

Stress Assessment Guidance Notes:

This note provides guidance for those completing the Stress Risk Assessment Form. This guidance note should be read in conjunction with [Work Related Stress - Information for Managers / Supervisors](#), a guidance document which outlines the general principles of risk assessment in relation to stress at work.

Stress is not covered by any specific piece of legislation; however the Health and Safety at Work etc Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations apply in regard to the requirement to assess the risks relating to stress within the workplace.

Identify the Hazard:

Identify all the common organisational stressors (hazards) relating to the work activities; evaluate the risks (low / medium / high); describe all existing control measures and identify any further measures required.

Specific hazards should be assessed on a separate risk assessment form and cross-referenced with this document where appropriate. Specific assessments are available for hazardous substances, lone working etc., refer to our [Risk Assessment section](#) for further details.

Some common organisational stressors to consider may include:

- Heavy targets and workloads
- Insufficient resources
- Long working hours
- Rapid change
- Conflicting priorities
- Uncertainty or insecurity
- Poor communication
- Lack of involvement
- Poor delegation
- Management style and conflict

A variety of methods can be used to identify these including informal staff talks, focus groups, sickness/absence records, questionnaires and workplace inspections.

Evaluate the risk

1. Assess the likely impact of the identified causes on staff.
2. Remember that different times of the year may result in different risks, depending on priorities and workload. For example the start of the Academic year, exam times, (financial or other) year end, etc may require to be considered separately.
3. Try to speak to staff to ascertain the problem.

4. If speaking to an individual who is known to suffer from stress, this will require a careful planned approach and should be done sympathetically.

Identify Control Measures - Possible Solutions

Demands

- Evaluate that sufficient resources are available to complete work allocated, if not re-evaluate priorities
- Ensure the demands on staff are achievable
- If work load is a problem, look at trying to reduce it. Ensure targets are challenging but realistic, listen to the individual; consider flexible working
- Support staff by assisting with prioritisation of work and the establishment of realistic deadlines
- Strike a balance between ensuring that staff are interested and busy but not under-loaded, overloaded or confused about the job
- Help people prioritise workloads, provide time management training if required;
- Provide adequate staff training and ensure that their skills and abilities match the demands of the job
- Encourage staff to raise problems in early stages if they cannot cope
- Encourage delegation if it is possible;
- Ensure that proper risk assessments are carried out to control physical hazards
- Ensure that employee's concerns about their work environment are considered and addressed
- Ensure that any risk from physical violence, verbal abuse and bullying is identified, controlled or dealt with
- Encourage team cohesion and commitment
- Make sure holidays are taken, not accumulated;

Control

- Endeavour to provide more control to staff by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how this should be completed and how problems should be tackled
- Enrich jobs by ensuring that staff are able to use their skills to get tasks completed and understand how their work fits in to the wider aims of the Department or Section
- Only monitor employees output if this is essential
- Ensure regular meetings with staff take place to see how things are going
- Provide a supportive environment

Support

- Provide support and encouragement, even when things go wrong
- Listen to staff and agree actions for tackling problems

- Review employees' performance so that they know how they are doing. Encourage feedback from your employees to identify any problem they may be having
- Ensure that staff are fully involved
- Encourage staff to share their concerns about work-related stress at an early stage
- Encourage staff to discuss their problems with you, make yourself approachable;
- Take a sympathetic approach to any personal problems the employee may have;
- Ensure that adequate training and information have been provided
- Ensure that individuals do not feel that they are being discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, disability and other irrelevant reasons – value diversity
- Encourage achievement of effective work-life balance.

Relationships

- Work in partnership to ensure that bullying and harassment do not emerge as an issue
- Ensure that procedures already established via Human Resources are fully utilised
- Ensure that the policy on stress, bullying and harassment are properly communicated to staff and these policies have full management support
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the consequences of breaching the policies

Role

- Ensure that roles are defined and understood to prevent conflict and ambiguity
- Make sure staff have a clearly defined role and understand exactly what their role and responsibilities are
- Encourage staff to talk at an early stage if they are not clear about priorities or the nature of the task to be undertaken
- Talk to staff regularly to ensure they are clear about their current job, what it entails and what the expectations of them are
- Ensure that all new members of staff or re-deployed staff receive adequate induction

Change

- Explain clearly why any changes are necessary, explain timetables for actions and outline the initial steps to be taken
- Communicate new developments as quickly as possible to avoid the spread of rumours and misinformation
- Ensure full opportunity to comment and ask questions before, during and after change
- Involve staff in discussions about how jobs might be developed, changed and how means of solving problems can be generated

- Ensure that risk assessments are reviewed if changes such as decreases in staff are liable to increase the probability of hazards arising.

Persons at Risk:

Any member of staff may be affected by work-related stress. Some individuals may be more vulnerable than others, dependant on their job and domestic pressures. The focus is not merely on the individual but on the work and organisation as a whole. Know your staff. Individuals suffering from stress often display a range of outward signs that may be noticed by colleagues and other managers.

These signs include:

- Tiredness and irritability
- Reduced quality of work indecisiveness and poor judgement
- Loss of sense of humour
- Physical illness such as headache, nausea, aches and pains
- Poor sleep pattern or excessively 'jumpy'
- Increased sick leave
- Poor time keeping
- Staff taking work home or staying late excessively

It is important that these individuals are made aware of the outcome of the risk assessment and informed of actions and control to minimise the risk.

Recording of Assessment Details:

1. Record the significant findings of your risk assessment and set a review date;
2. Ensure support is offered;
3. Refer to the University's support services available for guidance where required;
4. Refer to the HSE website for guidance.

It is important that schools maintain records of risk assessments for inspection. Obtaining a signature from individuals to confirm that they have read and understood the information contained in the risk assessment is advised and should be implemented at the discretion of each school.

Sources of Guidance and Advice:

- [Work Related Stress - Information for Managers / Supervisors](#)
- [Stress - Managers Checklist](#)