UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTE

1.1(i) Some level of stress is a normal aspect of everyday life. However, the harmful effects of stress, particularly when chronic, are now regarded as having a significant negative impact on the overall physical and psychological well-being of individuals. Harmful stress is seen as a contributory factor in a wide range of diseases and conditions and it is accepted that the recognition, management and reduction of stress can have substantial benefits in improving an individual's general health.

1.1(ii) Stress in the workplace[1] can be a major factor in reduced staff performance, commitment and motivation, increased sickness absence, loss of productivity and general absenteeism. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports that stress continues to be one of the main causes of short and long-term absence at work. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reported 17.9 million working days lost to stress in 2019/20.

1.1(iii) For these reasons, the University, as a responsible employer, wishes to address the issue of stress in the workplace by means of the following policy and its associated documents. The University believes that the measures set out here will have a substantial effect on reducing those potential causes of stress within the control of the institution.

1.2 NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term "*staff*" is used throughout this document to refer to **all** employees of the University, Similarly, "*line managers*" is used to describe all those with a responsibility for the management of staff, in whatever category.

2 STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

2.1 POLICY STATEMENT

2.1(i) This policy sets out the University's aims and objectives for the management of health and safety in relation to harmful stress at work. The intention of the policy is to ensure that staff members who experience stress are helped, whatever the causes of that stress.

2.1(ii) The University believes that its staff are its most important asset and that their well- being is essential to effective work performance and the provision of a high quality service.

2.1(iii) Under the terms of the relevant legislation and regulations, the University has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the physical and mental health, safety and welfare at work of all its staff. The University also has a duty to assess the health and safety risks to which its staff are exposed.

2.1(iv) Harmful stress reduces performance, creativity and productivity. The University is therefore concerned to develop procedures, training measures and support systems to help all staff understand and recognise the nature and causes of stress, and to take positive steps to manage stress effectively.

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[1] The HSE defines workplace stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work'.

2.1(v) The key aims and objectives of this policy are therefore

- to increase awareness of stress and the methods available to combat it
- to initiate appropriate action to manage and reduce stress at work
- to assist staff in managing stress in others and themselves
- to manage problems which do occur and to provide confidential support
- to manage the return to work of those who have been absent as a result of stress

2.1(vi) Whilst the University has no control over external factors, it is committed to identifying sources of stress in the workplace and will take action to reduce or, where possible, to eliminate those causes of stress within its control.

2.2   STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

2.2(i) The recognition and management of stress are integral to the University's responsibilities towards its staff and form an important part of the role of managers and supervisors. This policy is therefore primarily concerned with stress arising from the workplace. However, it is recognised that stress may be influenced by a variety of factors and that no one cause may necessarily be identified.

2.2(ii) The emphasis of this policy is to encourage and assist staff and all those with responsibilities for their management to identify and deal with stress themselves. Nevertheless, there may be times when some staff require professional help or support. For this reason, the University recommends that staff seeking help should normally approach their line manager in the first instance. HR Business Partners Occupational Health and our Employee Assistance Programme are also available to provide guidance and assistance, which may include the provision of counselling where necessary.

2.2(iii) Some staff may be reluctant to admit that they are experiencing adverse effects as a result of stress. This policy acknowledges that any staff member, at whatever level, can experience stress at work. The University considers that seeking help and support should be seen as a positive approach, and aims to provide staff with the support needed..

2.2(iv) This policy applies to all University staff and is subject to review and evaluation from time to time.

2.3   THE POLICY IN PRACTICE

2.3(i) PRE-EMPLOYMENT HEALTH SCREENING
- All those offered[2] monthly paid appointments at the University will be required to complete a health questionnaire.
- No person shall take up monthly paid employment with the University before the health questionnaire has been assessed by the Occupational Health Provider.
- The assessment process will be used in a positive way, identifying what support, if any, an applicant might need to carry out a job effectively. Discussions will take place with the applicant during this process.

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[2] Section 60(1) of the Equality Act 2010 prohibits employers asking candidates health questions before they are offered employment (with some exceptions). Therefore pre-employment health screening checks take place after offer.

2.3(ii) INDUCTION, PROMOTION AND TRANSFER / REDEPLOYMENT

- All new staff will receive local induction into their posts. Starting a new job can be stressful and a planned programme of activity will help to eliminate many concerns.
- Staff already employed by the University can be at particular risk of stress when they are promoted, take on new roles or are subject to transfer or redeployment. In these cases, a local induction programme similar to that for newly appointed staff should be arranged. The staff member's manager or supervisor should monitor progress and well-being at regular intervals.

2.3(iii) ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Absence which appears to be a result of work-related stress should be managed in accordancewith the current policy on sickness absence. The following procedures should therefore be observed:

- Managers and supervisors must ensure that all absences are properly recorded.
- All absences should be discussed with the staff member and any underlying reasons identified.
- Managers should maintain regular contact with absent staff. This contact should be undertaken sensitively and appropriately. The manager should discuss any underlying causes and arrange support and assistance if the absence appears likely to continue.
- Managers should consider informing the HR Business Partner (HRBP)if a staff member's absence continues beyond ten working days, or sooner if the cause of absence appears to be one where the HRBP might be of immediate assistance.

2.3(iv) RETURN TO WORK AFTER ABSENCE

- Managers should plan an individual's return to work after a stress-related illness. This planning should include consultation with the staff member and advice from the HRBP, Occupational Health as appropriate.
- After a staff member returns to work, managers should continue to monitor and discuss their recovery and the factors which may have contributed to or caused the stress. The frequency of these meetings may be higher than in a normal supervisory situation. The meetings should be conducted in the spirit of the notes of guidance in Appendix 2.

2.3(v) TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Many staff experience stress through feeling that they are not adequately trained for their current post and are especially at risk when they move to a new or changed role. The identification of development needs should have a high priority, especially so in cases where restructuring of individual posts, sections or larger units is taking place. The identification and meeting of development needs should not be seen merely as a token annual exercise but asa continuing and vital process.
- Managers and supervisors should raise staffawareness of the risks of stress and of the measures they should take to identify and reduceit.
  - Organisational Development provide general stress management and other related courses for staff at regular intervals. Managers and supervisors should encourage and enable staff to attend these courses.

2.3(vi) GUIDANCE NOTES AND INFORMATION

Guidelines for line managers are appended to this document (*q.v.* Appendices 2 and 3 respectively). Information for all staff on the recognition of stress, stress reduction and sources of help and advice may be found in Appendices 1 and 4.

2.4   MONITORING AND EVALUATION

2.4(i) Monitoring and evaluation are essential to any effective policy of stress management. They provide feedback which is critical to the maintenance and development of strategies andprocedures to control stress in the workplace.

2.4(ii) For this reason, the University will carry out stress audits from time to time, the key objectives of which are as follows:

- to ensure that the requirements and standards set out in the policy are being met
- to assess and compare the effectiveness of different aspects of the policy
- to provide information to justify continuation of current policy or to propose any necessary changes in strategy
- to assess the cost-effectiveness of the policy and its provisions

Data collected for these audits will include both individual and organisational issues, on a similar basis to that outlined below (Appendix 3) for risk assessment. Trade Union Safety Representatives will be consulted during this process.

References:
** HSE (1998) *"Self-reported work-related illness in 1995: results from a household survey"*.
*** HSE (1995) *"Stress at Work: A Guide for Employers"* HSE Books.

Richard Price, Staff
Welfare Officer. 19.5.2000
Minor revisions made JR JUN 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX STRESS MANAGEMENT

POLICYAPPENDIX 1

RECOGNISING STRESS AND ITS SOURCES

1. WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is what we experience when we feel we cannot cope with the pressures and demands placed on us. We all vary in our capacity to cope with different levels or types of pressure. Some pressure, even when high, can be positive and is frequently challenging and motivating.Responding effectively to this kind of pressure can lead to job satisfaction. However, when pressure reaches a level we cannot cope with, we may experience negative stress. This may also occur when there is too little pressure or challenge to motivate us. The effects of stress can be observed in both physiological and psychological symptoms. This document is concerned with those negative and harmful aspects of stress.

Stress can also be caused by the many different pressures people experience in their home and personal lives. For instance, bereavement, relationship or family problems, financial worries are some of the factors which can make people more vulnerable to stress at work. Theharmful effects of stress are often caused by a combination of work and home stress. An individual's personality and attitudes may also affect the levels of stress they experience. Stress in one area of life is likely to affect other areas.

2. RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Some common signs of stress are shown below. Experiencing any of these for short periods does not necessarily indicate that you are stressed. However, stress may be indicated when one or more of these signs persists **and** you have difficulty in making adjustments to cope.

- **Persistent or recurring moods:** anger, irritability, frustration, detachment or withdrawal from others, worry or anxiety, depression, guilt, sadness.
- **Physical signs:** aches and pains, raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin problems, sleep disorders, exhaustion, nausea, lowered resistance to minor illnesses.
- **Behaviour changes:** difficulty concentrating, losses of memory, an inability to "switch off", poor judgement, loss of creativity, making more mistakes, checking things repeatedly, eating disorders, loss of interest in sex, increasing use of coffee, alcohol, drugs or tobacco.

If you experience stress over long periods, other signs may also develop. These include, for example, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, chronic anxiety, long-term depression.

3. RECOGNISING SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Be aware of these possible signs: -

- **An increase in overall sickness absence -** especially frequent short absences.
- **Poor work performance** - less output, lower quality of work, poor decision making, poor timekeeping, increased occurrence of accidents.
- **Relationships at work** - poor relationships with customers or people you work for,conflict between colleagues.
- **Staff attitude and behaviour** - poor timekeeping, loss of motivation or commitment,working long hours but with decreasing effectiveness.

Some of these signs may also be symptoms of other problems, including psychiatric illness, alcohol or drug misuse (any one of which may also, of course, be related to stress). If you wish to discuss any of these matters or need to seek advice or guidance, contact your line manager.

4. POSSIBLE SOURCES OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

These may be some of the sources of stress arising from your work: -

- Poor physical working conditions or job design.
- Uncontrolled or excessive workloads and working hours, conflicting demands, uncertaintyabout responsibilities.
- Inconsistent or poorly communicating management, lack of support.
- Complaints from service users, colleagues or other sources.
- Unresolved and/or unaddressed issues raised by the staff member.
- Being set tasks which are inappropriate to ability, lack of adequate training, inadequate staffing.
- Harassment and bullying.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX STRESS MANAGEMENT

POLICYAPPENDIX 2

THE LINE MANAGER'S ROLE IN STAFF CARE:

The University's managers have a key role to play in the implementation of the Stress Management Policy. The recognition and management of stress are seen as integral to that role. The following points, all drawn from the policy, are offered to managers and supervisors as actions which they could take to produce a significant impact on stress reduction amongst the University's staff. Some managers may already be doing some of these things, some may be doing all of them. Nevertheless, an improvement of practice in these areas could produce beneficial results.

- Seek advice from your HRBP or from the Occupational Health Service when you are unsure how to deal with a problem.
- Identify posts where stress has been or is a problem. See what can be done to reduce the risk of stress to the postholders.
- Meet all staff reporting directly to you on a planned and regular basis. Provide time to discuss their concerns. Listen to what they say.
- Take care over the allocation of work. Do your staff have the necessary skills? Are the timescales reasonable?
- When your staff are absent, find out why in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Contact and offer support to staff on longer-term absences.
- Ensure that all new staff in your section, unit or school receive a planned local induction programme which fully prepares them for their work at the University. You should also allow time for your staff to attend University-wide induction events, including safety training.
- If staff are promoted or their job changes, ensure that they are given advice, support and any necessary training to help them adjust to the new situation.
- Identify the training and development needs of your staff. Monitor your own and their progress in meeting those needs.
- Ensure that staff are treated fairly, consistently and with respect. Do not tolerate harassment or bullying.
- Clear communication is essential to explain, share and achieve objectives. It also helps to minimise staff uncertainty and stress at times of change. Discuss issues with your staff andprovide regular and accurate information on matters which affect them and their work.
- Confidentiality should be maintained when staff have disclosed matters to you which are not work-related and have no bearing on their capacity as members of staff.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX STRESS MANAGEMENT

POLICYAPPENDIX 3

RISK ASSESSMENT

1. Health and safety legislation requires the University to undertake an assessment of the risksarising from work hazards. This process forms the basis of a pro-active and preventative approach to health risk management and must consider risks to psychological as well as to physical health.

2. For this reason, risk assessments in relation to stress and psychological hazards must be carried out by those responsible for other aspects of routine risk assessment. The procedures for these assessments are set out in the University Safety Policy and other documents.

3. Assessment of the hazards associated with work stress should aim to identify

- factors at work likely to cause stress
- whether these factors are currently causing stress
- those staff who are at risk of experiencing work stress
- existing preventative or precautionary measures
- action required to eliminate or reduce the risk

4. 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 individuals' perceptions ofstress as well as objectively assessing work conditions (*e.g.* excessive working hours) which are likely to cause stress. Any assessment should therefore contain both these subjective and objective elements.

5. Appropriate additional training will be provided for those managers and supervisorsrequired to identify stress-related risks.

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POLICYAPPENDIX 4

HELP WITH STRESS

1. SELF HELP

You can help yourself to manage and prevent the build-up of stress. Here are some ideaswhich could help you to cope better: -

At work:

- if you are under stress, acknowledge it and try to identify the sources
- be more assertive
- manage your time effectively - identify what's important and prioritise work
- create and maintain a support network of colleagues and friends
- if the problem is work-related, discuss it with others, including your manager and trades union representative when this is appropriate.
- seek confidential support if you feel the need
- take advantage of training opportunities to extend your knowledge and skills
- take a proper break from work during lunch or other mealtimes
- delegate work when this is possible: trust your staff - a compulsive and unnecessary need to control every aspect and detail of a work process can generate severe stress in yourself and in others
- praise and reward yourself and others - even a brief "thank you" or "well done" can often achieve positive results

Take care of yourself:

- **Good health** - eat sensibly, get enough rest and avoid the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.
- **Exercise** - take regular exercise such as walking, swimming, cycling etc..
- **Life style** - make time for yourself. Enjoy leisure activities and interests outside work.
- **Talking** - talking things through with friends and relatives can help. If problems become too great, arrange to see a counsellor.
- **Time to think** - give yourself thinking time each day. This helps to manage time and priorities.
- **Rest and relaxation** - learn to relax. Taking short breaks throughout the day will make it easier to wind down at the end of the day. You could also try relaxation methods or meditation, both of which offer real benefits in stress reduction.

2. OTHER SOURCES OF HELP

Most of us get informal help from our families, friends and colleagues. Sometimes, though, we may need to talk to someone who is outside the situation. If you are feeling under stress, do not wait for the problem to build up - talk to someone straight away. You have a numberof different options:-

- If a work or home problem is affecting your work, discuss it with your manager or supervisor. Arrange a special appointment if necessary. Your manager will then know about the situation and treat the matter in confidence whenever possible.
- With your consent, you can be referred for short-term counselling, if this appears necessary, by the Occupational Health Service.
- If you have been affected by a particularly stressful situation or have had to deal with violent or distressing events in your work, contactyour line manager or one of the University's Dignity and Respect Champions. It is often very beneficial to talk something through soon after an incident.
- If you are experiencing harassment in the workplace, you can discuss the matter with your line manager or with one of the University's Dignity and Respect Champions confidentially. (add link)
- If you are a trade union member, your union may be able to provide support and advice.