



Strategic Stress Risk Assessment

2024-2025

Purpose

The purpose of the **Strategic Stress Risk Assessment (SSRA)** is to:

- Identify workplace issues that might have an adverse effect on health and work performance of an individual, team, section or department
- Identify reasonable adjustments that could be implemented to reduce the risk of adverse effect
- Identify sources of practical and emotional support at work
- Ensure managers are supported to develop the knowledge and confidence to identify early symptoms of poor mental health and know how and where to signpost a member of staff for support
- Support a programme of early intervention and ensure timely action is taken to reduce the risk of a deterioration in mental/physical health of a member of staff
- Document organisational controls and resources so that specific (local) actions required can be identified to reduce and minimise the risks to a department/section/team or individual's mental health

The SSRA is also a record of the resources the University has in place to:

- reduce the risk of occupational stress through development of good working practices, based on the HSE Management Standards.
- identify and address occupational factors that can contribute to employee stress through a process of risk assessment; and
- create an enabling environment where positive relationships promote well-being for all participants, and which allows individuals to experience a sense of belonging.

The SSRA will enable UoE to:

- Identify potential hazards.
- Identify who might be harmed and how.
- Assess the risk and decide if it is currently causing stress.
- Record the findings and decide on any action required to eliminate or reduce stress.

- Regularly review the assessment over time.

This SSRA highlights what the UoE can do to reduce harm to a member of staff. It will help to:

- Identify any potential stressors that might be experienced by those working on our campuses, from their homes or other locations aboard or in the UK (field work, in external companies, hospitals etc)
- With respect to good emotional wellbeing, identify what measures can be put in place to support a member of staff's mental health, ensuring that pressures from work remain a motivator not a stressor.

What is Stress?

The University uses the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition of stress, which is:

"The reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them"

This makes a distinction between pressure, which can be stimulating and motivating, and stress, which occurs when pressures become too great, and people feel they cannot cope.

Stress is not an illness, but a term used to describe a state where people undergo emotional, behavioural and mental changes in response to excessive pressure. However, if stress is excessive and prolonged this can lead to mental and physical illnesses. People may also experience stress when too few demands are placed on them, for instance if they are bored or feel under-valued.

Pressure is often an important part of a job and can help us achieve our goals and perform better. However the changes that occur when an employee experiences stress can have a significant negative impact on their work performance and lead to increased sickness absence.

The stage at which pressure becomes stress will vary from person to person; we all have different tolerance levels. People will also be affected by non-work-related pressures, which may lead them to react adversely to work pressures earlier. Whatever the cause of stress, the negative impact on the individual, team and organisation will be the same. This is why the University is committed to supporting employees experiencing stress from non-work-related pressures as well as those caused by work.

Further information on the importance of managing stress can be found on the [Stress page](#) of the Staff Directory.

Our mission

The University will support all staff who are feeling stressed and anxious to ensure they do not feel overwhelmed by work tasks or become incapacitated by their emotions. Support will be given to all staff to enable them to continue to think under pressure, maintain resilience and to develop creative solutions to dilemmas whilst taking into account the impact of individual circumstances on their ability to balance home and work responsibilities.

All staff may experience periods of pressure at work, and short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern. It is the risk from sustained and / or excessive pressure, without the opportunity to recover, that needs to be assessed and measures put in place to control the risk of adverse effects.

The [Health and Safety Executive](#) has identified six key '[Management Standards](#)' that represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, wellbeing and organisational performance. These standards provide a practical framework that organisations can use to minimise the impact of work-related stress.

The six [HSE management standards](#) are:

1. **Demands:** e.g. workload, work patterns, and the work environment
2. **Control:** How much say a person has in the way they do their work
3. **Relationships:** Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
4. **Role:** Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
5. **Change:** How organisational change is managed and communicated
6. **Support:** The encouragement, support and resources provided by the organisation, line managers and colleagues

Stress Guidance

- [Stress Management Policy \(.docx\)](#)
- [Work-related stress](#)
- [HSE guidance to stress at work](#)

[HSE stress management standards](#)

Stress Risk Assessment

The [Health & Safety Executive](#) makes it clear that employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by completing risk assessments and acting on them.

Stress Risk Assessments are a tool to help identify manage and mitigate/control the risks associated with workplace stress. Undertaking a stress risk assessment will involve a manager, an individual or a team, it will give the manager an opportunity to look closely at the identified stressors within the HSE six areas of work design which

can affect stress levels to rise. The manager will then be able to implement targeted interventions to control the risks to the individual as far as reasonably practicable.

A **3-part training** Moodle training has been created to ensure that managers are able to support their teams in managing stress and using stress risk assessments when needed. To complete the training, you must watch all **three videos** and mark them as completed. Each video is approximately 15 mins long, and you do not have to complete it in one sitting.

- [Part 1](#) covers the Stress Management Policy and your responsibility as a manager to support your team and to prevent and manage workplace stress.
- [Part 2](#) focuses on how to complete the assessment.
- [Part 3](#) addresses frequently asked questions and the additional resources available to you and your team.

You can find the stress risk assessment template and the Stress Management Policy the [Staff Directory](#). If you have any questions, please email ohquery@essex.ac.uk.

To support with completing the Stress Risk Assessment, these can also be completed:

- [Perceived Stress Assessment tool](#) (.docx) – This is designed to measure individual stress levels by looking at how different situations affect feelings and thinking.
- [Stressor Assessment Tool](#) (.docx) – This questionnaire helps to identify the areas under the HSE Management Standards where support may be required

Occupational Health Advisers may recommend stress risk assessment for individuals who have been suffering stress. It is also a useful to carry out assessments for teams where there are stress related issues or are undergoing significant change.

University of Essex Strategic Stress Risk Assessment

STANDARD 1: DEMANDS

Issues to consider: Difficulty in achieving work life balance, working over contracted hours, work overload/under-load, peaks in demands, staff working beyond their capabilities, conflicting priorities, working environment at home or on campus (noise, ventilation, lighting etc.), exposure to potential violence/aggression, lone working/night work, shift systems.

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
<p>Members of staff feel able to cope with the demands of their job</p> <p>Systems in place to respond to staff individual concerns.</p>	<p>UoE provides staff with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work</p> <p>Staff skills and abilities are matched to job demands</p> <p>Roles are designed to be within capabilities of staff</p> <p>Staff concerns about work environment are addressed promptly and they are made aware of support resources</p> <p>Members of staff communicate they can meet the demands of their role.</p>
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS

<p><u>Conflict of demands</u> of work and personal responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular one to ones with line managers to highlight any conflicts and concerns ▪ Six monthly and yearly PDR reviews ▪ Flexible working ▪ Workplace Coaching for Success service ▪ Stress Management Policy ▪
<p>Sections and Departments requesting work from other Departments and Sections with unrealistic timescales and expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular one-to-ones with line managers to highlight any conflicts and concerns and to re-prioritise workload as necessary ▪ Line managers able to redesign priorities to address current environment and capacity of staff to undertake the duties required
<p>Poor work environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Display Screen Equipment guidance ▪ Occupational Health advice and Support (on non-safe work environments)
<p>Health and Safety controls on campus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health and Safety
<p><u>Workload</u></p> <p>Concerns with increasing workload</p> <p>Feeling exhausted due to little downtime from work</p> <p>Not feeling able to take annual leave to rest or have a break</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular one-to-ones with line manager to identify issues and any changes that can be put in place. ▪ Re -prioritisation of work when demands are high ▪ Stress Risk Assessments to identify specific stressors ▪ Flexibility and influence over how to manage workload.

<p>Overextended – working additional hours to meet demands in the evenings and weekends</p> <p>Lack of control over work</p> <p>Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year</p> <p>Conflicting work demands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support from teams to identify areas of continuous improvement.
SUPPORT AVAILABLE	
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work Related Stress ▪ Employee Assistance Programme ▪ Silvercloud for Staff ▪ Parent Support Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mind – How to be Mentally Healthy at Work ▪ Wellbeing Directory - Stress

STANDARD 2: CONTROL

Issues to consider: Employee opportunities to participate in decision making, influence how work is done, consistent structure/routine within roles, control over workload deadlines and breaks, underutilisation of skills, lack of development opportunities.

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
For members of staff to feel they have appropriate control over their work and can raise concerns if there are issues.	Where possible, employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ have control over their pace of work▪ are consulted about their workload, pace of work and changes to their working environment.▪ have a say over when breaks can be taken▪ are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.▪ are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS
Staff unaware of how to raise issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Regular conversations with line managers are encouraged.▪ <u>Appraisal - PDR</u>▪ <u>Trade Union Representation</u>▪ <u>Grievance Procedure</u>

Staff feeling not consulted on changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health and Safety consultation ▪ <u>Trade Union Representation</u>
Lack of support for training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Professional development</u> programmes available to build new areas of expertise and skills ▪ <u>Peer Exchange Network</u>, Learning Lounge to connect with colleagues. ▪ <u>Training in leadership and management</u> so that managers are open to flexible arrangements and job sharing etc ▪ <u>Appraisal - PDR</u>
SUPPORT AVAILABLE	
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Professional development</u> 	

STANDARD 3: RELATIONSHIPS

Issues to consider: Prejudice (e.g. gender, race, religion), team dynamics and relationships, welcoming new starters into teams, departure of colleagues (e.g. retirement, change of job), interpersonal difficulties, bullying and harassment, verbal abuse, threat of violence, victimisation, humiliation, ridicule, malicious gossip, dealing with individuals with complex issues.

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
Staff 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.	UoE promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness. 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 staff to report unacceptable behaviour.
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS

<p>Lack of procedures for staff to report concerns</p> <p>Failure to act on stress indicators e.g. rising staff absence, turnover of staff</p> <p>Inconsistent approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour</p> <p>Pressures over tight deadlines</p> <p>Lack of procedures to resolve workplace conflict</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Online meeting protocols in place for participants and chairs of meetings ▪ Training in use of Zoom and other supporting technologies ▪ Workplace Coaching Service ▪ Equality and diversity policies and training ▪ Support for team development available through People & Culture ▪ Support for individuals available through People & Culture ▪ Zero tolerance of harassment and bullying ▪ Report and Support ▪ Harassment Advisory and Support Service ▪ Employee Voice staff surveys, pulse surveys, and listening exercises to capture staff experience ▪ How We Work at Essex essential training ▪ Stress Risk Assessments. ▪ Support from People & Culture to help staff return to the workplace after a period of absence. Phased return to work plans through WHSW. ▪ Support for managers on absence management ▪ Trade Union and staff representation on key committees
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SUPPORT AVAILABLE

INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <u>Report and Support Service</u><li>▪ <u>Coaching for Success</u><li>▪ <u>Coaching Essentials for Managers</u><li>▪ <u>Employee Assistance Programme</u><li>▪ <u>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy</u><li>▪ <u>Sickness Leave</u>	

STANDARD 4: CHANGE

Issues to consider: Restructuring, constant change, change management, communication of change, employee consultation, new technology, anxieties about employment status e.g. redundancy, space allocation, remote working and dual learning

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
<p>Staff indicate that the UoE engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns</p>	<p>UoE provides staff with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes and provides opportunities for staff to influence proposals.</p> <p>Staff are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs/roles. If necessary, staff are given training to support with any changes in their jobs.</p> <p>Staff are aware of timetables for changes and have access to relevant support during changes.</p>
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS
<p>Changes to job role and expectations</p> <p>Fears about job security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Managing Structural Change Policy▪ Consultation with Union and staff representatives▪ Training in managing change▪ Professional development and training▪ Support for role transitions▪ Regular communication from senior leadership

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employee Relation Advisors and P&C Business Partners Team advise managers on managing change appropriately ▪ PDR/Appraisal Process ▪ Details of new employment policies circulated to all staff and all policies on Employee Relations webpages ▪ Recognised Trade Unions who are consulted on the detail of change affecting staff and to keep their members informed
<p>Not enough time allowed to implement change</p> <p>Inexperience/fear of new technology</p> <p>Lack of skills for new tasks</p> <p>Not enough resource allocated for change process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support for using new technologies – resources, training, one-to-one guidance. ▪ Regular University communications from Director of People & Culture ▪ Reports to Senate from Director of People & Culture ▪ Financial planning and sustainability as part of planning round as well as January stock-take of resources. ▪ Clear timetables for decisions about financial sustainability and business continuity.
SUPPORT AVAILABLE	
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Building Resilience▪ ITS support pages▪ Learning Lounge▪ Peer Exchange Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪
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STANDARD 5: ROLE

Issues to consider: Role ambiguity – an employee not having a clear picture of their objectives, the scope and responsibilities of their job and their co-workers' expectations of them, role conflict e.g. conflicting demands

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
<p>Staff indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities, and that of their colleagues</p> <p>Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.</p>	<p>Employee Voice surveys confirm that colleagues understand their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Staff retention is high and exit interviews confirm colleagues understand their role</p> <p>We ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ As far as possible, the different requirements placed upon staff are clear and compatible.▪ Staff are provided enough information to understand their role and responsibilities.▪ Systems are in place to enable staff to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS
<p>Changing priorities mean that colleagues are not clear in terms of their objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Regular University communications to be clear about priorities and changing circumstances

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexibility in terms of how work is managed in the short and medium term. ▪ Regular team connections through meetings and shared goals.
Colleagues feeling unsure what is expected of them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business continuity is supplemented by longer term goals and planning ▪ Achievements are recognised and celebrated. ▪ Recruitment Guidance and Resources ▪ Grading Review Procedures ▪ PDR/Appraisal Process ▪ Academic Permanency and Promotion • Professional Development and Training
SUPPORT AVAILABLE	
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workplace Coaching Service ▪ Professional Development programme ▪ Recognition events by role/area 	

STANDARD 6: SUPPORT

Issues to consider: Staff support – colleagues/peer support & managers, supervision – management or other, appraisal, constructive feedback & advice when things go wrong, team make up, emotional support e.g. it is acceptable to feel vulnerable and receive adequate support for individuals to feel listened to, adequate induction, individual difference e.g. staff who thrive on tight deadlines, others may need time to plan, personal issues e.g. family or domestic problems, bereavement

AIMS	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
<p>Staff indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and managers</p> <p>Processes are in place locally to respond to any individual staff concerns.</p>	<p>UoE has policies and procedures to adequately support staff</p> <p>Processes are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.</p> <p>Processes are in place to enable and encourage staff to support their colleagues.</p> <p>Staff know what support is available and how and when to access it.</p> <p>Staff know how to access the required resources to do their job</p> <p>Staff receive regular and constructive feedback</p>
POSSIBLE ISSUES	ORGANISATIONAL CONTROLS
<p>Working on campus with reduced numbers of staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support for managers to work with teams remotely ▪ Access and disability information and support ▪ Health and Safety Policies and Risk Assessment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occupational Health Services
Impact of personal issues affecting work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counselling services ▪ Support from WHSW ▪ Employee Assistance Programme ▪ People & Culture policies to support family commitments.
Impact of resources and staffing within the department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prioritisation of workload under the clear the decks approach ▪ Regular conversations with managers to identify issues early ▪ Support identified through planning round.
SUPPORTING RESOURCES	
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
<p>New staff Inductions provided at University Department and section level</p> <p>Individual needs Mandatory training on, and active support of diversity and inclusion</p> <p>Strong process for reasonable adjustment through referrals to WHSW</p> <p>Sickness Absence management training through P&C in</p>	<p>https://www.lifehack.org/articles/work/12-ways-stay-focused-and-productive-when-you-work-from-home.html</p> <p>https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/7-simple-tips-to-tackle-working-from-home/</p> <p>How to Sleep Better IAPT Webinar</p> <p>How to Cope with Stress IAPT Webinar</p> <p>Relaxation Skills IAPT Webinar</p>

<p>Structured and supported return to work system provided through WHSW</p> <p>Complaints Grievance and disciplinary procedures in place through P&C</p>	
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Document Control Panel

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