**Stress Risk Assessment**

**Guidance Notes – Completion of Stress Risk Assessments**

The HSE have produced a 6 category system to aid in the identification of work related stress.

1. **Identify the stress risk factors**

The key work-related factors with potential to cause stress-related illness (the risk factors) are**:** a) Demands b) Role c) Control d) Support e) Relationships f) Change

1. **Decide who might be harmed and how**

Although some people may be more vulnerable to developing work-related stress illness than others, any individual could be working under conditions that could cause undue pressure and so be at risk from work-related stress.

1. **Evaluate the risks**
2. **Record the findings; develop and implement action plans**
3. **Monitor and review action plans and assess effectiveness**

The Stress Risk Assessment should be reviewed on an ongoing basis, ordinarily through normal line management practices. Where appropriate, formal review dates may be built in.

You will see the stress risk assessment is separated into 5 areas which over each of the factors above. The following guidance provides some ideas of topics for discussion which may be impacting on stress in the workplace and some suggested control measures. There is no limit to the amount of items which can be on the stress risk assessment however these should be tangible and relevant to the role. These are examples to aid discussion and are not prescriptive as there may be specific factors linked to the staff member.

Stress risk assessments are confidential, they are for use by the line manager and the individual. In cases where the employee has been referred to Occupational for further support the stress risk assessment may also be shared with them to aid discussion and recommendations.

**Factor a and b Work Demands and Role**

These 2 factors are detailed in one box on our stress risk assessment

**Work Demands**

Demands on the individual are often quoted as the main cause of work-related stress. It is important that job demands are fully evaluated to identify what are the true demands of the job and that these demands do not become unmanageable. Workload, capability/capacity to do the work, physical and psychosocial environments would be looked at here.

For example:

• Workload/deadlines

• Hours and patterns of work

• Individual capabilities assessed, including training needs

• Mechanisms to flag concerns

• Physical working environment (temperature, noise, light, etc.)

Proposed control measures

For example:

• Re-allocate duties (temporary or permanent)

• Set achievable demands in relation to workloads and deadlines

• Give guidance over prioritisation of tasks

• Adjust work hours/patterns (temporary or permanent)

• Address training needs and allocate appropriate time for training

• Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

• Make physical adjustments – with hazards properly controlled

• Encourage employees to recognise and take responsibility for raising concerns about deadlines/workloads they view as unreasonable

**Role Demands**

The potential for developing work-related stress can be greatly reduced when a role is clearly defined and understood, that expectations do not produce areas of conflict. The main potentially stressful areas are role conflict and role ambiguity, together with responsibilities.

For example:

• Lack of clarity over role

• Lack of clarity over who individuals report to

• Perception of being pulled in different directions by conflicting demands

Proposed control measures

For example:

• Ensure role description clearly defines the role, expectations, reporting lines, etc. ¬– consider any necessary revisions

• Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

• Make effective use of PDR discussion and core training where applicable (time management and effective communication)

**Factor c - Control**

Research has shown that where an individual has little control in how their work is carried out, this can be associated with poor mental health. Research also suggests that where there are greater opportunities for decision making there is a greater level of self-esteem and job satisfaction. An obvious issue for consideration here would be task design.

For example:

• Pattern/pace of work

• Setting priorities

• Work patterns, including timing of breaks

• Opportunities to act on initiative and to utilise/develop skills

Proposed control measures

For example:

* Give appropriate empowerment to staff members
* Allow appropriate flexibility over work schedules
* Suggest time management training
* Offer flexible working
* Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

**Factor d – Support**

An organisation that has systems for providing regular and sustained levels of support to staff will be more effective and less likely to suffer the effects of stress.

This means, talking about possible stressors, providing a sympathetic ear. When employees feel well supported they would indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. Potential concerns may include;

For example:

• Staff feel ill-informed about workplace issues

• Staff feel they do not have the opportunity to raise concerns

• Staff feel isolated or unsupported by management/colleagues

• Support for disability or illness-related issues (including stress)

• Failure to praise/recognise good performance

Proposed control measures

For example:

• Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

• Refer staff to appropriate existing policies and procedures within the University

• Make staff aware of supportive mechanisms available within department and wider University and how to access them, such as the Education Support Partnership, the Occupational Health Service, and Chaplaincy etc.

• Seek advice from HR / Occupational Health Service

• Set up coaching/mentoring within the department

• Ensure good communication and give positive feedback/praise

**Factor e - Relationships**

"Relationships" is the term used to describe the way people interact at work. Other people can be important sources of support but they can also be sources of stress. At work relationships with colleagues at all levels can dramatically affect the way we feel at the end of the day. The two specific aspects of these relationships that could lead to work-related stress are bullying and harassment.

For example:

• Low team spirit

• Staff feel bullied, harassed or victimised

• Staff feel no mechanism exists to enable them to raise issues

• Staff perceive there to be a lack of awareness of diversity and equality issues

Proposed control measures

For example:

• Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

• Encourage more team working

• Encourage staff to communicate verbally rather than by email

• Encourage appropriate communication from management to department to reinforce University position in relation to work interactions

• Consider management intervention to resolve specific issues appropriately and at an early stage

• Communicate and make reference to appropriate existing policies and procedures within the University, including complaint procedures

• Seek advice from Human Resources (HR) and/or the Occupational Health Service

• Seek advice from University Bullying & Harassment Advisers

• Consider diversity and equality training if appropriate

**Factor f - Change**

Many organisations have had to undergo change in recent years. These changes could incorporate the introduction of new technology, new working practices and procedures, downsizing and complete or partial restructuring. The changes could be one clear overall objective or a series of smaller, on-going, more subtle frequent changes. Poor management of any change can lead to individual's feeling anxious about their employment status and reporting work-related stress. Therefore, it is very important that any change is properly managed.

For example:

• Staff feel ill-informed about changes to their role/department/University and how they may be affected by them

• Staff feel under-supported

• Staff feel they do not have a voice

Proposed control measures

For example:

• Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and are operating effectively (individual and group)

• Involve/engage/consult staff in a timely manner during key change initiatives, allowing opportunities for staff to feed in their views

• Explain the reasons and benefits for changes, as well as information on timescales

• Consider training needs

• Communicate information to staff in a timely manner