

Human Resources/Environment Health & Safety Services

Manager's guide to Managing/Recognising Stress

Introduction

This guide should be read in conjunction with the University's Occupational Stress Policy. It is intended to provide further information to managers on the causes and avoidance of stress in the workplace and possible steps that can be taken to avoid stress in the workplace.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regards occupational stress as a major employment risk. As well as the distress caused to individuals, stress-related employee absence is estimated to cost the UK economy in the region of £3.8 billion per year.

Early reports and guidance on work-related stress concentrated on the legal Health and Safety duty to assess risk and to take measures to control the risk. More recently there has been a greater emphasis on effective management skills as the key to managing and preventing occupational stress. The HSE's current guidance emphasises that effective stress management does not have to be a separate activity, but should be part of everyday management and behaviour. Research has been carried out by the HSE and the CIPD which has resulted in a development of a set of management competences which are essential from minimising stress with in the workplace. The guidance document can be viewed at:-
http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/_lnstrswrk.htm

The HSE have developed a competency indicator, where managers can complete a survey which provides results against the management competencies, this can be viewed and completed at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm>. It is a totally interactive spreadsheet and is totally confidential.

This guidance will demonstrate the main stressors within each section and identify positive and negative management behaviors which could influence these stressors.

The Scottish Government have an online guide providing practical ways of dealing with stress. This information can be accessed via the following website www.stepsforstress.org/

Recognising signs of stress

Employees have a duty to look after their own Health and Safety at work, and to draw problems to the attention of their managers, at an early stage. However, managers should also be alert for signs of stress amongst their staff.

The key indicators of stress may be;

- Change in an employees normal behaviour – eg irritability/withdrawn/unpredictability, uncharacteristic behaviours.
- Change in their appearance.
- Sudden Lack of concentration/commitment eg. lateness.
- Absenteeism.

Identifying the signs of stress at an early stage increases the possibility that action can be taken to deal with the symptoms and the underlying causes, thus minimising the risk to the individual's health and well-being and the effects on the department.

Common causes of workplace stress

There are several causes of work place stress some of which may be work-related or some originating from an individuals personal life, either way it is a managers responsibility to identify stressors within their department and put actions in place either departmental wide or individually.

The management of stress should be integrated into everyday management and forms part of the annual Health and Safety Audit. Appendix 1 provides a checklist for managers in accordance with the Management Standards, which can be used to help carry out individual or team based risk assessments, identify adjustments to reduce stressors and put actions in place to minimise the risk of continued or increasing stress.

The list below highlights some of the main stressors categorised under HSE 'Management Standards' framework. (See Appendix 2 for a full list of the management standards)

Triggers of stress and management behaviours which impact:

1.Demand: *Employees indicate they are able to cope with the demands of their job.*

Triggers which could cause stress;

- Work overload.
- Boring/Repetitive duties.
- Inadequate resources.
- Physical environment i.e. lighting, space, temperature, disruptions etc.
- Psychological working environment: Verbal abuse, inappropriate behaviours.
- Working long hours – not taking lunch breaks/annual leave.
- People management issues.
- Inadequate allocation of work.

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
Identifying if additional resources can be brought in. Awareness of team members abilities and provide training where appropriate. Monitoring workload and refusing additional work when the team are under pressure / setting realistic deadlines. Following through problems on behalf of employees/foster a problem solving approach. Developing action plans and plan/forecast workloads. Review processes to identify improvements. Promote task rotation/job enrichment.	Delegating work unequally. Creating unrealistic deadlines. Listening but not taking action. Lack of consistency in approach / being indecisive. Panicking and not forward planning workflow and deadlines. Not being aware of team pressures.

2.Control: *Employee indicates that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.*

Triggers which could cause stress;

- Not being able to manage the demands of the job and life outside work.
- Rigid working patterns and deadlines imposed with no autonomy or control allowed.
- Conflicting work demands – from different managers or aspects of the job.
- Two way conversation and discussion not actively encouraged to discuss issues.

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
Trusting employees to do their work/empowerment . Steering employees in a direction rather than imposing. Knows when to consult employees and when to make a decision. Provides opportunity for employees to air views and holds regular meetings. Encourages staff to develop and reviews development.	Micro management. Imposing 'it's my way or no way'. Not listening to employee's and making decisions without consultation. Not allowing time off for employee's development and to attend training courses. Not listening to new ideas or allowing employee's to suggest and try improved ways of working.

3.Role: *Employees indicate they understand their role and responsibilities.*

Triggers which could cause stress;

- Lack of clarity of job role – no job descriptions/objective setting.
- Employees unaware of polices and procedures in place to support them and to be used.
- Lack of one-one communication/meetings/feedback.

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
Keeps teams in formed of what is happening with the department and the organisation. Communicates clear goals and objectives. Clearly defines roles, expectations and lines of communication. Regular meetings and two way communication.	Keeps people in the dark. Often makes decisions and holds meeting behind closed doors with no consultation in situations where consolation would have been appropriate. Does not update and have regular meetings to communicate changes. Talks to others about actions not completed without approaching the employee concerned.

4.Support: *Employees indicate they receive adequate support and information from colleagues and managers*

Triggers which could cause stress;

- Lack of support and encouragement from managers and colleagues.
- Lack of development/career progression opportunities.
- Lack of information sharing/withholding information.

- A working culture of encouraging long or unsociable hours i.e. seeing colleagues as weak if they don't consistently work long hours.

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
<p>Ensuring all health and safety requirements are met. Eg Working time directive.</p> <p>Praising work/acknowledging employee efforts.</p> <p>Providing supportive/constructive criticism.</p> <p>Operating a no blame culture and problem solving approach.</p> <p>Flexibility to support employee's if needing time off.</p> <p>Having an awareness of the employees pressures outside work.</p> <p>Encouraging development and training having regular 1-1 meetings.</p> <p>Leading from the front and taking responsibility 'buck stops with me.'</p> <p>Seeks help and advice from Occupational Health/HR.</p>	<p>Not taking H&S issues seriously and questioning the ability of an employee who raises a H&S issue.</p> <p>Not giving credit when jobs done well/deadlines met.</p> <p>Views feedback as 'one way' or giving feedback that employees are wrong just because their way of working is different.</p> <p>Assuming everyone is ok.</p> <p>Not having knowledge and understanding of your teams tasks/workloads.</p> <p>No consideration of work life balance.</p> <p>Badgering an employee as to what is wrong</p> <p>.</p>

5.Relationships: *Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours.*

Triggers which could cause stress under this category;

- Poor working relationships with managers/teams
- Combative or confrontational communication styles
- Poor communication and information sharing
- Not dealing with complaints/disputes at an early stage

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
<p>Listening objectively to both sides of conflict.</p> <p>Supporting and investigating complaints.</p> <p>Dealing with conflict at an early stage and flowing up on actions.</p> <p>Having a positive approach and staying calm when under pressure.</p> <p>Keeps employees issues private and confidential.</p> <p>Admits when wrong.</p> <p>Treats all employees equally.</p>	<p>Not dealing with complaints/issues and hoping it will resolve itself</p> <p>Taking sides</p> <p>Passing on their pressures to employees/being unpredictable and losing temper</p> <p>Talks about employee's issues with others staff members/making personal issues public</p> <p>Makes promises and does not deliver</p>

6.Change: *Employees indicate that the Organisation engages frequently with them when undergoing Organisational change.*

Triggers which could cause stress;

- Poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening
- Fears about job security
- Ineffective time planning of change
- Insufficient training or knowledge transfer on new systems/processes
- No consultation/engagement.

Positive management behaviours	Negative management behaviours
Keep team informed with regular meeting and communication updates – 2 way communication. Communicates clear goals and objectives and expectations. Provides timely information and consult Provides adequate support e.g. training. Considers group dynamics and physical working environment/positioning.	Leave team members in the dark about changes. Communicating at the last minute. Allowing people to hear messages through the grape vine. Not allowing 2 way communication on matters of change.

Dealing with individual cases of stress:

Stress should not be a reason for managers to be afraid to manage. If a stress related illness is reported it should be treated as any other sickness absence. Below are some steps that should be taken.

- Treat stressed employees in the same way as those with a physical health problem.
- Discuss the issue with the member of staff and demonstrate that you are concerned with their health.
- If work is affected, discuss the problems with Human Resources and explore the option of a referral to Occupational Health.
- Ask if there is anything as a manager you can do to help/try and identify the stressors. Checklist in Appendix 1 provides a basis for conducting basic risk assessment.
- Seek advice from the individual on any action that could be taken to alleviate the stress e.g. simple modifications to work for a short period, increase communication etc.
- Advise the individual about sources of help within or outwith the University – see general guidance.
- Document agreed actions and actively follow up to ensure stress levels have been reduced.
- Review and if necessary modify the work tasks and responsibilities of individuals who have had sickness absence due to stress as a result of their work.
- Be aware of the impact of stressed employees on other members of staff.

If you are concerned about stress in the workplace, advice can be sought from Janey Watt, Occupational Health Adviser, ext 2752, e-mail jw235 or Human Resources ext 3096, e-mail humres.

Human Resources
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Checklist to assist in identifying the type of adjustments that can be made to meet the HSE Management Standards

Ref:

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
<p>DEMANDS</p> <p>Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	Should/can tasks be redesigned or reallocated?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can adjustments (temporary or permanent) be made to working hours or patterns?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can changes be made to the way resources are managed or allocated?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Should further training be provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can changes be made to the work environment/equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Review workflow/properties and deadlines?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are breaks and annual leave taken?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
<p>CONTROL</p> <p>Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	Should the job design be altered to give more control over the pace, organisation or location of the work?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can adjustments be made to working hours or patterns?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can further training be provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can more autonomy over deadlines and priorities be given – more forward planning of deadlines?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
<p>SUPPORT</p> <p>Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues? ¹	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are systems in place to give and receive regular feedback? ²	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know how to access information, policies and procedures relevant to their concerns?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know how to access the resources necessary to do their job?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Should further training be provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the University? ³	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees have a supportive working environment with open communication encouraged?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

¹ E.g. Team meetings, regular 'one to one' meetings.

² E.g. Appraisal and Personal Development Review.

³ E.g., Occupational Health Service and counselling service, trade union representatives, harassment contacts.

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
ROLE Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Is the job design clear?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are there conflicting demands which could be minimised?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are systems in place to give and receive regular feedback?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are clear objectives set and polices and procedures communicated? ⁴			
	Are there clear lines of communication and line management structure?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?			

⁴ E.g. Appraisals/Q6 meetings, localised induction for new staff, probation review meetings.

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Is conflict identified and addressed at an early stage?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know where to find information, policies and procedures relevant to their concerns?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the University?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<p>CHANGE</p> <p>Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and systems are in place to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	Are employees consulted on proposed changes in a timely manner where possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are employees provided with information to help understand the reasons for change, if required?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are systems in place to provide employees with information on the probable impact of change on their jobs?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Are systems in place to make employees aware of timescales for change?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Can further training be provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the University?	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

DEMANDS - includes workload, work patterns, and the work environment	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work.</p> <p>People’s skills and abilities are matched to the job demands.</p> <p>Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees.</p> <p>Employees’ concerns about their work environment are addressed.</p>
CONTROL - how much say the person has in the way they do their work	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work.</p> <p>Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.</p> <p>Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.</p> <p>The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills.</p> <p>Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken.</p> <p>Employees are consulted over their work patterns.</p>
SUPPORT - includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees.</p> <p>Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.</p> <p>Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.</p> <p>Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it.</p> <p>Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job.</p> <p>Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.</p>

RELATIONSHIP - includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.</p> <p>Employees share information relevant to their work.</p> <p>The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.</p> <p>Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour.</p> <p>Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.</p>
ROLE - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that individuals do not have conflicting roles	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible.</p> <p>The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities.</p> <p>The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear.</p> <p>Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.</p>
CHANGE - how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation	
The standard is that:	Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
What should be happening / states to be achieved:	<p>The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.</p> <p>The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals.</p> <p>Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs.</p> <p>Employees are aware of timetables for changes. Employees have access to relevant support during changes.</p>