UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Work-related Stress Policy

Work-Related Stress Policy

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1. Context

This policy outlines the University's approach to preventing and addressing work-related stress. It recognises that a certain level of pressure is a natural part of working life and can motivate individuals to remain engaged and perform well. However, when pressures become excessive and/or prolonged it may negatively affect wellbeing. This Policy sets out the actions a manager must take to proactively identify, and manage the sources of stress, and what to do, when an employee is experiencing work-related stress symptoms.

There are clear benefits to the University of preventing work-related stress, including:

- Improved workplace morale, positive working relationships, increased employee satisfaction and retention.
- Healthier and happier employees are more motivated and productive.
- Protection from reputational damage and financial costs of legal action.
- Preventing stress can support attendance, as stress is a leading cause of long-term absence.

This Policy is not contractual and may be amended from time to time, considering changes in legislation or operational requirements.

2. Eligibility

This policy applies to all employees.

3. Definitions

Managers, the term manager is used throughout this Policy. However, it is recognised that in some cases it may be appropriate for steps attributed to a manager to be delegated to another appropriate person.

Stress, the University has adopted the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) definition of stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them".

This distinguishes between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and excessive pressure, which can be detrimental to health. The point at which workplace pressures become excessive will be different for different people.

4. Causes and impact of work-related stress

This policy is based on the 6 stress management standards used by the HSE which cover the primary causes of work-related stress, these are:

1. *Demands*: workload, work patterns, and the work environment
2. *Control*: how much say you have in the way you do your work
3. *Support*: encouragement, sponsorship and resources available through the organisation, line management and colleagues
4. *Relationships*: avoidance of conflict and promotion of positive working
5. *Role:* understanding of role within the organisation
6. *Change*: management and communication of change

Stress affects people in different ways. Stress is not an illness; however, the impact of stress can contribute to physical and mental health problems. Stress is associated with physical conditions such as heart disease, back pain and gastrointestinal illnesses and mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression. Stress can also lead to an individual using unhealthy coping habits that impact their health e.g. misusing alcohol.

Individuals respond differently to pressure and the impact of stress on an employee will be influenced by a wide range of factors including their personal circumstances and characteristics. It is therefore important to tailor support to an employee's needs.

Work-related stress negatively impacts on the University's ability to fulfil its mission. This is due to its impact on performance, working relationships, attendance and retention of staff.

5. Policy statement

The University has adopted the following policy principles:

- The University is committed to supporting employee wellbeing and providing a safe and healthy working environment for all staff.
- The University will comply with its legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act to protect workers from harm; this includes harm arising from work-related stress.
- Departments are required to proactively consider risks of work-related stress at department or team level alongside physical risks when undertaking risk assessments.
- Managers should consider reasonable measures that can prevent work related stress at an individual level.

- Managers will be alert to the signs of work-related stress in their teams and take timely and appropriate action when an employee starts to show signs that they are experiencing excessive pressure.
- Employees will be supported when returning to work following stress related absence.

6. Preventing work-related stress

6.1 Department or team level

The University has a legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to protect staff from harm: this requirement covers both physical and psychological harm.

In accordance with this legal obligation the University's Risk Assessment Policy Statement states, "each Head of Department is ultimately responsible for ensuring that risk assessments are being completed. On a day-to-day basis, those managing research or other work, i.e. Principal Investigators, managers/supervisors, must ensure that risk assessments are completed in their area of control". At a department or team level, the standard risk assessment form (RA1) is used to identify both physical risks and psychological risks, i.e. potential stressors in line with the HSE Management Standards (demand, control, support, role clarity, relationships and change).

Once stressors have been identified, appropriate control measures must be put in place to address these in the same way as controls are implemented to mitigate physical risks. Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that appropriate control measures are implemented and monitored, with support from Departmental Safety Officers.

For further information see the University's Risk Assessment Guidelines. Please contact the Safety Office for further guidance on how to meet the University's risk assessment requirements.

6.2 At an individual level

Managers should aim to create safe and professional team environments where all employees feel valued and supported. Building positive working relationships helps create an environment where employees feel able to raise concerns. Managers are encouraged to have regular contact with team members; this will give them an opportunity to identify early signs that an employee is experiencing excessive pressure. Managers should be available and open to having discussions about workload pressures and make adjustments where possible. It is particularly important that managers keep staff informed about changes that impact them and give them the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, make suggestions and raise concerns. Managers

are responsible for addressing workplace issues promptly using the relevant policies and procedures.

7. Addressing work-related stress

Managers must be alert to signs of work-related stress in their team/team members. See Signs of work-related stress (Annex A) for further information. Training is available for managers on identifying and managing work-related stress, including how to use the Individual Stress Identification Tool (SIT) effectively.

If an employee is showing signs that they are experiencing excessive pressure or work-related stress, the manager should discuss this with them at the earliest opportunity using the Individual SIT (see below, and section 12 for further details). The manager should approach this conversation in a sensitive and non-judgemental way, avoiding making assumptions, as there may be a variety of reasons for the behaviour observed. A manager may seek advice, if needed, from their HR Business Partnering Team about how to approach the situation with the employee.

Alternatively, an employee may tell their manager or another party that they are experiencing work-related stress.

The Individual SIT should be used when an employee is experiencing work-related stress. This aims to identify the cause of an individual's work-related stress at an early stage. This assessment can be done jointly by the employee and manager in discussion. Alternatively, the employee may complete the stress risk-assessment before discussing their answers with their manager. In some instances, including if the employee's working relationship with their manager is contributing to work-related stress, it may be appropriate for another person to work through this process with the employee e.g. a local HR contact, Department Safety Officer or Departmental Administrator.

Once the cause of an individual's work-related stress has been identified, appropriate actions need to be taken to address this. See work-related stress suggested actions which gives examples of management actions that can apply in different situations. Taking effective prompt action can prevent work-related stress developing into problems with physical and mental health. Actions taken should be kept under review to check if they are effective. Managers needing advice on action to reduce work-related stress should speak to their HR contact.

Before making a referral to Occupational Health (OH) about work-related stress, the manager is expected to have used the Individual SIT and taken appropriate management action to address the causes of stress identified.

8. Stress related absence

An employee who is absent due to stress or mental health, should follow the sickness absence notification process detailed in the Health and Attendance Procedure.

During a period of stress related absence, it is important that the manager keeps in contact with the employee. The manager and the employee should agree how they will keep in touch and how often they will speak. This allows the manager to stay informed about the employee's fitness to work and keeps the employee up to date with any key news from their team. Detailed work discussions are not appropriate during sickness absence. If appropriate, an alternative contact may be agreed if the employee does not feel able to speak to their manager.

The manager should signpost support that is available from the Staff Counselling Service and the Access to Work Mental Health Support Service.

Where an employee is absent on a long term basis managers should consider how their work will be covered. This helps prevent work from accumulating and becoming overwhelming when the employee returns. Managers are encouraged to contact their HR Business Partnering Team to advice on any necessary cover arrangements in the first instance.

The manager should make a referral to OH for guidance on when the employee is likely to be fit to work and recommend workplace adjustments to support the employee on their return to work, which may include a phased return. In planning a return to work, it is important that the manager and employee complete the Individual SIT or, if this has been previously done, review and update the existing version to reflect the current situation. This will help to highlight stressors that led to work-related stress and agree and document actions that will be taken to address these stressors, to prevent the employee experience the same issues on their return to work.

For further information see the Health and Attendance Policy and Procedure.

9. Stress outside work

An employee may be experiencing stress arising from difficulties outside work e.g. major life events or upheavals, caring responsibilities, isolation, financial challenges, or relationship issues (including coercive or abusive behaviour at home). In this situation managers should signpost the support that is available from the Staff Counselling Service and consider if there are any workplace adjustments that may support the employee while they deal with challenging life events e.g. changing working patterns or working hours.

An employee may experience pressure from external sources as a result of their lawful work at the university e.g. negative attention from the media, online platforms or from members of the

public. The University has a duty of care to ensure that employees are appropriately supported and has a range of services available. The employee should speak to their line manager or Head of Institution in the first instance about their concerns. Managers can seek advice from their HR Business Partnering Team.

10. Confidentiality

Information about stress and mental health is highly sensitive. Everyone involved in applying a workplace policy or procedure should treat this information as confidential. However, there are limited occasions when information about an employee's mental health may need to be shared with a third party. For example:

- Where an employee presents an immediate danger to themself or others.
- Where medical advice is required to determine how to support an employee. This includes asking an employee to give their consent before making a management referral to OH.
- Where allegations of harassment, bullying or other misconduct require a disciplinary investigation or proceedings to take place.

In these circumstances, wherever practical, matters should be discussed with the employee before any action is taken.

11. Sources of information and support

11.1 Internal

Occupational Health (OH) can give further guidance on how to deal with issues identified using the Individual SIT. A manager, with an employee's consent, may make a management referral to OH. Following an OH appointment, a report will be prepared giving recommendations for follow up actions. The employee will view the report before it is issued to their manager. The manager is responsible for considering whether recommendations can be implemented. Managers needing advice about considering OH recommendations should speak to their HR contact.

Staff Counselling Centre - employees can self-refer, or a referral can be made by HR or OH. Counselling provides the opportunity for employees to talk to a qualified and experienced professional in a confidential and non-judgemental setting. Difficulties do not have to be work-related to access counselling. An employee will have the opportunity to reflect on their situation and will be supported in managing any difficult or painful feelings that they are experiencing.

11.2 External

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) - See HSE work-related stress and how to manage it for more information.

Access to Work Mental Health Support Service - The Access to Work Mental Health Support Service is available to an employee experiencing a mental health issue that is impacting on them coming to work or while at work. This is a national service provided by both Maximus and Able Futures. It is available to anyone that has a mental health concern (diagnosed or undiagnosed) that is making attending work or doing their job difficult. This service provides employees with long term confidential and tailored mental health support that focuses on mental health in the workplace. This is provided via one-to-one meetings with a Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant. There is no cost to the employee or the University to use this service.

12. Review

The Policy will be reviewed within 2 years of the implementation date and then every 4 years.

Annex A: Supporting information - Signs of work-related stress

This information is adapted from the Health and Safety Executive (see Work-related stress and how to manage it).

Signs of stress in an individual

A change in the way someone acts can be a sign of stress. For example, they may:

- Take more time off sick
- Arrive for work later
- Behave in an uncharacteristic way
- Exhibit mood swings
- Seem withdrawn
- Lose motivation, commitment and confidence
- Have increased emotional reactions – being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive

Signs of stress in teams

Signs of stress in a team include:

- Increase in sickness absence for mental health and physical health reasons (consideration of physical conditions is relevant as these can be caused or exacerbated by stress or can mask mental health issues)
- Decreased performance and productivity
- Higher staff turnover
- Low team morale
- More complaints and grievances
- Multiple employees reporting that they are experiencing stress

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