

Avoidance and management of stress

Guidelines for managers

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Avoidance and management of stress - guidelines for managers

1. Introduction

The University is committed to providing a healthy work environment, and promoting good health and wellbeing. We recognise that good health is fundamental to a good staff experience, and it is also essential for achieving high levels of performance.

Around 15% of all staff absences are attributed to stress or stress related illnesses. These guidelines have been drawn up to enable you as a manager to support those staff who may be suffering from stress. The guidelines are intended to complement the University's *management of work-related stress policy* and *stress at work action plan*

The aim of the guidance is to help you to avoid work-related stress amongst your staff, identify signs of stress in your staff, take appropriate action where necessary and to make you aware of the various sources of support that are available across the University.

2. Definition of stress

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”*.

The term work-related stress is a state which results when there is an imbalance between demands placed on the individual, and the individual's ability to cope with the demands. Up to a certain level, pressure is stimulating and motivating and leads to optimal performance. However, pressure beyond this level can result in distress, fatigue and deteriorating performance.

Stress affects people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. How individuals' appraise their personal situation will depend on various factors including their:

- background and culture
- skills and experience
- personality
- personal circumstances
- individual characteristics
- health status
- ethnicity, gender, age or disability
- other demands both in and outside work

Work-related problems can be exacerbated by family problems, relationship difficulties, financial worries etc and these factors may need to be taken into account in understanding reactions to the demands of work.

3. Causes of stress

The following are a list of potential causes of stress for your staff:

- Under-utilisation of skills
- Too high a workload, impossible deadlines
- Too low a workload, no or few challenges
- Low task variety
- Inflexible and/or over-demanding work schedules
- Pressures which are cumulative/prolonged
- Conflicting demands - causing confusion
- Lack of control/autonomy
- Inadequate/inappropriate training
- Low interpersonal support, e.g. via inadequate or insensitive management
- Role ambiguity - unclear expectations
- High levels of uncertainty, e.g. due to poorly defined roles and responsibilities
- Bullying and harassment
- Change
- Balancing work and home
- Job insecurity

4. Manager responsibilities

All staff have a responsibility in seeking to minimise the occurrence of work-related stress and to deal with it effectively should it occur. Managers have the following specific responsibilities:

- (a) To understand and be aware of the potential causes of stress.
- (b) To monitor individuals and staff groups for signs of stress.
- (c) To understand how to minimise and manage stress when it occurs.
- (d) To provide support to employees, and refer to alternative sources of support, as appropriate.
- (e) To review the work and the work environment, particularly at times of change, and take action to avoid or minimise the potential for stress to occur, and to effectively manage it, when it occurs.
- (f) To take action when concerns regarding stress are raised by employees.

In addition, you should consider your own behaviour and learn to recognise and deal with stress in yourself.

Human Resources will support managers in carrying out their responsibilities by the following:

- (a) To carry out awareness raising and training sessions.
- (b) To support managers and individuals in resolving problems related to stress at work.
- (c) To give guidance to managers and employees on practical measures for

- reducing stress at work.
- (d) To monitor sickness absence statistics and promulgate them to faculty and service management teams.

5. Avoidance of stress

Managers have a responsibility to assess the work environment for the presence and extent of stressors, take action to prevent or control them and minimise the risk to staff wellbeing. The Health and Safety Unit have a series of tools, including a 5 step approach to risk assessment to prepare managers to avoid stress. Further information on the tools can be found on the Health and Safety Unit website and by contacting the Health and Safety Unit.

5.1 Stress management improvement tool

The data gathering step of the risk assessment includes the stress management improvement tool, which is a simple 30 question completed by all staff within a department. The tool has been developed for managers' use in assessing the stress risk.

The survey is designed to find out how individuals feel about various aspects of work and working conditions in a department. The survey is accessed electronically and returned in complete anonymity. The survey is open for two weeks, after which the results are analysed and a report provided to the manager highlighting key issues. In support of the manager, the Health and Safety Unit also provides some tools to devise and progress an action plan.

6. How to identify stress

You should monitor staff for signs of stress via general observation of their day to day behaviour and during communications in one to one and team meetings. The following are a list of general signs which may indicate to you that that staff may be suffering from stress.

Attitude and behaviour

- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Working increasingly longer or shorter hours
- Failure to take allocated annual leave
- Erratic or poor time-keeping
- Unusual displays of emotion, for example frequent irritability or tearfulness
- Poor concentration/lack of focus
- Change in habit e.g. drinking, smoking, eating etc

Relationships at work

- Tension and conflict
- Withdrawal from social contact

Sickness absence

- Increase in overall sickness absence – long term or short term intermittent

Work performance

- Reduction in outputs/productivity
- Constant tiredness or low energy
- Poor judgement/indecisiveness
- Deterioration in planning and control of work
- Failure to meet deadlines and/or delegate

In addition, you can also use the following sources of data to identify possible stress within your teams:

- Increase in sickness absence levels
- Reduced work output from the team
- Increase in number of staff disputes and disaffection within the team
- Increase in number of complaints and grievances received from staff
- Increase in cases of poor performance of staff
- Reports of customer dissatisfaction
- Increase in complaints received from customers
- Increase in staff turnover
- Difficulty in attracting new staff to the team
- Analysis of annual leave reports
- Analysis of flexisheets
- Increase in number of workplace accidents

7. Handling individual stress cases

If you consider that an individual member of your staff is showing signs of stress you should meet with them as soon as possible to assess whether there is a problem and offer support. You should aim to identify the causes of their stress and explore whether it is personal or work-related. You should remain sensitive to any personal issues and be aware that staff may not wish to discuss their personal circumstances. Meetings with staff should be informal and held in private.

7.1 Personal-related stress

If the member of staff informs you that they are suffering from stress as a result of a personal issue you should inform them of the support available at the University. The Employee Assistance Programme helpline (Tel: 0800 1116 387) which is provided by Right Corecare can provide both telephone and face-to-face counselling.

If appropriate, you could allow them some flexibility and time to resolve their personal issues. Advise them of the leave available which may be appropriate (carers leave, compassionate leave) or consider allowing unpaid leave or flexi leave.

You should recognise that although a member of staff has highlighted a personal issue the stress may also impact upon their work. You could review their work to see if some could be prioritised, unnecessary work cut out or deadlines extended to reduce additional work pressures. When people are dealing with stressful personal issues their usual coping strategies may not be enough and it may be too much for them to cope with a busy and demanding role without additional support measures in place.

You should also advise the member of staff to view the www.uwe.ac.uk/feelgood webpage for information on health and wellbeing support facilities available throughout the University.

7.2 Work-related stress

If the cause of the stress is work-related you should aim to identify the specific cause. The Health and Safety Executive's set of Management Standards for Stress cover the 6 primary causes of stress at work. The 6 primary causes and some of the things you can do to address them are set out below. The Management Standards can also be used by managers as a tool for avoiding stress.

(a) Demands of the job - includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Too much to do, too little time
- Too little/too much training for the job
- Boring or repetitive work, or too little to do
- The working environment

What you can do:

- Pay attention to the way the job is designed
- Prioritise tasks, cut out unnecessary work, try to give warning of urgent or important jobs
- Make sure individuals are matched to jobs, provide training for those who need more, increase the scope of jobs for those who are over-trained
- Change the way jobs are done by moving people between jobs, giving individuals more responsibility, increasing the scope of the job, increasing the variety of tasks, giving a group of workers greater responsibility for effective performance of the group

(b) Control– how much say the person has in the way they do their work.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Employees can feel disaffected and perform poorly if they feel a lack of control over work activities

What you can do:

- Give more control to staff by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how that work should be completed and how problems should be tackled

(c) Relationships – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust
- Bullying and harassment

What you can do:

- Provide training in interpersonal skills
- Refer to the University's systems to tackle bullying and harassment

(d) Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Uncertainty about what is happening
- Fears about job security

What you can do:

- Plan ahead
- Provide timely information to enable staff to understand the reasons for the changes
- Provide opportunities for employees to influence proposals if appropriate
- If necessary, provide training to support any changes in their jobs

(e) Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Staff feeling that the job requires them to behave in conflicting ways
- Confusion about how everyone fits in

What you can do:

- Talk to people regularly to make sure that everyone is clear about what their job requires them to do
- Make sure that everyone has clearly defined objectives and responsibilities linked to business objectives, and training on how everyone fits in
- Ensure as far as possible that different requirements placed upon employees are compatible

(f) Support – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

Problems that can lead to stress:

- Lack of support from managers and colleagues
- Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work

What you can do:

- Provide regular and constructive feedback
- Encourage a healthy work-life balance
- See if there is scope for flexible work schedules if requested
- Take into account that everyone is different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that helps them work best

In addition, the following areas of support should be discussed:

- Inform the staff member of the Employee Assistance Programme helpline (Tel: 0800 1116 387) which is provided by Right Corecare and can provide both telephone and face-to-face counselling.
- Explore whether training courses available through the Learning and Development Centre, for example, time management or stress management would be beneficial.
- Contact your HR Adviser if you feel that a referral to Occupational Health is necessary.
- Inform the staff member of facilities available throughout the University to support health and wellbeing and refer them to the www.uwe.ac.uk/feelgood webpage.

You should agree a specific action plan which is copied to the member of staff and maintain a record of the discussion. You should schedule follow-up meetings to assess progress against the action plan and to find out whether the situation has improved and if any further support is required. If the member of staff highlighted you (their manager) as a cause of stress it is not appropriate for you to take matters forward and you should contact Human Resources for guidance.

8. Support for managers

Human Resources will provide support to managers in dealing with stress of their staff. However, it is recognised that there are times when you may need further support.

Right Corecare provides a manager support function to help managers in dealing with difficult staffing issues. A confidential telephone meeting can be arranged with a HR Consultant employed by Right Corecare who will provide you with appropriate information and support in dealing with the situation. It may be necessary to obtain guidance on how to support the remaining team members. This facility gives you the opportunity to speak with someone from outside the University who will be able to provide you with support in a confidential manner.

Appendix (A) details sources of support for managers when dealing with stress cases.

9. Absence from work

If a staff member is absent from work due to stress you have a responsibility to maintain regular contact with them throughout their absence to check on their wellbeing. It can be difficult to gauge when to make contact with them and you may have concerns about not wishing to add pressure or anxiety at a difficult time. However, without any contact staff can start to feel increasingly out of touch and undervalued. The Managing Absence Guidelines for Managers provides further information on maintaining contact and absence management. An occupational health appointment can be arranged for staff who are absent from work. You should contact your HR Adviser if you feel that a referral to Occupational Health would be beneficial.

10. Returning to work

You should conduct a return to work discussion on the day the member of staff returns to work or at the earliest opportunity after their return. The purpose of the return to work discussion is to explore the causes and symptoms of the stress and agree a way of addressing them. For all staff returning from a work-related stress absence you should use the Arrangements for Conducting a Return to Work Risk Review for Work-Related Stress tool (appendix B). The purpose of this tool is to help identify whether there are any features of the work that may have led to the stress and agree appropriate measures to prevent them from recurring.

If the member of staff has had an appointment with occupational health it may be appropriate for a HR Adviser to attend the return to work discussion to discuss any recommendations or adjustments within the occupational health report.

You should schedule regular follow-up meetings to monitor and review their recovery and ways of avoiding stress in the future.

11. Reasonable adjustments

Section 1 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) defines a disability as 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on (the person's) ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. Stress could give rise to a mental impairment as the latter includes various forms of depression provided the prognosis is long term and there is appropriate medical evidence. 'Long term' is stated as being for a period of one year or longer. The DDA also requires that the employer makes reasonable adjustments to working arrangements so the disabled employee is not at a disadvantage. Reasonable adjustments may be to the work environment or to the way the work is done. Occupational health advice should be obtained to determine what adjustment should be made. Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- Allowing a phased return to work
- Changing an individual's working hours
- Agreeing home working
- Allowing time off for rehabilitation treatment
- Enabling the taking of annual leave
- Providing clarification of role and responsibilities
- Providing additional training and development
- Providing new or modifying existing equipment
- Providing a buddy or mentor;
- Providing closer supervision
- Reallocating work and responsibilities within the team
- Providing alternative work through redeployment

When determining the practicalities of making any adjustments, the following factors should be considered:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment in preventing any disadvantage
- The practicality of the adjustment
- The financial and other costs of the adjustment and the extent of any disruption caused
- The extent of financial or other resources
- The availability of financial or other assistance, for example Access to Work funding.

HR Support

If you have any questions or need further guidance please contact your HR Adviser.

Appendix A

Supporting information for a manager of an individual suffering from stress at work

Managing an individual suffering from work-related stress can in itself be extremely stressful. Managers are encouraged to seek the support of their line managers or colleagues when dealing with such cases. There are also sources of support across the University where advice and guidance can be sought:

1. Human Resources

Human Resources can assist you by advising on University policy, practice and precedent and by giving practical advice on the situation you are dealing with. They can also help facilitate discussions with your member of staff and/or their representatives where appropriate. HR Advisers will also advise on other appropriate forms of support available and will assist in referring to Occupational Health where appropriate.

A list of HR Advisers can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/hr/

2. Wellbeing

The University provides a range of initiatives to support employee wellbeing. These range from a variety of flexible working initiatives to actions to promote good health.

Information can be found at uwe.ac.uk/feelgood

3. Occupational Health

The University works with Avon Partnership Occupational Health who act as impartial independent advisers who have responsibilities to the member of staff and the manager. The service can assist managers when it is apparent that a member of staff's health may be affecting work or work is affecting health.

Contact your HR Adviser for more information.

4. Employee Assistance Programme

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) offers staff access to a free confidential telephone helpline service available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The service offers information and advice on a range of personal,

emotional, family, legal and financial issues. The EAP also provides a manager support function to help managers in their role.

The service is provided by Right Corecare an independent company highly experienced at providing this type of service to organisations throughout the UK, including the HE sector.

Information can be found at eap.rightcorecare.co.uk.

5. The Health and Safety Unit

The Health and Safety Unit provide access to health and safety information on stress and other health and safety issues. .

Information can be obtained from the Health & Safety Unit on ext 82596 or at www.uwe.ac.uk/healthandsafety/

6. Equality and Diversity Unit

The Equality and Diversity Unit provides professional support and advice to staff and managers on equality and diversity issues. The unit audits current policy and practice, leads equality projects and policy initiatives which impact on identifying and tackling discrimination, removing barriers and improving the experience of both staff and students. The Unit can provide assistance on suitable reasonable adjustments to working arrangements for staff covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

Information can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/groups/equalityanddiversity/

7. Staff networks

Staff networks are run by staff for staff and bring together people from all faculties and services that identify with a group relating to one of the University's six equality strands (gender, race, disability, age, faith and sexual orientation).

Information can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/staffnetworks

8. Learning and Development Centre

The University encourages all members of staff to develop themselves in order to reach their full potential. The Learning and Development Centre provides training courses in a range of areas including personal development, management and IT.

Information can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/hr

9. The Living Centre

The Living Centre is located in the Octagon and hosts faith and spiritual sessions and offers a range of holistic therapies including massage and meditation.

Information can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/advice/wellbeingandspirituality

10. Dignity at work

The University has established a network of advisers to offer advice and support to employees who may be experiencing unreasonable behaviour as part of their working life and who are unable to resolve the problem alone.

Advisers are volunteers who have undertaken specialist training to equip them for this role.

Further information and a list of Dignity at Work Adviser can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/hr.

11. Career Development Unit

The UWE Career Development Unit can provide staff with careers information advice and guidance.

Information can be found at www.uwe.ac.uk/careers

12. Trade Unions

UWE has three recognised Trade Unions who can support staff at work and UWE is committed to joint working. UCU (University and College Union) for all academic, academic-related and research staff. UNISON for administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff. Unite for all manual staff.

Appendix B



Health and Safety
Executive

Return to work questionnaire

Cause of stress	Question	Was it a problem for you? <i>Use this space to detail what the problem was. If it was not a problem leave it blank</i>	What can be done about it? <i>Can we make any adjustments?</i>
Demands	Did different people at work demand things from you that were hard to combine?		
	Did you have unachievable deadlines?		
	Did you have to work very intensively?		
	Did you have to neglect some tasks because you had too much to do?		
	Were you unable to take sufficient breaks?		
	Did you feel pressured to work long hours?		
	Did you feel you had to work very fast?		
	Did you have unrealistic time pressures?		
Control	Could you decide when to take a break?		
	Did you feel you had a say in your work speed?		
	Did you feel you had a choice in deciding how you did your work?		
	Did you feel you had a choice in deciding what you did at work?		
	Did you feel you had some say over the way you did your work?		
	Did you feel your time could be flexible?		
Support (Manager)	Did your manager give you enough supportive feedback on the work you did?		
	Did you feel you could rely on your manager to help you with a work problem?		

	Did you feel you could talk to your manager about something that upset or annoyed you at work?		
	Did you feel your manager supported you through any emotionally demanding work?		
	Did you feel your manager encouraged you enough at work?		
(Peers)	Did you feel your colleagues would help you if work became difficult?		
	Did you get the help and support you needed from your colleagues?		
	Did you get the respect at work you deserved from your colleagues?		
	Were your colleagues willing to listen to your work-related problems?		
Relationships	Were you personally harassed, in the form of unkind words or behaviour?		
	Did you feel there was friction or anger between colleagues?		
	Were you bullied at work?		
	Were relationships strained at work?		
Role	Were you clear about what was expected of you at work?		
	Did you know how to go about getting your job done?		
	Were you clear about what your duties and responsibilities were?		
	Were you clear about the goals and objectives for this department?		
	Did you understand how your work fits into the overall aim of the organisation?		
Change	Did you have enough opportunities to question managers about change at work?		
	Did you feel consulted about change at work?		
	When changes were made at work, were you clear about how they would work out in practice?		
Other issues	Is there anything else that was a source of stress for you, at work or at home, that may have contributed to you going off work with work-related stress		

Management of stress flow chart

