

## **POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF WORK-RELATED STRESS**

### **Synopsis**

This policy explains how the University identifies the potential causes of work-related stress, manages to minimise the instances of stress-related ill health, and supports staff who suffer as a result of stress, whether work related or otherwise.

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**Approved by: The Policy and Resources Committee**

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## Revision Record

ISSUE	DATE	REASON FOR REVIEW
Draft 1		New document (2.0) for consultation, intended to replace the policy of the same name, dated 2019. Note: Section 4 and 7 are almost entirely unchanged but all other sections have been either amended or updated in some way.

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## 1.0 Introduction

This policy has been developed to support the University's commitment to the wellbeing, health and safety of its diverse community, supporting and developing its people to achieve their full potential, as outlined in University's strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040.

It forms part of the toolkit which underpins the Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy by setting out how the University will minimise the causes of work-related stress, support staff suffering from stress and stress-related ill health and support and empower staff to maintain good mental health and overall wellbeing.

This policy applies to all staff of the University. The University is responsible for providing the necessary resources for its implementation and the Senior Management Team and Line Managers are responsible for the successful implementation and ongoing support of this policy.

We will provide timely information to, and work collaboratively with, Trade Unions on identifying and dealing with work-related stress factors which give rise to health or safety risk.

## 2.0 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to address and reduce the causes of work-place stress for all staff at the University. It sets the standards and responsibilities for staff and management for the management of work-related stress and ensuring reactive support for staff where work related stress may be a factor affecting their wellbeing.

## 3.0 Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all University staff of all Schools and Directorates (including Postgraduate students where they undertake work activities).

It is designed to ensure that the University provides a supportive working environment for staff and complies with health and safety at work and employment legislation to support staff wellbeing.

This policy addresses matters which are within the University's control (i.e. those which are work-related), stress caused by factors outside work are outside the scope of this policy. However, the University recognises that stress is rarely caused by factors which are entirely either work-related or personal, and that work can affect home life and vice versa. Therefore, a more holistic approach has been adopted to support staff who experience stress regardless of the cause(s).

It also follows from the above that the stress of students associated with their studies is not included within the scope. However, this is addressed as part of the arrangements for student health and wellbeing, including the Wellbeing Strategy.

#### 4.0 HSE Management Standards

The HSE has developed six Management Standards to help assess and tackle the main causes of stress. The standards focus on six aspects of work as follows:

1. Demands – Includes issues such as workload, work pattern and the work environment.
2. Control – How much autonomy/input the person has in the way they do their work.
3. Support – Includes the encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
4. Relationships – Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
5. Role – Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.
6. Change – How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The University commits to using the HSE Management Standards within the institution to help identify sources of harmful levels of stress at work with a view to minimising the likelihood of stress (through risk assessments) and dealing with individual cases which arise. For more information on the HSE's Management Standards go to; [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

#### 5.0 Definitions

Pressure – In the context of people, pressure is the factors which persuade, motivate or force individuals to act in particular ways. Most people find that a certain level of pressure helps motivate them and is beneficial. Indeed, a total lack of pressure can be as harmful as too much. However, very intense pressure, even for a short time, or a sustained high level of pressure leads to stress.

Stress - The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them" which can be detrimental to physical and mental health.

Work-related – Means connected with someone's job or paid work. In the context of work-related stress, it means that the work tasks or working environment causes stress or makes it worse, when added to pressures or stress which is not work-related.

Hazard – An activity, process or substance which has the potential to injure or cause harm to an individual

Risk - The probability of somebody being harmed by the hazard and how serious the harm could be

Risk assessment - The process of identifying hazards, evaluating the risk from the hazards, deciding upon and implementing appropriate controls to reduce the risk

## 6.0 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the University of Aberdeen to take all reasonable and practicable steps to safeguard the health and safety of our employees while at work. The University recognise that excessive levels of pressure, especially if endured for long periods may lead to stress. Harmful levels of stress can arise because of factors both within the workplace and from employees' personal and family lives. Whilst the University recognises that we have no control over external factors, our objectives as an employer committed to effectively managing stress at work are to:

- Pro-actively identify hazards or sources of harmful levels of pressure and carry out work-related stress risk assessments.
- Prevent, as far as is reasonably practicable, employees being exposed to stress at work, including ensuring fair and reasonable allocation of workloads.
- Where stress at work cannot be eliminated, implement control measures to reduce the causes of stress and their impact on staff.
- Ensure effective consultation with staff, directly and via their Trade Union in advance of making significant changes to policies or working practices.
- Consult and work with the Trade Unions on work-related stress risk assessments and control measures;
- Provide training to enable managers, supervisors and individual employees to identify causes of stress and recognise, at an early stage, symptoms which might be related to stress;
- Provide training and guidance to managers to enable them to carry out stress risk assessments and implement effective control measures.
- Provide and promote support for those who are suffering ill health due to work-related stress and assistance to enable employees to recover their full potential as soon as possible.
- Monitor both the causes of stress at work and consequences (e.g. workload, sickness/absence, grievances, staff turnover, referrals to various sources of support, etc.).
- Use monitoring data, and that gathered from relevant questions included in the Staff Survey, to identify and address weakness in the University's arrangements.
- Foster a workplace culture that recognises and understands individuals' roles and optimal levels of pressure and encourages empathy.

The University recognises that a policy on work-related stress cannot sit in isolation. It must be underpinned by other policies designed to mitigate employee stress, and regular proactive and reactive risk assessment scaled as appropriate across the institution. See section 12 for related policies.

## 7.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The University has responsibilities towards its employees under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated Regulations, namely the management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to carry out risk assessments and to implement control measures to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the prevention of and control of risk of work related stress at work. The University discharges this responsibility through the line management structure and functions as follows:

### 7.1 Principal, Senior/Vice Principals and University Secretary

The Principal has the overarching responsibility for health and safety at work and along with the Senior/Vice Principals and the University Secretary provides leadership in matters of health, safety and wellbeing. This includes defining goals, objectives and expectations in matters of work-related stress, in particular to:

- Ensure that this Policy is implemented appropriately throughout the University;
- Ensure that the University management teams are provided with adequate resources including training to deal with issues arising from work related stress risk assessments; and
- Ensure that health, safety and wellbeing including work related stress is reported and reviewed at the Senior Management Team meetings.
- Ensure that staff understand they have a right to work in a safe environment, are able to raise issues and to access support
- Ensure that staff understand that seeking help and support is seen as positive and encouraged and handled without censure.

### 7.2 Heads of School, Heads of Professional Services and Line Managers

In line with the requirements of the University Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy, the responsibilities of Heads of Schools, Heads of Professional Services and Line Managers on the management of work-related stress are to:

- Implement the University Policy on Managing Work-Related Stress.
- Maintain and encourage a healthy, safe and supportive working environment for all staff.
- Conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their areas of control.
- Ensure effective communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure staff in their areas are appropriately informed and trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure staff are provided with appropriate personal developmental opportunities.
- Monitor and manage workloads of staff to ensure that workloads are not excessive.
- Monitor and manage working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not working excessive hours.
- Monitor and manage annual leave patterns to ensure that staff have the opportunity to take their full entitlement.
- Attend training in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that the Staffing Policy Against Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace is implemented and bullying and harassment is not tolerated in their areas; and
- Ensure that any work-related stress issue raised by a member of their staff is investigated and matter addressed within a reasonable period of time.
- Remain vigilant to and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside of work e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Where a line manager is unable to implement the policy within their own resources any concerns should be raised with their immediate line manager.

### 7.3 All Staff

All employees of the University should safeguard their own health and safety and that of others and are encouraged to:

- Follow the guidance in relation to work related stress and use the support systems in place;
- Assist and cooperate with the University in addressing work related stress issues and implementation of this Policy.
- Provide responses when consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress;
- Cooperate with the University in the implementation of this Policy and raise issues of concern with their line manager, Safety Representative, or Occupational Health.
- Feel able and encouraged to seek support if required for their own health, safety and wellbeing.
- Be supportive of work colleagues and maintain positive working relationships.
- Recognise that a colleague may demonstrate signs of stress but be unaware and/or unable to recognise those signs in themselves and know what appropriate action to take.
- Take action e.g. by discussing with a senior manager, if they have concerns about stress in the workplace; and
- Actively engage with opportunities for training when recommended and consider support and counselling services available.

#### 7.4 Human Resources

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress at work.
- Provide guidance to managers on the Policy on the Management of Work-Related Stress.
- Support individuals who have been absent from work due to stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer individuals who indicate they are stressed to Occupational Health Counselling Service as required.
- Support the monitoring of the effectiveness of measures to address work related stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements; and
- Provide support on the management of change to managers and individuals Staff

#### 7.5 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team

- Assist with the training and support of managers in implementing stress risk assessments and findings.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the University and the University Health and Safety Committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.
- Work in partnership with Trade Unions health and safety reps as per HSE guidance

#### 7.6 Safety Committees

- The University Health and Safety Committee which consists of management and trade union representative, and the local Health and Safety Committees will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented; and

- The Committees will oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

## 8.0 Management Arrangements

The following are important parts of the management of work-related stress.

### 8.1 Risk Assessments

The University commits to carrying out risk assessments to identify steps needed to mitigate stress in the workplace. Such assessments may be proactive (e.g. workload issues or ahead of a major change) or reactive (in response to specific issues raised by individuals and groups).

When carrying out or reviewing all general risk assessments the risk of work-related stress must be considered and, where this is thought significant, either appropriate control measures included within it or a separate stress risk assessment completed.

Individual stress risk assessments will be required where individuals are identified who are suffering from stress or are considered more at risk than others. This may be because of their role, particular work circumstances or individual susceptibilities.

In both cases the control measures documented in the action plan must be implemented and progress reviewed.

### 8.2 Workload Planning Review Group

The Workload Planning Review Group is undertaking a review of the workload planning process across the University and will develop a framework that:

- i. underpins a fair and transparent approach to workload allocation and
- ii. simplifies and enhances data collection to ensure the effective monitoring of the impact of workload allocation.

This is fundamental to tackling the HSE Standard of “Demands” at a strategic level.

### 8.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Group has various roles, as explained in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and its Terms of Reference. These include the collation and analysis of a wide range of data, from a range of sources, in relation to all significant Mental Health and Wellbeing related activities to, wherever possible, measure their uptake and effectiveness.

### 8.4 Staff Surveys and Action Plans

Staff and related surveys will be used as part of the ongoing programme to monitor a range of issues, including levels of stress and staff wellbeing.

No individual will be identifiable in this process. Information gathered in these ways will be used to identify areas for detailed assessment and implementing controls or improvement. Where appropriate, focus groups will be used as per HSE guidance to provide qualitative data to complement the quantitative information gathered via surveys. Action plans will be implemented by those responsible as outlined below.

The University will attempt to collate anonymised records of incidence of work-related stress and report annual figures in order to document scale and track trends across time in order to inform action to reduce work related stress.

### **9.0 Training and Development**

An awareness of the symptoms of stress and learning how to recognise and reduce individual stress levels will be incorporated into staff training where appropriate.

Training will also be provided for Senior Management and Line Managers, focusing on the cause of work-related stress, stress risk assessment, minimising the likelihood of stress (using the HSE's Management Standards) and providing advice on dealing with individual stress cases.

Managers new to the University and staff new to management roles can access training or advice from HR partners on good management practices including dealing with such issues as:

- Poor performance and capability.
- Disciplinary and grievances.
- Sickness and absence.
- Poor behaviour and conduct.
- Dealing with conflict.
- Dealing with difficult conversations.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Wherever possible training will be integrated and illustrate the management and staff culture the University wishes to encourage.

### **10.0 Support**

The University provides a wide range of sources of support for those staff who may experience stress, which is caused by, may be made worse by, or may affect their work.

These include:

- Occupational Health referrals.
- The Employee Assistance Program.
- The Counselling Service.
- Mental Health First Aiders.
- Dignity at Work Network.
- Human Resources Partners.
- Mediation.
- Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.
- Staff Equality Network Groups.
- Coaching.
- Mentoring.

In addition, staff may wish to speak to their Trade Union Representative. Staff who feel they cannot raise concerns with their manager are encouraged to contact human resources directly or one of the other sources of support as appropriate.

This list is not exhaustive. More details are available on the University intranet pages.

### **11.0 Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be periodically reviewed, by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team, in conjunction with Human Resources, to ensure it is kept up to date (in terms of both the legislation and how it works within the University as a whole).

### **12.0 References**

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- The University's Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.
- The University's Wellbeing Strategy.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Staffing Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace
- Workload Reduction Toolkit
- Change Management Toolkit
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Flexible Working Policy