



October 2022

EMD UK

Instructor Wellbeing
Research Report & Recommendations

From Lindsey Simpson



WORKPLACE
MENTAL WEALTH
fitness & active leisure

About this report

During a meeting on 6 May 2022 with Marcus Kingwell, we explored how EMD UK could benefit from the instructor-specific data gathered in 2021 and 2022 as part of The Fitness & Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Surveys, EMD UK's goal being to better understand the wellbeing of this group and how to support them.

The initial output was a webinar in the summer during which I shared the findings of the data analysis. The insights were also shared internally by Kat Mummery who has been working with me on the project for EMD UK.

The webinar on 15 July 2022 was used to:

- Promote EMD UK's commitment to workforce wellbeing
- Publicly share the quantitative analysis with EMD UK members
- Gather feedback and comments on the quantitative findings from webinar participants to help refine the focus group content
- Promote and ask for volunteers for focus groups on 27 September 2022.

Other channels were also used to recruit participants for the two 90-minute focus groups which took place online.

The following report and recommendations brings together insight from:

- The quantitative results for instructors from the Fitness and Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind Surveys in 2021 and 2022.
- Feedback from the webinar.
- Qualitative information from the focus groups.

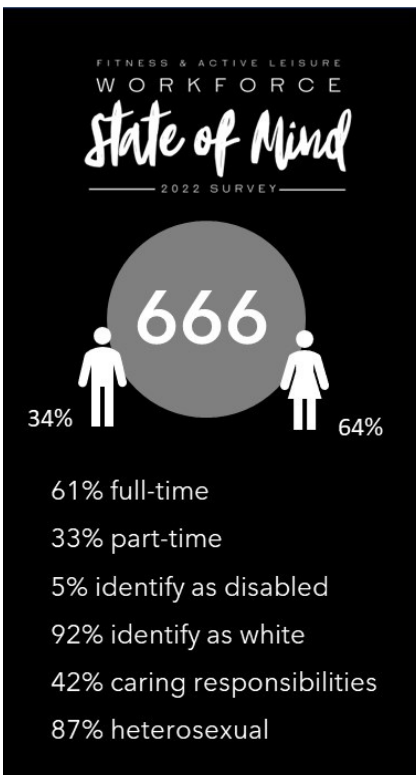
It also highlights the role of workforce mental health in realising EMD UK's vision and mission.

I am grateful to Kat Mummery for her support, insight, humour and collaboration and commend EMD UK for embracing the conversation and taking action around workforce wellbeing. There is much to do, and this project is a useful step forward in making the changes the industry needs.

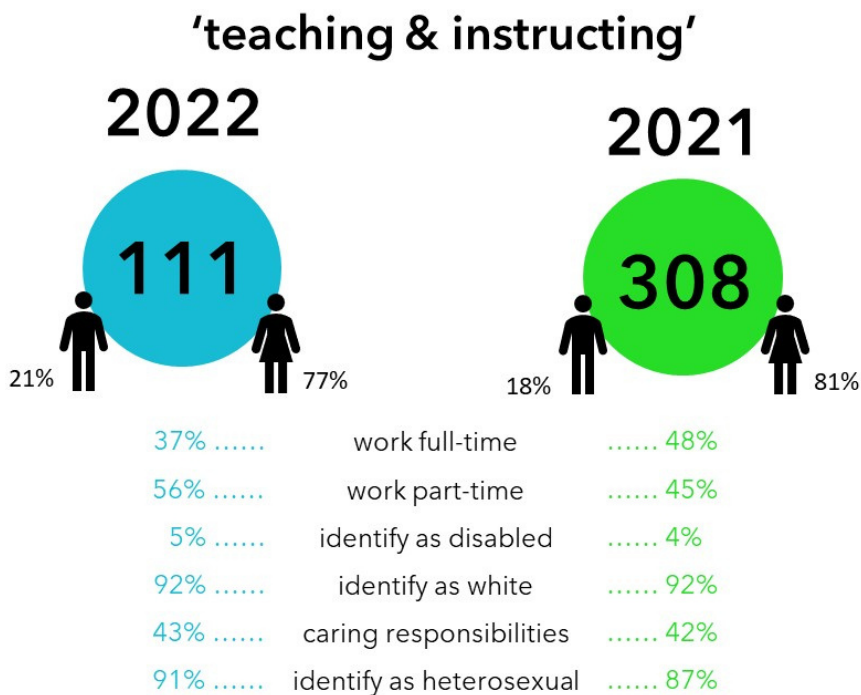
Lindsey Simpson

Who did we hear from?

The visuals below show the demographic data on independent and freelance 'teachers and instructors' from the 2021 and 2022 State of Mind surveys which we used in this piece of work. In the black box to the left you can see the breakdown for all respondents to the survey in 2022 as a comparison.



Copyright: Workplace Mental Wealth 2022



**WORKPLACE
MENTAL WEALTH**
fitness & active leisure



Independent - I
work for myself
direct with clients

58%

(down from 64% in 2021)

Freelance - I
work with one
or more
organisations

34%

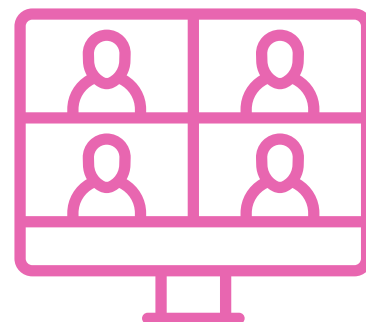
(up from 31% in 2021)

Who did we hear from?

Online focus groups:

We heard from 10 people in the focus groups. They had a variety of backgrounds and characteristics in terms of:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation and gender expression
- Length of time in the industry
- Ways of working



We did struggle to recruit male participants and only one took part in the focus groups.

Although we suspect this is broadly representative of EMD UK's male membership, we would like to hear from more men in future research.

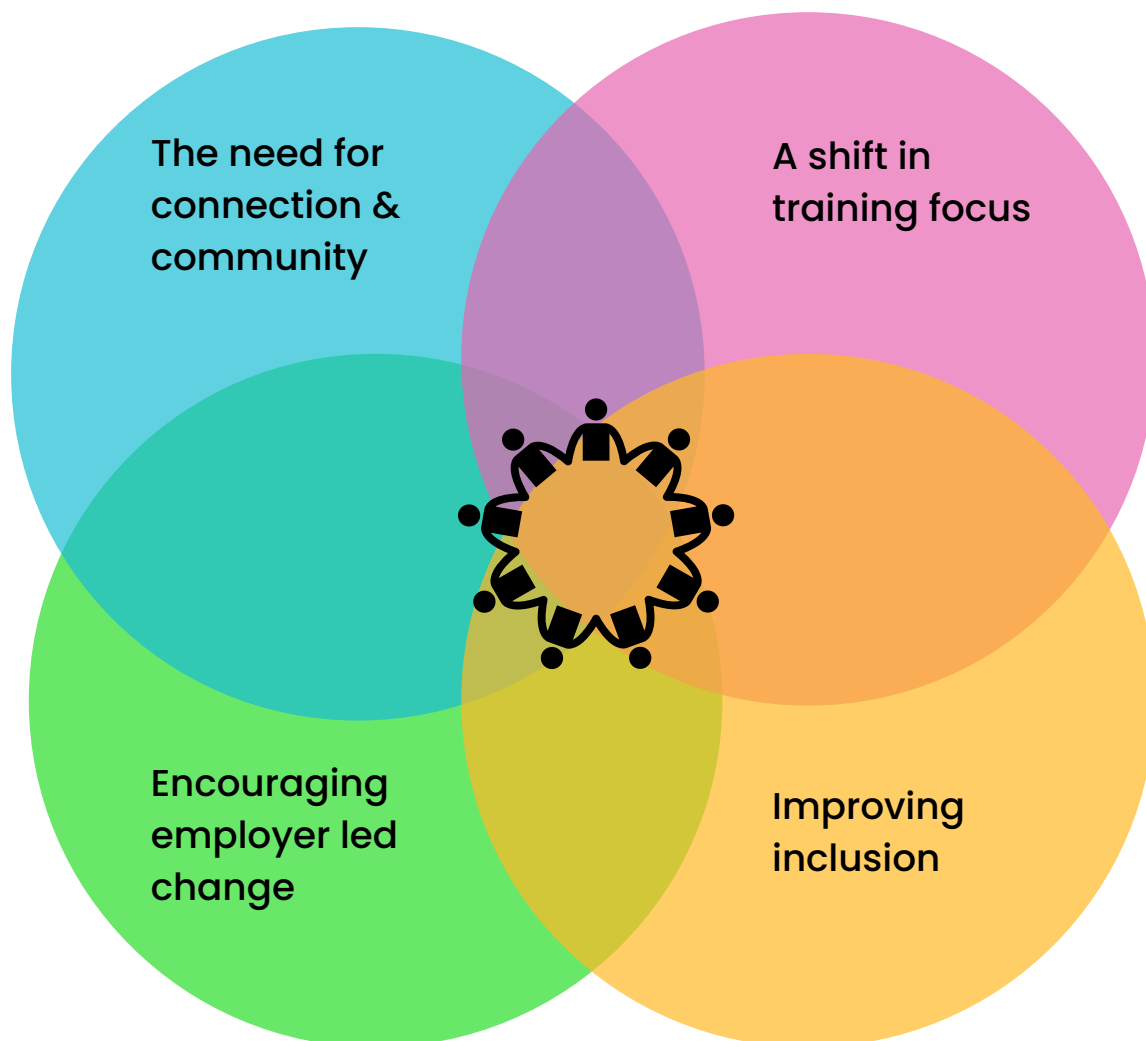
We address inclusion, one of EMD UK's 'values and behaviours' more broadly on page 15.

Key themes

There are four key themes that came out of the work. These sit well with EMD UK's 5 year strategy.

- The need for connection and community
- A shift in training focus
- Encouraging employer led change
- Improving inclusion

This report covers these in turn, although there is considerable overlap across the themes.



Theme 1: The need for connection & community

Having purpose and feeling valued was the top factor survey respondents gave as positively affecting their mental health in 2021 (53%) and 2022 (36%). Good relationships with clients and partners was second (18% & 19% respectively). And the need for meaningful connection with clients, and a sense of community with other instructors, were the strongest themes that came out of the focus groups.

Participants spoke passionately about their clients and their motivation to help them. We heard how much it means to them to see those they teach overcome obstacles, become fitter, healthier and more vital, both physically and mentally. They love making and seeing a difference. It makes them feel valued, especially when clients thank them.

Although the majority of our focus group participants felt very connected to clients most of the time, they also talked about feeling isolated professionally.

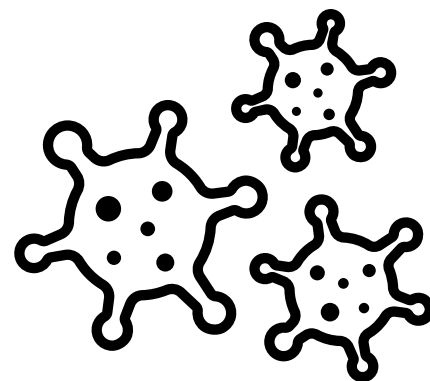
Both groups said these feelings were exacerbated by the pandemic.

They talked about having 'given their all' during the pandemic, often working for free or at a reduced rate to keep their clients going, support activity levels, and in some cases, be 'a life line'. However, once physical spaces reopened, many instructors felt their willingness to adapt and support people was forgotten, and they felt taken for granted, especially when clients left or returned to facilities.

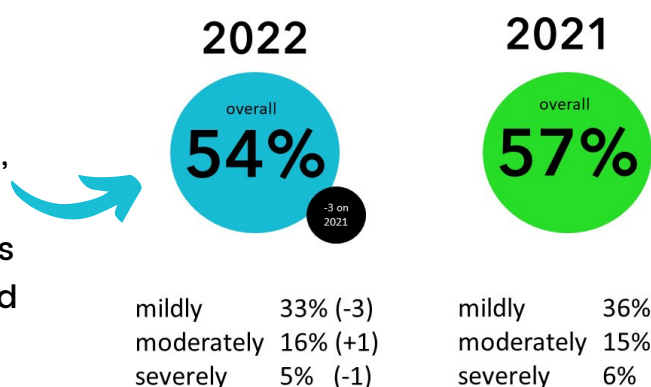
In particular our focus groups talked about feelings of isolation in terms of:

- Being physically remote during the pandemic lockdowns
- Delivering digital classes whether during the lockdowns or otherwise because they didn't get so much meaningful contact and feedback
- Having very transactional relationships with the facilities they deliver classes for – they go in, deliver the work, they leave
- Not having a peer group for discussion and support

We heard that EMD UK had been a valuable focal point for some instructors during the pandemic, and whilst there were cheaper options for buying insurance, EMD UK had provided valuable and timely guidance, support and a sense of community during this time. This was much appreciated.



So, while we heard that instructors still feel a very strong sense of purpose, and although the survey scores around the incidence of mental distress among instructors are slightly improved in 2022, we still see over half (54%) reporting a mental health issue in the last 12 months and instructors telling us that they would really value a stronger sense of community.



Theme 1 Recommendation

Place greater emphasis on EMD UK as a community that supports and nurtures its members as people, not just professionals.

What could that look like?

Quick win

Review the way EMD UK uses Facebook and if its impact can be improved; none of our focus group participants were aware of the EMD UK instructor members' group which currently has 1118 members. It may be that the 'quick win' is promoting this group to raise awareness and drive engagement. Or, it may be that an additional or alternative type of group(s), possibly on another platform, would be more effective to deliver the type of community support we heard the focus groups ask for.



Medium to longer term

Run a six-month project to systematically explore and test options to deliver a 'Community Builder' programme. Ideally this is run by someone with experience in building and maintaining communities with a view to creating a clear offering and regular touch points throughout the year, and appointing a dedicated community manager.

This project could include:

- Understanding the needs of different groups in more detail. Distinctions we heard about that may be important include the lifestyle/hobby instructor vs the main income instructor, and the different needs of male, female and non-binary instructors.
- Looking at online/in-person and hybrid community models.
- Considering funding and or/pricing - many instructors are experiencing financial pressures.
- Considering how the community elements would link with training and possibly mentoring (see page 11).
- Scoping and running a pilot.
- Considering measures of success.
- Developing a 'community manager' job description.

Theme 2: A shift in training focus

It was notable that although most of our participants are self-employed they do not speak about their work in terms of running a business. They speak about a vocation, likely underpinned by the strong sense of purpose described earlier. And when we asked them about the kind of services they wanted from EMD UK they did not ask for traditional business support like marketing, but talked about developing their emotional intelligence and personal wellbeing as their highest priority. This seems to be linked with the need for community (Theme 1) and brings in ideas around:

- Building resilience
- Managing conflict with others and between clients
- Understanding how to maintain their own emotional wellbeing especially when they are supporting clients who are experiencing distress

There is still a strong desire for continuing professional development in terms of teaching and technical skills with an important caveat that cost is often a barrier to new learning for independent fitness professionals.

Topics participants would like for CPD include menopause, mental health, conflict resolution, social media safety and management. It was noted by one participant that Les Mills has developed some excellent support around topics like these.

Exploring these further, we noticed two elements that often blurred together during participant discussions around the two subjects of mental health and menopause:

- What the instructors want to know for their own use and wellbeing
- Knowledge about that same subject that will help them in a customer-facing capacity to support clients

While there are many instances where information and skills for personal and professional use appropriately overlap, there are some subjects where clarity is needed, particularly (in this research) around mental health.

Mental Health

Some instructors' comments led us to think that they were 'diagnosing' and 'treating' mental health conditions but not necessarily having the appropriate/clinical training to do so.

We were not able to dig into this during the focus groups but this is potentially concerning and something EMD UK should be mindful of.

Menopause

Webinar participants and the focus groups told us they would like information for themselves and to support their clients. This is unsurprising. EMD UK's membership is dominated by women who have, or will very likely, experience menopause. The classes they teach also tend to be disproportionately populated by women who will experience the same.

Several of our focus groups shared stories of how menopause had or was affected them and their working life.

We heard from our webinar viewers that they would like to know more about menopause. Our focus groups went further. The majority would like a definitive course that covers not only menopause but women's health from puberty to late aging with both self-help and client support perspectives included.

A sector-wide approach would be appreciated so that there is clarity, quality and consistency, and so that effort is not duplicated.

Theme 2 Recommendation

Place greater emphasis and increase access for training and offerings that support the emotional curriculum.

What could that look like?

Quick win 1:

- EMD UK to feed back the relevant insights of this research to Sue Wilkie to share with the sector-wide task force on women's health.



Quick win 2:

EMD UK's training offering could be restructured and presented to reflect current priorities and help instructors find what they're looking for. Our research suggests the three main themes focus group participants want are:

A. Personal development & wellbeing for fitness professionals

- The emotional curriculum - support and guidance on managing their own emotional wellbeing and could include: community support (see page 8), webinars, courses and a mentoring programme. This is a key area for development.

B. Professional development aimed at the customer experience

- This includes teaching, technical skills, knowledge and the instructor's role in managing member's wellbeing. You have some of this but cost is an issue for many.

C. Business skills and management

- Our research suggests that you should keep what you have. But, we are not hearing that this is instructors' current priority or that more of this type of content is wanted.

Short to medium term

- EMD UK should clearly promote the appropriateness and limitations of mental health advice and training it offers or endorses.
- When support is for members' personal use, EMD UK should make sure this is delivered or discussions facilitated by suitable, qualified organisations and individuals who understand the context.
- Any training or information offered with the intention of instructors supporting clients should make the limitations and boundaries of that training and advice clear. Unless qualified to do so, instructors should not be diagnosing and treating clients' mental health conditions. They should be aware of their duty of care and appropriate safeguarding, reassurance and signposting.

Medium to longer term

- EMD UK may wish to explore, evaluate, categorise and if appropriate promote, more advanced mental health/exercise educational options already on offer. This would give visibility to this pathway and valuable guidance to those that wish to work as practitioners in the 'intervention' space to develop their skills and distinguish themselves professionally. It could also reflect well on the sector's credibility.
- This analysis may also reveal a gap in the market which EMD UK could work to fill in collaboration with others.
- Training that could be reviewed includes:
 - The YMCA Level 4 Certificate in Delivering Physical Activity for Individuals with Mental Health Conditions; and
 - The Platinum Institute's level 4 Diploma in physical activity for adults with a mental health condition; and
 - The Msc in Sport, Physical Activity and Mental Health at Edgehill University.

Theme 3: Employer led change

While there are some fantastic employers in the sector, we heard about poor working relationships between organisations and instructors in both our survey work and the focus groups.

Although employers have a mental and physical health and safety duty of care to those that work for them (Health & Safety At Work Act 1974), most of our participants did not expect, or always want, much of a relationship with the facilities they work in. We heard this particularly from instructors who worked for quite a few organisations perhaps only doing one or two classes a week in a given venue. Instructors told us they preferred instead to focus on building relationships with fellow professionals in other contexts as described on page 6.

What we did hear quite clearly was that just a simple 'hello' or 'thank you' makes a big difference to an instructor coming in to teach a class. This seems a very low bar, but even this is not a given.

Theme 3 Recommendation

Promote better working relationships between employers and instructors by educating and supporting employers to create healthy relationships with instructors that work for them.

What could that look like?

Quick win

A PR campaign aimed at the employer audience to share the findings of this work around what matters to EMD UK instructors and how it affects their wellbeing. This could improve how instructors are treated and help employers to attract and retain the best talent. It's also the right thing to do to treat people well.

What could that look like?

Short to medium term

Support employers to make sustainable change by championing The Good Work Pledge.

One size doesn't fit all, but the six government-back standards at the heart of the Pledge help employers shape an approach that reflects the needs of their organisation and workforce.

The diagnostic tool and action planning guide help employers understand and take action to improve how they systematically prevent and protect their people from psychological harm and support those that are in distress.

Employers also get use of The Good Work Pledge logo to demonstrate their commitment to providing Good Work.

The Good Work Pledge is a sector-wide initiative. It's backed by CIMSPA, and EMD UK and ukactive have also signed up. They sit alongside organisations such as Active Nation, MyZone, Alliance Leisure and Parkwood Leisure who have made the commitment. It was developed by Workplace Mental Wealth in response to the first survey findings to promote meaningful change.



Theme 4 : Increasing inclusion

Poor representation is a UK sector-wide issue and a crucial one. It matters who works in the sector. Our leaders create the culture and organisational infrastructure that are the backdrop to the workforce experience. This can affect if people are attracted to working in the sector, if they thrive when they are at work and if they can be retained. And if we are to understand, connect with and support people from all walks of life to be active, our workforce, from the boardroom to the front line, should reflect the diversity and needs of the communities we serve and those we must better reach.

Our research, your membership statistics (which are not comprehensive) and the focus groups suggest that EMD UK's member base, like the wider sector, is not representative of the UK population in terms of sex, age (in particular the older generation), ethnicity and disability. There is also how intersectionality of these, and other characteristics, can further increase marginalisation.

EMD UK is currently recruiting for a DE&I role and this is a welcome step forward. We offer the observations above and the comments below from the focus groups to support the development of EMD UK's work in this area.

- Belonging is a key issue for instructors generally, and we heard particularly from ethnic minority people in our focus groups that this was not a given.
- We found it hard to recruit men to our focus groups and only one joined. We heard that the female bias in the instructor space can leave men feeling excluded. This is not inevitable. We heard that in other countries such as New Zealand there is more of an even split both in instructors and class participation, probably reflecting cultural differences that promote mixed sport as normal (for example in tag rugby and netball).
- There may be value in studying and learning from other countries who have more representative workforces to improve representation in our own. Again, cross-sector collaboration on this kind of work is likely to have most impact.

Recommendations summary

Theme 1

Place greater emphasis on EMD UK as a community that supports and nurtures its members as people, not just professionals.

Theme 2

Place greater emphasis and increase access for training and offerings that support the emotional curriculum.

Theme 3

Promote better working relationships between employers and instructors by educating and supporting employers to create healthy relationships with instructors that work for them.



Finally

Thank you for asking us to work with you on this project.

As you consider the findings, recommendations and how you'll respond, please get in touch if you would like to talk about how we can help you further.



Our third Fitness & Active Leisure Workforce State of Mind survey will kick off in January 2023 and will continue to build on our insights and strengthen the resources we offer employers.

We look forward to collaborating with you to boost instructor participation to help gain deeper insight and drive improvements in workforce wellbeing across the sector.

Best wishes

Lindsey

Lindsey Simpson
Mob: 07966 279013

lindsey@sparkteamcomms.com

sparkteamcomms.com

workplacementalwealth.com

Meet the team



Lindsey Simpson

**Co-founder Workplace Mental Wealth
Research & training lead**

Workforce advocate focused on culture, performance, research and wellbeing

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications & engagement specialist, facilitator, trainer, speaker, 5 Voices leadership coach, 25 years experience in-house, agency & consultancy

Fitness industry roles including swim coaching, PT & operations, PR (Promote PR) and as the FIA's first membership liaison manager

Award-winning culture change work

Director at Spark Team
Communications

Degree in Sport & Recreation (BA Hons)

Masters student - workplace health & wellbeing



Katie Lewis

**Co-founder Workplace Mental Wealth
Communications & partnerships lead**

Passionate about making mental health part of every day 'chatter' and helping organisations create emotionally supportive environments

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor (level 1-3, delivering Ofqual regulated, FAA accredited qualifications), Mental Health First Aider (MHFA England)

Communications specialist in the physical activity & sport sector for more than 17 years, 10 years operational experience in the leisure sector

Director at Brand Chatter

Degree in Human Movement Studies (BA Hons)