



University of Essex



# Stress Management Policy

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# Overview

The aim of this policy is to encourage colleagues to talk about work-related stress (and other aspects of stress in their life that may be impacting them), to let them know what we will do to support them, and to give information on where managers and colleagues can go for further help.

## What is Stress?

Stress can be defined as 'the adverse reaction to excessive pressure'. Pressure is often part and parcel of work and helps to keep people motivated. Excess and/or badly managed exposure to pressure can lead to stress. Members of staff who experience stress, anxiety or depression are unlikely to perform effectively. This can be costly to management and the member of staff.

We recognise that unhealthy levels of stress can affect our mental, physical, and emotional well-being, and the University wants to encourage a culture of openness and support. We understand that individuals may also be affected by issues outside of work that can increase the likelihood of them experiencing [acute or chronic stress](#).

# 1. Our Commitments

1.1 Reasonable pressure at work can be positive and motivating. However, work-related stress can occur when pressure exceeds a person's capacity to cope. The cause of work-related stress will vary between individuals. The stage at which excessive pressure leads to work-related stress will also vary between individuals.

1.2 We are committed to taking all reasonable steps to make sure that our staff's health is not put at risk because of too much pressure or excessive demands at work. In this spirit, we will work with managers and staff to achieve the below steps to minimise the risk of high stress:

- Workload is reasonable.
- Members of staff do not need to work excessive hours to get their job done.
- Individuals are given the training they need to do their job.
- Managers let individuals and teams know what's going on, especially when things might be changing.
- If an individual tells us they are experiencing symptoms of stress, we will take this seriously and carry out a stress risk assessment, take actions to reduce the workplace stressors as far as possible, and signpost to other sources of support.
- We review workforce information at regular People Landscape meetings and during the annual planning cycle so that we can be alert to any insights that may be suggestive of potential stress (e.g., absence, turnover etc.)
- We provide support and guidance/training for those with management and supervisory responsibilities, to enable them to develop their competence and support/mitigate the impact on individuals who may be experiencing stress.
- We treat any issues of bullying and harassment seriously, as we know that this can be a cause of stress – see our [Harassment and Bullying \(Zero Tolerance\) Policy](#) for more information.
- We encourage a culture of promoting health and well-being and a healthy work-life balance.
- We measure, monitor, and review the implementation of this policy to ensure it adds value and is effective.

## 2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all University of Essex colleagues. It does not matter how long you have worked at Essex or how many hours you work a week. Please be aware that this policy does not form part of your contract of employment, and we may update it at any time.

2.2 If you are (or manage) a colleague of [University of Essex Campus Services \(UECS\)](#) or [Wivenhoe House Hotel](#), please be aware that they have their own specific policies and procedures.

## 3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 **Managers** – it is essential that managers have an active role in facilitating and supporting staff to do their jobs effectively and to contribute to the success of their team and the University as a whole.

3.2 **To respond to incidents of work-related stress managers must:**

- Ensure a prompt referral to Occupational Health within two weeks of a member of staff going off with work-related stress
- Carry out a stress risk assessment for staff who have been off sick with work related stress as part of their return-to-work process; staff showing signs and symptoms of stress; and as directed by the Occupational Health service.
- Consider putting temporary adjustments in place to help an individual cope in the short-term whilst other steps are taken to remove or reduce the causes of stress. Adjustments might include relieving the individual of some work tasks, considering special leave policy, reduced hours, flexible start / finish times, a temporary change of working environment, or referral to other sources of help.
- Consider longer-term alternatives if the stress is work-related and short-term adjustments are unlikely to resolve the situation. This may involve permanent redistribution of work tasks; introducing a different working pattern via the flexible working, work to improve team cohesion; mediation; or access to personal development training, coaching or mentoring.
- Complete any additional training and development required as advised by Occupational Health.

### 3.3 To minimise the risk of work-related stress, managers must:

- Ensure good communication, particularly where there are organisational or procedural/system changes
- Ensure jobs are designed to avoid conflicting demands and that expectations and the job role are clear
- Ensure staff are trained to undertake the demands of their job and are able to contribute to decisions about how the job is done
- Ensure there are regular opportunities for feedback on performance e.g. regular one-to-one meetings and team meetings
- Identify or respond to issues of concern promptly and seek constructive solutions
- Complete any additional training and development required as advised by Occupational Health
- Make use of the support and training/development resources available
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful training and development opportunities
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated
- Be aware of signs of problems and offer additional support to an individual who is experiencing signs of stress outside of work e.g. bereavement or separation
- Comply with University policies and procedures on health, safety and security
- Consider putting temporary adjustments in place to help an individual cope in the short-term whilst other steps are taken to remove or reduce the causes of stress
- Seek appropriate advice and support at an early stage if difficulties arise



3.4 **Employees** – it is important that everyone takes an active role in contributing to their own development and to the success of their department and the University as a whole, by using the resources available to carry out their role effectively.

**To minimise the risk of work-related stress to themselves and others, staff must:**

- Ensure good communication with colleagues and their manager
- Support their manager by providing appropriate information and by sharing knowledge and resources where appropriate
- Engage in discussions about their performance and act on feedback
- Raise issues of concern at an early stage and seek and participate in constructive solutions
- Make use of the support and training resources available
- Play their part in ensuring that bullying and harassment is not tolerated
- Comply with University employment policies and procedures on health, safety and security
- Seek appropriate advice and support at an early stage if difficulties arise. Senior Employee Relations Advisers and Occupational Health can provide advice and guidance

3.5 **People and Culture** are responsible for:

- Advising and supporting managers to effectively manage stress in the workplace
- Monitoring statistical and survey data to identify any areas of concern, and work in conjunction with the University to develop solutions to reduce potential organisational stressors
- Creating resources, training, and guidance to support the active and effective management of stress at work
- Recommending specific training and support as required
- Providing a framework for developing the skills and competencies of leaders and managers

3.6 **Workplace Health Safety and Wellbeing** should always be considered but may not always be necessary. The Senior Employee Relations Advisers and Occupational Health Advisers are available for advice and guidance. Occupational Health Advisers can advise on undertaking a stress risk assessment if it has not already been undertaken, temporary adjustments to duties or phased return to workplan and how to fill out a [Wellness Action Plan](#).

3.7 Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing are responsible for:

- Advising on supportive measures which may help resolve difficulties with stress in the workplace
- Receiving referrals to Occupational Health in the following circumstances:
  - When the management relationship with the person has become difficult or broken down
  - When the member of staff is reporting as sick, particularly if the member of staff has already been off work due to stress for two weeks or more
  - Where there are other underlying health problems which may require additional consideration and support eg anxiety and depression which may have been triggered or exacerbated by stress

3.8 **The University and its Senior Managers** are responsible for:

- Leading by example and where necessary minimising and monitoring the effects of their decisions on health and safety, including workplace stress
- Encouraging a working environment in which staff and managers are pro-active in enhancing well-being and reducing occupational stress, thereby optimising performance and impact
- Promoting a healthy and safe working environment which fosters a culture of trust, accountability and community, in which all staff treat one another with dignity and respect
- Ensuring that colleagues at all levels are aware of the steps that they can take to minimise the effects of stress on themselves and others and their personal responsibilities in this area
- Ensuring effective systems are in place to identify, measure and monitor the effects of stress on individuals and the organisation, and to establish triggers for action. Where 'hot spots' are identified, take action by ensuring action plans are implemented
- Ensuring that the Stress Policy and associated risk assessment resources are adhered to and effectively implemented with the necessary support, resources and mechanisms in place



## 4. Talking about stress

4.1 If staff are experiencing stress, we want them to tell us so we can help to do something about it. Stress can happen to anyone, and we know that it can affect people differently. So, we want to encourage staff to talk to their manager about things (either at their next one-to-one or sooner if needed), so they can give the support needed. There are other sources of support highlighted later in this resource. We know that stress is not always work-related, but we will try to understand and support individuals with things going on outside of work as well.

4.2 If you are a manager and want help to reach out and get conversations started, [HSE's Talking Toolkit](#) (.pdf) can help kickstart simple, practical conversations with team members, identify any issues and tackle them.

4.3 We encourage staff to discuss any issues with their immediate manager. They can also raise matters relating to stress at work through their Faculty Manager, Head of Department or Section where these are not their immediate line manager, a Trade Union Safety Representative, Occupational Health or the Employee Relations Advisory Team in People and Culture.

## 5. Stress Management Standards

5.1 Our approach to managing work-related stress draws upon the research and guidance from the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Management Standards for Stress. These standards identify six areas of risk ('stressors') and establish a framework for employers to use to tackle work-related stress.

- **Demands:** Issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Change:** how large or small organisational change is managed or communicated
- **Relationships:** such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict
- **Support:** including encouragement, sponsorship and resources
- **Control:** how much say teams have over the way they do their work
- **Role:** how people understand where their role fit in the organisation

We have [stress management guidance for line managers](#) available, including the [HSE stress management competency indicator](#) tool. You may find this helpful in assessing your effectiveness at preventing and reducing stress in your team, and in identifying your developmental needs, and you may also want to look at the [Management Development programme](#) for relevant training opportunities.

# 6. Stress risk assessment

6.1 One of the measures that we may take is to carry out a stress risk assessment with the member of staff. This may be something that we initiate if we have any concerns that stress may be impacting an individual, or they may request for this to be undertaken. In either situation we will ensure that the member of staff is actively involved.

6.2 A stress risk assessment is simply a careful look at what in a workplace could cause you to experience work-related stress, so that we can identify any further actions that could be taken to reduce their impact and mitigate them causing stress. It focuses on the six areas that could contribute to work-related stress but can be tailored to the member of staff as not all areas may be an issue - '(demands, relationships, control, change, support and role). The risk assessment also looks at support needs, training, communication and management. Once reasonable steps to minimise or remove the stressors have been agreed, they should be recorded, either informally or using a [Wellness Action Plan](#). Actions should be reviewed regularly with the member of staff until the situation is resolved or they are feeling less stressed.

6.3 A copy of the [Stress Risk Assessment form](#) (.docx) is available, and there is also [guidance available](#) for managers/colleagues to help use the risk assessment. We have also created the [Perceived Stress Assessment Tool](#) (.docx), and the [Stressor Assessment Tool](#) (.docx), which are designed to provide an overview of your stress risks based on your traits and behaviours, which may be helpful in building awareness so that you can take steps to mitigate stress becoming an issue. Members of staff can self-assess and do not need to ask for this to be undertaken.

6.4 Access to early intervention and professional help is key to managing our stress levels and preventing it getting to dangerous levels of breakdown and burnout. Tackling the root causes is a good place to start, for mind and body.

# 7. Stress and other factors

7.1 We understand that stress in the workplace can sometimes be caused by or affected by other experiences, including family circumstances, health, or financial worries. If an individual is struggling to cope, this may affect how they respond to workplace stressors and vice-versa. It is up to them how much they share with their manager but alerting their manager may make it easier for support to be provided, and understanding its potential impact will be important for identifying actions to help address or mitigate potential stress.

7.2 While stress is not a medical condition, we know it can be closely linked to mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. For more information about our support for colleagues experiencing mental health issues see our [mental health resources](#). You can also find more information about our [Dedicated Mental Health First Aiders](#). In addition, [HSE's Working Minds campaign](#) has specific advice and tools to help staff and managers to promote and encourage good mental health and support each other. It's based on five simple steps of risk assessment:

- reach out and have the conversations
- recognise the signs of stress
- respond to any risks identified
- reflect on what's happened
- make it routine

# 8. Supporting Resources

In this section we provide links to resources and support that we provide for colleagues (and guidance for managers) for different issues that may be of relevance to stress at work.

8.1 We have several [staff forums and networks](#) that can provide a source of support for individuals who may be facing challenges at or outside of work, or for individuals who just want to connect with colleagues who may have experiences in common. It can be incredibly valuable having colleagues on hand who can empathise with your experiences and provide practical advice and support, which can be a big help in preventing employees from feeling isolated during difficult moments.

8.2 We have an [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) in place, delivered by a professional and independent provider who offer a range of confidential guidance and support for a variety of issues, including financial and family matters.

8.3 Workplace Health Safety and Wellbeing offer information resources, short workshops and courses, online self-study courses, accreditations and qualifications. These can all be accessed through the [Staff Directory](#) and/or the [Wellbeing Directory](#). Examples include:

- **Mental Health First Aid** - is an educational course which teaches people how to identify, understand and help a person who may be developing a mental health issue. In the same way as we learn physical first aid, Mental Health First Aid teaches you how to recognise those crucial warning signs of mental ill health. This is valuable for both professional and personal development.
- **Managers Mental Health awareness training** can be completed at a time that suits you and will give you the skills and confidence to support colleagues and yourself. It is a useful “first step” for one of our other in-house or MHFA England training sessions.
- **Dedicated Staff Mental Health First Aiders.** We have formed the Dedicated Mental Health First Aiders; a network who have completed the MHFA course and have volunteered to offer confidential and informal support to staff on mental health matters. Whether it is meeting with a Supporter on Zoom or going for a lunchtime walk with them on campus, the network will provide a non-judgemental, confidential listening ear as well as providing suggestions of other relevant support services, based on the principles of Mental Health First Aid. To contact a MHFA, search ‘dedicated mental health first aider’ in the Staff Directory
- **Suicide First Aid** - The Suicide First Aid through Understanding Suicide Intervention course gives learners the knowledge and tools to understand that suicide is one of the most preventable deaths and some basic skills can help someone with thoughts of suicide stay safe from their thoughts and stay alive.
- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy** - Our Occupational Health team may advise you that you may benefit from CBT. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave. It's most commonly used to treat anxiety and

depression but can be useful for other mental and physical health problems. A referral via OH will require referral from your manager but will enable you attend up to six sessions. Any member of staff can also book a one-off session of CBT without a referral be emailing [ohquery@essex.ac.uk](mailto:ohquery@essex.ac.uk).

- **Silver Cloud** uses clinically proven tools based on CBT techniques to support staff with a range of issues. This is accessible any time online and is confidential. The areas covered by Silver Cloud include:

Wellbeing	Mental Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Positive Body Image</li> <li>■ Sleep</li> <li>■ Resilience</li> <li>■ COVID-19</li> <li>■ Mindfulness</li> <li>■ Money Worries</li> <li>■ Alcohol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Stress</li> <li>■ Perinatal Wellbeing</li> <li>■ Depression</li> <li>■ Panic</li> <li>■ Depression &amp; Anxiety</li> <li>■ Anxiety</li> </ul>

- **HealthHero** - an independent telephone Employee Assistance Programme offering a wide range of support including:
  - A counselling service offering an ad-hoc single session of support. They can offer self-care strategies, practical advice, and an onward referral
  - Legal Advice on your legal rights including consumer rights, motoring law, criminal law, family law, county court judgements, housing and tenancy, will and probate
  - Money and Debt support
  - Advice on Health and Wellbeing including general health concerns, sleep, diet, addictions, illness and living with a medical condition
  - Support and guidance to managers when dealing people management issues.
  - They can be reached by calling 0800 358 4858. They also offer an online portal providing a wealth of wellbeing resources
- **Able Futures** - a government service created to help you manage your mental health at work offering nine months advice and guidance from a mental health specialist who can help you

learn coping mechanisms, build resilience, access therapy or work with us to make adjustments to help your mental health at work.

- **Health Checks** – run by an NHS nurse, who checks blood pressure, height, weight, body mass index and waist measurement. For those over 40. A cholesterol check and blood glucose test may be provided. The nurse also provides advice on living a healthier lifestyle.

## 9. Related university policies and procedures

- [Equality, diversity, and inclusion policy](#)
- [Grievance Procedure](#)
- [Bullying and Harassment: Our Zero Tolerance Approach](#)



# 10. Equality Statement

10.1 We are committed to meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which requires the University show no discrimination as required by law on account of age, disability, gender reassignment\*, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The University will always act lawfully and this may include taking action to support people with particular protected characteristics, including disability and sex. In addition to its obligations under the EA, the University shall adopt policies, practices, and procedures that define expected standards of behaviour and specify any additional characteristics, beyond those required by law, to which protection is provided, for example, in relation to political belief, social background and refugee status.

\*The University's policies, practices and procedures specifically extend to all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

10.2 Our [Equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#) sets out our approach, in the context of our institutional mission, values and objectives as set out in our Strategic Plan, our People Supporting Strategy, our Education and Research Strategies and equalities legislation.

# 11. Monitoring

11.1 People, Culture and Inclusion Advisory Group ensures legal compliance and monitor on behalf of USG, the implementation of the University's people strategies, policies and practices, including those relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); promote dissemination of good people management practice throughout the University and draw to the attention of USG any areas of concern requiring attention.

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