

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY, GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH STRESS AT WORK AND HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

1. The University, in its Statement of Health and Safety Policy makes clear its commitment to providing a healthy and safe workplace for all its employees. This commitment extends to all aspects of occupational health and safety including the effects of stress.

2. The University accepts that it has a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that an employee's health is not placed at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way his or her work at the University is organised, the way people deal with others or from the day-to-day demands placed upon staff members.

3. The University is taking the following steps to tackle the causes of occupational stress and to provide support to staff members. These include:

a) Risk Assessment - stress is one of the hazards that are assessed by departments/schools when undertaking risk assessments.

b) Communication - good two-way communication is essential. The University will continue to develop systems to ensure that staff members are kept informed and can make themselves heard.

c) Working Environments - regular inspection and monitoring of departments/school health and safety arrangements is undertaken.

d) Guidance on Dealing with Stress at Work – The University has published the guidelines on this web page that give information to managers and staff on what stress is, how to avoid it and how to deal with it. The University also issues leaflets on occupational stress to each employee and provides managers with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on 'Managing the Causes of Occupational Stress'.

e) 'Procedure for Dealing with Sickness Absence' in the Staff Handbook is designed to assist with the identification of stress as a factor that may have led to sickness absence and with how to follow up on this sympathetically.

f) The Occupational Health Service (OHS) - provides advice and support to staff members experiencing the effects of stress at work. This includes guidance on how to return to work after periods of absence as a result of stress-related ill health. All employees submitting a medical certificate indicating that stress is a factor in their absence will have an appointment made for them with the OHS by Human Resources. The OHS will be asked to discuss with the employee whether occupational stress is an issue that the University needs to address with regard to him or her.

4. Each Division will take steps to implement arrangements to ensure stress in the workplace is effectively managed. (HSE has identified six key areas (or 'risk' factors) that can be causes of work-related stress and has set standards for managing these factors that if achieved should minimise the risk of occupational stress-related illness. The HSE's Management Standards are set out at the end of the 'Guidance on Dealing with Stress at Work'.)

4.1 Heads of Division are responsible for:

- a) establishing the 'organisation and arrangements' for implementing the University's Health and Safety Policy including the management of stress at work.
- b) ensuring that risk assessments are completed and monitored.
- c) ensuring that good two way communication processes are in place.
- d) ensuring that regular safety inspections and monitoring of health and safety arrangements are undertaken.
- e) monitoring and reviewing on a regular basis the effectiveness of the responses of their area to stress at work.
- f) ensuring that staff returning from sick leave are interviewed in accordance with the Sick Leave Arrangement Policy to establish how the member of staff is and provide them with help and support if necessary. An employee who has had a number of single days of absence over a relatively short period of time may be suffering from some underlying condition.
- g) setting clear and measurable work objectives for their staff.
- h) identifying development needs and ensuring appropriate development is provided
- i) ensuring all relevant policies are implemented.

4.2 All staff are responsible for:

- a) talking to their managers/supervisors about their job and its demands.
- b) identifying and taking the initiative regarding their developmental needs.
- c) letting managers/supervisors know if they are overloaded or underloaded.
- d) taking an active part in performance management and staff development.
- e) voicing any concerns about job security, changes in job structures, etc to managers.

4.3 The Human Resources Division is responsible for:

- a) providing general advice and guidance to all staff on the management of stress at work.
- b) providing suitable training courses to complement/enhance this strategy.
- c) monitoring staff medical certificates for stress being given as a cause of sickness absence and referring the member of staff to the OHS soon after his/her return.
- d) consulting with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- e) monitoring implementation of this Policy.

GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH STRESS AT WORK

1. Definition of Stress

a) There are many definitions of stress. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as, "the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they worry they can't cope".

b) Often the feeling of 'not coping' is seen as a weakness that cannot be acknowledged and people 'soldier on'. Stress is sometimes worn as a 'badge of office' - that suffering from excessive stress is almost a 'status' symbol and part of the territory of particular jobs. Both viewpoints are unhealthy.

c) Individuals generally accept reasonable pressures, which are, in the main, considered as positive and motivational. These pressures can provide the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. It is only when there is excessive pressure whether at work or outside (or both) that stress might become harmful. It can then damage performance and undermine the health of the staff member.

d) Stress is often described as "a variance between workload and capability". The workload may be greater than the capability of the individual or the workload may be less than the individual's capability.

2. Effects of Stress

2.1 Excessive stress can manifest itself in physical, emotional or behavioural effects. These effects are usually short-lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressures recede, there is a quick return to normal. Stress is not therefore the same as ill health. It is only when pressures are intense and continue for some time that the effects of stress can become more sustained and far more damaging leading to longer term psychological problems and physical ill health.

2.2 Long term stress has been associated with conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety and depression. These conditions may arise from other causes, and if a particular individual is suffering from one of these disorders, it will be for a medical practitioner to advise on the extent to which it is work related. Hence the University's use of the Occupational Health Service (OHS) as mentioned in the University's Occupational Stress Management Policy.

3. Causes of Harmful Levels of Stress

3.1 The University will take every reasonable step required to reduce the risk of staff members developing work-induced stress-related disorders.

3.2 There is no simple way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress. The levels of stress that are harmful differ for each individual according to their personality,

experience, motivation and importantly the support they receive from managers, colleagues, family and friends. The ability to cope with high levels of stress will also be determined by the amount being experienced outside of work, resulting from such situations as bereavement, family sickness, and marital or other interpersonal problems. Harmful stress is more likely to occur when there is/are:

- a) pressures which are cumulative and/or prolonged.
- b) demands placed upon the individual over which he/she feels he/she has lost control,
- c) lack of competence and/or training,
- d) demands which are conflicting - causing confusion,
- e) High levels of uncertainty about their work, their objectives or their job and career prospects,
- f) inflexible and/or over demanding or too simplistic work schedules,
- g) prolonged conflict between individuals, including possibly sexual or racial harassment, or bullying, or where staff are treated with contempt or indifference,
- h) absences of leadership and/or understanding from managers or supervisors.

3.3 These factors combined with others such as health problems and home pressures (e.g. financial worries or marital/relationship difficulties) may lead to the reduction in the ability to cope with pressures at work.

3.4 Physical conditions such as noise, heat, humidity, vibration and a presence of toxic or dangerous materials, overcrowding, bad ergonomic design or other hazards might also increase stress levels for the employees working within that environment.

4. Provisions to Prevent Harmful Levels of Stress

4.1 **Job Design** - As part of the risk assessment process, where appropriate all current jobs will be assessed in order to identify tasks and responsibilities which may place prolonged and harmful levels of stress upon jobholders. When necessary, and in consultation with the jobholders, job design may then be altered in order to reduce the risk. The University will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that jobs will be designed in such a manner that:

- a) the responsibility and tasks can be clarified and communicated to each job holder,
- b) the job is achievable by the job holder who can receive credit for its accomplishment,
- c) job holders are not placed within a job for which they do not have the ability,

d) early training and instruction with regard to the job, the working environment and any specific pressures can be given,

e) there is scope for varying working conditions and for people to influence the way their jobs are done - increasing their control, interest and sense of ownership.

4.2 Management Style - People can cope with most styles of management, but they cannot easily cope with inconsistency, indifference or bullying. During periods of change the levels of uncertainty suffered by individuals inevitably increase. Efforts will be made to reduce these to the minimum by regular communication and counselling.

4.3 Any employee who feels that satisfactory progress is not being made to resolve any issue raised related to stress may request that the matter be referred to the Human Resources Division.

4.4 An employee may at any time register a grievance under the University's current procedures. However, it is intended that these procedures are only used by employees who have been unable to resolve an issue at local level.

5. Some Guidelines for Employees to Alleviate the Negative Side of Stress

a) Firstly identify the problem/problems. You can use the HSE's Stress Indicator Tool (Section 9 on this page) to help with this.

b) Take some time to think up a few solutions.

c) Only tackle things you can change, those you cannot, are someone else's problem.

d) If possible, talk to colleagues. They too may have ideas.

e) Talk to managers/supervisors about concerns and see if help or advice can be given.

f) Let managers know if jobs are: overloaded - having too much to do, not enough time etc. Underloaded - not enough to do, repetitive etc.

g) Voice any fears about job security, changes in job structures etc. with managers/supervisors.

h) Prioritise your workload. Deal with the high priority jobs first; no matter how unattractive. Completing them will create a great sense of achievement and boost your morale.

i) Match your workload and pace to your abilities and training. Do not be afraid to delegate or ask for help.

j) Try not to express or experience anger. If this emotion comes to the fore, take a deep breath, "stand back" in your mind's eye (in other words count to ten) before reacting.

k) Try to maintain a sense of humour and keep things in perspective. There may be outside personal pressures to add to those at work. Developing a personal action plan to tackle both issues could be very beneficial.

6. Additional Guidance for Managers on Risk Assessment

6.1 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) place an obligation on employers to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in their workplace. The purpose of the assessment is to enable the employer to identify what measures it needs to take in order to provide employees with a safe environment in which to work. Risk assessment forms (with guidance on how to use them) are available among the University's Health and Safety Adviser's web pages at: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/so/forms/risk>. Area safety co-ordinators and the Health and Safety Adviser can provide assistance with risk assessment.

6.2 In making their assessments, the assessor need only consider the main factors that are likely to cause intense or sustained levels of work-related stress, taking into account precautions that are already being taken. This should serve to identify whether it is reasonable to expect the person to be capable to do the work concerned when provided with adequate information, training, equipment and working environment.

6.3 In carrying out the risk assessment the manager should take into account records of sickness absence, timekeeping and productivity. Listen to employees' concerns, enquire about the numbers of hours worked. Long hours may indicate that they are overworked, inadequately trained for the job or being subjected to unreasonable demands. Investigate staff motivation and ask about the quality of working relationships, involving safety or other representatives in such discussions.

6.4 In making their risk assessment, and unless they have (or could have reasonably found out) evidence to the contrary, the manager may assume that their employees are mentally capable of withstanding reasonable pressures at work. Contrary evidence might include past stress-related illness. Such evidence should not necessarily exclude the deployment of a person to a particular post or task if reasonable adjustments to the work can be made that are likely to avoid the employee developing work-related stress.

6.5 If the initial assessment does not reveal any significant levels of sustained work-related stress, the manager need only keep the matter under review.

6.6 If factors that could cause intense and/or sustained levels of stress are identified, controls must be put in place to eliminate or reduce them to the lowest levels reasonably practicable. These may include:

a) Providing employees with the necessary training to carry out the work they undertake. This means that where, for example, an employee is likely to encounter situations which are likely to induce stress, steps should be taken to ensure that the employee's risk to mental injury is reduced by providing training to deal with foreseeable situations which could induce stress.

b) Providing employees with adequate information about the nature of the work they are to do and giving the necessary support and supervision to enable them to carry out work in a safe manner.

7. Additional Guidance for Managers on Employees Affected by Stress

7.1 An employee who has suffered and been affected by stressful situations should be offered counselling. Thereafter, provided a risk assessment reassures the manager that the employee could continue in the same position, the employee may need to be given training so that, should the same stress situation arise again, they are better equipped to deal with it.

7.2 All employees submitting a medical certificate indicating that stress is a factor in their absence will have an appointment made for them with the OHS by the Human Resources Division. The OHS will be asked to discuss with the employee whether occupational stress is an issue that the University needs to address with regard to him or her.

8. Safety Representatives

8.1 Trade Union Safety Representatives must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.

8.2 Trade Union Safety Representatives must be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.

9. The HSE's Management Standards

HSE has identified six key areas (or 'risk' factors) that can be causes of work-related stress and has set standards for managing these factors that, if achieved, should minimise the risk of occupational stress-related illness. These are.

1. DEMANDS

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs;
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

2. CONTROL

How much say the person has in the way they do their work

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work;
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken;
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

3. SUPPORT

The encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors;
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job;
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

4. RELATIONSHIPS

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

5. ROLE

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities;
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear;
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

6. CHANGE

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change;
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

7. HSE's Indicator Tool for Work-related Stress (Please tick as appropriate)

1. I am clear what is expected of me at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
2 I can decide when to take a break	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
3 Different groups at work demand things from me	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
4 I know how to go about getting my job done	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
5 I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
6 I have unachievable deadlines	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
7 If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
8 I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
9 I have to work very intensively	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
10 I have a say in my own work speed	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
11 I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
12 I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
13 I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
14 There is friction or anger between colleagues	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
15 I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always

16 I am unable to take sufficient breaks	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
17 I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
18 I am pressured to work long hours	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
19 I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
20 I have to work very fast	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
21 I am subject to bullying at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
22 I have unrealistic time pressures	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
23 I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Often	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Always
24 I get help and support I need from colleagues	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
25 I have some say over the way I work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
26 I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
27 I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
28 Staff are always consulted about change at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
29 I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
30 My working time can be flexible	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
31 My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
32 When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
33 I am supported through emotionally demanding work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
34 Relationships at work are strained	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree
35 My line manager encourages me at work	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Agree	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree

This policy will be reviewed at least once every two years in consultation with the Trade Unions.

Last revised on 25 February 2014