Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

Managers guide to monitoring stress and supporting staff

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 Dean of School/Director of 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 Dean of School/Director of Service or a member of Human Resources.
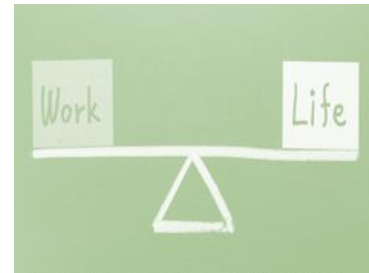
This guide should be read in conjunction with the University Stress Management Policy and the Employees' Guide to Stress Recognition and Reduction. It is intended to provide further information to managers on the causes of stress in the workplace and possible steps that can be taken to avoid stress in the workplace and the provision of staff support.

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.

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.

ⓘ HSE – Advice for line managers

Key areas of causes of work related stress

All employers have a responsibility to support staff who may be suffering from stress, either work-related or otherwise. When considering the likelihood that a work activity could result in employees becoming stressed, it is necessary to first identify the potential hazards. The table below includes the factors identified by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as being the most significant contributors to workplace stress. There is also an additional factor - personal factors - that can impact on ability to cope with work pressures. This latter factor becomes particularly relevant when conducting a stress risk assessment for a specific individual. These management standards provide a practical framework which organisations can use to minimise the impact of work-related stress.

ⓘ The HSE Management Standards

Summary of HSE Management Standards

Demands	This includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
Control	How much say the person has in the way they do their work
Support	This includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
Relationships	This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
Role	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
Change	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

Additional factor – personal factors

Personal factors	Staff are supported with any mental and physical health; bereavement or other traumatic events; dependant(s) with ill-health; financial, relationship problems etc.

The checklist, based on the HSE management standards, is intended to provide managers and staff with guidance on the practical steps they can take to identify and address potential sources of workplace stress. These standards should be considered in all strategic or work activities whether at institutional or School/Service level.

Major university-wide initiatives should always include an assessment of the potential for work-related stress and how this can be mitigated, for example:

- By the provision of appropriate training and support
- Ensuring effective and timely communication
- By giving consideration to the timing of new initiatives to avoid conflicting deadlines and priorities
- By ensuring the demands on staff are not otherwise excessive
- By seeking to ensure a supportive management culture.

Similarly, School/Service managers should have arrangements in place to identify and address potential stressors in the workplace, for example: regular review of sickness absence records/certificates, particularly those indicating stress; data on staff turnover; trends emerging from personal development reviews; and issues raised in individual and staff meetings and by local staff representatives.

Where workplace stressors need to be assessed on an individual basis, however, the HSE management standards provide a useful broad template for recognising and categorising possible stress factors, and the checklist may be a useful tool in this context.

The university is committed to improving management practice through the provision of guidance, training and support, the promotion of harassment prevention policies, as well as supporting positive initiatives such as personal development review and reward and recognition schemes to recognise and enhance individual contribution to the work of the University.

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.

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

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   - uncertainty about one's working future

interpersonal
- social/physical isolation   - poor relationships with manager / colleagues   - bullying and/or harassment   - frequent changes in type of leadership style

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 wellbeing.
- ensure staff are aware of individuals they can talk to about problems either within the School/Service or out with.
- 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 and safety

- Ensure appropriate health and safety checks are undertaken.
- Deal with problems in the workplace as quickly as possible.
- Provide a good working environment with the appropriate equipment.

Supporting 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.
- Carry out a stress 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, increased communication.
- Advise the individual about sources of help within or out with the University – see "Where to get help and support".
- 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 help and support

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. Staff 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.

Health & Safety – email, website

Sports Centre [EN]gage - 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. [EN]gage website.

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

Staff counselling - MCL Medics - This exists to provide a confidential, independent source of advice. Counselling may be offered by telephone or in person. MCL Medics website.

Externally

General Practitioner – The 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.

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[NHS Inform](#)   t: 0800 22 44 88
On-line stress tool [European Agency for Safety and Health at Work](#)
[**HSE – Stress and mental health at work**](#)