Stress Awareness Policy & Procedures for staff

1. Introduction

Stress is a complex and sensitive issue that needs careful consideration before taking any action. There are many factors that have an influence on stress including; employees’ individual characteristics and circumstance, the organisation’s culture and the way employees are managed.

The definition of stress is contained in Appendix 1.

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 stress at work.

Under the terms of the relevant legislation and regulations the University has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the physical and mental health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees.

The University also has a duty to assess the health and safety risks to which its employees are exposed. For further information on Health and Safety within the University visit the Health, Safety and Risk homepage (see section 5 for the link).

The University also has a Mental Health policy which may apply to situations involving stress. See section 4 for further information about the link between policies.

2. Key Principles / Scope of the Policy

The University believes that its employees’ well-being is essential to effective work performance and the provision of a high quality service.

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.

This policy, which applies to all employees, sets out the University's aims and objectives for the management of harmful stress at work. The intention of the policy is to ensure that all employees who experience harmful stress are supported so that they:

- have the confidence to raise concerns, whether about their own situation or a that of a colleague
- are reassured that they will be treated with dignity and in confidence
- will not suffer any adverse consequences or be “stigmatised” as a result
Harmful stress reduces performance, creativity and productivity. It is in the University’s best interests to develop procedures and support systems to help all employees understand and recognise the nature and causes of stress, and to take positive steps to manage stress effectively.

The key aims and objectives of this policy are therefore:

- that seeking help and support should be seen as a positive approach, to be encouraged and dealt with without jeopardy.
- to increase awareness of all types of stress and the methods and support available to combat adverse reactions.
- to initiate appropriate action to manage and reduce stress at work at the earliest possible time.
- to assist employees in managing stress in others and themselves.
- to manage proactively the return to work of those employees who have been absent as a result of a stress-related illness.

Whilst the University has no control over external factors impacting on the health and well-being of its employees it is committed to identifying sources of harmful stress in the workplace and will take action to reduce or, where possible, to eliminate those causes of stress within its control.

3. Policy Statement

The recognition and management of stress are integral to the University's responsibilities towards its employees and form an important part of the role of Managers and Supervisors.

The emphasis of this policy is to encourage and assist employees and all those with responsibilities for their management to identify and deal with stress. It is acknowledged that despite this there may be times when some employees require professional help or support. For this reason, the University recommends that employees seeking help should normally approach their Manager in the first instance, or where necessary their Manager’s Manager.

Human Resources are available to provide guidance and assistance, which may include the provision of counselling or referral to medical services where appropriate.

4. Lines of Responsibility

Principal and PME

Legal responsibility for stress related injury proven to be caused at work ultimately rests with the University Principal/PME. Appropriate action can only be taken by the Principal/PME to reduce the risks of such injury if Managers are vigilant and report to Human Resources or Health and Safety circumstances which are likely to cause or are causing stress related injuries or illness.
Managers:

In keeping with good management practice, managers should:

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their area of responsibility.
- Work with HR to support and manage stress related absence for their employees.
- Ensure good communication between management and their employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure employees are fully trained to carry out their duties.
- Ensure employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities through the Performance and Development Review programme.
- Overview workloads to ensure that employees are not overloaded continuously or at a level that causes dangerous levels of stress.
- Overview working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking on a prolonged or unnecessary basis.
- Encourage employees to take their full annual leave entitlement every year.
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to an employee who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.

Employees:

Everyone has a role to play in managing stress and individuals therefore should:

- Take responsibility for their own well-being.
- Take active steps to develop individual coping strategies for the management of stress.
- Raise issues of concern with their Manager (or their Manager’s Manager if their Manager is a contributory factor) in the first instance. Other sources of support are the HR Adviser or Trade Union Representative.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.
- Use all sources of support available e.g. GP, OH, colleagues, friends and family networks.

The Health and Safety Team will:

- Provide specialist advice.
- Source and/or provide awareness training on stress, in conjunction with the HR Team.
- Train and support Managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the University and the Occupational Health and Safety Committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.
The Human Resources Team will:

- Give support and guidance to Managers on the Stress Awareness Policy.
- Support managers with the Stress and Attendance Management Policies to manage stress related absence.
- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating and reporting sickness absence statistics.
- Advise Managers and employees on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to Managers and employees in a changing environment.
- Work with the employee’s Manager to make referrals to Occupational Health where appropriate.
- Support employees who have been absent with stress-related illness and advise them and their Managers on a structured return to work programme and/or other measures to enable them to return to work.
- Refer employees to the Employee Counselling Service as required.

The Occupational Health and Safety Committee will:

- Perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- Oversee monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

5. Additional information

This policy applies to all University employees and will be accessible through the University's web pages. It is subject to review and evaluation every two years or earlier should there be legislation introduced or amended which impacts on it.
Appendix 1

Definition

Harmful stress is what is experienced when an individual feels s/he cannot cope with the pressures and demands placed on him/her. Everyone varies in their capacity to cope with different levels or types of pressure. Some pressure, even when high, can be positive and is frequently challenging and motivating. Responding effectively to this kind of pressure can lead to job satisfaction. However, when pressure reaches a level an individual cannot cope with, they may experience negative stress. This may also occur when there is too little pressure or challenge to motivate them. The effects of stress can be observed in both physiological and psychological symptoms.

Stress can also be caused by the many different pressures people experience in their home and personal lives. For instance, bereavement, relationship or family problems, financial worries are some of the factors which can make people more vulnerable to stress at work. The harmful effects of stress are often caused by a combination of work and home stress. An individual's personality and attitudes may also affect the levels of stress they experience. Stress in one area of life that may also impact on other areas.
Appendix 2

PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING EMPLOYEE STRESS ISSUES

1. Introduction

The following section outlines the existing processes the University has in place to support an employee who discloses that they are suffering from stress or a manager who suspects stress is causing their employee difficulties at work.

There is a close connection between the Stress Awareness Policy and the Mental Health Policy (see section 4). The Stress Awareness Policy gives advice and guidance in dealing with Stress in the first instance. For further information about the Mental Health Policy visit the HR website or consult your HR Adviser.

2. Responsibilities of employees dealing with individuals suffering stress

Managers with responsibility for Staff

The accountabilities of managers in relation to managing stress in their employees are outlined in the policy under section 4.

If you have concerns that your employee is experiencing stress related difficulties you should feel able to speak to him/her about your concerns. You may be concerned about impaired work performance or attendance, for example. It is advisable that an individual approach be made as the situation may not be related to stress and personal contact will assist in ensuring the most appropriate course of action is undertaken.

In planning to discuss your concerns with your employee you should ensure that you put time aside and meet with them in private ensuring no interruptions. During the discussion you should listen to the employees concerns as well as sharing any of your own. In this meeting you may offer support in relation to workload, counselling or another reasonable support measure. If you are offering support you should make a note of this for your own records.

You may wish to contact your HR Adviser for guidance on how best to approach your employee and for general advice about what support is available. Once contact has been made and a dialogue has been established, if appropriate, HR can arrange an Occupational Health referral to the University Health Centre. The Section below, ‘Support Available from HR and other sources’, sets out more detail about this.

Employees

If you feel that you are suffering from stress you should seek help at an early stage. Help can be sought from the following:

- Immediate colleagues or your Manager or Head of Section/School/Department
- Your Human Resources Adviser, who can, if necessary arrange a referral to Occupational Health or the Employee Counselling Service
- The University Chaplain

Approved by PME on 23 September 2010
Author: A. Skinner, Human Resources
We strongly advise you to make your difficulties known in order to ensure that we provide help and support and we recognise the need for confidentiality and sensitivity in such matters.

Support Available from HR and other sources

The University has referral processes in place to support its employees. As a Manager or employee you should be aware of what processes are in place to enable a swift and appropriate response.

Employee Counselling Service

The University offers a confidential, off-site Employee Counselling Service. This is paid for by the University and accessed via application to the HR Department. Requests for counselling may be made either by the manager or the individual, or may be proposed by HR or Occupational Health as appropriate support. The service is completely confidential. If the individual has made the request directly to HR his/her manager will not be made aware that the request has been made unless with the express consent of the individual.

Occupational Health Advice and implementation/review

Referrals to Occupational Health are made via HR. In most cases, referrals for Occupational Health Advice (usually via the University Health Centre) are made when an employee is or has been absent due to ill-health. However, Occupational Health referrals may also be arranged in response to direct requests by managers or employees regardless of whether the employee is absent from work.

HR sets up an appointment with Occupational Health, providing referral with as much information as is available. The referral requests advice on how to manage the absence, how to support a return to work or ongoing attendance at work or any reasonable adjustments that can be made to support the employee. HR then advises the individual of the date and time of the appointment.

After the appointment, once the Occupational Health report is received in HR, the HR Adviser will phone the Manager with a summary of the advice provided. Depending on whether the absence is short term, intermittent, long term or very serious, the relevant section of the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure will be put into place including, where recommended, any reasonable adjustment, risk assessment required (which will be carried out by the Health and Safety Team) or follow-up meetings.

Reasonable Adjustments

Examples of reasonable adjustments might include:

- a “phased return” to work, i.e. starting back on shorter hours or less days and gradually building up to full hours.
- a shorter working week for a specific period of time.
- A temporary reduction in duties.
- considering temporary or permanent alternative employment.
There may be other ways of making reasonable adjustments depending on the nature of the illness and the type of job being carried out. Any such adjustments would be advised by the Occupational Health Physician, and implemented by the School/Section in conjunction with HR if these can be accommodated and are acceptable to the employee.

All referrals to Occupational Health are treated with confidentiality and in line both with Data Protection legislation and the Access to Medical Records Act.

3. Links to Attendance Management Policy

Where an employee is absent for any illness (including stress), it is the responsibility of their Manager to monitor and manage their attendance in accordance with the Attendance Management Policy, with HR Advisers available for support and advice.

Additionally, on a monthly basis, HR Advisers check the list of employees absent through ill health for any absence that may require support and intervention, perhaps because of the nature of the illness or the length of the absence. Where an absence is stated to be for stress, anxiety or depression, whether or not work-related, this is treated as a priority for referral to Occupational Health and the HR Adviser will advise and support the Manager on appropriate action and consultation with the employee.

No action should be taken by a Manager under the Attendance Management Policy for an employee suffering stress prior to discussion with their HR Adviser.

4. Links to the Mental Health Policy

The aim of the Stress policy is to proactively manage stress and to invoke preventative solutions.

There are close links between the Stress Awareness Policy and the Mental Health Policy.

The University recognises that the term ‘mental health’ covers a broad spectrum. Mental ill-health can affect people at any time of life and in different ways, including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, self-harm and dementia and can be triggered by many factors. Stress, life events, past experiences and genetics all play a part in determining our mental health along with many other factors. Anybody can have a mental health difficulty and, on average, one in four people will experience a mental health difficulty at some point in their lives. Most people who experience mental health difficulties do get over them or learn to live with them, especially if support is given early on.

For further information on the Mental Health Policy visit the HR website or consult your HR Adviser.

5. Useful links

HR Policies and Procedures - [http://www.hw.ac.uk/hr/p_index.php](http://www.hw.ac.uk/hr/p_index.php)
Equality and Diversity Website - http://www.hw.ac.uk/equality/

Health and Safety - http://www.hw.ac.uk/safety/