University of
Reading

Stress at Work Policy

1.   Introduction

The University is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for its staff and recognises the importance of fostering psychological as well as physical well-being. Stress is a complex subject and the University has to deal with its effects irrespective of its source. Whilst work related stress is addressed, other causes of stress are considered.

The policy aims to reduce the levels of stress so far as is reasonably practicable. This will be achieved in practice through appropriate job design, creating a supportive work environment, training and supporting managers and employees to assist them in preventing and coping with workplace stress, and supporting employees if and when they are experiencing stress.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reports that work-related stress, depression and anxiety accounts for 40% of all work-related ill health and 12.5 million working days were lost to stress in 2016/17.

Whilst stress can occur among employees and students, there are considerable differences in the legal responsibilities for these two groups. This policy applies to the University's responsibility as an employer. Managers are responsible for implementation and providing the resources required under this policy. This policy is related to the University Safety Policy, and other University Human Resources policy statements, and should be read in conjunction with them. The following key policies and procedures are relevant:
University Health and Safety Policy (and supplements)
Health and Wellbeing Policy
Review and Restructuring Policy
University Grievance Procedure
Code of Good Practice (Valuing Ourselves and Others)
Harassment Statement and Guidelines
Workplace Mediation Guidance

2.   Purpose and scope

2.1. Definition of Stress

The HSE define stress as:
"Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they perceive that they are unable to cope with those demands. It is not a disease in itself, but if stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental or physical ill-health"

This makes a distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Different *primary causes* of stress are distinguished as they have different potential management approaches, but they are all matters that the University is committed to addressing at work.

2.2. Management standards

The HSE have provided a set of standards for managing stress in the workplace.

Demands – 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.

Control – 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.

Support – 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.

Relationships – the Standard is that:
- employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours. eg bullying at work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

Role – 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.

Change – the Standard is that:
- employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisation change; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

2.3. Primary causes of stress

The management standards can be used to identify the primary causes of stress and make the process of managing stress in the workplace easier and more effective. The primary causes are:

Demands – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

Control – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work

Support – such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

Relationships – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

Role – such as whether people understand their role within the

Organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

Change – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

However, as each cause will have different impacts on different individuals there is not a simple relationship between any one primary cause and the level of stress that individuals experience. Stress will also arise in individual's personal lives, over which we have no control or responsibility but this may affect work performance.

3.   Principles

The University at all levels will follow the Management Standards Approach to managing stress:
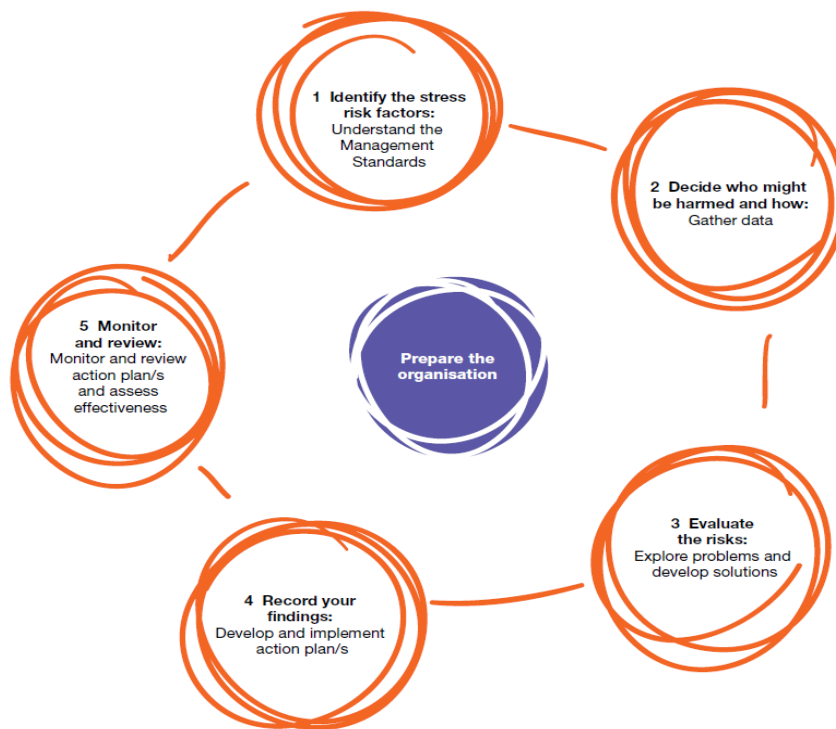

Figure 1. The Management Standards Approach   (Source: The Health and Safety Executive)

In addition to the above, the University at all levels will also:
- Provide training for all managers and supervisors in good management practice.
- Consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress and where appropriate provide time and resources to enable them to do this role.
- Ensure (so far as is practicable) that employees have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their roles.
- Provide access to confidential occupational health support and where necessary counselling.
- Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the policy.

4.   Responsibilities

4.1. Managers

All University managers (from Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Board through to individual line managers and supervisors) shall:
- conduct and implement recommendations from risks assessments within their jurisdiction
- ensure good (i.e. clear and appropriate) verbal and written communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
- ensure that employees are adequately trained and have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their duties
- ensure that employees skills and abilities are matched to job demands
- ensure, as far as is practicable, that employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities
- monitor workloads to ensure that staff are not overloaded
- ensure that employees' concerns about work environment are addressed

- monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that individuals are not overworking
- monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their entitlement
- attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
- ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction
- be vigilant and offer additional support to employees experiencing stress whether arising inside or outside work e.g. bereavement or separation
- ensure that employees are recruited to/employed in roles for which they are suited

4.2. Occupational Health Service

The OHS shall provide:
- specialist advice and support to employees suffering with stress
- advise managers in implementing stress risk assessments
- Monitor and report on any high levels of work related stress cases in specific work locations.
- help support those employees at work with stress and advise them and their managers on the actions required to enable them to remain at work
- help support individuals absent from work with stress, and advise them and their management on the actions required for a planned return to work
- initiate case conferences where appropriate to address employee stress issues with the employee's consent liaise with the employee's GP or other practitioners
- refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required
- monitor and report on the effectiveness of occupational health measures to reduce stress related absence
- inform the University Health and Safety Committee and Staff Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
- report periodically to the University Health and Safety Committee and Staffing Committee, in conjunction with the HR team, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements
- provide specialist advice and input into awareness training on managing stress as required.

4.3. Health and Safety Services

Health and Safety Services shall:
- support managers in implementing stress risk assessments
- monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress
- inform the University Health and Safety Committee and Staffing Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
- report to the University Health and Safety Committee and Staffing Committee, in conjunction with the HR teams, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements
- in conjunction with HR train managers in undertaking stress risk assessments and contribute to management development training programmes where appropriate.

4.4. Human Resources

The Human Resources Department shall:
- provide support and guidance to managers and employees on all aspects of managing stress in the workplace effectively
- development fair, transparent and effect policies that ensure the organisation is supporting managers and employees to effectively manage stress in the workplace
- assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics
- advise managers and individuals on training requirements
- provide continuing advice and support to managers and individual staff (e.g. advice on policy, supporting employee well-being)
- encourage referral to occupational health where appropriate
- provide training on managing stress for staff and managers in conjunction with HSS.

4.5. Employees

Employees shall:
- take responsibility for their own health and well being and also develop an awareness of their own abilities and coping mechanisms
- raise issues of concern in the first instance with the relevant line manager if able to (or an appropriate colleague), their HR Partner/Advisor, their Area Health and Safety Coordinator, a Staff Forum or Trade Union representative, or the Occupational Health Service
- consider opportunities for training when recommended
- discuss and consider opportunities for counselling when recommended.

4.6. Trade Union Safety Representatives

Under the Health and Safety legislation the University has a network of Trade Union Safety Representatives. These are people appointed by the Unions and recognised by the University. The representatives assist in the development of health and safety solutions and they:
- must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress
- must be able to consult with members of staff on the issue of stress
- must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process
- should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR
- should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to help implement the University Stress at Work Policy and attend appropriate Trade Union training relating to workplace stress
- should conduct joint inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled, e.g. excessive temperatures at work

None of the listed roles above are any different from the Trade Union Safety Representatives roles, rights and responsibilities for any other part of their health and safety role.

10 April 2018