

## **GUIDANCE ON UNDERTAKING STRESS RISK ASSESSMENTS**

This document supports the University's Stress Management Policy and Procedure to provide guidance for managers on undertaking School/Service Stress Risk Assessments and Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklists. Online training modules are available via People Development Online, including 'Team Stress Risk Assessment', 'Stress, Work and You' and 'Managing Stress'.

### **School/Service Stress Risk Assessment**

The purpose of carrying out a School/Service Stress Risk Assessment is to proactively identify and control the potential causes of work related stress, rather than deal with issues once they have occurred. Actions should be identified and prioritised in order to eliminate or reduce risks and promote wellbeing.

It is the responsibility of each Dean or Director to carry out a School/Service Stress Risk Assessment. This enables oversight of key potential issues within the School/Service and ensures that actions are prioritised and reviewed. In addition, it may be appropriate at times to undertake stress risk assessments for individual subject groups or teams within the School or Service, for example, where particular areas of concern are identified.

The School/Service Stress Risk Assessment uses the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 6 management standards for work related stress to identify areas of concern. The management standards cover the primary sources of stress at work that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates.

- Demands - The workload, work patterns and work environment
- Control - How much say a person has in the way they do their work
- Support - The level of support provided by managers and colleagues
- Relationships – Not being subject to unreasonable behaviours (e.g. bullying at work)
- Role - How well an employee understands their role and responsibilities
- Change - How well organisational change is managed and communicated

### **When to carry out a School/Service Stress Risk Assessment**

School/Service Risk Assessments should be carried out and reviewed every six months (or more frequently where there are significant changes within the School or Service, or factors such as increased employee turnover, sickness absence or grievances). Deans and Directors should ensure that the most recent risk assessment is available as evidence prior to the annual health and safety audit.

Where a Stress Risk Assessment has been undertaken for an individual subject group or team, it may be decided at the six monthly review that it is no longer necessary to continue with this separate stress risk assessment. If this is the case, it should be noted on the summary action plan, and future comments/feedback should be fed into the overall School/Service Stress Risk Assessment.

### **Preparing for a School/Service Stress Risk Assessment**

The School or Service leadership team should gather information from a range of sources to help identify particular areas where workplace stress may be an issue. The School/Service Stress Risk Assessment must not be done in isolation by the leadership team - it is **essential** that opportunities are given to employees to voice concerns they may have in relation to the pressures and demands of their roles and working environment. Each member of the leadership team should seek feedback from their team (e.g. through team meetings and informal day to day conversations) to identify areas of work that staff might find stressful. Discussion should focus on both high risk areas (and potential actions) and areas where measures put in place have worked well to eliminate or reduce stress. Such measures can be shared across the School/Service. Indeed, team workload/upcoming deadlines are likely to be regular areas of discussion at team meetings which will provide useful information for the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment. Through working with their teams, members of leadership team should identify up to three areas of concern/proposed actions.

Other sources of information may include:

- Employee turnover
- Sickness absence reports
- Complaints and grievances
- Staff survey responses, and related follow up actions/focus groups

### **Completing the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment**

The Leadership team should meet to complete the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment (part of the Stress Management Policy and Procedure).

#### **Step 1 – What aspects of work might staff find stressful and what is already in place to help address any issues?**

Consider each of the management standards and identify significant factors that have the potential to cause team members stress (examples are provided on the form).

Certain roles may have a higher exposure to workplace stressors. Special consideration should be given to people working in the following roles:

- Conflicting demands such as those between teaching, research and management responsibilities
- Roles that have significant exposure to conflict or dealing with complaints
- Those working longer hours or shifts or during the night
- Roles where extensive travel is required

Make a note of the existing control measures which are already in place to help address the issues and in order to create a healthy working environment (examples are provided on the form). Certain control measures, such as regular one-to-one meetings may appear against a number of the management standards as they help employees in different ways.

Allocate a risk level for each management standard. The risk level should be assigned taking a balanced view of the issues identified which may cause stress and the existing control measures which are in place. Think about the significance of the issues you have identified, and be reasonable about their potential to cause harm. Allocate a High, Medium or Low risk level.

High (H) Likely to cause harm and current control measures are inadequate and should be improved within a fixed timescale.

Medium (M) Some risk to employees, additional control measures should be considered.

Low (L) No significant risk to employees, current control measures are adequate.

The risk level is to help you to identify and prioritise any additional actions that are required.

**Step 2 – What other reasonable measures could be taken? With these in place, what is the remaining risk factor?**

Actions must be developed where Step 1 has identified medium and high risks. Appendix 1 contains a variety of practical solutions and ideas for tackling work-related stress drawn from information produced by HSE, CIPD and ACAS. Once you have identified potential additional measures which could be taken, allocate a risk level for each management standard with these in place.

High (H) Likely to cause harm and planned control measures are inadequate. Consider escalating issues and/or seeking further support from outside of the School/Service to resolve the issues.

Medium (M) Some risk to employees. Keep control measures under review, and seek additional support from outside of the School/Service as appropriate.

Low (L) No significant risk to employees, current/planned control measures are adequate.

**Action Plan Summary**

Actions identified throughout the risk assessment should be transferred to the action plan on the front page of the document (this may include continuing actions to reduce/eliminate workplace stress). For each action, the person who will be responsible for implementation and monitoring progress must be identified, along with a clear timescale for completion.

This Action Plan Summary is the key part of the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment. It is important that it is followed through to completion and is shared with all employees in the relevant School or Service, including the next planned review date.

## Process for Conducting a School/Service Stress Risk Assessment

Members of the Leadership team talk with their team members to identify the workplace stressors, measures already in place and suggested actions through e.g. team meetings.

Members of Leadership team send a summary of team discussions to the Dean/Director in advance of leadership team discussion (summary to focus on high risk factors, successful measures in place, and up to 3 proposed new actions).

The Leadership team meet to discuss and complete the assessment and agree the action plan (including responsibilities, timescales and monitoring). Data on turnover, sickness absence, complaints and staff survey actions should also be considered.

The risk assessment and action plan must be shared with the wider School or Professional Service, and colleagues should be updated regularly regarding progress. It also forms part of the annual health and safety audit.

Risk assessments should be reviewed every 6 months and when there is a significant change in circumstances.

If required, consider the following:

Contact Human Resources for support on particular identified actions/issues.

Seek further information on the Managing Stress webpage

Complete the online modules available via People Development Online – 'Team Stress Risk Assessment', 'Stress, Work and You', 'Managing Stress'.

Complete stress risk assessments for individual teams within the School or Service where particular areas of concern are identified, or where the working environment or pressures on a particular team are significantly different.

The Safety, Health and Wellbeing Committee review the key themes and issues from all School/Service Stress Risk Assessments annually.

## **Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist**

The School/Service Stress Risk Assessment identifies a number of ways that workplace stressors can be identified and controlled. However, there may be occasions where individuals suffer from the effects of stress, whether related to work or other factors away from work.

### **Recognising the signs of stress**

A manager may become aware of an issue with stress through a number of ways, including;

- Increase in absence
- Return to work interviews
- Private discussions with staff
- Medical reports
- Feedback at team meetings or one-to-ones
- Individual performance
- Complaints
- Changes in behaviour

### **Managing Individual Cases of Stress**

Where a manager becomes aware that an employee is being affected by stress, the manager must determine the exact nature of the issue and, where the cause is work-related, explore potential causes of stress in the individual's role and working environment. There may be aspects of these that need changing to reduce the employee's exposure to a particular stressor. In addition, there may be actions that the employee can take or is already taking to improve wellbeing. In order to help with this, the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment should be reviewed and the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist completed (part of the Stress Management Policy and Procedure).

### **Reviewing the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment**

Considering an individual case of stress may identify more actions that can be taken at a School, Service or team level. There may be issues with a particular aspect of the role or the working environment that require resolution, not just for the individual but also the wider team. Some of the actions may already be documented in the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment and so this should be reviewed prior to completion of the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist.

### **Completing the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist**

The Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist should be used to structure an evaluation of the individual's concerns. The process for completing this form will depend on the exact circumstances of the case, such as whether the individual is at work or absent from work. Completion of the document may require the support of Human Resources to benchmark and compare with other similar roles in the School/Service or across the University.

#### **Step 1 – Assess the individual's concerns**

The example questions on the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist can be used to help identify and record the areas of concern. It may be that the individual's issues are all contained within one management standard area (and so the other sections do not need to

be completed), or may cross over a number of management standards. For instance, a heavy workload could impact not just on 'demands', but also 'control' and 'support'.

Record the individual's concerns to ensure you fully understand the issues. This will require input from the individual member of staff, either directly in a meeting, or retrospectively following a previous meeting. Steps that individuals are taking to manage their own wellbeing should also be recorded.

## **Step 2 – Evaluate the need for further action**

Decide whether additional reasonable measures could be implemented which are specific to the individual, keeping in mind the control measures previously identified in the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment.

Additional measures may be easy to implement and have little cost impact. However, it may be that it is not reasonable to go beyond the measures that are already in place. The line manager will have to base this decision on a range of factors including significance of the concern raised, the costs and practicability of additional measures, wider impact on the work of the School or Service, resources available, and the impact on the health of other employees.

If further measures for the individual can be taken, then set out details. Make reference to existing, wider measures in place if appropriate.

## **Action Plan Summary**

Actions identified should be transferred to the action plan on the front page of the document (this may include continuing actions to reduce/eliminate workplace stress). For each action, the person who will be responsible for implementation and monitoring progress must be identified, along with a clear timescale for completion.

## **Support from Human Resources**

Human Resources can provide advice to managers on how best to deal with each particular case. This may include referral to Occupational Health and the consideration of reasonable adjustments. Human Resources may accompany the manager in meetings with the member of staff as well as speaking directly to the member of staff and/or the trade union representative.

Absence from work as a result of stress, as with absences for other reasons, will be managed in accordance with the Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure.

## **Referrals to the Occupational Health Service**

If a manager has concerns about the effects of work related stress on an employee's health a referral to Occupational Health can provide clear, impartial and professional advice. Please refer to the [Essential Guide to Managing Sickness Absence](#), and the 'Referrals to Occupational Health' and 'Managing Stress Related Absence' documents in particular. An Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist must be completed prior to referral to Occupational Health.

**Employee Assistance Programme (Health Assured)**

As part of our University's commitment to provide a safe and healthy workplace, all members of staff have access to a free, confidential counselling and legal advice service. This is provided by Health Assured.

Experienced and qualified counsellors provide 24-hour telephone support to help with a wide range of issues, including work related stress. There are also a range of free online tools, including emotional and fitness advice, personal coaching and health assessment.

**Further Guidance**

The HSE website [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress) includes a booklet on Tackling Work-related Stress using the Management Standards approach.

Further information is available on the [Managing Stress webpage](#).

## Process for conducting an Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist

Individual is suffering from stress or has been absent from work due to stress.

Manager to review the School/Service Stress Risk Assessment to identify any more actions which can be taken at a School, Service or team level.



Manager to complete the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Checklist to determine individual's specific concerns, and any additional reasonable actions to be taken.



Manager to discuss and agree with member of staff an appropriate action plan and agree the review period.



If required, consider the following:

- Contact Human Resources for support
- Referral to Occupational Health
- Seek further advice from Health Assured (Employee Assistance Provider)
- Seek further information on the Managing Stress webpage
- Complete the online modules available via People Development Online – 'Stress Case Management', 'Stress, Work and You'



## 1. Demands                      Workload, work patterns and the work environment

### Possible Solutions

#### Workload

- Hold regular team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload for the forthcoming week, and deal with any planned absences
- Hold regular meetings with individuals to discuss their workload and any anticipated challenges
- Outline individual objectives to ensure employees understand their role, responsibilities and priorities
- Adjust work patterns where possible to cope with peaks and employee absences
- Allocate sufficient resources for employees to be able to do their job
- Forward planning to manage workload at peak times
- Identify ways in which employees may be able to better manage their own workloads

#### Competency

- Provide training to help employees prioritise, or outline how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities
- Keep training records up to date to ensure that employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job
- Carry out a PDR to help identify individuals training and development needs
- Bring concerns to the immediate attention of the individual

#### Work Patterns

- Review working hours and shift systems and agree with employees
- Where possible consider reviewing working hours and patterns to assist employees with external pressures such as childcare, commuting etc.
- Develop a system of notifying employees of unplanned deadlines and any exceptional requests to work longer hours

#### Physical Environment

- Ensure risk assessment for physical hazards and risks are up-to-date e.g. workstations, hazardous chemicals, manual handling etc.
- Provide training to help employees deal with and defuse difficult situations such as complaints and conflict
- Assess the risk of physical violence and abuse and take steps to deal with this

#### Do...

- Provide realistic deadlines
- Provide adequate training and resources for doing the job
- Design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for employees to use their skills
- Provide sufficient challenge/pressure to keep employees motivated and interested in their work
- Take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels, improve physical

#### Don't...

- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do
- Encourage employees to take work home with them
- Allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours

comfort and ensure correct use of work equipment

- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it.
- Encourage employees to raise concerns about demands of work

## **2. Control                      Employees have a say in how they do their work**

### **Possible Solutions**

- Enable employees to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, through team meetings, one-to-ones, performance and development reviews etc.
- Hold regular forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the planned output and methods of working
- Allocate responsibility to teams to take projects forwards to enable them to agree objectives, define roles, set-out timescales, and determine required management support
- Talk with employees about the way decisions are made
- Talk with employees about the skills they have and whether they are being fully utilised

#### **Do...**

- Allow employees some control over the pace of their work where possible
- Allow and encourage employees to participate in decision-making to help them feel valued
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work
- Negotiate working hours and shift patterns
- Take people's lives outside of work into account when making demands of their time

#### **Don't...**

- Secretly monitor employees' movements in detail
- Expect employees to work late without notice

### 3. Support

### The level of support provided by managers and colleagues

#### Possible Solutions

- Hold regular one-to-ones to talk about any emerging issues or pressures
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings to discuss local pressures
- Include 'team workload/upcoming deadlines' as a standing item for team meetings and performance reviews
- Seek examples of how people would like to, or have received good support from managers and colleagues and consider whether these can be adopted
- Ask how employees would like to access managerial support, such as 'open door' policies
- Develop refresher training sessions to ensure that knowledge and competencies are up-to-date and appropriate for the core functions of the job
- Where possible introduce flexibility in work schedules to assist team members to cope with domestic commitments
- Talk to team members about ways in which the organisation can provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside of work
- Share information on other areas of support that is available e.g. Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health, Trade Unions

#### Do...

- Capture employee training requirements in a skills matrix
- Ensure team members receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job
- Provide constructive, supportive advice as part of the PDR process
- Provide flexibility in work schedules where possible
- Allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence where appropriate
- Monitor the effectiveness of rehabilitation/phased return programmes following sickness absence or injury
- Hold regular team meetings
- Provide opportunities for career development
- Deal sensitively with employees experiencing problems outside of work

#### Don't...

- Trivialise the problems of others
- Discriminate against people on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, disability, gender, faith or religious belief or no belief, sexual orientation, or marital status,
- Make assumptions about people in the above groups

#### **4. Relationships**

#### **Not being subject to unreasonable behaviours (e.g. bullying at work)**

##### **Possible Solutions**

- Ensure the Dignity at Work & Study Policy is fully implemented, enforced and communicated to all team members
- Implement procedures to prevent and quickly resolve conflict at work
- Ensure everyone is aware of the University's interventions, policies and processes for the reporting and escalation of unacceptable behaviour
- Consider using informal methods for resolving relationship difficulties in the workplace, such as the mediation service
- Ensure all matters are resolved in accordance with the University's Grievance Procedures
- For new projects, select and build teams that have the right blend of experience and expertise
- Provide training to help employees deal with and defuse difficult situations
- Encourage good communication between all team members
- Discuss how individuals can work together and how they can build positive relationships
- Identify ways to celebrate success

##### **Do...**

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels
- Provide opportunities for social interaction among team members
- Provide support for team members working remotely or in isolation
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other
- Agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure that everyone is aware of these
- Reflect on your own management skills and practices
- Access mentorship or coaching

##### **Don't...**

- Allow bullying behaviour or harassment
- Allow conflict to go unresolved

## **5. Role            Employees understand their role and responsibilities**

### **Possible Solutions**

- Hold team meetings to enable individuals to clarify their role and discuss any potential role conflict
- Display team and departmental targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual roles
- Align PDR objectives to departmental outputs
- Ensure job descriptions generally reflect the functions and priorities of the role and are supported by the PDR process
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months
- Ensure new starters undergo a suitable induction, and that other team members understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit

### **Do...**

- Ensure all team members understand what is required of them
- Define team structures clearly so that everyone understands who is doing what, and why
- Ensure any new employees get a thorough induction to the organisation, including an introduction to all team members
- Ensure objectives are captured in the PDR form
- Avoid competing demands

### **Don't...**

- Make changes to the scope or content of someone's job or responsibilities without ensuring they know what it is required of them, and that they accept it

## **6. Change    How well organisational change is managed and communicated**

### **Possible Solutions**

- Ensure all team members are aware of why the change is happening
- Define and explain the key steps of the change
- Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the change programme
- Communicate new developments to the change programme quickly
- Agree planned methods of communications during the change process and stick by agreed timescales
- Ensure team members are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs
- Provide a feedback mechanism to team members that allows them to comment and ask questions
- Review local and individual work plans following the change to ensure objectives are clear.
- Complete Change Management Risk Assessment/Relocation Risk Assessment, where appropriate

#### **Do...**

- Evaluate the impact of senior management decisions or changes on the work-related stress of employees
- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is necessary
- Consult with team members at an early stage and throughout the process
- Involve team members in the planning process so they understand how their role might be affected by the proposed changes

#### **Don't...**

- Delay communication of new developments
- Underestimate the effect of minor changes