Policy for Psychological Wellbeing &
the Avoidance & Management of
Stress
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**POLICY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND THE AVOIDANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF STRESS**

### 1. Introduction

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. ***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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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
1. 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.

2. 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.
3. The University will support psychological wellbeing through its policies, which have a bearing on recognised organisational and personal stress factors. These policies are published in the HR Web site, which may be accessed through the web at http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/.
4. 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

5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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

## Appendix 1 - 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.

**Appendix 2 - 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 the http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling or phone extension 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 has contacts with local specialised counselling agencies to which they may refer an individual for specific counselling if they consider this appropriate with their clients consent. For further details phone extension 44329/4330.

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

**External Organisations**

**Trade Unions**

- UCU - A professional, confidential, 24-hour Stress Helpline is provided to members. Details can be found through the UCU web site (https://www.ucu.org.uk/)
- UNISON - Produce information that might be useful at: https://www.unison.org.uk/

**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. This can be found 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, well being 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 contained in the Staff Handbook. The University policy concerning psychological wellbeing and the avoidance and management of stress is also published in the HR web site:
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/healthandwellbeing/index.aspx

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, e.g. 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 | |
|---|---|
| **Physical Conditions** | **Job Design** |
| noise | excessive workload |
| poor ventilation | conflicting demands |
| exposure to fumes, chemicals or other unpleasant substances | tasks inappropriate to ability |
| | boring repetitive work |
| poor lighting | surveillance |
| poor equipment | uncertainty about responsibilities |
| exposure to the elements | under use of skills |
| poor temperature control | time pressures |
| poor workstation | inadequate job description |
| | responsibility for others |

| Work Relationships | Work organisation and conditions |
|---|---|
| inconsistent management | continual changes in work |
| poor management communication | lack of participation in decision making |
| customer/client complaints | complexity and demands of new systems |
| lack of support or assistance | lack of control over work |
| bullying | inadequate staffing |
| lack of appropriate training | low pay or low status |
| lack of constructive feedback | lack of consultation over changes |
| social isolation | job insecurity |
| harassment | lack of recognition or promotion prospects |
| the threat of violence | lack of facilities for rest or breaks |
| | unclear reporting lines |
| | over promotion |
| | lone working |
| | excessive working hours |