

Written evidence from the British Standards Institute [WRH0007]

Introduction

BSI is the UK's National Standards Body (NSB), appointed by government to oversee the development and management of national standards by UK stakeholders, to represent the UK at the international and European standards organisations and to provide the infrastructure for UK experts to participate in international standards setting activity. BSI operates in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK Government and has a public function in support of the UK economy and society. We bring together over 13,500 stakeholders (including government, businesses, and consumers) to facilitate the development of "what good looks like". BSI is sponsored by the Department for Business & Trade and works across government and with regulators to advise on the use of standards to support the delivery of policy objectives.

Our response to the inquiry is to highlight the role of standards as a tool to improve health and wellbeing. We would like to provide evidence of how British Standards can assist workplaces to support those that are suffering with health conditions and allow them to stay in work. BSI cannot offer medical expertise or perspectives based on direct experience of the conditions that are the subject of the inquiry.

We have recently engaged with members of the Women and Equalities Committee to discuss our recently published British Standard on menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace (BS 30416:2023), which is designed to help organizations support employees and better enable them to retain experienced and talented people. We are grateful for the support we have received and would like to explore how standards can help support women's health more broadly. BS 30416:2023 can be downloaded here:

<https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/menstruation-menstrual-health-and-menopause-in-the-workplace-guide/standard>

British Standard on Menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause in the workplace. Guide (BS 30416:2023)

BS 30416:2023 is designed to help organizations identify practical workplace adjustments and actions that reflect good practice for supporting women in the workplace. The focus in this standard is on menstrual and menopausal health and wellbeing, however the recommendations are likely to be of benefit to all employees and to businesses in all sectors and of all sizes. It is likely to be particularly helpful for small businesses.

The standard gives guidance on developing policies and practices that are supportive of employees in the workplace experiencing menstruation or peri/menopause. BS 30416:2023 is a practical tool with many examples of actions and small adjustments that can be made to improve the wellbeing of people at work who are experiencing menstruation or menopause. It can also help organizations identify the misconceptions around menstruation and peri/menopause, and the impact the taboo surrounding them can have on workplace support.

The standard will help those responsible for managing individual workloads, wellbeing, or work environments. It provides examples of adjustments for physical aspects of work, policy guidance and practices, supportive workplace cultures, work design, inclusivity and evaluation and metrics.

The standard also includes practical annexes with checklists and tools including tips for having confidential conversations, conversation topics and potential workplace adjustments that could be helpful, team management considerations, ideas for facilitating culture change and training considerations.

A lot of misinformation is being used to shape new policies, training materials and practice in this area, which can leave organizations with negative or even legal consequences. BS 30416:2023 provides standardized national guidelines that are authoritative and reliable. Adopting the recommendations in BS 30416:2023 can also benefit organizations by:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of employees
- Increasing employee engagement and productivity
- Boosting the healthy working life expectancy of employees
- Increasing employee retention, and reducing the costs or attrition, recruitment and training
- Improving diversity and inclusion objectives by preventing the loss of women and people who menstruate, as well as older, disabled, neurodivergent or chronically ill employees due to inadequate or inflexible working conditions.
- Demonstrating the organization's commitment to the Equality Act 2010
- Increasing confidence in the organization's commitment to staff
- Strengthening risk management

Using standards to support health and wellbeing

BSI has already published a suite of standards to support the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace. We have a wide range of national committees and very engaged stakeholders that provide expertise during the standards development process in the UK and internationally. Some of the key committees that may be of interest to this inquiry are those responsible for standards in Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources, Ageing Societies, Healthcare Organisational Management, Menstrual Products and Gender Equality.

Some examples of standards that support the wellbeing and safety of employees in the workplace are:

BS 30416:2023 Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace

BS ISO 45001:2018 Occupational health and safety management systems

BS ISO 45003:2021 Occupational health and safety management — Psychological health and safety at work — Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks

BS EN ISO 27500:2017 The human-centred organization. Rationale and general principles

BS ISO 30415:2021 Human resource management — Diversity and inclusion

BS ISO 26000:2010 Social Responsibility

The BSI standards development team, in collaboration with committee experts and sector stakeholders, regularly undertake horizon scanning activities to assess gaps where standardization might be needed. BS 30416:2023 is a prime example of how a standard was developed to address a specific need to support women in the workplace. Further standards can be developed should they be required, and this can certainly be explored further if that might be useful for this inquiry.

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