



This guide is in line with the University's legal responsibilities for the health and welfare of its staff. The University believes that the effective management of all staff will ensure the success of the organisation and will reduce work-related stress. Where specific work practices are identified as stressors, the University will encourage the Head of School/Service to make reasonable adjustments to reduce workplace stressors. Individuals have a legal duty to take reasonable care of their own health and that of others especially if others may be adversely affected by an individual's action. Staff are strongly encouraged to discuss, at an early stage, any stress related issues with their Head of School/Service or the Occupational Health Adviser or a member of Human Resources.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Employees' Guide to Stress Recognition and Reduction. It is intended to provide further information to managers on the causes of stress in the workplace and possible steps that can be taken to avoid stress in the workplace and the provision of staff support.

Managers' Guide to Monitoring Stress & Supporting Staff

Introduction

The aim of this guide is to provide information to all managers about stress, its common causes and effects and to identify actions that can be taken to lessen the harmful effects of prolonged stress.

A measure of stress can be beneficial especially when it helps to motivate and stimulate an individual, however it can become a problem if the stressors become more than a person can comfortably tolerate, thereby causing distress. The result of this is often ill-health and a decrease in self-confidence, work efficiency and performance. Therefore, the early recognition of an individual's distress and an effective remedial action can benefit not only the individual concerned but also the workplace.

6 key areas of causes of work related stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2004) has identified six key areas that can be causes of work related stress. These are:-

- the demands of the job
- the control the employee has over their work
- the support staff receive from managers and colleagues
- the relationships in the workplace
- the employee's role in the organisation
- organisational change and how it is managed

What is stress?

Stress is experienced when a person believes that demand is exceeding capacity to cope. Essentially, this reaction is experienced when a person finds it difficult to handle the pressures placed upon them. A stress reaction is an individual response and what may constitute stress for one individual may not be stressful for another; similarly the type and severity of stress response varies from one individual to another.

Causes of stress?

There are varying sources of stress such as: family concerns; workplace relationships; work you are unable to complete or are ill equipped/trained to do; financial worries; personal and family ill-health; workload and ability to cope with it. Even positive events can be stressful e.g. holidays, weddings and moving house.

The following are typical stressors at work:

Physical/Environmental Conditions

Excessive noise, uncomfortable workplace temperatures, inadequate lighting, air pollution, potentially harmful environments, lack of privacy, poorly designed equipment/workstation.

Interpersonal

Social/physical isolation; poor relationships with manager/colleagues; bullying and/or harassment; frequent changes in type of leadership style.

Cultural

Poor communications; inadequate staffing levels; lack of support; inconsistent management style; too little/too much supervision; continual changes; lack of participation in workplace decision making; and uncertainty about one's working future.

Job Content

Lack of variety; repetitive or fragmented work; under usage of skills; lack of training for type of work undertaken; implementation of new technology; conflicting demands of more than one manager.

Possible Solutions

The following provides a checklist that can be used to promote good management:-

▶▶ Provide a supportive work environment

- Deal with staff in a sensitive and caring fashion.
- Monitor staff satisfaction and well-being.
- Ensure staff are aware of individuals they can talk to about problems either within the School/Service or outwith.
- Facilitate a team approach and good relationships between staff.

▶▶ Work Design

- Do staff have clear roles and responsibilities?
- Are known work pressures reviewed and monitored e.g. tight deadlines, staffing levels?
- Are clear and concise instructions provided to staff?
- Try to identify jobs where stress has been or is a problem to see what can be done to reduce the risk of stress.
- Where possible, ensure that staff have some control of their work and that their work has variety.
- Do staff take proper breaks?

▶▶ Communication

- Is there clear regular two-way communication?
- Are there regular meetings to inform staff of events/issues?
- Is there the opportunity for informal discussion?
- Can staff discuss their concerns?
- Is appropriate action taken as required to deal with concerns?
- Are team objectives, missions etc discussed openly with all members of the team?
- Do you have time for individual staff members?
- Do you give supportive and constructive criticism when required?
- Do you recognise and praise individual or group achievements, hard work and efforts?
- Are staff helped to prepare for proposed changes in staffing, responsibilities, work and busy periods?
- Do you think through the impact your actions and decisions have on the staff for whom you have responsibility?

▶▶ Health, Safety and Welfare

- Ensure appropriate health and safety checks are undertaken.
- Deal with problems in the workplace as quickly as possible.
- Visit staff in the workplace and know how long they are working.
- Encourage staff to take their full entitlement to holidays each year.
- Provide a good working environment with the appropriate equipment.

▶▶ Supporting Stressed Members of Staff

- 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 who may refer the individual to Occupational Health.
- Ask if there is anything as a manager you can do to help.
- 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.
- Advise the individual about sources of help within or outwith the University – see general guidance.
- Actively follow up an individual with stress problems and continue to demonstrate your wish to support them.
- 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.

Where to get further help / advice

Internally

Occupational Health Service

You can refer to the University's Occupational Health Service to discuss your concerns, and for further advice.

Human Resources

Human Resources will discuss with you and advise on how to deal with issues causing stress.

Learning & Development

Learning & Development provides a variety of courses which you may find very useful, such as bullying and harassment in the workplace; counselling skills, assertiveness training; managing sickness absence; management skills course; recognition and reduction of stress; conflict resolution; presentation skills and supervision skills.

Sports Centre

Various activities are available to help alleviate tension and reduce stress. A personal "one to one" fitness assessment can be undertaken and assistance given to find the fitness programme that is tailor-made to suit you.

Trade Union

General support and advice. Information on the Unions can be obtained by contacting UNISON or EIS/ULA.

Continuing Education

Some people may find it beneficial to develop their skills, learning a new language etc.

Staff Counselling - Care First

This exists to provide a confidential, independent source of advice. Counselling may be offered by telephone or in person.

Externally

General Practitioner

GP is a good source of advice and can often recommend remedies to assist or may refer to a local support group/class.

Evening classes and leisure activities

For example, yoga, rambling, walking. Enquire at your local council for local classes.

Friends and family

Friends and family are a good source of support. Often openly expressing problems can in itself be beneficial.

NHS Helpline

The Helpline provides information about what is available in your area. Call 0800 33 44 88.

HEBS

Scottish Health Information Site. Call 0131 536 5500. Visit www.hebs.org.uk.

Contact Details

Occupational Health Service

OHS.napier@connaught.plc.uk

Human Resources

Ext 3411

Corporate Learning & Development

Corporate Learning & Development Manager

Ext 5046

Fitness Centre

Ext 4437

Care First

Tel: 0800 174319

Health and Safety

Health & Safety Adviser

Ext 6373

Looking ahead

Forward planning for stressful events can assist; there will be certain times of the year that place heavy demands on staff and therefore cause stress, such as Matriculation, Examinations etc. If you or your School/Service is aware of these times and would like assistance to deal with them before they arise, small staff groups can be seen at the workplace. (Contact Occupational Health Adviser).