

# Stress Management Policy

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## 1. Introduction

At Strathclyde we take the responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of our colleagues seriously. We aim to take a positive and pro-active approach to protect the mental health and wellbeing of employees by doing our best to reduce stressors within the workplace. This is important to look after your wellbeing and to ensure our continued success as an organisation.

We are committed to ensuring that if you have had or are experiencing symptoms of stress, work related or in your home life, you are supported as early and effectively as possible. We will always aim to treat matters as confidentially as possible.

In this policy you will find information on the definition of stress, causes and symptoms of stress and the impact that it can have on health and work. You will also find out more about Stress Risk Assessments and how they can be used to reduce stressors. It has been developed to provide guidance and support for both employees and managers.

Please note, if this policy refers to additional guidance, FAQs, online forms, or training, these are accessible to University colleagues on our [People Hub](#).

## 2. Who is Covered by this Policy?

This policy applies to all University employees and workers. It also includes agency workers.

## 3. What is Stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as the “adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. Pressure can be a positive state and we need it in our lives to stimulate and motivate us. However, if stress is a result of an overload of pressure, thresholds it can have a negative effect on health.

We can all experience stress from time to time and is a perfectly natural human response. What might be stressful for one person may not be for another. The challenge is to ensure that the level of pressure is managed correctly to avoid impacting on health.

## 4. Causes of Stress at Work

We all have different work experiences, stress thresholds, and different opinions of what excessive pressure is. As a result, there is a wide range of potential causes of stress at work which can include (but are not limited to):

- Long periods of excessive pressure to perform.
- Conflicting demands.
- Feeling that you are unable to organise your own workload.
- Threat of aggression/harassment or bullying.
- Unclear work roles.
- Poor working relationships and poor communication.
- Lack of recognition.
- Job insecurity or changes in the workplace.
- Excessive workload or working excessive working hours.
- Monotonous or repetitive work.
- Difficulty with balancing the demands of home and work or coping with personal difficulties.

It is worth noting that stress might also be the result of the number of pressures you face at one time. You might experience stress because of one major event, or it may be a build-up of several pressures over time.

## 5. Signs of Stress and the Long-Term Effects

How you react to stressful situations can vary and you may experience emotional, behavioural, or physical warnings of stress. These may include (but are not limited to):

- Emotional signs – feeling overwhelmed, feeling depressed or anxious.
- Behavioural signs– difficulty sleeping, low self-esteem and being indecisive.

- Physical signs – headaches, lack of energy or frequent short-term illnesses such as cold or flu.

It's helpful to recognise and accept that you will likely encounter stressful experiences in work and in your home life from time to time. These are often short-term encounters and are unlikely to have a lasting impact. Individuals react differently to pressure, and this can often lead to greater productivity and satisfaction at work. We want all colleagues to feel productive in their roles but we do not want short-term pressure to have a negative impact and result in work-related stress.

When stress is prolonged, the early warning signs described previously have the potential to lead to longer term issues. This can include:

- Absence from work
- Psychological issues
- Physical illness
- Damage to relationships.

For further examples of the symptoms of stress and more details on the long-term effects of stress, you should refer to [Warning Signs of Stress and Long-Term Effects](#) (staff login required).

## **6. Preventing and Managing Work-Related Stress: What do I Need to Do?**

At the University we aim to reduce the risk of work-related stress to the lowest level 'reasonably practicable' to protect colleagues mental health.

All colleagues should familiarise themselves with this policy and the guidance that supports it along with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) [Stress Management Standards](#). This will help to recognise symptoms of stress and workplace stressors as early as possible, to avoid any longer-term health effects that these might cause.

You will find more details on managing work-related stress and your responsibilities below.

## 6.1. If You Are an Employee

You, along with the University, have a duty of care to manage your mental health wellbeing. It is important that you are aware of the symptoms and signs of stress and know how to identify them and seek support for these early on.

You are encouraged to speak to your line manager as early as possible and raise concerns about your symptoms. This will allow them to offer or signpost to support and help to reduce any work-related stress factors. If you are unable to speak to your line manager, then you might prefer to seek support from a more senior manager in your area. Alternatively, you can contact [Human Resources](#) or [Occupational Health](#) who will be able to provide advice or guidance.

If you have identified that you are experiencing work-related stress, or we become aware of this through a GP Fit Note or from an Occupational Health referral, you will be expected to participate in a [Stress Risk Assessment](#) (staff login required). This will allow you and your line manager to work together to identify the stressors you are experiencing and to develop a Stress Action Plan to address, reduce or eliminate these. This may also be conducted by an alternative manager or with input from a Human Resources colleague if required. It is important that the Stress Risk Assessment is undertaken to identify issues and address the situation.

It is important to note that there may be stressors that you are experiencing that cannot be removed completely but by completing the Stress Risk Assessment you and your line manager can identify what action can be taken to support you.

We also recognise that stress may not be as a result of work-related factors. If this is the case you may benefit from speaking to your GP, friends or family or other sources of support included in our Further Information and Support section.

## 6.2. If You Are a Manager

If you become aware that a member of your team is experiencing signs or symptoms of stress it is important that you act quickly to offer them support. This may be because they come and speak to you, you are concerned they are stressed, or they are sharing that they are feeling under pressure. Alternatively, or you may receive a Fit Note from their GP or a report from Occupational Health. It is best to act immediately, and you should act within 2 weeks of being notified.

You should conduct a Stress Risk Assessment with the employee to identify the stressors and then work with them to develop a Stress Action Plan. This plan should include any temporary or long-term reasonable adjustments that can be made to reduce the stress related factors. Work adjustments can also reduce pressures causing stress that is not work-related. Where required, advice on appropriate adjustments can be provided through your HR team.

On completion of these documents, it is important that you share a copy with the employee and that you regularly review them to ensure that they are making a positive impact. It may also be appropriate to refer the colleague to Occupational Health or other support sources available such as counselling through our [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

### **6.3. If You Are a Senior Manager (Senior Officer, PS Director, Faculty or Department Manager)**

If you are in a senior manager role at the University you have a responsibility to prevent, recognise and manage work related stress in your area. It is important that you:

- Promote and raise awareness of the Stress Management Policy to colleagues within your area.
- Provide support to managers in your area that are managing cases of stress in their areas or teams.
- Encourage good communication between managers and colleagues to reduce potential stress related factors, particularly when there are organisational or procedural changes.
- Ensure that managers in your area are aware of the expectations to undertake Stress Risk Assessments when required and that they undertake training to complete these effectively.

## **7. Stress Risk Assessments**

There are four stages of the Stress Risk Assessment which are as follows:

1. You complete the 'individual assessment' questionnaire.
2. Your line manager (or an alternative manager if this has been agreed) completes the 'manager's assessment' questionnaire.

3. You both meet to review the questionnaires, to identify the issues that need attention and to agree on the Stress Action Plan.
4. At an agreed time, you and your line manager meet to review progress with the Stress Action Plan and to determine whether any additional actions are required.

The Stress Risk Assessment is designed to try and identify and address stress risks within the following six areas which are outlined in the HSE Stress Management Standards. These include:

- The **demands** placed on employees.
- The **control** individuals have over their work.
- The **support** people have in doing their job.
- The **relationships** people have with managers and colleagues.
- The nature and clarity of employee's **role**.
- The effectiveness with which **change** is implemented.

When undertaking the Stress Risk Assessment, it is important for you and your manager to look for potential risks and solutions under each of these areas. You should consider how these might impact on you or others and then consider what can be done to address these.

Following completion of this assessment, a Stress Action Plan should be produced to positively address any identified stressors. The Stress Action Plan should:

- Help set goals to work towards.
- Help decide on priorities.
- Demonstrate a commitment to positively address the stressors from all involved.
- Provide a document to evaluate and review against.

You will find our template Stress Risk Assessment and Stress Action Plan on our People Hub. For more detailed guidance and support in undertaking Stress Risk Assessments and developing Stress Action Plans you should refer to the [Stress Risk Assessment and Stress Action Plan Guidance](#) (staff login required).

## 8. Further Information and Support

If you have any queries about this policy, please talk to your line manager or contact Human Resources. Further information and guidance for both staff and managers can also be found on our People Hub. This includes our [Managing Stress - Guidance for Managers](#) (staff login required) and links to our [Wellbeing Hub](#) and a range of other external sources of support designed to support colleagues and managers.

And remember, our free and independent Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider, can also offer confidential support. Visit our [Wellbeing Hub](#) for more information.

## 9. Policy Review

This policy is reviewed by Human Resources on a regular basis. To see when the next review is due, please see our [Policy Review Schedule](#) (staff login required) on our People Hub.