as Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE), to measure the psychological wellbeing of users before and after counselling. These results show whether the services provided are effective in improving psychological wellbeing in the majority of users, and therefore can be extremely valuable when it comes to assessing EAP return on investment. They can also be used to measure the effectiveness of counsellors, and various interventions.



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The value of management information

EAP providers vary significantly in the amount and sophistication of management information available to their clients. Some make this information available on a monthly basis through basic statistics, for example, whilst others provide it half yearly or annually.

As an EAP buyer it is important to understand what management information is included within the cost of your programme and when it will be delivered. Some providers are able to customise the data beyond the standard to take into account your needs such as location, job grade or age.

However, it is important to remember that from the individual's perspective, the gathering of too much data risks the EAP being viewed as intrusive, which could put them off recommending the service or using it again themselves in the future.

It is also important that the data protects the identity of users; your provider will guide you on this matter.

8.0 EAP quality and standards

EAP providers vary in the standards they operate. Some may use programmes such as Investors in People while others may use ISO or other standards of accreditation. Regardless of the programme, it is important to recognise that these schemes provide a measure of quality that provider organisations have invested in and operate from.

EAPA UK, for example, has a published set of standards for its members, to which all its registered providers adhere. These outline the minimum operating level purchasers can be assured that providers should meet, as well as a set of ethical standards they uphold.

In addition to organisational accreditation, professionals within the EAP, such as counsellors, will adhere to their own professional standards and ethics, such as those of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. These operate hand in hand with EAP standards and can be a valuable benchmark when selecting an EAP provider.

8.1 Why use an EAPA member?

EAPA is the largest professional body for employee assistance professionals and sets its own standards for EAP service and delivery. The delivery of an EAP may vary slightly in different countries but a set of core services and standards exists.

All EAPA UK members agree to abide by the standards and guidelines, and professional code of ethics, set out by the organisation. As a buyer this means that the EAPA member provider you select is working to a quality and operational standard. You can be confident of a reliable, safe and high quality service for your employees when they need it most.

All current UK registered providers of EAPs are listed on the website.

If you wish to audit the operation of your provider you should discuss this with them. You may wish to build this into your tender document. Providers welcome audit – whether undertaken by existing or potential clients or by a specialised consultant – but it must be remembered that the data they hold about employees is confidential.



All members of EAPA UK agree to abide by the standards and guidelines set out by the organisation, and by its professional code of ethics

Working with specialist advisors

The EAPA has recognised some leading independent advisors in the field of EAP who can assist clients to find the right EAP solution. These advisors can help to identify the services specification, provide audit services, or assist in the tender process as an independent expert working alongside you.

9.0 EAPs and HM Revenue & Customs

The recent revised guidelines for the guidance of local tax inspectors has been developed by EAPA UK in conjunction with HMRC to address the issue of how legal and financial information can be delivered within an EAP if the EAP is to remain exempt.

EAPA UK has had significant consultation with HMRC to secure greater clarity for local tax inspectors concerning legal and financial information provision. The point concerning dependants was highlighted when confirming the wording associated with legal and financial information provision. However, it is worth emphasising that nothing in this area has changed and the legislation concerning dependants remains as it has always been.

These guidelines are for local tax inspectors' guidance and each local inspector is encouraged to make a common sense judgment on this area. As such, EAPA UK would refer providers to the introductory note headed Full Text where it says:

'It follows that if there are some services provided under an EAP which clearly satisfy the terms of the exemption and others that clearly do not, it makes sense for the two sets of services to be separated... However, if it is not possible to separate the services in this way, common sense should be applied where the welfare counselling provided by an employer consists substantially of facilities that satisfy the term of the exemption...'

The issue of dependants remains a grey area because in some circumstances dependants are allowed, such as couples counselling. Despite this, nothing has changed in this area and

there is scope for providers to have constructive discussion with their local tax inspector, in the unlikely event that the issue of dependants is raised.

The issue of tax exemption and EAPs came into the spotlight again following the 2011 Budget Statement. EAPA encourages interested individuals to refer to the Association's website for the latest information relating to this issue.

10.0 EAP pricing

EAP providers have a number of approaches to pricing an EAP. When purchasing a programme it is important that you understand exactly how the cost of your EAP has been calculated.

The most common approach to EAP pricing is to calculate charges on a 'per capita' basis that will enable the purchaser to source an EAP at a fixed cost. This rate is calculated on the expected (not actual) use of services. Potential purchasers should be aware that it is not always in a supplier's interest to encourage a high level of use unless this is assumed from the outset, as they are likely, without such an assumption, to lose money on the contract.

Another popular way to cost an EAP is to focus on 'as used' pricing. This method typically has core services, such as telephone counselling, work-life services and web-based services included as a fixed fee. Alongside this, all face-to-face counselling would be paid for as an additional sum, based on the volume used.

Pricing EAPs 'per call' is another approach. Here there may be a set-up fee for the EAP, as well as additional costs for marketing and account management. On top of this, the purchaser would pay for any calls to the EAP at a set rate. This approach has the advantage that purchasers only pay for what they actually use, but the purchaser may be billed for activity that they assumed was delivered free of charge.

Regardless of the pricing model for your EAP, you need to be fully aware of what is included. Some variables that you might choose to discuss with your provider include:

- Marketing literature (annually).
- Awareness training.
- Management information.
- Account management meetings.
- Web portal.
- Wellbeing portal.
- Capped utilisation.



When purchasing an EAP programme it is important that you understand exactly how the cost has been calculated

11.0 Commissioning an EAP

When commissioning an EAP there are a number of questions to ask a prospective provider. This section outlines some questions you might ask when procuring your service.

Organisational

- What is the structure of your organisation?
- What is your registered name?
- What is your VAT registration number?
- How many staff do you employ?
- What is your annual turnover?
- What percentage of your annual turnover would this contract be?
- How many counsellors do you employ full time/part time?
- Are any of your senior management qualified psychologists, counsellors or CEAP?
If so, who are they?
- Please describe escalation points for complaints and issues.
- Please provide proof of professional indemnity cover.
- What parts of your business/EAP service are outsourced to other providers?
- How many complaints a year do you receive about your service?

- Would any part of the service be subject to TUPE?
- How does the EAP link to other services, such as occupational health?

Telephone access, intervention and intake

- Describe your telephone access and intake system, including how you handle calls after regular business hours and at weekends.
- What are the role and qualifications of the typical person who answers the initial call, and of your counsellors?
- What are your average timeframes for scheduling routine counselling appointments?
- Describe what would happen if one of our employees accessed the EAP at 3am with an urgent problem.
- What is your process for providing short-term counselling?
- What types of personal and behavioural health problems do your EAP clinicians handle?
- What specialised EAP counselling services do you offer?
- Describe your handling of clients in crisis such as potential suicide or child harm.



Describe what would happen if one of our employees accessed the EAP at 3am with an urgent problem

Face-to-face counselling

- Describe your assessment process that leads to face-to-face counselling.
- How many sessions of face-to-face counselling do you offer per case?
- What is your average number of face-to-face sessions delivered?
- What percentage of telephone cases go on to face-to-face counselling?
- Is specialist cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) counselling included?
- How is outcome measured in face-to-face interventions?

Workplace assistance

- Describe your ability to offer help to managers to improve employees' performance.
- What are your services for handling critical incidents and violence in the workplace?

Network development and management

- Describe your current network of EAP affiliates and the method used to control the network.
- List the criteria for EAP clinicians to be included in your network.
- How are their credentials verified?
- Are all of your affiliates premises checked? How?
- Do you have coverage outside the UK for clients phoning from abroad?

Communication and reporting

- Please provide sample copies of standard utilisation reports.
- What utilisation measure do you use?
- Do you have a dedicated website for the EAP? Please describe its content.
- How many account management visits do you hold annually?
- What is the experience of your account managers?

Quality improvement and evaluation

- How do you measure and evaluate service quality?
- What professional standards, if any, does your EAP adhere to?
- Are you members of any professional bodies such as UK EAPA or BACP Workplace?
- Are you accredited by any professional bodies?
- What training do you provide to staff?
- What values do you operate as a company?
- What policies do you have for health and safety, wellbeing and engagement, diversity, and bullying and harassment?

Programme implementation

- What is your plan for EAP promotion and employee communications?
- Please provide examples of printed communication, if available.
- Who will deliver the implementation sessions?

Pricing

- What pricing assumptions are being made around utilisation of services?
- What counselling session model is being proposed?
- What is included within the price?
- How many sessions of face-to-face counselling are expected?
- What is the price for extra sessions of counselling?
- Are awareness-training sessions included?
- Is web-based/online counselling included?

Preparing an EAP tender

EAP tenders are much the same as any other tender but it is important to specify whether, for example, you require any of the following as part of your EAP:

- Telephone service 24/7.
- Management consultancy.
- Legal information.
- Child or elder health and support services.
- Referral pathways.
- Face-to-face counselling network.
- Web-based counselling.
- Face-to-face model type (3/5/7 sessions).
- Management information content.
- Account management.
- Promotional activity and materials.
- Awareness training.

As part of the tender submission process you may wish to visit a provider to observe their operational capability. This would be an opportunity to see where and how calls are handled and who answers them, and to gain some insight into their business continuity, data handling and storage, and case management. You would be able to establish which services are provided in-house and which are outsourced. Typically EAP providers welcome visitors and want to demonstrate their capability.

If your current programme is in-house or specifically dedicated, you may have to consider TUPE requirements.



More information
on the UK EAPA
is available at
www.eapa.org.uk

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