

# **Stress Management Standard**

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Guidance updated to reflect Wellbeing survey outcomes July 2011.

Approved, following further minor amendments, by MSG 22 November 2011.

Updated September 2012 to incorporate a stress self-assessment questionnaire (Appendix B) and additional columns on the HSE table of management competencies (Appendix E).

Standard was revised in February 2015 and approved by H&S Committee

Reviewed and updated November 2018

# Stress Management Standard<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Purpose and aims

1.1 The purpose of this standard is to assist managers to comply with Health and Safety (H&S) stress legislation and to help individual managers and staff avoid or manage excessive pressure and stress; and recognise when pressure becomes stressful.

1.3 The aim is to seek to:

- prevent stress occurring in the first place by identifying causes of unacceptable pressure and whenever possible taking action to eliminate or reduce the impact of the causes;
- increase awareness of stress related problems and encourage staff to work together to try and resolve these difficulties; and
- provide support to staff (including managers) who are feeling stressed.

## 2. What is stress?

2.1 Stress is not always negative. Some stress is believed to be a good thing and in small doses, it can help you perform under pressure and motivate you to do your best. If however there is too much stress, whether at work or home or both, it can become too much even for the most resilient of individuals.

2.2 'Stress is 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them'<sup>2</sup>. It becomes problematic when an individual perceives that the demands exceed their ability to cope'<sup>3</sup>.

2.3 Being undervalued or under-utilised can also be stressful, as can feeling that you are not in control of your work e.g. not knowing what is expected of you.

2.4 Excessive stress can have a negative impact on performance, health and relationships. Individuals vary in how they react to pressure.

## 3. Symptoms of stress

3.1 Stress can cause complex changes in the body's chemical processes which might affect the way that individuals think, feel and behave. There are many different symptoms of stress and no two individuals will react in the same way. Exhibiting any of the symptoms below may not be unusual but being aware of the repercussions of any of these symptoms is important from a management and individual perspective. Key changes in a person's normal behaviour could indicate stress as an underlying cause. The following list of responses is not exhaustive, nor is stress the only explanation for these responses:

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<sup>1</sup> Informed by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Stress Management Standards

<sup>2</sup> Source HSE

<sup>3</sup> Source: Professor Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health, Lancaster University

- 3.1.1. Withdrawal
  - Increase in absenteeism; especially frequent short absences which could be down to lowered resistance to minor illnesses
  - Increase in staff turnover
  - Poor timekeeping (arriving late, leaving early, long lunch breaks)
  - Change in working relationships, quieter, not interacting with other colleagues
- 3.1.2. Poor work performance
  - Less output
  - Loss of creativity
  - Making more mistakes
  - Poor decision making
  - Increased occurrence of accidents
- 3.1.3. Staff attitude and behaviour
  - Mood swings
  - Tension and irritability
  - Poor concentration and judgement
  - Inability to switch off
  - Repetition of arguments in meeting
  - Refusal to listen to advice and suggestions
  - Loss of motivation or commitment or becoming withdrawn
  - Staff working long hours but with decreasing effectiveness
  - Increase in disciplinary issues

#### **4. Causes of stress**

- 4.1 Excessive stress is a negative and demoralising condition. It may be experienced when an individual perceives that they are unable to meet the demands and pressures that are placed upon them. Stress may be associated with a range of adverse effects and these may be physiological and psychological. There is no easy way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress, since different people respond to different types of pressure in different ways and at different times, according to their personality, experience, motivation and the support they receive from managers, colleagues, family and friends.
- 4.2 It is important to identify the causes of stress and try and deal with those causes as quickly as possible, preferably before the more serious symptoms of stress become apparent. Some causes of stress may be:
  - Personal:
    - Ill health
    - Relationship problems
    - Financial difficulties
    - Family worries
    - Addictions

- Organisational:
  - Overwork
  - Feeling of being undervalued
  - Poor communications
  - Job ambiguity
  - Conflict with colleagues/manager
  - Lack of control/autonomy
  - Inadequate/inappropriate training
  - High levels of uncertainty
- Environmental:
  - Poor physical working conditions or job design
  - Heat
  - Noise

4.3 Some effects of stress may be (this list is not exhaustive):

- Physiological:
  - Raised blood pressure
  - Aches and pains
  - Dizziness
  - Lowered resistance to minor illness
- Emotional:
  - Anger
  - Depression or anxiety
  - Sleep disorders
  - Mood swings
- Organisational:
  - Absenteeism
  - Lack of stimulation/lack of work
  - Loss of creativity
  - Increased level of mistakes
  - Poor judgement

This list is not exhaustive.

## 5. Stress risk assessment

5.1 As a normal part of their responsibilities, managers should undertake an assessment of the risks arising from work hazards and the job role, including stress. This risk assessment forms the basis of a pro-active and preventative approach to health risk management.

5.2 Stress risk assessments should be used to identify:

- Factors at work with the potential to cause stress
- Whether these factors are currently causing stress
- Whether the stress is having a negative impact on performance, health or relationships.

- The effectiveness of preventative or precautionary measures
- Any new actions to reduce or eliminate negative impacts

- 5.3 A flow chart of when to do a stress risk assessment can be found at Appendix A<sup>4</sup>.
- 5.4 Managers can complete an Initial Stress Risk Assessment to help identify any issues and sources of stress (Appendix C). This could include asking individual members of staff to complete a Stress Self-Assessment questionnaire (Appendix B).
- 5.5 If there are potential work issues to address, a full Stress Risk Assessment could be undertaken (Appendix D).
- 5.6 If the manager identifies excessive stress from non work-related sources, they should encourage the individual to seek support from the Employee Assistance Programme.
- 5.7 If the manager identifies excessive stress from work-related sources, they should implement actions to reduce the stress, seeking guidance from HR, Health and Safety or referring the member of staff to the OH service if needed.
- 5.12 Having implemented any actions identified, the line manager is advised to monitor the situation and to repeat the assessment if there are ongoing symptoms of excessive stress.

## **6. Prevention measures**

- 6.1 All managers have a central role to play in the recognition and management of stress in their staff. The following guidance is intended to help line managers in the prevention, management and recovery of stress for staff. Managers and supervisors should:
- Induct and train
    - Ensure that all new staff in the department/school receive a planned local induction programme which fully prepares them for their work at the University. This should include details of the school/department's structure; who their line manager is; and their role and responsibilities. Allow time for them to attend University-wide induction events including health and safety training.
    - Ensure that their staff have the skills, training and support they need to do their job and make proper use of those skills and maintain a staff development log for all staff.
    - If staff are promoted or their job changes, ensure that they are given advice, support and any necessary training to help them adjust to the new situation e.g. time or people management skills.
    - Identify the training and development needs of staff. Implement and monitor the progress in meeting those needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Our approach is based on the HSE's five-step stress risk assessment and the HSE stress management tools.

- Communicate, inform, involve and provide feedback
  - Meet all staff reporting directly to them on a regular, planned basis, updating them and providing time to discuss their concerns and listen to what they say, encouraging them to raise any concerns at the earliest opportunity in order to try to avoid problems escalating.
  - Try to provide the opportunity for informal discussions as well as formal meetings.
  - Ensure that all staff are aware of the school/department's targets and how these relate to the Strategic plan and discuss progress against targets at school/departmental/team meetings.
  - Ensure good two-way communication, especially at times of change, consulting staff as early as possible on proposed changes to their roles/departmental structures, ensuring that all staff are clear as to why change is being proposed.
  - Discuss issues with staff and provide regular and accurate information on matters which affect them and their work.
  - Where possible, provide some scope for staff to participate in decision making and planning and to influence the way their jobs are done to increase their interest and ownership. Invite suggestions from staff e.g. on cost saving measures.
  - Facilitate understanding amongst teams of individual roles and how these link together.
  - Emphasise the importance of team work and effective team communication. Consider team building exercises e.g. annual away day. Encourage staff to make suggestions about successful team work and positive team relationships.
  - Encourage staff to talk to their line manager about any concerns that they might have.
  - Ensure that any negative feedback is constructive with the aim of improving future performance and not to attribute blame.
  - Promote open communication with support colleagues, such as HR and Health and Safety.
- Monitor and review workloads
  - Set well-defined and realistic work objectives and provide staff with the opportunity to discuss their workload and deadlines.
  - Maintain records of working hours, overtime and sickness
  - Develop a schedule of regular workload patterns, which all staff can access, factoring in peak activity periods to assist in planning other work priorities.
  - Consult staff on how best to allocate work with tight deadlines at short notice and communicate this system to staff.
- Acknowledge contributions and achievements
  - Recognise and encourage individual and group efforts and achievements. Encourage staff to share success stories.

- Appraise staff
  - Ensure that all staff have annual appraisal and personal development discussions.
- Ensure staff are aware of the support available to them
  - Promote our support mechanisms including the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
- Promote health and wellbeing
  - Promote healthy eating
  - Encourage exercise
- Look out for and address signs of stress
  - Display an open and understanding attitude to what staff say to them about the pressures of their work, and actively look for signs of stress.
  - Show that they take stress seriously and be understanding towards people who consider that they are under too much pressure.
  - Identify posts where stress has been or is a potential problem and try to establish what can be done to reduce the risk of stress to the postholder(s).
  - If a member of staff is exhibiting symptoms of stress try to be flexible wherever possible and undertake an individual stress management questionnaire.
  - Ensure that stress is discussed at school/department meetings
- Maintain confidentiality
  - Maintain strict confidentiality when staff have disclosed matters which are not work-related and have no bearing on their capacity as members of staff
- Ensure consistency
  - Ensure that staff are treated fairly and consistently
- Monitor absences and the reasons for these
  - In accordance with the Sickness Absence policy, monitor absence in the school/department.
  - When staff are absent due to illness, try to be sensitive when establishing the nature of the illness, and ensure that a return to work interview is carried out on their return.
  - Contact and offer support to staff on longer-term absences. Consideration should be given to any rehabilitation or flexible arrangements for return to work, in line with the sickness absence policy.
- Bullying and harassment
  - Ensure that staff are aware that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated and that all staff are aware of our policy on this.

## **9. Additional HSE guidance**

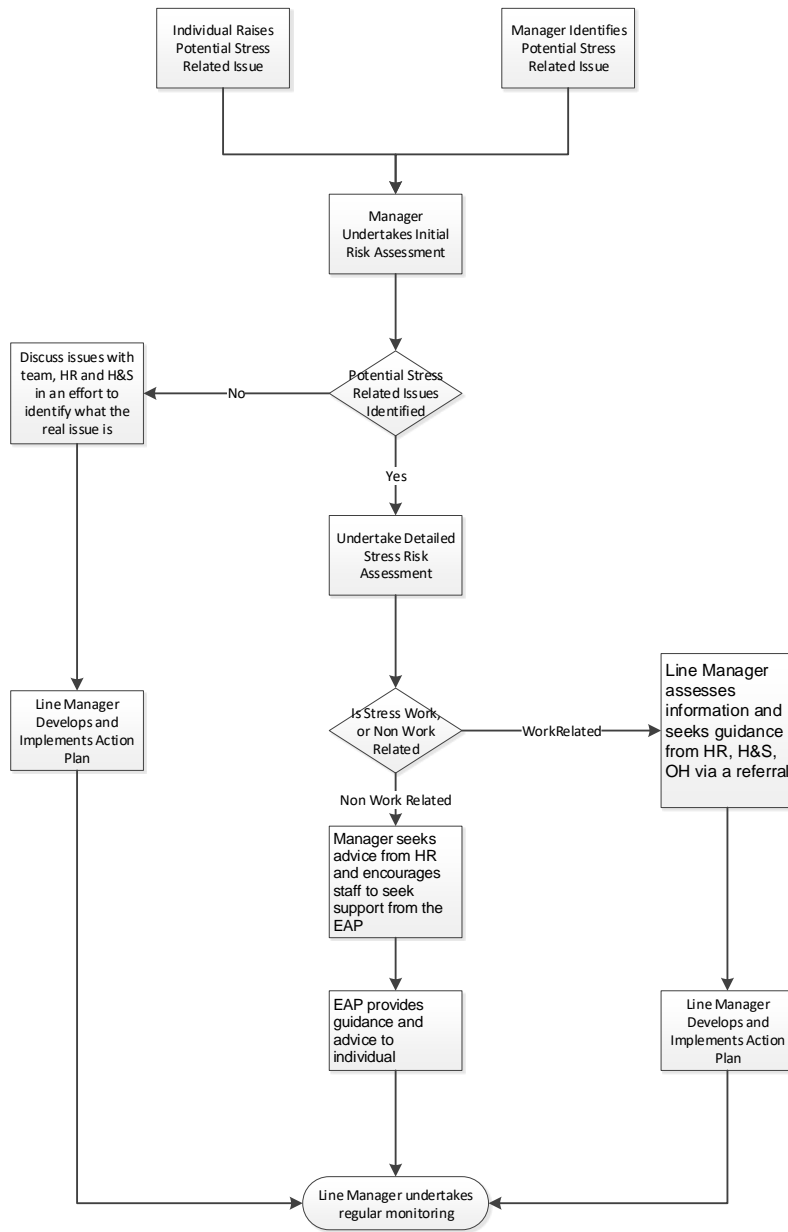
[HSE guidance](#)

[HSE Stress Management Standards](#)

[How to tackle Work Related Stress: A Guide for Employers on making the Stress Management Standard Work](#)



## Appendix A – Stress Risk Assessment Flow Chart



## Stress self-assessment

Please use this form to help to identify sources of work and/or personal stress.

You can also use this form to help communicate sources of stress to your line manager.

Work factors	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Demands</b>			
Do you feel that your physical working environment (lighting, noise, heat, ventilation etc) is satisfactory?			
Do you generally feel your skills and abilities meet the demands of the job?			
Do you feel you are able to effectively manage your time at work?			
Do you generally have a feeling of job satisfaction?			
<b>Control</b>			
Do you feel you have adequate control over the way you do your day-to-day activities?			
Do you feel you have adequate control over the pace at which you do your day-to-day activities?			
Do you feel you have adequate input into the planning and prioritisation of your day-to-day work activities?			
Do you feel you are able to air concerns about your work environment?			
Do you feel you are provided with the opportunity to improve your skills and obtain adequate training to enable you to carry out your work effectively?			
<b>Support</b>			
Do you know how to access managerial support?			
Do you feel you are able to access support at an early stage?			
Do you feel there is support available when undertaking new tasks/activities etc?			
<b>Relationships</b>			
Do you feel there are suitable lines of communication between yourself, colleagues and line managers to discuss work procedures and other work-related issues?			
Are you satisfied that you have no significant work-related problems or concerns within your work area, etc?			
Are you aware of how to report work-related problems or concerns within your own school or department?			
Are you free from significant concerns about bullying or harassment within your own workplace?			
<b>Role</b>			
Do you feel you received adequate induction			

training/information to help you carry out your work?			
Do you feel you can manage conflicting work demands from different managers?			
Do you have a clear and detailed job description?			
Do you generally have a clear idea of your day-to-day activities?			
Are you aware of how your job fits into the running of the wider University?			
<b>Change</b>			
Do you feel suitably able to, or are supported to, cope with any significant changes which have or may occur to your work?			
Do you feel there is adequate consultation within your school/department on major changes at work?			
Are you aware of support available to assist staff with any changes?			

### WORK FACTORS:

Where you have identified a 'NO' to any of the questions above you are advised to discuss these with your line manager to try to see a resolution and / or seek confidential advice from our [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

<b>Health factors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are you aware of the importance of keeping physically active?			
Do you generally manage to incorporate physical exercise into each day/week?			
Are you aware of the importance of a healthy balanced diet and incorporating five portions of fruit and vegetables into your daily diet?			
Do you generally manage to eat a healthy balanced diet?			
Are you generally in good health?			
Do you generally manage to have an adequate restful sleep pattern?			

<b>Relationship factors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Do you generally feel you are able to create adequate quality time with family / friends?			
Are you free from significant concerns regarding your close relationships (partner, relatives, friends etc)?			

<b>Financial factors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are you free from significant concerns about your financial security/wellbeing?			

**Self-Assessment completed by:**

**Date:**

## Appendix C

### Initial Stress Risk Assessment Form

<b>Department:</b>			
<b>Post title:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

**Reason for Stress Risk Assessment:** (please state below:)

<b>New post</b>	<b>New postholder</b>	<b>Updated assessment</b>	<b>Other (please specify below)</b>

<b>1</b> <b>NATURE OF THE JOB</b> What does the individual do (duties)?	<b>2</b> <b>HAZARDS AND STRESSORS</b> What are the particular hazards and potential stressors involved in the job?	<b>3</b> <b>RISK EVALUATION</b> Is the risk high, medium or low and why?	<b>4</b> <b>CONTROL MEASURES</b> How can the risk be reduced?	<b>5</b> <b>PRIORITY TIMESCALE</b> and Review date

**Risk assessment completed by:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Stress Risk Assessment Form

*This form can be completed for an area or an individual member of staff.*

	Assessment details
School / Department	
School / Department location	
<i>If applicable:</i> Name of member of staff to which this assessment refers:	
Location(s) of work (i.e. room number):	
Date of assessment	
Brief description of work:	

## Appendix D

### Stressor identification

Identify all hazards (stressors) specific to the working activity; evaluate the risks (low / medium / high); describe all existing control measures and identify any further measures required.

Stressors	Risk L/ M/ H	Examples of potential control measures (This is not a definitive list)	Additional control measures to be applied	Action completed by: (name and date)
Poor working environment		Assess lighting, noise, thermal comfort, ventilation, etc. Faults / defects are reported to Estates and Buildings via the normal route. Discuss issues with the relevant Building Manager or contact the Health and Safety team for advice		
Perceived excessive workload by staff		Discuss workload with staff. Assess and monitor work demands and priorities. Eliminate parts of the workload and/or redesign work activity. Share or delegate tasks. Re-prioritise workload and set/agree realistic targets. Utilise additional resources (e.g. Temporary agency staff). Offer training in prioritising workload.		
Tight deadlines		Plan and communicate workload and deadlines in advance. Publish a workload calendar e.g. with peak workload times. Share or delegate tasks, especially at key periods.		

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		Provide appropriate staff training.		
Work requiring high levels of concentration		Ensure adequate levels of lighting. Minimise disruptions e.g., telephone, background noise.		
Lack of communication		Regular team meetings. Managers cascading information.		
Perceived lack of control over pace / planning of work		Discuss plan of work activities with staff on regular basis. Ensure staff have input into planning of work activities. Encourage staff suggestions. Provide additional training to improve staff skills.		
Work pattern		Encourage work-life balance.  Flexible working in place where applicable, in line with the <a href="#">Flexible Working Policy</a> .  Refer staff to support available to them including our <a href="#">EAP</a> .		

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Stressor(s)	Risk L/ M/ H	Potential control measures	Additional control measures to be Applied	Action completed by: (name and date)
Lack of managerial support		Open door policy. Staff encouraged to air concerns at earliest stage. Concerns / complaints dealt with seriously and quickly.		
Bullying, harassment, sexism, racism, etc		Ensure that staff are aware that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated. Complaints dealt with seriously and sympathetically in line with employment Policies and procedures. Ensure staff are aware of the existence of these policies and procedure for highlighting concerns. Online equality and diversity training.		
Unacceptable behaviour		Ensure all staff are aware of the University's <a href="#">Disciplinary procedure</a> .		
Conflicting demands on staff time / priorities		Ensure that each member of staff has a detailed job description and is clear about what is expected of them. Discuss planned work with staff on regular basis. Encourage staff to ask questions if unclear, or refer to their supervisor/line manager. Offer time management and stress management courses.		



## Appendix D

Hazard(S)	Risk L/ M/ H	Potential control measures	Additional control measures to be applied	Action completed by: (name and date) *
Changing priorities		Issues, progress and changes discussed regularly with staff at team meetings		
Other Issues: (Please specify).		Please note here any other special circumstances, local conditions, etc., which are relevant to the management of stress within the workplace.		

### Persons at risk:

Identify all those who may be at risk.

Type	Name	Type	Name
Academic Staff		Technical Staff	
Professional Service staff		Manual staff	
Postgraduate Student		Undergraduate Student	
Cleaning staff			
Contractors		Visitors	

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Type	Name	Type	Name
Others			

## Training:

Identify the level of information, instruction and training required (induction, IT, time-management, assertiveness, etc.).

Training:	Yes	No	N/A
Has necessary information, instruction and training been given?			
Expand and clarify, if necessary.			

**Additional information:**

Identify any additional information relevant to the working activity.

<b>Assessment carried out by:</b>		<b>Dates:</b>	
Name:		Date:	

Appendix D

Assessment carried out by:		Dates:	
Signature:		Review Date:	

Name:	Signature:	Date: