

Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing at Work policy

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Introduction

The University's Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing policy provides a source of reference material for all staff dealing with stress at work. Managing stress presents a challenge to all those concerned — it can be difficult to identify and tackle, with an impact both on the stressed person and those around them, seriously affecting quality of working lives and effectiveness in the workplace. It is therefore important to take prompt action to prevent, minimise and take action to manage stress. Advice on how to do this is given below.

Staff seeking advice on what to do if you are experiencing stress, should refer to, the [Staff guidance](#), [Policy statement](#) and [Summary of actions](#). You should raise your concerns with your supervisor if you can. Other sources of advice include the [Occupational Health Service](#) or your GP if stress is affecting your health; the [Staff Counselling Service](#) if you are finding it difficult to cope.

Managers seeking advice on how to tackle stress should refer to [Management guidance](#), [Policy statement](#) and [Summary of actions](#). The [HR Business Manager or HR Adviser allocated to your institution](#) can provide detailed advice on individual cases.

For general information about our stress policy and for advisory information please refer to:

- [Policy statement](#)
- [Management standards \[HSE\]](#)
- [Stress at work booklet \[ACAS\]](#)

The University of Cambridge 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. This commitment arises from the University's duty of care to all its staff, and more generally the recognition that a safe and healthy working environment contributes to the motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and creativity of all staff. Specifically the University is committed to the promotion of health, to the prevention of work-related stress and to the provision of support to any member of staff who may suffer stress.

Eligibility

This policy applies to all categories of staff.

Statement of policy

The University's stress policy provides a source of reference material for all staff dealing with stress at work. Managing stress presents a challenge to all those concerned — it can be difficult to identify and tackle, with an impact both on the stressed person and those around

them, seriously affecting quality of working lives and effectiveness in the workplace. It is therefore important to take prompt action to prevent, minimise and take action to manage stress. Advice on how to do this is given below.

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress at work as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them."

This makes an important distinction between **pressure**, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and excessive pressure causing **stress**, which can be detrimental to health. The point at which workplace pressures become excessive will, of course, vary with individual levels of tolerance and with levels of pressure in other areas of life at particular times.

Stress may affect people in a variety of ways, and in serious cases may be a causative factor of a physical or mental illness. In addition, people may interpret their experience of stress in different ways, for example according to their philosophical or religious belief.

Causes of stress

Research commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive has indicated that:

- about half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill
- up to 5 million people in the UK feel 'very' or 'extremely' stressed by their work
- stress-related illness is responsible for the loss of 6.5 million working days each year
- costs society about £3.7 billion every year (at 1995/6 prices) (*Cartwright and Cooper 2002*)

In 2001, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) provided funds to the University of Plymouth for a three-year nationwide study of occupational stress in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The primary aim of this study was to provide stress benchmarks for Higher Education, to enable comparisons with other professions and intra-sector comparisons with cognate HEIs (i.e. old versus new universities) (*Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper and Ricketts 2005*). The main causes of stress identified in all HEI's were:

- long hours
- job security, particularly in relation to terms of employment and stress levels
- work relationships
- resources and communications

These issues are explored in more detail below.

Work-related stressors

Overload

This is the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of their workload and the associated time pressures are a source of pressure, for example:

- unrealistic deadlines and expectations, often as a result of super achievement by the most talented
- technology overload
- unmanageable workloads
- under recruitment of staff for work already timetabled

Control

The experience of pressure is strongly linked to perceptions of control. Lack of influence and consultation in the way in which work is organized and performed can be a potential source of pressure, for example:

- lack of control over aspects of the job
- lack of involvement in decision making
- account not taken of staff ideas/suggestions about the job
- lack of influence over performance targets
- lack of time

Work relationships

Many jobs demand regular contact with other people at work. Poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues and/or supervisors can be a potential source of pressure. In addition, pressure can occur if individuals feel isolated or unfairly treated.

Poor work relationships can be a result of:

- aggressive management style
- lack of support from others
- isolation at work
- aversive behaviour, e.g. bullying and harassment
- lack of understanding and leadership
- manager forever finding fault
- others not pulling their weight
- others take credit for personal achievements
- poor relationships with colleagues

Job security

This is the extent to which lack of job security and job changes are a source of pressure, for example:

- job insecurity
- lack of job permanence, e.g. temporary/fixed term contracts
- future job change
- fear of skill redundancy

Work-life balance

The demands of work have the potential to spill over and affect personal and home life and so put a strain on relationships outside work, for example:

- long hours: being expected to or having to work additional hours at home to the detriment of personal, partner and family relationships
- over-demanding and inflexible work schedules
- unsocial hours
- excessive travel time
- work interfering with home/personal life

Resources and communication

To perform a job effectively, individuals need to feel that they have appropriate training, equipment and resources. They also need to feel that they are adequately informed and that they are valued. Stress may result from lack of:

- information about what is going on in the organisation

- feedback on performance
- adequate training to do the job
- equipment/resources to do the job

Pays and benefits

The financial rewards associated with a job are important in terms of lifestyle. They are also often perceived to be an indication of an individual's worth and value to the organisation. Although financial reward may not be a prime motivator, it could become a factor if there are other negative aspects of the job.

Aspects of the job

These are potential sources of stress that relate to the fundamental nature of the job itself. Factors such as the physical working conditions, type of tasks and the amount of satisfaction derived from the job.

- job is unlikely to change in the next 5–10 years
- poor physical working conditions
- fear of physical violence
- work performance closely monitored
- organisation changes for change's sake
- dull and repetitive work
- dealing with difficult customers/clients
- lack of enjoyment of job

Effects of work-related stress

Where stress is not controlled and the individual and organisation suffers, the following may be observed. Effects on people may include:

Physical

- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal upset
- Raised blood pressure/cardiovascular disease

Emotional

- Anxiety and irritability
- Depression
- Labile emotions

Intellectual

- Loss of concentration
- Lack of motivation
- Difficulty with thought process
- Loss of memory
- Poor decision-making

Behavioural

- Substance (including alcohol) misuse
- Decreased libido
- Inappropriate display of behaviour
- Isolation
- Unpunctuality

Effects on the organisation may include:

- High absenteeism
- High labour turnover
- Poor time keeping
- Poor performance and productivity
- Low morale
- Poor motivation
- Increased employee complaints
- Increased ill-health, accidents and incidents reports

The University aims to minimise the risk of stress through a risk management process involving the identification, assessment and implementation of control measures to workplace stressors. In furtherance of these aims, it will do the following:

Preventing stress

Take stress prevention measures such as:

- Fostering a co-operative and supportive environment
- Ensuring good communications within teams
- Ensuring adequate preparation for new roles and responsibilities through risk assessment and training
- Enabling staff to report excessive workloads, interpersonal pressures and symptoms of stress without fear of discrimination
- Recognising early signs of stress in employees and taking action to provide appropriate intervention
- Supporting staff in recovering from stress-related illnesses and managing the return to work after any period of sick leave so that stress does not recur.

Detecting and addressing stress

- To take reasonable action to combat and prevent workplace stressors identified through risk assessment or those raised by members of staff
- To increase general awareness of stress and methods to prevent and combat harmful, excessive workplace stressors in various ways, including training and health promotion initiatives
- To consult with union safety representatives on proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress
- To assist staff in managing stress in others and themselves
- To manage problems that do occur and provide a confidential referral service
- To manage the return to work of those who have been absent from work with stress related problems

Monitoring effectiveness

- To review risk assessments in accordance with best practice so as to monitor risk management to prevent stress.
- To monitor, investigate and evaluate stress indicators, such as excessive sickness absence or high labour turnover

Legislative influences

There is no specific law on controlling stress at work, but broad health and safety law applies:

- Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.
- Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employers have a duty to assess the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed at work. Such an assessment should include an analysis of the risks to employees' health caused by stress at work.
- Under the Equality Act 2010 employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on account of their disability as defined under the Act. This involves making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or to the way the work is done, if the existing working arrangements or physical features place the disabled person concerned at a substantial disadvantage. Ill health arising from, or exacerbated by, stress at work may constitute a disability under the Act.

Ill health resulting from stress caused at work has to be treated in the same way as ill health due to physical causes in the workplace.

This means that employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that health is not put at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, or from the day-to-day demands placed on their workforce.

All staff have an individual responsibility to minimise the risk of any kind of harm to themselves and their colleagues and to co-operate with the University in its efforts to manage work-related stress.

Case law has established that, unless the employer knows otherwise, it can be assumed that employees are mentally capable of withstanding reasonable pressure from work.

Employers are not under a legal duty to prevent ill-health caused by stress due to problems outside work, e.g. financial or domestic worries. However, non-work pressures can make it difficult for staff to cope with work and, consequently, their performance at work might suffer. Therefore, being understanding to staff in this position is in the employer's best interest.

Roles and responsibilities

Heads of institution and managers

Line managers should be alert to the risk of work-related stress in their staff and to signs of adverse reactions in individuals. This awareness will prompt them to take remedial action.

Their responsibilities are to:

- Conduct appropriate risk assessments using HSE Management Standards, covering demands, control, support, relationships, role and change, and HSE guidance on risk assessment in general.
- Implement actions arising out of risk assessments.
- Ensure good communication especially where there are organisational or procedural changes.
- Ensure staff understand and, if necessary, are trained to perform their roles and, as appropriate, encouraged to develop further.
- Monitor workload, working hours, annual leave and sickness absence to ensure that staff are not overloaded.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.

- Offer support to any member of staff who is experiencing stress outside the workplace.
- As part of the monitoring process, conduct return to work interviews with staff when they resume work after any period of sick leave and exit interviews with staff leaving the University.
- Refer the employee to the Occupational Health Service should they or their doctor attribute a period of sickness absence to work-related stress.

Members of staff

All staff have an individual responsibility to minimise the risk of any kind of harm to themselves and their colleagues and to co-operate with the University in its efforts to manage work-related stress.

- Staff must co-operate with their managers to reduce hazards that may affect their physical and/or mental well-being, including attending any training provided and following guidance regarding work-related hazards.
- Where an individual believes they are at significant risk of work-related stress, then they should inform their manager in confidence so that appropriate steps can be taken to reduce the risk. Other sources of support to which they can turn if they feel they cannot speak to their manager for any reason include Occupational Health, Human Resources, Union representatives, or the Staff Counselling service, as appropriate, who will facilitate early support or intervention.
- Staff must recognise their own training and development needs.
- Staff should be aware that a healthy lifestyle supported by an appropriate work–life balance is an important contribution to a person's well-being.

The Human Resources Division

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.
- Monitor the success of the stress policy by providing and analysing sickness absence and labour turnover statistics and conducting surveys of staff attitudes.
- Provide support to managers and staff, through provision of written guidance and training.
- Provide assistance in managing individual cases of stress and advice on stress prevention.
- Ensure that the stress policy is implemented.

Support services

The agencies involved in supporting heads of Institution and individuals in achieving these objectives and their responsibilities are as follows:

The Occupational Health Service, the Health and Safety Office and the Staff Counselling Service, whose responsibilities are:

- The provision of training to both management and employees on stress awareness, the risk assessment process and the application of appropriate control measures.
- Providing confidential consultation with the aim of assessing, medically managing or referring for specialist assistance, as appropriate.
- Consulting with management, reassessing the work environment as part of problem investigation or rehabilitation, and advising on the need for any individual work adjustments.
- Providing counselling and/or welfare advice to staff experiencing stress.

The HR Division and the Support Services functions mentioned above will:

- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Keep the University informed of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

The Safety Committees

- Ensure the stress policy is implemented.
- Oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and the measures it recommends.

Departmental Safety Officers

- Monitor the implementation of safety policy locally.
- Advise the head of institution on the effectiveness of the local arrangements and the adequacy of the control measures, for example as a result of carrying out risk assessments.
- Report on safety to the head of institution.

Summary of actions

Managers

- Assess the work environment for the presence of stressors, planning ahead and taking action to control and minimise risk to employee well-being.
- Ensure good communications and a supportive environment.
- Ensure adequate preparation, briefing and training for new roles and responsibilities.
- Undertake regular (at least two yearly) appraisals and departmental risk assessments.
- Listen to a member of staff who says they have a problem.
- Identify and try to remove barriers that may prevent a member of staff from being in work.
- If a member of staff takes sickness absence, contact them in accordance with the absence policy guidance and discuss how you could help support them back into work.
- Identify stressors, especially if a member of staff is off sick with stress or mentions stress.
- Mitigate against stress where possible.
- Be aware of staff displaying symptoms of stress and take action at the earliest opportunity.
- Work with the member of staff to find a solution.
- Refer the member of staff to support services as appropriate, including the Occupational Health Service and/or the Staff Counselling Service.
- Seek advice from your HR team, as appropriate.

Staff

- Tell someone if you are not coping with work or feeling stressed (even external stress).
- Try to recognise your own training and development needs and communicate these to manager.
- Discuss your stress-related issues with your manager, Occupational Health, Staff Counselling and/or Union Representative.
- Co-operate with management to enable them to meet their responsibilities.

- Make full use of measures put in place to minimise stress at work.
- Act on the advice given by the Occupational Health Service and your GP.
- If you take sickness absence keep in contact with your manager in accordance with the absence guidance.
- Work with your manager to resolve the problems/identify stressors.

Guidance

Management guidance

- [Management guidance](#)
- [Risk assessment](#)
- [Individual Stress Identification Tool \(PDF format\)](#)
- [Individual Stress Identification Tool \(Word format\)](#)
- [HSE management standards indicator tool](#)
- [Summary of actions](#)

Staff guidance

- [Staff guidance](#)
- [Individual Stress Identification Tool \(PDF format\)](#)
- [Individual Stress Identification Tool \(Word format\)](#)
- [Summary of actions](#)

Additional sources of information

Information in relation to stress and wellbeing, as well as advice and information on the support available can be found on the [Occupational Health Service website](#).

Additional information is also available at the following University and external websites and support services:

- [Staff Counselling Service](#)
- [HR Business Manager or HR Adviser](#)
- [Internal Mediation Service](#)
- [The Safety Office](#)
- [Recognised trades unions](#)
- [Chaplain to University staff](#)
- [Sickness absence policy](#)
- [Disability and employment policy](#)
- [Dignity at work policy: advice to staff](#)
- [Management standards \[HSE\]](#)
- [Stress at work booklet \[ACAS\]](#)