Health and Safety
Performance Standard HSPS 005

Psychological Well-being
Title: Psychological Well-Being

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1. Objectives

1.1 Introduction

The University of Kent, as an employer, places a high value on maintaining a healthy and safe working environment for all its employees. The University recognises that this duty of care extends to mental health as well as physical health at work. Mental health problems have many causes, including stresses in the workplace and in the life of employees away from work. Whilst the University has no control over external factors it is committed to identifying sources of stress in the workplace and taking action to eliminate or reduce them.

This Health and Safety Performance Standard sets out the University’s aims and objectives for the management of health and safety in relation to harmful stress at work that could impact upon the physical and mental well-being of staff and students of the University of Kent, and should be read in conjunction with other University policies and strategies. Any strategy to eliminate sources of stress in the workplace has to be a partnership between the management of the University and the management of its constituent parts and individual members of staff.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them”

This makes an important distinction between the beneficial effect at work of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating, motivating, and can give a 'buzz'), and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or 'pressures' that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.

Who experiences work-related stress?

Everyone can, in principle. No one is 'immune'. Work-related stress exists where an individual perceives they cannot cope with what is being asked of them at work.

It is important to remember that work-related stress is not an illness, but, if it is prolonged or particularly intense, it can lead to increased problems with ill health, whether physical or psychological. See appendix 1.

It can also lead to other behaviours that are not helpful to your health, such as skipping meals, drinking too much caffeine or alcohol and smoking cigarettes.

The effects on the organization can be:

- An increase in sickness absence, which can have a domino effect - one person goes off sick, which leads to their workload being shared among the remaining staff;
- Reduced staff morale;
- Reduced staff performance or staff seeking alternative employment.
1.2 Aims:

To ensure as far as reasonably practicable that the mental and psychological well-being of University employees will not be harmed by workplace hazards.

Objectives:

To comply with legislation under the **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974) Section 2** that requires employers to ensure that their workplace is safe and healthy – so far as reasonably practicable, and in particular the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)**. These require employers to undertake risk assessment for hazards in the workplace and put in place control mechanisms.

2. Management Responsibilities

2.1 University Level

At University level the Safety Health and Environment Executive Committee (SHEEC) in consultation with Occupational Health Advisor Group (OHAG) have oversight of the management of health and safety risks, which includes risks to mental and physical health. These groups, on behalf of the University Council, will monitor this Performance Standard.

In particular:

- The University will publish a strategy for stress management that is intended to achieve the objectives above. This strategy will be subject to regular review to monitor progress and to consider the efficacy of action taken.

- The University will provide training programmes to ensure core competencies enabling management to adequately manage the causes of stress.

- Senior management will take account of the impact of change on employees’ mental well-being.

- Other University policies will reflect the requirements of this Performance Standard to improve the mental and psychological well-being of staff.

- The University will provide an Occupational Health service with confidential referral arrangements for members of staff.

- The University will provide a confidential Counselling Service for members of staff.

2.2 Departmental Level

University Policy (see Safety, Health and Environment Unit website) requires that all Heads of Department ensure that an assessment is undertaken of the risk factors which contribute to work place hazards, as required under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations (1999).
This includes organisational factors that may pose a risk to psychological well-being. (see Appendix 2 for guidance and organisational factors) The assessment must include those risks that pose a threat to psychological health as well as physical health and safety. In addition Heads of Department will

- Ensure that all line managers are trained in the identification and causes of stress and how to eliminate or control it.
- Make arrangements to ensure support to staff who are undergoing difficulties, and that line managers are aware of the referral procedure to the Occupational Health Adviser or directly to the Counselling Service, in accordance with the management referral procedure and the sickness absence policy.
- Provide arrangements for consultation and communication on changes affecting staff.
- Establish good communications through the provision of regular departmental briefings, team meetings, appraisal and performance reviews etc. within their department and foster a supportive environment in which stress can be discussed.
- Monitor and support line managers in the implementation and operation of this performance standard

2.2.1 Line Managers

Ensure that risk assessments relating to stress as required under University policy and Health & Safety Legislation are in place. See 1.2.

The principles of risk assessment for work-related stress do not differ from other forms of risk assessment. There is, however, a need to take account of the individual’s perceptions of stress as well as to assess objectively any work conditions that are likely to cause stress. Assessments should be undertaken by the line managers in conjunction with the individual.

Assessments of the hazards associated with workplace stress should aim to identify:

- Factors at work that are likely to cause stress (Appendix 2)
- Whether those factors are currently causing stress
- Those employees who are at risk of experiencing workplace stress
- Existing preventative or precautionary measures
- The action that is required to eliminate or reduce risk (Appendix 2)

3. Employees’ Responsibilities

Individuals have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health and that of others that might be affected by their actions, as required under the University’s Health & Safety Policy (see Safety, Health and Environment Unit website) and The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Section 7.

The University cannot respond to alleviate a stress situation unless it is made aware that such a situation exists.
In the first instance this should be reported to your Line Manager using the department’s reporting procedure or failing that to one of the following three:

- A Human Resources Officer
- An Occupational Health Adviser in the Safety Health & Environment Office. The matter will be dealt with in confidence, unless the individual gives express permission for a report to be sent to Human Resources and/or the head of department/departmental manager.
- The Counselling Service.

By the time a member of staff is medically diagnosed as suffering from stress by their GP, injury may have been sustained. (Appendix 1)

All staff will attend training as required and will comply with the University’s procedures in place, in relation to bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Individuals are also encouraged to support colleagues showing early signs of stress.

4. Monitoring

The University will monitor that these Performance Standards are being met through SHEEC and the Staff Policy Committee.

- The Safety, Health and Environment Unit will work in conjunction with the Human Resources Department to monitor trends in data relating to stress and other mental health issues.

- In light of the results obtained from the above monitoring processes the University Performance Standard on Psychological Well-Being and the Health and Safety Strategy for dealing with stress will be reviewed and may well be altered as required.

- All departments will monitor sickness absence and other indicators to enable early identification of stress issues.

- Departments to monitor implementation of Performance Standards

- Departments are responsible for reviewing risk assessments when there is a significant change in circumstances.

5. Training

- The University will, through the Staff Development Programme, ensure that training courses are available to assist staff in managing personal stress.
- All managers to undertake training in managing stress in the workplace.

6. Further information
www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Other University policies that may apply [available from the Human Resources Department]:
http://www.kent.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/

Other legislation that may apply:

7. Appendices

Appendix 1  Effects of Stress on the Individual and the Organisation

Appendix 2  Organisational Risk Factors that can contribute to stress and possible solutions

Appendix 3  Managers’ Guidelines
Appendix 1

What are the effects of Stress on the Individual and the Organisation?

Stress is often a multifaceted phenomenon and rarely the result of one individual stressor. These symptoms can be experienced in a number of other medical conditions so please consult your GP if you experience any of these symptoms and they last longer than a few days.

**Physical**

- Headaches,
- Raised blood pressure, Aggravation of heart conditions, Palpitations
- Irritable bowel syndrome/gastro-intestinal disorders
- Weight loss/gain
- Skin conditions, Ulcers
- Muscular tension (upper and lower back, neck and shoulders)
- Fatigue, Insomnia/sleep disturbances
- Low immune system. (Frequent minor infections)

**Mental**

- Anxiety/Depression
- Anger, Frustration
- Low self esteem
- Mood swings, Irritability
- Memory loss, Lack of concentration, Accident-prone
- Lack of motivation and creativity

**Effects on the organisation**

- Reduced staff morale
- Sickness absence rates
- Staff turnover
- Accident rate
- Customer complaints
- Error rate

**Stressors in your personal life** could be the major source of your stress symptoms and these could include:
- Relationship difficulties: marriage/partner/divorce
- Financial problems
- Long term ill health in your self or close family member
- House move
- Death of a loved one
- Arrival of a new baby.
Appendix 2

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) have identified the following Organisational Risk Factors and their possible solutions

Demands

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work
- People’s skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees’ concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new
- and challenging pieces of work;

- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
The standard is that:

- Employees 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.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

**Relationship**

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

**Role**

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
• The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
• The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
• The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
• Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The standard is that:

• Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
• Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

• The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
• The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
• Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
• Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
• Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Appendix 3

Psychological Well-Being Management

A Manager’s Guide

Introduction

As organisations change and become more flexible to adapt to the environment, employees can be placed under stress. It is recognised that working in higher education places unique demands and pressures on staff. This guide seeks to provide you with information about

- The symptoms of negative stress: to enable you to identify those employees who experience the adverse effects of stress.
- Your responsibility for the prevention and reduction of negative stress in the workplace, to enable you to discharge your managerial responsibilities effectively.
- The support mechanisms available within the University for those staff who experience the negative effects of stress.

Why have a Psychological Well Being Performance Standard and Interventions?

Under health and safety regulations, you have a duty of care for the health, safety and welfare of the staff you manage. This applies not only to the physical environment but the mental well being of staff as well.

In addition to this legal context, it is recognised that long term excessive stress has a negative impact on individuals in a number of ways. Firstly, a build up of tension can result in a deterioration of health and increased absenteeism from work. Secondly, stress can affect the individual’s thought processes, which impact upon work performance and relationships between colleagues in the workplace.

So the management of stress is a key issue which impacts upon our ability to deliver our service and the activities which support this.

What is stress?

Stress is a natural response to a challenge or change. Some forms of stress can be enjoyable and motivating e.g. competing in a sport. Normally the effects of stress are short-lived and cause no lasting harm. However, when pressures are extreme and demands placed upon us are beyond the individual’s perceived ability to cope, negative stress is the result. The threshold at which point the ‘dam bursts’ and develops into negative stress varies between individuals and in different situations and at different times.
What are the Symptoms of Stress?

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<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Behavioural</th>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Tiredness</td>
<td>Poor concentration</td>
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<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Poor time management</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
<td>Sleep disturbances</td>
<td>Erratic eating habits</td>
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<td>Irritability</td>
<td>Muscle tension</td>
<td>Frequent sickness absence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fearfulness</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>Reduced performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>Increased intake of alcohol,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td></td>
<td>cigarettes, etc.</td>
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<td>Low Self esteem</td>
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<td>Accident-prone</td>
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These symptoms can be experienced in a number of other medical conditions so the individual should be encouraged to report them to their General Practitioner.

What do I do if one of my Employees is showing signs of Stress?

- Try to discuss your concerns with the employee, i.e. identify the behaviours you have noticed and whether there is an underlying cause. Try to refer to specific instances if possible.

- Ensure the employee is put at ease and not made to feel guilty.

- Listen actively - pay attention to what the employee is saying (and omitting to say), ensure you are empathetic with the individual and communicate this to them.

- If stress is agreed to be a contributing factor, try to reach an understanding with the employee as to what action needs to be taken either by you as the manager and/or the employee.

- Ensure the employee is aware of the sources of support available to them and how to access them, and encourage them to use them.

- If the employee is absent from the workplace possibly due to stress-related absence, discuss the case with your Human Resources Manager and/or make a referral to the Occupational Health Adviser.

- Where employees are recovering from the negative effects of stress, monitor the situation closely to ensure that they are not exposed to similar circumstances again. Utilise the services of Occupational Health.

What can I do to reduce the risks of my employees experiencing negative stress?

- Try to be flexible with the elements of the workload that can be planned and agreed; be realistic about the level of work to be done and the employee’s ability to do it.

- Provide or ensure access to training for employees to enable them to perform effectively.
• Wherever possible explain the reasons for managerial decisions you take. Be watchful for conflict between individuals including possible sexual/racial harassment and bullying and take appropriate action where such behaviours occur.

• Encourage those staff who regularly work excessive hours or do not take lunch breaks or holidays, to re-establish a balance between work and leisure activities.

• Praise your staff for doing well and where you have concerns about the performance of individuals discuss these with them privately, in a non-threatening manner.

What are the sources of support for those experiencing the negative effects of stress?

In some cases all that will be required is assurance and encouragement from the employee’s line manager. However, where this does not resolve the problem, the manager should discuss the case with their Human Resources Officer. S/he will be able to discuss the options available to individuals and where appropriate refer the individual to the following:

**Occupational Health**

An Occupational Health Nurse Adviser will discuss the individual’s concerns and any underlying health conditions which may be contributing to the negative effects of stress experienced by the individual. Where appropriate, the Adviser will refer the individual on to the occupational health physician who deals with health issues relating to staff. Any individual can self-refer (01227 82) 7002/3563 or may be referred by Human Resources or management.

**Staff Counselling Service**

This is a confidential service on campus where individuals can be referred or can self-refer. (01227 82) 3206 or email www.counselling@kent.ac.uk

**Conclusion**

The University of Kent is committed to reducing the risks of stress. You, as a line manager, have a vital role to play in this process: facilitate debriefing when staff are involved in stressful situations in the workplace, be watchful for employees suffering from negative stress, provide support to them and refer them to others where appropriate, and mostly make best efforts to create a work environment which reduces the risks of stress developing.

**Reference**  University of Birmingham (11/02) Health and Safety Fact File