

## **GUIDELINES ON MANAGING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

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### **Summary**

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association ('UCEA') and the Health and Safety Executive ('HSE') have published their management standards and guidance for tackling health and well-being and managing stress at work. This document provides guidance for University staff.

The management of stress and well-being in the workplace is recognised as an issue which the University must tackle in an appropriate manner. There remains much debate about the nature of stress, its determinants and the best way to deal with it in an occupational setting. There are no simple answers because we are dealing with individuals and their perceptions and feelings and there are many confounding factors.

It is readily accepted that stress is a very complex issue and that there will be more than one definition that will be acceptable and applicable, but there are common areas running through the different definitions. Definitions and references to managing health and well-being and stress are given in Appendix 1.

### **Our Legal Obligations**

The Health and Safety at Work Act is an umbrella piece of legislation under which a number of Acts and Regulations are brought into force.

The Act covers the broad principle of the employer's 'general duty of care', which should ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health (including mental health), safety and welfare of all employees whilst at work. This means that employers do have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that health is not placed at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way that work is organised, the way people deal with each other at work, or from the day to day demands placed on their employees. This involves assessing possible health hazards in the workplace, keeping an eye out for developing problems, and being prepared to act if harm to health seems likely. In other words, ill-health and well-being, including stress, should be treated by all employees like any other occupational health hazard.

### **Provision of Support Services**

The University takes a pragmatic approach to do what we can to tackle ill-health and stress in the workplace, and continues to learn from experience. It can be seen as an iterative process in a rapidly changing and evolving environment, and although prevention is always better than cure, there remains a significant continuing need for support for staff, and a clear understanding of our particular roles and responsibilities for effecting policy.

We acknowledge that it is in the interests of the University to provide support for staff wherever their problems arise, whether work-related or not. It simply may not be possible to separate work from non-work pressures and either way there is an impact at work regardless of the source. As a result the University provides a wide range of support services for staff. Summary details are provided below and further information can be found in the Employee Handbook available on the Human Resources page on the University's intranet Portia. Guidance policies and documents are also available on other matters including:

- Flexible working for parents, guardians and carers
- Maternity, paternity and adoption
- Retirement and working beyond retirement age
- Grievance
- Harassment
- Organisational Change

## **Counselling Service**

The University provides a counselling service for its staff and students. For students, the service is provided within Student Support Services, and for staff, the service is provided through an independent Lead Counsellor. The service gives access to confidential guidance and stress counselling from a group of professionally qualified counsellors. The services provided under the arrangement support both practical and emotional needs to a) enable staff to assess their situation, b) consider the options available, and c) support staff in finding appropriate solutions.

## **Eye Tests**

The University will support the cost of eye tests for staff for whom a Workstation Risk Assessment carried out by a Health and Safety Officer indicates there is a need. Subsidised lenses and frames are also available as part of the scheme.

## **Childcare Vouchers**

The University has a childcare voucher scheme administered by Fideliti Childcare vouchers can be used to pay for most types of childcare. The vouchers are non-taxable and exempt from National Insurance contributions, helping to reduce the cost of childcare.

## **Bicycle Scheme**

The University is working with an external company to provide staff with the opportunity to buy any new bike with a discount through salary deductions and offers students the opportunity to buy bikes with a discount.

## **Sports Activity Research Centre ('SARC')**

A variety of staff memberships are available should staff wish to make use of the University's sport and fitness facilities. A programme of events is available through the Active Sports Manager who is based in SARC. The Professional Development Programme outlines further membership details.

## **Health Care – Flu Vaccinations**

The University offers an annual on-site flu vaccination programme, available free to all staff through an external company, Working Health Solutions. Vaccinations usually take place during October/November each year.

## **Access to Other Health Care Providers**

The University provides access to a package of health care benefits and treatment through several sources. Staff can access health care support through Uni-health.c.ok, and The BUPA University Group Scheme. Staff can qualify for a discount when they sign up to the Schemes for themselves and their family. The Schemes providers are the agents and administrators for each prospective Scheme, offering comprehensive cover, for example full inpatient and outpatient care.

## **Human Resources**

The Human Resources Department works closely with managers and staff to ensure that issues of ill-health and stress are managed at the earliest opportunity. Staff should contact Human Resources if they recognise that they need some help and support. Human Resources will monitor the effectiveness of the policies, producing reports on the incidence of occupational stress and ill-health related issues, and sickness absence data. This will take the form of any emerging patterns or trends, numbers of occupational health referrals, (including a percentage of work related referrals), poor employee relations leading to any litigation or further action, and any relevant data arising from exit interviews.

## **Staff Development and Training**

The University offers a variety of staff development and training events and these focus on stress awareness, stress management and conducting risk assessments and health and wellbeing opportunities. The purpose of the development opportunities offered will be to help identify stress and related ill-health issues and to provide guidance on how to deal with it thereafter. Training will continue to be adapted to meet the changing needs of staff.

## **Managers**

Managers have responsibility for playing a key role in the implementation of sickness absence and stress management policies with responsibility for assessing the risks of ill-health and stress and, working with relevant colleagues across the University (including the Human Resources Department and the Health and Safety Officers), for taking steps to control such risks as identified.

### **Individual Staff**

Staff are responsible for informing managers of any stress related or ill-health problems. Individuals are responsible for adopting strategies to combat stress, which may include using the counselling services to assist themselves, or attending staff development events on raising awareness and stress management.

### **Pre-Employment Health Screening**

New employees are required to complete a pre-employment health questionnaire which is sent to and assessed by the Occupational Health Service. The assessment process is used in a positive way, identifying what support, if any, a member of staff might need to carry out a job effectively. If a potential stress problem has been identified in the initial screening process, but the decision is taken to employ the person nevertheless, the manager will monitor the well-being and progress of the staff member at regular intervals, in close liaison with Human Resources. This requires the full co-operation of the employee, who will also be required to raise any subsequent work-related health concerns with the manager as soon as possible.

### **Occupational Health Support**

The University employs an independent occupational health service to ensure adequate support for individuals suffering ill-health including stress related issues. Employees are referred to Occupational Health Physicians through the Human Resources Department to identify any particular areas for support, or for further advice.

### **Absence Management**

Staff should maintain regular contact with their manager to let them know how long they are likely to be off work, and to keep them informed of their progress. The University's sickness absence guidelines should be followed, and managers will ensure that all absences are properly recorded. Absences will be discussed with staff and any underlying reasons identified. In the case of a long-term sickness absence, managers will maintain regular contact with absent staff in a sensitive and appropriate manner – advice from Human Resources will be sought at an early stage.

### **Return to Work After Absence**

After a member of staff returns to work, the manager will hold a 'return to work' interview to ascertain whether there is any particular support required, and in some cases this will involve meeting with Human Resources at the same time. Managers will continue to monitor and discuss their recovery and the factors which may have contributed to, or caused ill-health, particularly if it is due to stress – the frequency of these meetings may be higher than in a normal line management situation.

### **Traumatic or Violent Incidents**

There may be occasions when staff experience traumatic, violent or distressing incidents. In these situations managers and Human Resources will offer the staff member the support of the Counsellor or Occupational Health Service at an early stage to facilitate appropriate support and action.

### **Risk Management Strategy**

Some potential sources of stress, the risks they entail, and some strategies for dealing with them have been identified and are included in Appendix 2.

### **Communication and Co-operation**

Individual staff are reminded that they must alert their manager if they believe they are suffering from a work-related health problem, including stress.

## **Appendix 1: Definitions of 'Stress'**

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health define stress as

“Job stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury.”

The European Commission define stress as

“Emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work content, work organisation and work environments. It is a state characterised by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping.”

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as

“Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on 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, such as depression, nervous breakdown or heart disease.”

## Appendix 2: Risk Management Strategies

Source of Stress	Risk Identified	Strategies for Managing Risk
<b>Planning:</b> Inadequate communication.	Staff may learn about events from external sources.	Managers must explain the situation and keep staff informed as soon as possible.  Staff need to be pro-active in asking for information.
<b>Organisation:</b> Lack of consultation in decisions on change.          Inadequately defined objectives and conflicting demands.	Staff may feel that consultation is tokenistic.          Staff may feel unclear of what is expected of them, especially in times of uncertainty.	Explain criteria on which decisions have to be made.  Explain the consultation process and opportunities for involvement.  Recognise that consultation does not necessarily mean that everyone will get exactly what they want.  Set clear objectives during PRDP appraisal events and ensure progress is measured.  Involve staff as much as possible in decision making processes.  Encourage staff to take responsibility for their own well being.

<p><b>Personal:</b> Organisational change/job insecurity.</p> <p>Quality of interpersonal relationships at work.</p>	<p>Staff are aware of the need to reduce staffing levels and fear for their jobs.</p> <p>Personal relations can become strained due to perceived inequality in workloads.</p> <p>Personality clashes exist to varying degrees (potentially stressful for third parties too).</p>	<p>Remind staff that the University's stated policy will be followed.</p> <p>Help staff identify new opportunities and new directions and support development for progression.</p> <p>Review job content and work load patterns, involving staff in redefining job content. Encourage staff to share their concerns with their Line Manager. Ensure all staff are aware of the procedures for dealing with a grievance, bullying or harassment.</p> <p>Personality clashes should not be allowed to interfere with work. Anyone suffering from stress as a result of a personality clash should report it to their Line Manager, or their Grievance Officer.</p> <p>Ensure all staff are aware that counselling is available for staff.</p>
<p>Unreasonable conflict</p> <p>Workload</p> <p>Pace of Work</p> <p>Flexible Working</p> <p>Temporary staff shortages</p>	<p>Conflict may occur.</p> <p>Fears about reducing or increasing workloads can both be causes of stress.</p> <p>Internal and external pressures may make unreasonable demands on time, leading to staff feeling that they have no control over the pace of work.</p> <p>Allowing one person greater flexibility may put undue pressure on other staff.</p> <p>Staff expected to cover may be</p>	<p>Deal with conflicts openly rather than ignore them. Recognise that differences of opinion, honestly held, are not necessarily 'a bad thing'.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>Manage expectations. The nature of the work entails meeting internally and externally imposed deadlines. Identify deadlines up front wherever possible so staff can plan around them.</p> <p>Manage expectations by ensuring staff realise that flexibility must fit with the requirements of the service. Implement the University's Flexible Working Policy uniformly.</p> <p>Discourage long hours over anything other than a short period.</p> <p>Encourage proper balance between work and home life.</p> <p>Ensure staff are aware of areas</p>

	unclear about what is expected of them.	of work they are expected to cover.
<b>Harrowing Situations:</b>	Staff may have to deal with distressed students or other members of staff.	<p>Staff should try to disengage personal feelings when dealing with staff and students.</p> <p>Staff should ensure their Line Manager is aware.</p> <p>Staff should take advantage of the counselling services and other support services the University provides.</p>
<b>Physical:</b> Work environment, heat, light, space, and noise  Intrusive behaviour  Abuse of shared space	<p>Staff may not be in control of their environment. There may be problems associated with open-plan offices.</p> <p>Other staff's work patterns and/or conversation may be intrusive.</p> <p>The areas around shared equipment may become cluttered.</p>	<p>Monitor environment as necessary. Provide what aids are feasible e.g. blinds, fans, heaters, shade, etc. Manage expectations. Report faults to the appropriate departments, e.g. Health and Safety or Estates and Premises.</p> <p>Everyone must be considerate towards and tolerant of everyone else.</p> <p>Everyone should take personal responsibility for their use of such shared spaces.</p>