

Human Resources

Stress at Work Guidance

# Introduction

The University is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for its employees and recognises the importance of fostering psychological as well as physical well-being. Stress is a complex subject and the University has to deal with its effects irrespective of its source. Whilst work related stress is addressed, other causes of stress are considered.

This guidance aims to reduce the levels of stress so far as is reasonably practicable. This will be achieved in practice through appropriate job design, creating a supportive work environment, the University’s culture, training and supporting managers and employees to assist them in preventing and coping with workplace stress, and supporting employees if and when they are experiencing stress.

[The mental health charity, Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-facts-and-statistics) has documented that currently 1 in 4 individuals may experience a mental health issue and 1 in 5 experience stress, depression and anxiety.

Whilst stress can occur among employees and students, there are considerable differences in the legal responsibilities for these two groups. This guidance applies to the University's responsibility as an employer. Managers are responsible for implementation and providing the resources required under this guidance

# Definition of stress

The [Health and Safety Executive (HSE)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/overview.htm) define stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they perceive that they are unable to cope with those demands. It is not a disease in itself, but if stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental or physical ill-health’

This makes a distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Different *primary causes* of stress are distinguished as they have different potential management approaches, but they are all matters that the University is committed to addressing at work.

The HSE have provided a set of [management standards](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm) for managing stress in the workplace. These look at 6 areas of work design that if not managed can impact on an individual’s health and wellbeing.

The management standards can be used to identify the primary causes of stress and make the process of managing stress in the workplace easier and more effective. The primary causes are:

1. **Demands** – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment;
2. **Control** – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work;
3. **Support** – such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues;
4. **Relationships** – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and to deal with unacceptable behaviour;
5. **Role** – such as whether people understand their role within theUniversity and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles;
6. **Change** – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

However, as each cause will have different impacts on different individuals there is not a simple relationship between any one primary cause and the level of stress that individuals experience. Stress will also arise in individual’s personal lives, over which we have no control or responsibility but this may affect work performance.

# Principles

The University at all levels will follow the Management Standards Approach to managing stress: This is a risk assessment approach to understanding and managing work related stress.

Figure 1. The Management Standards Approach (Source: The Health and Safety Executive)

In addition to the above, the University at all levels will also:

* Provide training for all managers and supervisors in good management practice.
* Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the policy.
* Consult with staff representatives and any relevant unions Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress and where appropriate provide time and resources to enable them to do this role.
* Undertake regular listening exercises to give employees opportunity to feedback to the University about their working environment so impactful action can be taken.
* Ensure (so far as is practicable) that employees have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their roles.
* Provide access to confidential occupational health support and where necessary counselling and advice about how to manage wellbeing at work.

# Responsibilities

## Managers

All University managers (from Vice-Chancellor and UEB and through to individual line managers and supervisors) shall:

* conduct and implement recommendations from risks assessments within their jurisdiction
* carry out a stress risk assessment in their area.
* ensure good (i.e. clear and appropriate) verbal and written communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
* ensure that employees are adequately trained and have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their duties
* ensure that employees skills and abilities are matched to job demands
* ensure, as far as is practicable, that employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities
* monitor workloads to ensure that employees are not overloaded
* ensure that employees’ concerns about work environment are addressed
* monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that individuals are not overworking
* monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their entitlement
* attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
* ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their area of responsibility.
* be vigilant and offer additional support to employees experiencing stress whether arising inside or outside work e.g. bereavement or separation
* ensure that employees are recruited to/employed in roles for which they are suited

## Occupational Health Service

The Occupational Health Service will provide:

* advice to managers on implementing stress risk assessments
* specialist advice and support to employees suffering with stress
* monitor and report on any high levels of work related stress cases in specific work locations.
* help support those employees at work with stress and advise them and their managers on the actions required to enable them to remain at work
* help support employees absent from work with stress, and advise them and their management on the actions required for a planned return to work
* initiate case conferences where appropriate to address employee stress issues with the employee’s consent liaise with the employee’s GP or other practitioners
* refer to Employees Assistance Programme or other specialist agencies as required
* monitor and report on the effectiveness of occupational health measures to reduce stress related absence
* inform the University Health and Safety Committee or People and Culture Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
* report periodically to the University Health and Safety or People and Culture Committee, in conjunction with the HR team, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements
* provide specialist advice and input into awareness training on managing stress as required.

## Health and Safety Services

Health and Safety Services will:

* support managers in implementing stress risk assessments
* monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress
* inform the University Health and Safety Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
* report to the University Health and Safety Committee, in conjunction with the HR teams, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements
* in conjunction with Occupational Health undertaking stress risk assessment training and contribute to management development training programmes where appropriate.

## Human Resources

The Human Resources Department will:

* provide support and guidance to managers and employees on all aspects of managing stress in the workplace effectively
* develop fair, transparent and effect policies that ensure the organisation is supporting managers and employees to effectively manage stress in the workplace
* assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics
* advise managers and employees on training requirements
* provide continuing advice and support to managers and individual employees (e.g. advice on policy, supporting employee well-being)
* encourage referral to occupational health where appropriate
* provide training on managing stress for staff and managers in conjunction with Health and Safety Services and Occupational Health Services.

## Employees

Employees will:

* take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and also develop an awareness of their own abilities and coping mechanisms
* raise issues of concern in the first instance with the relevant line manager if able to (or an appropriate colleague), an HR Partner or HR Adviser, a Health and Safety Coordinator, a Staff Forum or Trade Union representative
* consider opportunities for training when recommended
* discuss and consider opportunities for support from the University Employees Assistance Program who provide in the moment support and will assess if counselling will be appropriate for the individual circumstances.

## Trade Union Safety Representatives

Under the Health and Safety legislation the University has a network of Trade Union Safety Representatives. These are people appointed by the Trades Union and recognised by the University.

The representatives assist in the development of health and safety solutions and they:

* must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress
* must be able to consult with employees on the issue of stress
* must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process
* should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data provided by HR
* should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to help implement the University Stress at Work Policy and attend appropriate Trade Union training relating to workplace stress
* should conduct joint inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled, e.g. excessive temperatures at work

None of the listed roles above are any different from the Trade Union Safety Representatives roles, rights and responsibilities for any other part of their health and safety role.