



GLOBAL POLICY STATEMENT – EMPLOYEE STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING

INTRODUCTION

Heriot-Watt University values the health and welfare of all our staff, recognising that mental health is as important as physical health.

We aim to create a safe working environment from the point at which you express interest in working for us, throughout your employment until the day you leave us, however short or long that may be; and to promote processes and practices to protect, and where possible enhance, your health and wellbeing.

KEY PRINCIPLES

It is Heriot-Watt University policy to provide an environment in which staff who are adversely affected by stress and/or who have mental health difficulties feel able to discuss them in a safe, confidential environment; and to receive suitable support and adjustments to their working environment to allow them to work effectively and to fulfil their potential.

The University appreciates and values the commitment demonstrated by its staff who “go the extra mile” to support the delivery of our strategy and objectives. However, it is a key principle that significant levels of additional work carried out over sustained periods should not become the normal expectation.

Research has shown that stress-related conditions are amongst the most common forms of ill health affecting employees’ performance when they are at work. For those reasons it is in the interest of the University to be proactive in managing adverse stress at work as well as other mental or physical health conditions.

We encourage an inclusive and open working environment and are committed to creating an environment where staff feel supported to disclose any disability or condition. We strongly encourage early, confidential, disclosure to enable the University to provide support to meet the needs of staff experiencing stress or mental ill health.

Monitoring disclosure is an effective way of demonstrating our ability to create and maintain this environment. This activity is encompassed within our wider Equality and Diversity activity as outlined in our Equality Scheme which can be found at www.hw.ac.uk/equality. It is carried out with strict adherence to relevant Data Protection Legislation and in line with our [Staff Privacy Notice](#)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The University is responsible for:

- Promoting good mental health
- Providing centralised support through the Global HR Directorate (and in the UK, the Occupational Health Service).
- Providing training to staff in issues relating to mental health
- Encouraging a non-stigmatising environment for all staff and students within the University
- Ensuring sensitivity in disclosure

- Maintaining confidentiality unless it is clearly inappropriate to do so
- Monitoring the effectiveness of this policy on an ongoing basis.

Managers with responsibility for Staff

If you have concerns that a member of your staff is experiencing stress or mental health difficulties, you should feel able to speak to them about your concerns. Bear in mind, however, that it is possible to have a mental health condition that does not impact on attendance or performance. If it appears to you that their health is affecting them at work, you should speak to them to find out how they are and to encourage them to reach out for help and support but be careful not to make an assumption about their state of mind as there may be other reasons for their behaviour.

You may wish to contact a member of the HR Team for guidance on how to approach the individual and for general advice about what support is available.

All staff are expected to

- treat others with respect
- avoid stigmatising staff and students with mental health difficulties
- treat those with stress or mental health conditions as individuals, not as a “problem” or “condition”.
- maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity of individuals (unless the risk to the individual or others overrides the need for confidentiality, e.g., in the case of mental health emergencies such as suicidal ideas or the risk of harm to self or others).
- take advantage of training or information available to them
- recognise the limits of what they can do to support and seek help and guidance where they feel unsure of the right action to take.
- If you think a colleague may be experiencing stress or mental health difficulties and **if you feel able** to you should try to speak to them to explain your concern and suggest that they may benefit from seeking support and guidance. Bear in mind that they may be reluctant to discuss or acknowledge their condition with you or anyone else. If you have real concerns about their health, you should raise your concerns with your manager/Head of School/Department.

Confidentiality

All dealings with individuals should be carried out in confidence and this is especially important to those who are experiencing mental health difficulties. We have an obligation to respect individuals’ privacy and the need for sensitivity and have certain responsibilities, for example under the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR legislation in the UK; the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 in Malaysia; the ‘UAE Federal Decree-Law No. 45 of 2021 Regarding the Protection of Data Protection’ in Dubai.

We hold sensitive and personal data in line with our [Staff Privacy Notice](#)

However, there may be circumstances in which it is necessary to breach confidence if the individual is thought to be a risk to themselves or to other people. If there is a conflict in deciding the appropriate action to take **the safety of the individual and/or the safety of other members of staff or students takes priority over confidentiality.**

Support for staff and managers

There is a wealth of internal and external support available for staff at all of our campuses.

Our Global Employee Assistance Programme

The University uses an external [Employee Assistance Programme](#) to provide advice and counselling on a range of issues.

The service is contactable, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year for all employees, or via email during UK working hours. Any structured organised support is provided between the hours of 8am to 8pm UK time. The phone number and further information is available at this link [Employee Assistance Programme](#).¹ The service is entirely confidential and personal data will not be shared with anyone at Heriot-Watt University unless you personally choose to share.

The HR Hub

Please visit our [Wellbeing Site](#) on the HR Hub for details of internal and external support in each location and includes guidance for managers to support team members.

HR Colleagues

You can speak in confidence to a member of the HR Team by contacting the [HR helpdesk](#) and asking for a confidential conversation with a colleague in your location

UK only – Trade Union Reps

If you are based in the UK you may wish to join one of our recognised unions or seek help from them – you can enquire at one of these links:

- ucu@hw.ac.uk
- unison.hwuniversity@hw.ac.uk
- unite@hw.ac.uk

General Guidance

As a manager or member of staff, you are not expected to have the answers but should be aware of what processes are in place to enable a swift and appropriate response.

If you find yourself in a situation with an individual in distress you should consider the following:

- Console the individual and offer comfort
- Offer practical support/help (e.g., arrange privacy, cover for their immediate workload)
- Make them aware that they can meet with Occupational Health and that this can be arranged through HR, either by the manager or the individual themselves raising a ticket with [HR helpdesk](#)
- Signpost them to the [Counselling Service](#) and [Wellbeing Site](#)
- Advise them to contact their GP
- **Above all, ensure that you respect their privacy and the sensitivity involved, maintaining confidentiality if the individual wishes this.**

Staff dealing with Students

Any staff member who is seriously concerned about the mental health of a student should contact Student Support Services at studentwellbeing@hw.ac.uk to raise their concern. Further details are available [here](#)

Responsibilities in an emergency²

If you become aware of or involved in a situation with an individual who appears to be suffering from a mental health emergency or is severely stressed, you should first ensure your own safety:

- Assess the risk of harm to yourself and others
- Alert another member of staff
- Do not invade the 'private space' of the individual concerned

¹ The phone line is free of charge in the UK but may attract international charges elsewhere.

² Follow your local emergency procedures if you are in Dubai or Malaysia

Where the situation is deemed to be serious i.e. person at risk of harm

- Contact Emergency Services (999 in the UK, Dubai and Malaysia, or as per the local guidance on your campus).
- Then Contact Safeguarding via the Safe Zone App informing them that Emergency Services are on their way. You can also dial 222 in the UK or +971-52-5623467 in Dubai
- Stay with the individual if it is safe to do so
- Contact HR once the emergency situation has been dealt with for advice about continued support for the employee.