

Risk Assessment Process and Risk Matrix

This risk assessment identifies the significant organisational level risks to staff from work-related stress whilst working on campus and undertaking University operations away from campus. It does not cover activities such as commuter travelling to and from campus or activities that are not work activities carried out in people's own time. More detailed risk assessments will be developed for each Faculty, School, Division, Department, and Professional Service area as required.

The risk assessment recognises that we cannot completely remove all risk of workplace stress; however, the University will ensure that all reasonable precautions are in place to ensure that our working environment is as safe as reasonably practicable. By following the guidance from the Health and Safety Executive, this risk assessment will consider the six main areas of work design which can affect stress levels: demands, control, support, relationships, role, and change.

A risk assessment is an important tool that is used to identify work activities that could foreseeably cause harm to people. A risk assessment is a logical process which analyses each work activity to identify aspects of that activity that could cause harm, the hazards.

However, it is important to remember that the presence of a hazard does **NOT MEAN** that it **WILL** cause harm to a person. The likelihood of stress causing harm depends on many factors; the frequency of the activity, the numbers of people exposed to stress, the level of training and other wellbeing and safety mitigations being used and the degree to which stress is being controlled. The impact of any harm that may be suffered is also important as the greater the level of potential harm the greater our desire to prevent it. These two factors, **likelihood** and **impact** are collectively used to **ESTIMATE** the level of risk referred to as the risk rating.

Once we have identified potential hazards and estimated the magnitude of the risk, we then need to decide what, if any further actions are needed to reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable. For the purposes of this stress risk assessment the following matrix¹ is used:

Likelihood		Meaning in practice	Illustrative Scenario
1	Rare	Exceptional circumstances; almost never happens	Stress arising from a one-off crisis, e.g. evacuation due to fire alarm
2	Unlikely	Could happen, but not typical	Brief friction in a well-supported team during organisational change
3	Possible	Might occur depending on conditions	Pressure during exam season or major deadline cycles
4	Likely	Happens with some regularity	Team tension due to persistent role ambiguity or staffing shortages
5	Very Likely	Expected frequently or in most similar settings	Chronic stress from ongoing unmanaged workloads or long-standing poor leadership

LIKELIHOOD	5	5	10	15	20	25
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	1	1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		IMPACT				

¹ Following the USHA [Guidance for Managing Work Related Stress within the Higher Education Sector](#).

Impact (severity of harm)		Meaning in practice	Illustrative Scenario
1	Trivial	Temporary discomfort or low-level tension with no lasting impact	Feeling slightly pressured during a short busy period
2	Minor	Noticeable stress symptoms, manageable without formal intervention	Brief irritability or sleep disturbance during project deadlines
3	Moderate	Sustained symptoms requiring informal support or adjustments	Anxiety, fatigue, or mild burnout affecting work consistency
4	Major	Severe symptoms needing medical attention or long-term recovery	Depression or anxiety disorder linked to chronic workload pressure
5	Severe	Life-altering psychological harm or suicide risk	Post-traumatic stress following workplace bullying or harassment

Risk Score	Risk Level	Action Required
(1 - 3)	Insignificant	No further action
(4 - 6)	Low	Monitor
(7 - 10)	Moderate	Review assessment and monitor
(12 - 19)	High	Review assessment and improve controls
20+	Very High	Stop this activity until further action is taken

Like other documents relating to personal safety, this risk assessment is a dynamic and developing position that will be reviewed and updated as the University follows guidance from the HSE and sector specific requirements.

Note: For the purposes of this risk assessment the term 'Staff' is used collectively and includes full/ part time staff, Academic and Professional Services staff, Doctoral Tutors. (SR: PGRs are not staff... they are only staff when employed as DTs)

Clarifications and support related to this risk assessment are available from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team: healthsafety@sussex.ac.uk