## Work-related stress risk assessment guidance

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1. **Scope**

This document provides guidance on complying with the University’s work-related stress policy and on completing work-related stress risk assessments. The University has adopted the approach recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which is based on a set of ‘Management Standards’ concentrating on six key areas: demands, control, support, relationships, roles and change. For further details on the Management Standards please see appendix 1.

2. **Introduction**

An employee’s mental and physical health can be affected by a number of factors which may or may not be work-related. Work-related stress is a significant cause of illness and disease and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and also with a negative impact on teams and the organisation.

The University of Bristol believes that its members of staff are its most important asset and is committed to promoting a positive working environment for all colleagues. The University recognises that it has a legal duty to assess the risks of stress-related ill health from work activities and to take action to control those risks.
3. **Definitions**

Work related stress is distinct from reasonable pressure and challenges at work. In the context of the workplace the HSE defines work-related stress as:

“...the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.”

There is a clear distinction between pressure, and work-related stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive and exceeds the person’s capacity and capability to cope. The stage at which pressure becomes work-related stress will vary between individuals as each person has different tolerance levels. Also people may be affected by non-work related issues which can lead them to react to work pressures adversely.

4. **Risk assessment of work-related stress**

4.1 **Primary causes of work-related stress**

The HSE has developed a ‘management standard’ for examining stress in the workplace with the overall aim of helping employers manage the causes of work-related stress. The management standard covers six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity, increased sickness absence and work related stress. The six areas are:

- demands - workload, work patterns and the work environment;
- control - how much say the person has in the way they do their work;
- support - the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues;
- relationships - promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;
- role - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles;
- change - how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Each cause or combination of causes will have a varying impact on each individual as there is not a simple relationship between the primary causes and the levels of work-related stress that individuals experience.

4.2 **Risk assessment**

The University has the following risk assessment procedures in place to ensure that work-related stressors are identified and addressed as necessary in accordance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
4.2.1 School / service risk assessment

Heads of school/services are responsible for ensuring that there is a work-related stress risk assessment in place based on the HSE’s management standard and that control measures are implemented and communicated to all members of their staff in the school or service’s local rules.

The guidance in this section provides advice on how to conduct a work-related stress risk assessment in five clear stages. This information is adapted from guidance contained within the HSE publication; ‘Managing the causes of work-related stress: A step-by-step approach using the Management Standards’ [link]

Individual schools and services can undertake a work-related stress management survey as a tool to assist in the completion of school/service risk assessments. Further information regarding setting up a staff work-related stress management survey is available from Safety and Health Services.

The focus of this risk assessment should be on preventing and controlling the root causes of work related stress rather than dealing with issues once they have occurred. Advice on completing a risk assessment for an individual who may be experiencing work-related stress can be found in section 4.2.2 of this guidance.

The work-related stress risk assessment can be recorded using the template in appendix 2.

Step 1 - Identify the stress risk factors

The University's risk assessment process is based on the HSE’s management standard for work-related stress. The Management Standard identifies six key risk factors for work related stress (demands, control, support, relationships, role and change) which are included in the work-related stress risk assessment template in appendix 2.

When assessing the risks to which employees are exposed to, it is important to consider organisational level issues that have the potential to impact on teams rather than solely focusing on individual employees.

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Although some people may be more vulnerable to developing work related stress illness than others, any individual or team could be working under conditions that could cause undue pressure and so be at risk from work-related stress. The University Occupational Health Service website outlines possible signs and symptoms of work-related stress. This information is available at [link].

Information sources that may be useful in making an assessment of who could be harmed and how include:
- sickness absence data
- staff turnover rates
- exit interviews
- number of referrals to the Occupational Health Service
- staff reviews
• team meetings
• standard day-to-day meetings and other interactions with staff.

Step 3 - Evaluate the risks

The risk assessment template (appendix 2) has been designed for recording risks and allows any existing control measures to be added. Appendix 1 lists the HSE management standards for work-related stress for each six risk factors and outlines the HSE guidelines of what should be happening to reach the 'states to be achieved'. This is followed by suggested control measures within teams. Please note that these suggested control measures are not exhaustive and additional specific examples of control measures that you are currently undertaking can be added to your risk assessment. Do not add any control measures to the risk assessment that are currently not being done; the risk assessment must reflect current actions only. Any control measures that you hope to implement in future should be added to the action list, assigned an individual responsible for achieving this and a target date for completion.

Step 4 - Record the findings, develop and implement action plans

The work-related stress risk assessment template has been designed to ensure that risk assessments are appropriately recorded. Action plans can also be recorded on this template. Ensure this is kept up to date and that agreed actions are being undertaken.

Step 5 - Monitor and review action plans and assess effectiveness

It is recommended that work-related stress risk assessments are reviewed annually and that this process involves members of staff.

All members of staff are responsible for advising their line manager of any changes in activity which may affect the findings of the risk assessment which may initiate a document review. Ensure that the assessment review date is added and that changes are brought to the attention of all members of staff and others who may be affected.

4.2.2 Individual risk assessment

Where a member of staff indicates that they may be experiencing stress which is work-related or following a period of absence due to work-related stress, an individual stress risk assessment can be undertaken. Line managers should contact HR for further advice.

5. Training

An awareness of the symptoms of stress and learning how to recognise and reduce work-related stress is incorporated into manager and staff training as appropriate. Please see Staff Development for more information on courses available http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/.

6. Useful information

• Guidance note on work-related stress (LINK)
• University of Bristol Occupational Health Service information on work-related stress: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/health/advice/#stress
• PositiveWorking@Bristol: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/positive-working/
• The University of Bristol Professional Behaviours offer a professional development direction towards which all staff should be working: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/professional-behaviours/
• University of Bristol acceptable behaviour in the workplace policy: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/acceptablebehaviour/acceptablebehaviour.pdf
• Staff development courses: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/
• HSE’s management standard: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf
• HSE information on work-related stress: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/
### Appendix 1 – HSE Management standards and recommended team risk assessment control measures

#### DEMANDS - includes 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.
- Employees’ concerns about their work environment are addressed.

**Team suggested control measures:**
- One to one meetings in place where outcomes are agreed and recorded. Guidance over prioritisation of tasks.
- Staff review process in place and actioned.
- Team meetings held regularly.
- Risk assessments for work activities are in place and reviewed annually and when required.
- Staff training/coaching/supervision in place to ensure that staff are competent in their role.
- Up to date risk assessments for building and work environment as necessary. Physical adjustments to ensure hazards properly controlled.

#### 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.
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

**Team suggested control measures:**
- One to one meetings to clarify individual workloads and agree timetables. Review of work timescale agreed and followed.
- Appropriate communication mechanisms in place for both the individual and team.
- Staff review process in place and actioned.
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- 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.
- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work.
- Flexible working patterns considered where possible.

**SUPPORT - includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The standard is that:</th>
<th>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.</th>
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</table>
| 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.  
• Employees receive regular and constructive feedback. |
| Team suggested control measures: | • Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones and staff review process and group team meetings).  
• Reference to appropriate existing policies and procedures within the University  
• Training available via Staff Development for managers and individuals.  
• Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.  
• Employees are reminded regularly what support is available and how and when to access it (e.g. Staff Counselling, HR, Occupational Health Service, Sports Centre etc.).  
• Managers advised to provide regular and constructive feedback on pieces of work. |

**RELATIONSHIP - includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour**

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<th>The standard is that:</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| What should be happening/states to be achieved: | • The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.  
[http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/professional-behaviours/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/professional-behaviours/). |
- 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.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

| Team suggested control measures: | Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones and team meetings).
|                               | University Professional Behaviours at work are promoted;
|                               | University Acceptable Behaviour policy in place.
|                               | Agreed policies and procedures are in place to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
|                               | Managers lead by example. Management training available through Staff Development.
|                               | Team away days and socials organised.
|                               | Equality and Diversity Training completed by all members of staff as part of their induction and reviewed as appropriate. |

**ROLE - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that individuals do 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.
|                                                 | Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities. |

| Team suggested control measures: | Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones, staff reviews and team meetings).
|                                | Induction process in place that is signed off by the individual and their line manager.
|                                | Clear team structures in place.
|                                | Mechanisms in place to update any job description when appointing a new member of staff to that role or when there are significant changes to the role. |
## CHANGE - how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The standard is that:</th>
<th>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.</th>
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| 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. |
| Team suggested control measures: | • Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones, staff reviews and team meetings).  
• Staff training as necessary.  
• Ensure adequate employee consultation on changes (reasons, benefits and timescales) and staff provided with opportunities to influence proposals.  
• Trade Union representatives and staff representatives consulted on possible change.  
• Employees reminded by their line managers on how to access relevant support during change. |
Appendix 2 - Risk Assessment Template

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description and location of hazard</th>
<th>Existing control measures</th>
<th>High/Medium/Low</th>
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<td>Description and location of hazard</td>
<td>Existing control measures</td>
<td>High/Medium/Low</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong>&lt;br&gt;(e.g.)*&lt;br&gt;• Setting working patterns&lt;br&gt;• Rigid working patterns&lt;br&gt;• Fixed deadlines&lt;br&gt;• No opportunity to use initiative or to develop skills)</td>
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<td><strong>Support</strong>&lt;br&gt;(e.g.)*&lt;br&gt;• Staff feel that they isolated or unsupported by management/colleagues&lt;br&gt;• Staff feel they do not have opportunities to raise concerns&lt;br&gt;• Inconsistent management&lt;br&gt;• Failure to provide supportive feedback)</td>
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<td><strong>Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;(e.g.)*&lt;br&gt;• Unacceptable behaviours&lt;br&gt;• Lack of awareness of diversity and equality issues&lt;br&gt;• Low team moral)</td>
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*Note: The table is incomplete and requires further information to be filled in.
### Risk Level

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<th>Description and location of hazard</th>
<th>Existing control measures</th>
<th>High/Medium/Low</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role</strong> (e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conflicting demands or roles</td>
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<td>• Job descriptions not accurate</td>
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<td>• Lack of understanding on how role fits into team/organisation</td>
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<td>• Expectation of staff working excessive hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description and location of hazard</strong></td>
<td><strong>Existing control measures</strong></td>
<td><strong>High/Medium/Low</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Change</strong> (e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Staff feel ill-informed about change</td>
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<td>• Staff feel that they have not had the opportunity on influence change</td>
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<td>• Fear of new technology</td>
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<td>• Lack of skills for new tasks)</td>
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### Action Plan

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<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
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<td>High probability of long term sickness due to work related work-related stress. Immediate action required.</td>
<td>Medium probability of sickness due to work related work-related stress. Review risk assessment and control measures.</td>
<td>Low probability of work-related stress</td>
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