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Management of Work-Related Stress Procedure

1.   Introduction

The University is committed to promoting the wellbeing and safe and healthy work environment for its employees.

The University recognises the statutory requirements and responsibilities of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and other relevant health and safety law, Guidance and Codes of Practice. The procedure forms part of the University's overall Health and Safety Policy and is also an essential element of the good health promotion practices at work which encourage positive action on smoking, alcohol and drugs, nutrition, physical activity and work-related stress.

It is recognised that work-related stress is a health and safety issue and that risks to health can be minimised by the implementation of good management procedures.

The University is committed to minimising the risk of the harmful effects of stress by:

- increasing awareness and understanding of stress-related issues through training and health promotion;
- identifying workplace stressors and manage the risks that arise from them in order to minimise the effects of stress;
- providing adequate resources to enable managers to implement the University's agreed stress management procedures;
- consulting with Trade Union Safety Representatives on proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress;
- providing confidential counselling for individuals affected by stress caused by either work or external factors which impinge on their work;
- adopting a risk-based approach to the management of potential stressors in the workplace;
- investigating all incidents of potential or actual work-related stress.

2.   Scope

This procedure will apply to all employees at all levels of the University. Managers are responsible for its implementation and the University is responsible for providing the necessary resources and support to identify and reduce workplace stressors.

3. Definition of Stress

3.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them". This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health and an individual's wellbeing [Refer to Appendix 1]

3.2 There are many causes of work-related stress and individuals cope in different ways to manage that stress. There are six major categories of stress identified by the HSE and an explanation of these categories are outlined in Appendix 1. They are broadly recognised as:

- Intrinsic to the job
- Role in the workplace
- Relationships at work
- Work structure and climate
- Career development
- Home–work interface

3.3 The University recognises the ability to cope with stress is largely dependent on an employee's own threshold level which varies both from individual to individual and is affected by specific circumstances.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Corporate Management Responsibilities

The Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal and Senior Management Team members are responsible for the overall management of health, safety and welfare at work. They are responsible for ensuring consultation takes place through the University Health & Safety Committee. Responsibilities include ensuring that there are adequate procedures and necessary guidelines for managing work related stress and for minimising the risks to mental and physical health.

The Director of Human Resources and the Health & Safety Officer provide professional advice.

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4.2 Deans and Directors of Academic and Service Areas

It is the responsibility of Deans and Directors of Academic and Service Areas to ensure that:

- management systems for which they are responsible take account of the conditions that may lead to work-place stress
- risk assessments are carried out as appropriate to identify the scope and causes of stress related to work and to ensure that the recommendations are implemented including, where necessary, reasonable adjustments.
- good communication between management and staff exists, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
- workload placed on individuals is not excessive to the extent that a person could normally be expect to perform the task
- individuals are empowered to make representation on the suitability of tasks which they are instructed to carry out
- targets, objectives, and instructions given to, and requests made of individuals are clear and not conflicting
- signs and symptoms of stress are recognised, as reasonably expected, and appropriate action is taken
- Work schedules are fair and where practicably possible as flexible as possible
- conflict between individuals is addressed, resolving issues quickly and effectively where harassment and bullying arises, including issues of discrimination as related to the 'protected characteristics' of the Equality Act 2010.
- account is taken of poor working conditions, and the planning and execution of improvements as soon as is reasonably possible
- staff are fully trained to discharge their duties and provide meaningful developmental opportunities

4.3 Managers and Supervisors

Individual managers and supervisors have responsibility for playing a key role in the implementation of this procedure. They will:-

- ensure good practice in all areas of staff management throughout employment;
- be responsible for assessing the risks of stress and, working with relevant colleagues across the University, including Human Resources and Health & Safety, for taking steps to control such risks as are identified;
- ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;

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- monitor workloads to ensure as far as possible that people have a balanced workload;
- attend training as required in good management practice and health and safety;
- ensure that harassment, bullying and issues of discrimination are addressed within their area of responsibility;
- be vigilant and offer additional support to individuals who may be experiencing stress outside work, for example, bereavement or separation.

4.4 Individual Employees

All employees have an individual responsibility to minimise the risk of any kind of harm to themselves and colleagues by:

- co-operating with the University in its efforts to manage work-related stress and minimising risk;
- bringing to the attention of their manager concerns they may have in relation to factors in the workplace which may be causing stress;
- informing their line manager when they are feeling stressed at work. If an employee feels that they are unable to raise the matter through their line management, they should consider referral to Human Resources or their trade union representative who may represent them;
- complying with reasonable adjustments identified through a risk assessment process which may include changes to working practices, processes and equipment;
- adopting strategies for combating work related stress which is deemed good practice by the University, for example, encouraging access to support for staff counselling and wellbeing through Human Resources.

4.5 Human Resources

The Human Resources team will:-

- provide advice and guidance to managers on their responsibilities under the Management of Work-Related Stress Procedure;
- support managers and individuals in the management of work related stress and refer to staff counselling and wellbeing services where appropriate;
- make available staff counselling, wellbeing and Occupational Health services to enable adequate support for individuals experiencing work related stress and to provide advice on appropriate training;

- monitor the effectiveness of measures to address work related stress; including the audit of stress risk assessments and the collation of sickness absence statistics;
- monitor the effectiveness of this procedure with reference to compliance with the HSE's Stress Management Standards and will report accordingly to the University Health and Safety Management Committee;
- advise managers and individuals on training requirements and provide training opportunities in the management of work-related stress.

4.6 Union Safety Representatives

Recognised trade union safety representatives will:

- participate in the consultation process on relevant changes to work practices or work design that may reasonably raise concerns for the precipitation of work-related stress
- consult with trade union members on the issue of work-related stress including conducting workplace surveys
- be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to matters of work-related stress.

5. PROCEDURE: Management of Work-Related Stress

5.1 Identifying a Symptom or Problem

Managers and supervisors need to be aware that employees whose performance at work deteriorates or whose behaviour becomes erratic may be suffering with stress. Employees may display a variety of symptoms, and a discernable change in their conduct such as absenteeism, change in conduct, reliability, inability to meet deadlines, violent or aggressive behaviour, mood swings, irrational behaviour, depression, drinking or taking drugs (prescribed or not) where there impact is felt at work.

5.2 Identifying the Cause

It is accepted that stress can be caused by a variety of factors and are not mutually exclusive, for example, they may not be limited to the duties of an employee but may also include factors such as the working environment, perceptions of harassment or bullying.

Personal or family problems may also be a significant factor. The University has a duty of care, as far as is reasonably practical, to put in place measures to minimise the cause of the stress or to assist the

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employee to deal with it. The factors detailed below should be taken into consideration.

Where a cause/s and or symptoms of stress have been noted by either the manager or the individual, action must be taken to identify the stress factors. He/she must take into account the recognised causes of stress, both work-related as outlined in section 5 above, and non-work related such as domestic, financial and social stressors when making their assessment of the situation. The manager will be expected to discuss the issues initially on a one to one basis with the individual with a view resolving the matter before there is an escalation.

The manager should contact Human Resources for advice and support in handling cases of stress. At this point there may be a number of routes in managing the situation and may refer to other relevant policies and procedures.

Where there is no resolution the manager, with the advice and support of Human Resources, will be expected to hold a meeting with the employee, and where appropriate the individual may wish to be accompanied by a workplace colleague or trade union representative. The purpose of the meeting is to better understand the causes and effects of the stress (work and non work related) and to agree a mutually acceptable outcome if possible.

The individual may wish to refer the matter directly to Human Resources or their trade union representative acting on their behalf. This may be the case where an individual does not feel able to meet with their line manager if the line manager is perceived to a cause of stress or a contributing stressor.

5.3   Risk Assessment

Where a work-related stress condition has been reported or where symptoms of stress are identified, the employee's manager should assess the risk and decide on appropriate action. This may include, but is not limited, to undertaking a stress risk assessment where deemed necessary [Refer to Appendix 2].

Where work-related stress is considered to be present the employee should not normally continue with their normal duties before a formal risk assessment has been conducted. Where an employee is on sick leave a review based on the reported symptoms should still be attempted. The results of the risk assessment should be treated confidentially and discussed with the employee and their line manager. Where appropriate, action to minimise or where practicable, remove

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the causes and lessen the symptoms of work-related stress should be agreed. A copy of the risk assessment must be forwarded to the Human Resources for the employee's personal file.

The Stress Risk Assessment Form is a confidential dynamic document, and will be regularly reviewed by Human Resources in conjunction with Occupational Health Services. Copies of the form will be available through Human Resources and an example is attached in Appendix 2.

6. Dovetailing with other University Policies and Procedures

At any stage during this process the employee may wish to enact other procedural routes, such as the Dignity at Work Code of Practice. Similarly, the University may wish to enact other procedural routes which may better suit the particular circumstances of the case, such as the Sickness Absence. The procedural process outlined in section 6 above may be curtailed or revisited in consultation with the appropriate parties.

During the assessment process it may be advised that the employee be assessed by Occupational Health and they will advice the institution accordingly should any reasonable adjustments be required to enable to employee to return to work

7. Evaluation and Monitoring

It is essential that an assessment of the effectiveness of reasonable adjustments made or any control measures and support mechanisms are carried out in a timely manner. Where the assessment finds that stress conditions still exist then the risk assessment procedure must be revisited with a view to resolving where practicable the causes of stress.

8. Guidance and Training

To ensure that a consistent approach is applied managers may need to be trained to identify stress related symptoms and also be familiarised with assessment procedures for handling such conditions.

9. Procedural Review

This procedure will be reviewed in three years from the date of implementation, or earlier at the request of the University Health & Safety Committee.

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This Management of Work-Related Stress Procedure supersedes all previous Management of Work-Related Stress Procedures and shall be reviewed at no less than 3 yearly intervals

Authorised By:	Signature:	Issue Date:
Chair of Health & Safety Committee		
Review Date:	**March 2015**	

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The Management of Work-related Stress Guidance for Managers

This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Management of Work-Related Stress Procedure

Causes of workplace stress

There are many causes of work-related stress and individuals cope in many different ways. There are six major categories of stress. They are broadly recognised as:

- Intrinsic to the job
- Role in the workplace
- Relationships at work
- Work structure and climate
- Career development
- Home–work interface

Having identified some of the causes of stress, it is useful to remember that the individual's health and wellbeing is interlinked with the health and wellbeing of the University and are therefore interdependent. Hazards within the University can create substantial ill health amongst employees, and distressed employees can cause substantial dysfunction within the University. It follows that the institution will be more productive if employees are motivated and healthy.

Signs of stress in an individual

People perceive demands in different ways – as either challenging or threatening. Demands can lead to personal growth, satisfaction and fulfilment. However, when demands are perceived as threatening, mental and physical health can be affected.

In the short term the member of staff may cope well, however over a period of time, as the individual's body and mind are subjected to a perceived prolonged threat or attack, a variety of symptoms related to ill health could occur and these may be followed by serious stress-related illness.

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Stress can affect the body in three different ways, **physically, behaviourally and emotionally.** Individuals can suffer from one, or a combination of these symptoms for both short and long term periods.

Risk assessment

A pro-active approach in meeting our responsibilities means the University needs to demonstrate a positive approach to health and safety management by identifying and controlling factors that endanger people and/or the services provided by the institution. This is best achieved by **adopting a regime of risk assessment**. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a duty on the employer to assess risks to health and safety from the hazards of work and this includes the risk of developing a stress-related illness.

The purpose of conducting a risk assessment is to determine whether existing control measures will reduce the risk sufficiently or whether more should be done. However, completing a risk assessment will not in itself reduce work-related stress.

The subject of the risk assessment should be a **group of staff** doing similar work. Although account must be taken of people who will be particularly vulnerable (e.g. a member of staff new to the work, a pregnant woman or a new mother) it will rarely be necessary to assess an individual member of staff's risk. A staff group, however, may comprise of very few people – perhaps a single person.

Carrying out a risk assessment for work-related stress involves the same basic principles and process as for other workplace hazards. The **basic five step risk assessment method** approach advocated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 1997) provides a systematic and logical method of assessing the risk. This method enables the University to:

- Identify the main causes of work-related stress in the University
- Determine the extent of work-related stress amongst all different categories of staff
- Determine the current effects of work-related stress on staff physical, mental and social health
- Identify who might be harmed and why
- Identify any existing control measures to minimise stress and make recommendations where measures are found to be unsatisfactory
- Prioritise an action plan

The risk assessment should be initially undertaken by the employee and forwarded to the line management for completion and assessment. A copy

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must always be forwarded to HR to ensure appropriate support and advice is available to both the employee and line manager.

Care should be taken that a solution to a work-related problem does not have an adverse impact upon others – at worst the problem being merely transferred to another person.

Support in this process, including demonstration the risk assessment process, is available from HR and the Health and Safety service.

Five basic steps to risk assessment

The five steps, advocated by the Health and Safety Executive are as follows:

Step 1 Identify the hazard

Identify what it is about the work that has the potential to cause a stress-related illness.

Step 2 Identify who might be harmed and why

Identify who is at risk (look at the staff affected, how long they are exposed to the stressful situation, any particularly vulnerable workers).

Step 3 Evaluate the risk

Consider the control measures already in place. The most desirable option is to remove the stressor, if possible. The next most effective measure is to find ways of reducing the amount of stress experienced by the employees concerned. They should be consulted about how to achieve this. Any measures introduced to minimise the risk of stress must be reasonably practicable (i.e. the cost of putting in place the control measures should not exceed the cost of the benefits to be gained.)

Following this assessment an estimate of the following can be made:

- The likelihood that stress will occur, given the control measures in place, and
- The severity or consequences of harm which could occur

Step 4 Record the findings

Record any significant risk found and any new control measures put into place. It is important to document your findings as it provides

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proof that the statutory duty for risk assessment has been carried out and also provides a basis for revision of the assessment.

A written action plan should include the details of the controls, who is to carry out each action and when the action should be completed.

Step 5 Monitor and review

Monitoring of the effectiveness of measures put in to control stress and to address stress-related problems is essential. This can be done by a variety of methods: comparing sickness and absence levels; comparing accidents and incidents; reviewing complaints and staff turnover; using satisfaction questionnaires, appraisal meetings and feedback from return to work interviews after a period of sickness absence.

Should the nature of the work change, the assessment should be reviewed.

Risk factors

When carrying out a risk assessment for work-related stress there are seven factors that need to be considered and which are detailed in the Stress Risk Assessment form and its guidance. These are:

- **Culture** of the organisation and how it approaches work-related stress
- **Demands** such as workload and exposure to physical hazards
- **Relationships** covering issues like bullying and harassment
- **Control** - how much influence a person has on the way his/her work is done
- **Change** - how organisational change is managed and communicated
- **Role** – the member of staff should understand his/her role in the organisation and that the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
- **Support** – from colleagues and managers, including training to give staff the skills to perform their task and recognition of any factors that may be unique to the individual

Evaluating the risk

For each of the factors the following questions should be asked:

- What action is already being taken?
- Is it enough?

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- Are additional controls required?

Pro-active management: the work of the School or Service should be examined for the seven factors across the range of the work done and the academic calendar. The objective should be an appraisal of the stress risks to identify the hot-spots that then require a risk assessment. As with any risk assessment the significant findings and control measures proposed should be communicated to those concerned.

Reactive management: where work-related stress is suspected or identified, managers should seek to identify the reasons for stress and the means for eliminating or minimising it.

Risk assessment is an ongoing process. It must be done at least annually and particularly at times of change.

Absence due to work-related stress

There is no medical disorder called "stress" or "work-related stress". Any diagnosis which is "work related" may not be a completely accurate medical diagnosis as the NHS GP is unlikely to have specific details of the member of staff's work and work environment.

So, if a member of staff submits a "fit note" from his/her GP which refers to "stress" or "work related stress" or "work related anxiety/depression" etc you must contact Human Resources informing them accordingly.

As an accurate medical diagnosis is required in the GP's "fit note", in the above case it should be returned to the GP via the member of staff and the member of staff should be asked to obtain another note with an accurate diagnosis instead. If the only evidence of "work related" is the testament of the patient this needs to be explicit to protect the institution from legal liability.

If objective evidence of a work-related adverse health effect is found after a full investigation of the medical condition (by the Occupational Health) the workplace and the alleged causes (by management and/or the Health & Safety Officer), the individual concerned should not re-enter their place of work under the same working conditions until a full assessment of the risk has taken place and all necessary adjustments have been implemented.

Once an objective assessment has confirmed that the individual is fit for work, Human Resources will arrange a welfare meeting with the individual concerned and yourself. The purpose of this meeting is to explore the

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problems at work that may have caused their illness. However, before this meeting takes place the individual concerned will be required to see the Occupational Physician. This will enable the Occupational Physician's report to be part of the risk assessment process.

Following this meeting you should complete a risk assessment with the assistance of Human Resources and an action plan. This will then be sent to the individual concerned for their approval.