1. Introduction

The good health of individual staff members is a primary requirement for their effective performance at work. Psychological wellbeing is as important to an individual as good physical health. Without healthy, effective and efficient staff, the University will not function effectively.

The University has a statutory duty of care to its staff and through a variety of published policies establishes a framework of procedures that ensure a safe and healthy working environment within which staff can operate.

In any environment, both at home and at work, people are subjected to external pressures. Not all pressures on an individual are adverse. Some people enjoy and thrive with a lifestyle that is more pressured than that which will be tolerated by others in a similar situation. These contented individuals are working within their capacity to cope. However, exceeding that capacity to cope in any individual will lead them to become stressed.

Stress is the adverse reaction displayed by a person to excessive pressures and demands placed upon them. Stress will reduce a person’s ability to function effectively and if prolonged may damage their psychological wellbeing.

2. Stress and the Capacity to Cope

Stress is a complex process. Different individuals react in different ways to similar situations and individuals react differently to the same situation at different times.

This variation in an individual’s capacity to cope makes measuring stress or setting limits to the pressures, which induce stress unrealistic. However, there are well-defined factors, which are known to increase stress levels (see Appendix 1 for a listing of these factors). Individuals and line managers should identify the occurrence of these factors in their area of responsibility and take reasonable steps to eliminate or minimise the adverse effects of these stress factors. Preventing stress is always more effective and efficient than curing the adverse consequences it may induce.

There are recognised signs and symptoms (see Appendix 2) that indicate a person may be working beyond their capacity to cope. Therefore, as well as reducing causes of stress, managers should be aware of the symptoms of stress in individuals and be on the lookout for any signs within their staff.

Reasonable endeavours should be made to arrange the working environment to minimise the risk of taking an individual beyond their capacity to cope.

3. Actions for stress management

a. Preventative

Heads of Schools/Departments and Line Managers within their area of responsibility should be aware of:

- The potential and/or actual causes of stress and their occurrence.
- The presenting signs and symptoms of stress and any members of their staff exhibiting such signs.
Professional Development will provide appropriate training support for managers and staff to enable them to identify and reduce the causes of stress within their area of responsibility and work.

The University will support psychological wellbeing through its policies, which have a bearing on recognised organisational and personal stress factors. These policies are published on the HR web site at: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/.

The University operates successfully in a highly competitive environment, which is demanding and may induce pressures in its staff. However, in seeking to achieve objectives, managers need to be aware of the pressures, which may be placed on their staff from business decisions they take and seek opportunities to reduce the impact of such pressures.

b. Remedial

Whilst recognising that there are many factors outside the control of the University, which may predispose someone to suffer from stress, where possible Heads of School/Departments and Line Managers will arrange support and help for individuals who are experiencing difficulties related to stress.

In all cases where an individual is identified as suffering from the consequences of stress, from whatever cause, the emphasis will be on providing support for that individual through professional services available through the University (see Appendix 3) and where practicable, reasonable steps will be taken to reduce the sources of pressure within that individual's working environment.

Where an individual returns to work following a period of sickness absence, the cause of which has been diagnosed by a medical practitioner as being due to work-related pressure (or stress), a specific risk assessment to assist in identifying and resolving any factors that could lead to the development of work-related stress should be carried out (see Appendix 4). The diagnosis will usually be confirmed on the medical certificate covering the period of sickness absence. This policy will be reviewed at regular intervals not exceeding three years.

Agreed by Staff Policy Committee
25 November 1999

Updated February 2006 and August 2020
Possible Sources of Stress in the Workplace

The following can be sources of stress arising from work:

Physical Conditions
Noise
Poor ventilation
Exposure to fumes, chemicals, or other unpleasant substances
Poor lighting
Poor equipment
Exposure to the elements
Poor temperature control
Poor workstation

Job design
Excessive workload
Conflicting demands
Tasks inappropriate to ability
Boring repetitive work
Surveillance
Uncertainty about responsibilities
Under use of skills
Time pressures
Inadequate job description
Responsibility for others

Work relationships
Inconsistent management
Poor management communication
Customer/client complaints
Lack of support or assistance
Bullying
Lack of appropriate training
Lack of constructive feedback
Social isolation
Harassment
The threat of violence

Work organisation and conditions
Continual changes in work
Lack of participation in decision-making
Complexity and demands of new systems
Lack of control over work
Inadequate staffing
Low pay or low status
Lack of consultation over changes
Job insecurity
Lack of recognition or promotion prospects
Lack of facilities for rest or breaks
Unclear reporting lines
Over promotion
Lone working
Excessive working hours
Sources of stress outside the workplace

These are manifold, arising notably from personality, relationships, life events, socio-economic factors, health state etc.
Signs and Symptoms of the Adverse Effects of Working beyond the Capacity to Cope

For individuals, none of these signs is specific, however, the occurrence of several at the same time is one individual may raise concern.

- General deterioration in performance with increase in errors and a reduction in quality
- Difficulty in making decisions and an increased need for advice for simple decisions
- Loss of sense of humour and easy loss of temper
- Deterioration in relationships.
- Unusual stubbornness
- Worsening absence levels
- Low mood
- Low energy
- Agitation
- Loss of appetite
- Disturbed sleep pattern
- Panic attacks
- Tremor
Appendix 3

Arrangements for Providing Support to Individuals Identified as Suffering from Adverse Psychological Problems

If an individual appears to be displaying the signs of working beyond their capacity to cope, Managers should consider the following steps:

- Discuss with the individual your concern for their health.
- Implement any simple modifications to their working schedule and/or environment which are feasible.
- Refer the person to Occupational Health if their work is affected.
- Advise the individual of other agencies, which are available to provide help (see below).
- Follow up the situation and check that some form of help/support is being used.

The following facilities are available to support individuals identified as suffering from adverse psychological effects due to stress:

University Facilities

Counselling Service - This is a confidential service available to the whole University community, staff as well as students. The counsellors are all professionally trained and experienced and subscribe to the British Association for Counselling's Code of Ethics and Practice. For further details see: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling or tel ext: 13695.

Occupational Health - The role of Occupational Health is to promote and maintain good health in the workplace through the services of specialised occupational health professionals. The service maintains high standards of confidentiality. The staff have contacts with local specialised counselling agencies to which they may refer an individual for specific counselling if they consider this appropriate with their client’s consent. For further details tel ext: 44329/4330.

Chaplaincy - The Chaplains can provide pastoral support that is independent of the University structures and academic procedures. For further details see: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy/home.aspx.

External Organisations

Trade Unions

- UCU - https://www.uco.org.uk/
- UNISON - https://www.unison.org.uk/
- Unite - https://unitetheunion.org/

Professional Bodies

A number of professional bodies have established help lines for their members. Examples include:

- BMA
- Royal College of Nursing
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Self-help Groups

There are a number of self-help groups that usually provide support in relation to specific problems (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous). Contact details can be obtained through the University Counselling Service at: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/.
Appendix 4

Arrangements for conducting a Return-to-Work Risk Assessment for Stress

The main purpose of this risk assessment is to support a staff member's return to work following a period of sickness absence, the cause of which is diagnosed by a medical practitioner as being due to work-related pressure (or stress). The assessment is intended to help identify whether there are any features of the role holder's work that could have led to the development of the work-related stress. Appropriate measures should then be agreed to prevent these from reoccurring.

It is recommended that the assessment is also used as a tool to support the staff member in their return to work where stress has been diagnosed but not specifically in relation to work.

The assessment should be completed jointly by the role holder and their line manager, or if appropriate with the manager at the next level up. Where possible this should be developed over the period leading up to the person's return to work, during the contact whilst absent discussed in the University sickness absence policy. This will ensure that appropriate adjustments, where required, can be put into place prior to the return to work.

There is no requirement for the role holder to participate in this process although this should be strongly encouraged. Should the role holder decline the opportunity to participate then the manager should make a note to this effect.

A copy of the assessment should be retained by both parties and reviewed periodically until it is agreed that no further actions are required.

Further information and guidance is available from the Health and Safety Executive. They have developed extensive resource material to assist in identifying and managing stress, which is available at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm. This material includes Management Standards, which represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, wellbeing and organisational performance. The aim is to assist in identifying and closing the gap between current performance and these conditions.

The following information is provided as guidance to assist in completing the assessment (see Risk Assessment Form).

Background

The University has a statutory duty of care to its staff and through a variety of published policies establishes a framework of procedures that ensure a safe and healthy working environment within which staff can operate. A range of policies addressing specific issues that can be related to factors associated with stress are available on the HR web site.

The Sickness Absence Policy details procedures relating to sickness absence are available at: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/absenceandannualleave/sicknessabsence.

In any environment, both at home and at work, people are subjected to external pressures. Not all pressures on an individual are adverse. Some people enjoy and thrive with a lifestyle that is more pressured than that which will be tolerated by others in a similar situation. These contented individuals are working within their capacity to cope. However, exceeding that capacity to cope in any individual will lead them to become stressed.
Stress is the adverse reaction displayed by a person to excessive pressures and demands placed upon them. Stress will reduce a person's ability to function effectively and if prolonged may damage their psychological wellbeing.

Stress can present many difficulties for risk assessment for the following reasons:

- Stress is a cultural issue
- It is often multi-causal
- Stress can be the result of a combination of both work and domestic issues
- Stress is not, in itself, a medical condition (although it may lead to medical conditions) and may not be straightforward to identify
- Individuals have markedly different susceptibilities and coping mechanisms

The table below lists typical sources of stress arising from work. However, there are many potential sources of stress external to their role at the University, for example arising out of their personality, relationships, life events, socio-economic factors, other work activities or employment, health state etc. These need to be taken into consideration when reviewing the demands arising from their role at the University.

**Strategies to Reduce Work-Related Stress**

Interventions such as counselling, stress management training, physical exercise and other "self-help" activities are useful to individuals, but they do not eliminate the source of stress and are therefore unlikely to achieve long-term success. Examples of possible strategies to reduce stress in the workplace are:

- Implementing flexible approaches to work activities, working time, how activities are carried out and when. Allowing staff to prioritise their work activities. Discouraging staff from working long hours.
- Encouraging a participative approach to problem solving, project planning etc.
- Providing sufficient resources to complete tasks, eg time, materials, personnel, training, information, authority.
- Encouraging efficient open communication between all levels of staff, encouraging regular communication and discussion between supervisors and their groups, encouraging a team approach to work activities.
- Developing a supportive and trusting environment such that staff feel able to make suggestions or take decisions without the fear of recrimination if they are proved to be wrong. Planning to cope with staff absences to avoid work overload.
- Requiring comprehensive introductions for new staff such that they fully understand their role, responsibilities, level of authority and sources of support.
- Coping with change - explaining to staff why change is necessary; providing a timetable for change; communicating new developments quickly to avoid rumours; providing opportunities for questions and discussion.
## Typical Sources of Stress in the Workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Conditions:</th>
<th>Job Design:</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Poor temperature control</td>
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<td>Poor workstation</td>
<td>Time pressures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inadequate job description</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Responsibility for others</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Relationships</th>
<th>Work organisation and conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent management</td>
<td>Continual changes in work</td>
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<td>Poor management communication</td>
<td>Lack of participation in decision making</td>
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