

£9.4m to help people with health problems stay in work

The additional money will be directed to the In Work Support Service which aims to give people with mental or physical health conditions free and rapid access to occupational therapy in order to help them remain in employment. The injection of funding will enable the existing programme – which is delivered by Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) in South Wales and RCS in North Wales – to be extended until December 2022.

The In Work Support Service fills a gap in the market that was identified by partner organisations including General Practitioner Committee Wales and the Federation of Small Businesses, and provides rapid therapeutic interventions which help employees on or at risk of long-term sickness absence.

In supporting people with health problems to stay in work and in helping SME employers to manage the business impact of sickness absence, the programme aligns with the Welsh Government's Prosperity for All plan as well as its Economic Action Plan, Employability Plan and its Health strategy – A Healthier Wales.

The Economy Secretary announced the additional funding at a celebration event for Rhyl City Strategy (RCS), a not-for-profit organisation that aims to help people fulfil their potential through work. He said:

“The cost to the Welsh economy of work-related ill health is estimated at £500m per annum and we know that SME employers and their employees are disproportionately affected by sick absence at work. That is one of the reasons why our new Economic Contract encourages businesses to promote good health in the workplace.

“To further support this ambition I am pleased to announce an additional £9.4m for the In Work Support Programme. I hope this will help to prevent people with common health conditions from falling out of work, and will also encourage businesses to build healthier work places.”

The additional funding, which is made of £7.2m of EU funding and £2.2m of Welsh Government funding, will significantly expand the service to support up to 12,000 people and some 2,500 businesses to build a healthy workplace. The service will be widened to encompass more employees in rural areas and will look to increase engagement with small business networks and local health services.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“This project brings together health professionals, skills and

business support into a single service that helps people to remain in employment through direct workplace focused interventions.

It demonstrates the powerful potential of effective cross-government working to deliver positive action for vulnerable people in a joined-up and efficient way.”

RCS’s Operational Director, Alison Thomas, said:

“The In Work Support Service provides vital support to help keep employees in work in the face of individual health challenges, bringing enormous benefits both for employed and self-employed people and for the North Wales business community as a whole.

We are delighted at the news of the service extension to December 2022, which will allow us to continue our work in supporting employees and business owners to create healthy, positive and productive workplaces.”

Paul Dunning, Professional Head of Staff Health and Wellbeing at ABMU Health Board said:

“ABMU welcome the continued funding of the service which will enable the team to support the physical and mental health of the working population and support Welsh Government’s aspirations to look after the wellbeing of employees within the workplace.”