**University of Brighton**

# Stress management policy

## 1 Introduction

The University of Brighton believes that staff are our most important asset and that their well-being is essential if we are to maintain effective work performance and to continue to provide a high quality service. We also believe that it is important for staff to work in an environment that is supportive and where everyone is offered and entitled to receive appropriate support. We recognise that stress-related illness in the work-place is an occupational health issue and acknowledge the importance of the effective management of stress.

## 2 What is 'stress' and the 'duty of care'?

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as *"the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them".* Some level of stress is a normal aspect of daily life. Pressure in itself can be beneficial but when it exceeds a person's ability to cope and it goes on for too long, or comes from too many directions at once, it can result in ill health.

Stress can affect different people in different ways. What constitutes stress for one individual may well not be stressful for another. It can be caused by experiences at work, or outside work, by personal factors such as attitude, personality and lifestyle, or all of these combined. Excessive pressure or unpleasant situations can cause stress that may lead to ill health. Stress-related ill health may be revealed by one or more of a range of symptoms.

Ill health arising from stress is the key issue. It is important for managers to keep an eye on the staff for whom they are responsible, be aware of the signs of harm from stress, assess the risk of ill health arising from stress and find appropriate ways to prevent it and offer support. The Human Resources Department is able to provide to support to managers when a situation arises. Information for managers and staff on recognising stress-related illness and how to manage stress is available on Staff Central (see *Further information).* Advice and training is also available from the Human Resources Department.

## 3 The legal position

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure the psychological and physical health and safety at work of their staff, so far as is reasonably practicable. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess risks to health and safety, including stress-related illness, and implement avoidance and control measures. Both the Act and the Regulations require staff to tell their employer of any imminent risk to their health.

Discrimination against staff on account of their disability, including mental impairment that affects an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. The Act requires employers to support staff who have a disability by making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or to the way the work is done.

The Working Time Regulations 1998 set limits on working excessively long hours without adequate breaks and annual leave.

Legislation against unfair discrimination also obliges employers to treat staff fairly, provide equality of opportunity and prevent harassment and bullying, particularly on grounds of race, sex, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, age, married or civil partnership status, or transsexual status.

Employers are entitled to assume staff can withstand normal pressures of their role. However, they also have a duty to ensure that staff do not suffer reasonably foreseeable physical or psychological injury from work. Certain roles are more stressful than others and the causes of stress-related illness are often complex. No two people respond to stress in the same way. It is therefore unlikely that harmful stress can be removed entirely but steps should be taken wherever possible to seek to minimise its adverse effects.

## 4 Policy statement

The university is committed to maintaining the health, safety and welfare of its staff. The recognition and management of stress at work are integral to the university's staffing strategies and Human Resources policies.

The aim of this policy is to enable staff and managers to prevent situations that cause undue stress at work, to identify staff who may be suffering from stress, and to be able to help them to remain healthy, productive and at work.

The key objectives of the stress management policy are to:

- Raise awareness of the causes of stress, recognise the signs and symptoms of stress-related illness and the ways in which the university can support members of staff

- Ensure that staff are aware of the risk of excessive pressure and difficulty and how to take action to identify and prevent or control it

- Support staff who are suffering from stress to enhance their ability to cope and return to good health

- Take steps to ensure that the working environment does not adversely affect the health of staff

- Nurture a supportive culture and reduce the stigma attached to stress-related illness so that stress is discussed and reviewed as a normal component of management of day-to-day activities and it is acceptable to raise stress-related issues

- Identify and eradicate cultural norms that produce excessive pressure on staff, such as working excessively long hours and failing to take reasonable breaks

- Support and educate managers to develop and use the skills needed to prevent excessive pressure on staff and to manage staff who are suffering from stress with sensitivity and understanding

- Ensure that the organisation of work is appropriate for the resources available and that staff have the information, development and skills needed to perform well in their roles

- Foster harmonious and productive working relationships, a health-conscious culture and a healthy work-life balance.

- Provide clear information to staff about issues that affect them and encourage their participation in decisions that have implications for their role.

- Help departments and schools reduce the costs associated with work-related stress.

## 5  Responsibilities

**Responsibilities of Senior Management Team:**

- To demonstrate their commitment and support to this policy by ensuring that the principles and strategies for managing stress are implemented
- To reflect the policy's principles and strategies within their own management practice
- To ensure that resources e.g. management time and commitment, are available to ensure that stress management principles and strategies are implemented
- To ensure that stress management becomes an integral part of the university's culture and philosophy, engendering a supportive working culture to enable staff to feel they are an essential part of the university and motivated to bring loyalty and commitment to their work
- To ensure timely and appropriate communication at all levels which enables staff to carry out their roles most efficiently and effectively.

**Responsibilities of all Managers, including Deans of Faculty and Heads of Department**

Managers at all levels are responsible for contributing to the overall management of stress in their faculty, school or department and are expected to:

- Develop awareness of the issues related to stress at work and the ability to identify, assess and manage the consequent risks of illness arising from stress.  This could include attending workshops on stress and encouraging staff to attend a session on individual stress management and developing successful coping skills.

- Create a supportive culture where stress is discussed and reviewed as a normal component of management of day-to-day activities and staff feel secure enough to raise stress-related issues affecting their health without fear of stigma.

- Ensure good communication between management and staff exists, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.

- Undertake stress risk assessments according to university guidelines and develop associated actions plans with the assistance of Human Resources and Occupational Health.

- Bring any conditions or situations, which they believe may lead to excessive stress on individuals to the attention of their Manager, having taken the appropriate remedial action as necessary.

- Ensure staff who are new to their role (including transferred and promoted staff) are fully inducted and trained in the requirements of their role, the standards expected, relevant university policy and procedures and how their role relates to the work of the department/school/faculty and university. Regularly review progress during the induction and probationary period and carry out timely probation reviews to ensure they are receiving the information and support they need.

- Ensure that objectives and instructions given to, and requests made of individuals are clear, suitable, timely and not conflicting.

- Undertake staff development reviews in accordance with university policy and guidelines and enable staff to take advantage of opportunities that develop skills, experience and their career.

- In consultation with staff, review and develop the effectiveness of school/department communication and information.

- Implement the *Management of Sickness Absence* policy and procedures, including ensuring their staff report all sickness absence, meeting with them on their return to work and easing them back into work following stress-related absence.

- Be vigilant towards staff who show signs of stress whether it is work related or related to their personal lives and arrange (through the Human Resources Department) referrals to the Occupational Health Service in agreement with the member of staff where appropriate.

- Undertake recruitment and selection in accordance with university guidelines, particularly with respect to clear and realistic information about the role and appropriate selection processes.

- As far as possible prioritise, monitor and adjust workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded and that they have reasonable control over the way they do their work.

- Monitor working hours and overtime, including when staff are working at home, to ensure they are not working excessive hours and that they are able to take their full leave entitlement.

- Enable staff to work as flexibly as reasonably practicable, in order to be able to balance their work, external responsibilities and leisure.

- Implement the university's policies and guidelines on equal opportunities and harassment, ensuring that bullying, harassment and unfair discrimination is not tolerated.

## Responsibilities of Human Resources

It is the responsibility of the HR Team to:
- Provide guidance and an advisory service, on request, regarding work-related stress, and assistance in regard to stress risk assessments and development of associated action plans
- Review absence statistical data to identify any trends which may be occurring in particular areas of the workforce and to investigate their causes
- Work with line managers to proactively address issues before they result in sickness absence and ensure appropriate referrals to Occupational Health take place.
- Work with line managers to ensure that stress risk assessments are undertaken or arranged when individuals return to work after a period of workplace stress related absence
- Support colleagues and managers in managing stress

## Responsibilities of Occupational Health

It is the responsibility of Occupational Health to:
- Provide a professional occupational health service, which is capable of providing advice to the university on alleged work related ill health.
- Support the HR team and managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Make referrals to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Monitor patterns in stress-related ill health
- Ensure that managers are made aware of cases where they have concerns
- Monitor how effective the stress management policy is; and

Promote health and health-education programmes to make staff more aware of stress

## Responsibilities of members of staff

It is the responsibility of members of staff to:

- Adhere to the university's policies on equal opportunities and harassment, treating other individuals with dignity and respect and helping to prevent harassment and bullying.

- Become familiar with university guidelines and other information and training related, health and well-being (all are available on Staff Central) and take reasonable steps to follow the advice.

- Report all sickness absence in accordance with the *Management of Sickness Absence* policy and procedures, co-operate with management in maintaining contact during periods of absence and ensure that they meet with their manager on their return to work.

- Raise with their manager any difficulties with their work and working environment that is affecting their health as soon as possible and identify any training or guidance they feel they need in order to be able to undertake the requirements of their role.

- Co-operate with their manager in the undertaking of any risk assessment and the implementing of any necessary measures.

- Undergo appropriate medical examinations on request, e.g. with Occupational Health or as referred to another qualified medical expert, and allow the university appropriate access to such medical information.

- Alert their manager if they believe a colleague is suffering from the harmful effects of stress.

- If experiencing personal difficulties that are affecting their health they should raise this with their manager or, if it is too difficult to discuss the issue with their manager, ask for a referral to Occupational Health.

- Accept opportunities for counselling or other support when recommended.

- Accept advice and opportunities for personal and professional development and participate fully in the Staff Development Review process.

## 6   How the university will implement the policy

- Stress will be included as a standing item on meetings of the Safety Committee and Occupational Health Steering Group.

- Senior managers will ensure the effective implementation of the university's staffing strategy, employment framework and policies to support staff induction, development, reward, staff welfare and health promotion. Managers at all levels will identify workplace stressors, assess the risk of stress-related illness, find ways to eliminate or control the risk of illness arising from stress and regularly review risk assessments.

- The Human Resources Department and the Occupational Health Service will work together to raise awareness, provide training and guidance, provide a welfare service and counselling, plan and contribute to health and well-being initiatives, monitor cases of stress-related absence and keep the stress policy and practice under review.

## 7   Further information

Further information including guidelines for managers on managing stress and a toolkit which includes how to conduct stress risk assessments, causes of stress-related illness, recognising the signs of stress-related illness, managing one's own stress, and sources of support within the university and the community is available on Staff Central.

Documents on related topics such as training, career development, managing induction, Staff Development Review, equal opportunities, harassment, promotion, work-life balance, maternity and parental information, recruitment and selection and data protection are available under the relevant headings at this link: https://www.brighton.ac.uk/humanresources/policies-guidelines-procedures.html

Trade Unions also offer information and advice on options available to any of their members who are suffering from stress  http://www.aut.org.uk;  http://www.natfhe.org.uk ; http://www.unison.org.uk.

The Health and Safety Executive has an informative stress website at http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress