Guidance on General Risk Assessment for Work-Related Stress

Application
The legal requirement to risk assess is a duty under the Management of Health and Safety in the Workplace Regulations and applies to all work activities. Risk assessments should be carried out whenever new work activities are introduced, and should be periodically be reviewed.

Review
Risk assessments require to be reviewed periodically and whenever there is a change to any aspect of the work activity which could significantly affect the health, safety or wellbeing of employees; or under any other circumstances where the existing risk assessment is thought to be no longer valid. The regular period of review should be decided locally and will depend on the level of risk and how susceptible to change the activity is.

Hazard Identification - Factors to be considered
When considering the likelihood that a work-activity could result in employees becoming stressed, it is necessary to first identify the potential hazards. The table below includes the factors identified by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as being most significant contributors to workplace stress, and also an eight factor - external factors that can impact on individual ability to cope with work pressures.

Factor	Considerations
1. Demands	High volume of work, competing priorities, unrealistic deadlines, intense periods of activity, requirement for very fast work, expectation of very long hours, high pressured environment
2. Control	Level of control over pattern of work and breaks, inability to decide on work speed, priorities, access to flexible working
3. Role	Clarity and understanding of role itself; how to carry it out; how it relates to immediate team, local school/research institute/ support service and the wider organisation's strategic plans
4. Relationships	Inter-relationships with work colleagues, staff and manager(s); bullying; harassment; conflict; unkind behaviour
5. Support from Managers	Support in dealing with work difficulties, accessibility, constructive feedback, praise for good work, encouragement
6. Support from Colleagues	Support/ assistance in dealing with work difficulties, respect
7. Change	Communication, consultation and management of change.
8. External Factors	Mental health, other serious ill health, bereavement, dependant illness

1. Demands

Consider both the variety and extremes of demands placed on employees involved in the work activity. Ask and answer the following questions

- Is there an extremely high volume of work?
- Is the workload consistent or does it have peaks and troughs of intensity?
- Does the work require intense concentration for most of the time?
- Does a high proportion of the work have to be completed very quickly?
- Are there elements of the work that have to be achieved to strict deadlines that may require working beyond normal working hours?
- Are there serious immediate consequences for the individual/ colleagues/ the wider unit if work is not completed accurately or on time?
- Is there an expectation/ culture that employees will work beyond their contracted hours?
- Is there any evidence that employees are responding to perceived expectations created by local culture rather than actual expectations?
- Does the work activity require employees to frequently deal with confrontational situations/ conversations, over the 'phone, by email or face-to-face?
- Does the physical environment itself cause additional pressure e.g. through distractions such as high noise levels?

2. Control

- To what extent does the individual manage their own workload?
- Can the individual prioritise their own workload?
- Can the individual determine the timing of their breaks?
- Can the work be delivered through flexible working hours?
- Can any element of the work be delivered through working from home?

3. Role

- Do all employees understand their role – this is particularly relevant following changes to the job description, a change to new post for an employee or organisational changes.
- Is there a generally good understanding by post holders of the way their role supports local and organisational objectives?

4. Relationships

- Is there any existing or previous history of strained working relationships amongst staff involved in the work activity? (This could either be between colleagues or between staff and their line managers or other staff with whom they are required to work closely.)
- Are any forthcoming changes likely to create the potential for friction between team members or between staff and others they work closely with?
- Have there been any recent formal or informal allegations from staff of perceived bullying or harassment?

5. Support from Managers

- Are there any managers who are lacking in leadership experience or new to the organisation?
- Have there been any recent formal or informal allegations from staff of perceived bullying or harassment, directed at their managers?
- Do time constraints make it difficult for leaders to prioritise the managerial element of their role?
- Is there any evidence to suggest managers are unfamiliar with key employee-focussed policies?
- Is sickness absence unusually high in certain work teams?
- Do staff find the work environment encouraging and supportive?

6. Support from Colleagues

- Have there been recent complaints from staff who feel colleagues don't "pull their weight"?
- Is there a tendency for employees to operate independently of colleagues, focusing on personal goals and targets rather than contributing to wider team/ school objectives?
- Have there been recent incidents or allegations of disrespectful behaviour between colleagues?

7. Change (local and wider organisational change)

- Is there soon proposed to be, or has there recently been any substantial local or organisational change that potentially impacts directly or indirectly on the role or morale of employees?
- Is such change currently viewed either apprehensively or negatively by a high proportion of employees?

8. External Factors for consideration

Whilst the predominant focus here is on work-related stressors, it is important to consider non-work issues that make individual employees more vulnerable. These could include, for instance:

- Previous history of mental health issues
- Bereavement
- Relationship difficulties
- Serious illness of individual or a dependant
- Severe financial difficulties

Clearly these may render an employee less able to cope with even routine work pressures. Obviously, they can only be taken into consideration if the employee chooses to make their employer aware of them; if they do, an individual risk assessment should be carried out.

Existing Control Measures

The following questions, under each of the HSE stress factors, are designed to help you identify what you may already have in place to control the level of risk posed by the potential hazards you identified above

1. **Demands**
   - Are demands measured through personal work plans, workload models or similar mechanism?
   - Are clearly prioritised objectives set through P&DR and reviewed on a regular basis in response to unexpected changes?
   - Do Personal Development Plans identify any skills gaps for new work and address these through suitable training and support of employees?
   - Do staff receive training in dealing with confrontational situations where they arise?
   - Is workload manageability discussed regularly with employees? Do they include conflicting priorities management, and are adjustments made to priorities/ deadlines to allow for unplanned events that impact on the demands?
   - Can additional resource be made available to help in times of particularly high seasonal demand, staff absences or new, unplanned for, work?
   - Are measures in place for ensuring employees do not work excessive hours, do take regular breaks, and stay within the legal working boundaries established by the Working Time Regulations?

2. **Control**
   - Do you operate any local flexible working options for employees to assist with work/life balance pressures?
   - Are employees involved in designing workload models etc ?
   - Are projects allocated to teams rather than individuals to enable them to contribute to the project design and management and task allocation processes?
   - Are measures in place to empower employees to make decisions about how they work?

3. **Role**
   - Are roles clearly described in the job descriptions?
   - Are the job descriptions reviewed regularly and kept up to date and reflective of current circumstances?
   - Are the Person Specifications suitable and sufficient?
   - Do recruitment processes focus on suitability of candidates for *all* aspects of the post?
   - Are all members of staff taken through an induction when taking up a new post?
   - Do managers hold regular one-to-one meetings with staff to discuss work progress?

4. **Relationships**
   - Is there a local policy or code on appropriate conduct?
   - Are staff members made aware of the Dignity at Work Policy?
   - Have all staff members completed the Equality & Diversity awareness e-training module?
   - Are there social events to provide opportunities for staff to get together in a relaxed, informal environment?

5. **Support from Managers**
   - Are staff members who manage other employees suitably developed for this element of their role?
   - Is performance management in place and do staff receive at least annual performance and development reviews?
   - Do staff members receive supportive feedback on their performance throughout the year, including recognition of work well done?
   - Are there arrangements in place to provide additional support for staff members during emotionally demanding work situations?
   - Do “open door” policies exist to encourage staff to approach managers to discuss work-related problems?
   - Is there a good awareness of the support services available to staff within and through the University – such as Occupational Health, staff counselling through the external Employee Assistance Programme, chaplaincy etc.?
   - Are managers made familiar with key policies including Management of Sickness Absence Policy, Management of Stress?
   - Have all managers completed the Equality & Diversity for Managers e- training module?
   - Do managers support phased returns to work, and other reasonable adjustments where appropriate and operationally feasible, after significant periods of absence?

6. **Support from Colleagues**
   - Is a collaborative, collegiate approach encouraged within the work team?
   - Is there zero tolerance of disrespectful behaviour between colleagues?
   - Is the balance of workload amongst colleagues reviewed regularly and adjusted as appropriate to allow for new priorities, staff absence or other unplanned events?

7. **Change**
   - Are proposals for change widely consulted upon?
   - Do members of staff have sufficient opportunities and time to engage with, comment on and contribute to the change process?
   - Is change well communicated in appropriate time?
   - Are employees supported sufficiently through difficult changes?
   - Are managers trained in Managing Change?

8. External Factors

- Are all employees and their managers aware of the services and information available through the Employee Assistance Programme, which extend beyond work-related issues to coping with external challenges?
- When employees raise stressful personal circumstance which are impacting on their performance and ability to cope with normal work pressures, is it customary for an individual stress risk assessment to be carried out, utilising the Stress Hazard Identification form, at Appendix 3 of the Policy for Managing Stress in the Workplace document? (It is recommended that this be conducted in conjunction with the employee and with advice from Occupational Health and Human Resources)

Residual level of Risk – using the Stress Risk Assessment Template

By now you will have gathered information that helps you to assess the level of risk of staff in your area experiencing work-related stress. You now need to consider the information you have for each of the 8 hazard factors, alongside the relevant control measures, to establish the level of risk. Use the template at Appendix 1 to help. Below, the Hazard Factor of Demands is used as an example and the example risk assessment can be found at Appendix 5:

- You'll see, on the Risk Assessment template at Appendix 1, that there are sections for each of the 8 factors on the form. For each factor, you will find a list of potential contributory hazard components, and a list of potential control measures.

- Starting with the potential hazard components, considering each component in turn, enter a cross in the box alongside if your findings indicate a general tendency to increase stress. So, for example if for Demands, high work volume is a problem, enter a cross in the box; if you don't have seasonal variations to contend with, leave the box next to this component blank.

- When you've done this for all the hazard components listed under Demands, see whether you have a high or low proportion of crosses in this column. Then look at Appendix 2 – the Severity grading table will help you award a severity score from 1-5 for your Hazard Factor of Demands. Enter this in the box at the bottom of the hazard column for Demands on your risk assessment template. This figure is "S" and in our example at Appendix 5 this has been given the value of **3**.

- Now look at the control measures for Demands. Here you are aiming to identify missing control measures. So, if you don't have work plans in place, place a cross in the box here; if you do set prioritised objectives through P&DR, leave the box blank, etc.

- When you've done this for all the control measures listed under Demands, go to the Likelihood grading table at Appendix 2 (second table on the page) which will help you allocate a likelihood score from 1-5 for your control measures. Enter this in the box at the bottom of the control measure column for Demands on your risk assessment template. This figure is "L" and has been valued at **2** in our example at Appendix 5. (Control measures help to limit the likelihood of harm happening.)

- Now multiply S by L to calculate the Risk Score, a figure from 1-25. This is telling you how well your control measures are controlling your hazard aspects, for this factor of Demands, and in the example this is 3x2=**6**.

- Now go to Appendix 3, first table to see where your risk score sits. This will help you determine the Risk Rating for your hazard factor of Demands (Low, Moderate, High or Very High). Consult the table carefully as the same risk score can have different ratings, depending on whether severity or likelihood is the greater figure. In our example the risk is rated **Moderate**.

- Now look at the second table of Appendix 3. This gives you an indication of the urgency of action you need to take, given the risk rating for the hazard factor of Demands. It also guides you on the scale of resource you would be expected to invest to address the action. You will use this information in forming your action plan at Appendix 4. In our example, the Moderate risk rating requires actions to be taken within **3-6 months**.

- Now repeat this exercise for the seven remaining Hazard Factors (Control, Role etc.)

Required Actions and Prioritisation

Ideally, when considering risk assessment, the goal should be to remove the hazard. In relation to work-related stress, this may only be possible in a limited number of situations. Reasonable practicability is the standard adopted in law when considering the cost, both financial and operational, of implementing a control measure. The next best measure is either to reduce the hazard, or the likelihood of it causing harm, through various control mechanisms.

When determining the specific required actions, consider the gaps you found when looking at existing control measures and consider whether equivalent measures could be implemented in the relevant work area. Always consult with the affected staff for their contribution to ideas that might help resolve the difficulties and consequently either remove the hazard or reduce the level of risk.

It is important to appreciate that whilst some control measures help to reduce or prevent stress, others serve only to support employees who are already experiencing stress. Whilst, in time, these support mechanisms may assist those employees in recovering from this episode of stress, and even avoiding future episodes, the employee has already experienced harm. This in no way invalidates such measures which are widely recognised as not only valuable but also an expected facility for staff of responsible employers. However, provision of support services is generally perceived by the regulatory bodies as the minimum standard an employer can adopt to manage workplace stress.

Appendix 4 provides an Action Plan template that you should use to monitor progress in resourcing and implementing Actions. For each hazard factor (1-8, Demands etc.) that you have identified a need for action, list the required action(s), any resource implications, the person(s) responsible for implementing the action and the desired timescale. The final column enables you to record progress for each action, as you review this action plan on a regular basis.

Resourcing new Control Measures

As mentioned earlier, the amount an employer is expected to spend to eliminate, minimise or reduce a risk is dependent on the level of risk, as well as the number of people affected by it. In other words, if the risk is high and potentially impacts on several people, the employer would be expected to be prepared to invest more resource in reducing the risk, than in a case where it only impacted on one person and to a minimal extent. Between these extremes, we have to apply reasonable practicability when deciding on the suitability of our control measures. (The second table of Appendix 3 acts as a guide on allocating appropriate resources.)

Managers may well not have resources within local budgets and it is a reasonable expectation that they should then raise the issue at a School/ College/RI/ Service budget in order to make a case for additional resource. Budget holders must consider such demands

alongside other priorities in order to reach a decision and demonstrate that the principle of reasonable practicability has been applied.

Appendix 1

Stress Risk Assessment Template

(Use in conjunction with Severity/ Consequence Indices at App 2 and Risk Score /Rating Matrices at App 3)

Hazard Factor	Cross if this a potential problem	Control Measures	Cross if you *don't* have this in place	Risk Score (SxL)(1-25)	Risk Rating (Low/Moderate/ High/Very High)
1.Demands					
Volume of work		Personal Work Plans/ Workload Models in place		**Risk Score for Demands (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Demands =**
Seasonal intensity of work		P&DR prioritised objectives			
Intense concentration req.		Personal Development Plans			
Consistently rapid work		Individual workload reviews			
Strict/ Critical deadlines		Access to additional resource			
Frequent additional hours		Working Time Regulations			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
2.Control					
Manage own workload		Employee involvement in workload model design		**Risk Score for Control (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Control =**
Self determination of breaks		Employee empowerment in work prioritisation decisions			
Flexible working possible		Flexible working available			
Home working possible					
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
3.Role					
Understanding of own role		Clear job descriptions		**Risk Score for Role (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Role =**
		Up to date job descriptions			
		Adequate person specifications			
		Regular 1:1 meetings			
Clarity of contribution to University objectives		Recruitment focused on all-round suitability			
		Induction process			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
4. Relationships					
Strained work relationships		Social events for staff		**Risk Score for Relationships (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Relationships =**
Friction-inducing change		Awareness of Dignity policy			
Bullying/ harassment		Code of conduct in place			
		Completion of E&D training			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		

Hazard Factor	Cross if this a potential problem	Control Measures	Cross if you don't have this in place	Risk Score (SxL)(1-25)	Risk Rating (Low/Moderate/ High/Very High)
5.Support from Managers					
Inexperienced managers		Suitably developed, trained and aware managers		**Risk Score for Manager Support (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Manager Support =**
Manager awareness of key policies		P&DR at least annually			
Sickness absence levels		Supported returns to work			
Enough time to manage		Support for emotionally demanding work			
Supportive workplace		Open door policies			
		Awareness of support services			
Allegations against managers		Ongoing constructive and positive feedback on work			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
6.Support from Colleagues					
Allegations concerning colleagues efforts		Regular work allocation reviews		**Risk Score for Colleague Support (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Colleague Support =**
Evidence of team spirit		Encouragement of collaborate, collegiate behaviour			
Disrespectful behaviour		Zero tolerance of disrespect			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
7.Change					
Recent/ forthcoming change proposed		Adequate, timely change consultation		**Risk Score for Change (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for Change =**
Negative view of change		Support through change			
		Change management training			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		
8.External Factors					
Health Issues		Individual risk assessments		**Risk Score for External Factors (SxL) =**	**Risk Rating for External Factors =**
Other external factors		Promotion of support services			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=**	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=**		

Appendix 2

Section 1 Severity & Likelihood Index

Severity

	1 **Insignificant**	2 **Minor**	3 **Moderate**	4 **Major**	5 **Extreme**
Scale of potential psychological injury thought to be posed to staff as result of work-related Stress. Based on any existing evidence and experience of similar situations	Apprehension/ Alarm on one-off occasion or of short duration requiring no treatment	Minor concern or worry being displayed over a period of time, but responding to local support from manager and colleagues, and not requiring time off work.	Significant stress displayed after a traumatic work event or over a considerable time period, causing health issues requiring attendance at GP and/or counselling.	Major stress related illness resulting in long term incapacity/ requiring medical treatment and/or counselling.	Extreme stress-related ill health leading to major permanent incapacity, allusions of self-harm or worse.

Likelihood

	1 **Remote**	2 **Unlikely**	3 **Possible**	4 **Likely**	5 **Almost Certain**
Likelihood of the potential harm occurring	▪ Will only occur in exceptional circumstances	▪ Unlikely to occur but definite potential exists.	▪ Reasonable chance of occurring – has happened before on occasions.	▪ Likely to occur – strong possibility.	▪ The event will occur in most circumstances.

Appendix 3

LIKELIHOOD	SEVERITY				
	1 Insignificant	2 Minor	3 Moderate	4 Major	5 Extreme
5 Almost Certain	**5**	**10**	**15**	**20**	**25**
4 Likely	**4**	**8**	**12**	**16**	**20**
3 Possible	**3**	**6**	**9**	**12**	**15**
2 Unlikely	**2**	**4**	**6**	**8**	**10**
1 Remote	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Risk Scores ↑

Risk Rating	Risk	Actions
Low (L) (1-3)	Acceptable	No further preventative action is necessary, but consideration should be given solutions or improvements that impose no additional cost burden. Monitoring is required to ensure that the controls are maintained
Moderate (M) (4-9)	Action Required	Efforts should be made to reduce the risk, but it is acceptable that the cost of reduction be carefully measured and limited. Risk reduction measures should normally be implemented within three to six months
High (H) (10-15)	Immediate Action Required Unacceptable	Problematic new activities or processes should not be started until the risk has been reduced. Considerable resources may be required to reduce the risk. For existing activities or processes, the problem should normally be remedied within one to three months.
Very High (VH) (16-25)	Immediate Action Required Intolerable	The activity or process should not be started or allowed to continue until the risk level has been reduced. While the control measures selected should be cost-effective, legally there is an absolute duty to reduce the risk. This means that, if it is not possible to reduce the risk even with unlimited resources, then the activity or process must not be begin, or must remain prohibited.

Appendix 4

Action Plan Template

Factor (1-8)	Detail (e.g. Demands, Role, External Factors etc.)	Risk Score (1-25) and Rating (Low, Moderate, High or Very High)	Required Action(s)	Resource Implications (cost, time, equipment etc) and Status (unidentified, partially funded, fully funded, approved etc.)	Responsible Person(s)	Desirable Timescale (as per Appendix 3)	Progress (No progress, Partially Implemented, or Fully Implemented)

Appendix 5

Example Risk Assessment – Demands

Hazard Factor	**Cross if this a potential problem**	**Control Measures**	**Cross if you *don't* have this in place**	**Risk Score (SxL) (1-25)**	**Risk Rating (Low/Moderate/ High/Very High)**
1.Demands					
Volume of work	X	Personal Work Plans/ Workload Models in place	X	Risk Score for Demands (SxL) = 3x2=**6**	Risk Rating for Demands **Moderate** (from App 3 Matrix)
Seasonal intensity of work		P&DR prioritised objectives			
Intense concentration req.		Personal Development Plans			
Consistently rapid work	X	Individual workload reviews	X		
Strict/ Critical deadlines	X	Access to additional resource			
Frequent additional hours	X	Working Time Regulations			
Severity Score S (1-5)	**S=3** ("Moderate" from App 2, Severity rating table)	**Likelihood Score L (1-5)**	**L=2** ("Unlikely" from App 2, Likelihood rating table)		

Action Plan

Factor (1-8)	**Detail (e.g. Demands, Role, External Factors etc.)**	**Risk Rating (1-25) and scale (Low, Moderate, High or Very High)**	**Required Action(s)**	**Resource Implications (cost, time, equipment etc) and Status (unidentified, partially funded, fully funded, approved etc.)**	**Responsible Person(s)**	**Desirable Timescale (as per Appendix 3)**	**Progress (No progress, Partially Implemented, or Fully Implemented)**
1	**Demands**	**6 / Moderate**	Introduce personal work plans	Time to develop format, in discussion with team members.	Named Line Manager(s)	3 months Date:	No progress (if only just identified, this will change in time)
			Introduce workload reviews	Meeting to agree timescales and format; then develop relevant paperwork and procedure.	Named Head of Unit.	4 months Date:	
			Review of resources to support critical deadlines	Time for review. Findings of review may indicate additional resource needs.	Named Head of Unit	4 months Date:	
			Submit findings to CMG etc.		Named HoU	6 months Date:	