Guidance Notes for Management – Not part of policy document.

Risk Assessment of stress at work

This guidance note provides advice on how to conduct a risk assessment of stress at work in 5 clear stages using the risk assessment form at the end of this section.

The 5 steps to risk assessment are:

- Identify the hazards
- Decide 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
- Review the assessment over time

Identify the Hazards

The key work related factors with potential to cause stress related illness (the risk) in the company are:

a.   Demands of the job
b.   Control of work environment
c.   Support
d.   Relationships within the workplace
e.   Role within organisation
f.   Management of change

Decide who might be harmed and how

Some people may be more vulnerable to developing work related stress illness than others. In particular those who:

- have a history of significant or physical health problems
- have been absent work due to work-related stress or difficulties with coping in the past
- have personal difficulties which may be unrelated to work
- are inexperienced in their role
- are of a personality type which tends towards over work or being unable to cope with pressure.

You may be aware of some of these factors which will be handled sensitively and in confidence.

Risk Assessment Example Template: for guidance on evaluating level of risk.
This table lists some examples of the action planning to reduce the risk of work related stress problems.

A. DEMANDS OF THE JOB	
▪ Too little time for task ▪ Inadequate staffing	Prioritise tasks Look at job design and working practices. Cut out unnecessary work Try to give warning of urgent or important jobs to enable individuals to plan their work.
▪ Too much training for the job ▪ Too little training for the job ▪ Over promotion ▪ Skills not recognised –promotion prospects not fulfilled	Make sure individuals are matched to jobs. Analyse skills alongside the task. Provide training for those who need more e.g. when introducing new technology. Review and consider selection, skill criteria, job summaries, training and supervision Career planning discussion, training needs evaluation. Monitor workplace policies in practice: discrimination
▪ Boring or repetitive work ▪ Too little to do	Job enrichment/ job rotation Assess work station and work practice for possible solutions Consider changing the way jobs are done by moving people between jobs, giving individuals more responsibility, increasing the scope of the job, increasing the variety of tasks, giving a group of workers greater responsibility for effective performance of the group

▪ Inadequate resources for task	Analyse requirements for any project/task:
	    ▪ Equipment/ tools
	    ▪ staffing
	    ▪ funds

▪ Employees experiencing excessive workloads ▪ Employees working under excessive pressure	Review workload and demands regularly and as an integral part of the appraisal and performance management process. Support staff in planning their work. Try to establish what aspects of their job they find challenging. Redistribute work or set different work priorities if not coping. Check that holiday leave is being taken and staff needs are being accommodated.

B. CONTROL OF WORK ENVIROMENT	
• Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work	Encourage a healthy work-life balance. Ensure staff take all their allocated holiday allowance and distribute it fairly across the year.
• Rigid work patterns • Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year • Lack of control over work	Try to provide some scope for varying working conditions and flexible work schedules (e.g. flexible working hours, working from home), and the scope for people to influence the way their jobs are done.
• Conflicting work demands	Set realistic deadlines for tasks. Take into account that everyone is different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that helps them work best and using their talents. Be clear about tasks required
The physical working environment • poor temperature control • noise • lack of facilities for rest/breaks • poor lighting • poor ventilation	Make sure workplace hazards are properly controlled. Undertake risk assessments of work space and significant tasks
The psychological working environment • threat of aggression or violence • verbal abuse • poor management practices	Assess risks, implement controls including investigation of complaints and appropriate training
C. SUPPORT	
• return to work system • sickness and absence mgmt	Policies and systems in place, monitored and consistently applied Measure trends and changes Investigate variations
• inductions	New staff properly inducted, existing staff transferring or promoted or returning to work after long absence also to be inducted Special attention for young people as required Mentoring roles OH/HR support DDA adjustments in place, reviewed and checked
• post disciplinary, grievance or suspension	Support staff as appropriate and in line with ACAS good practice.

D. WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS	
▪ Poor relationships with others ▪ Staff complaints or rising absence trends	Investigate causal factors Provide training in interpersonal skills, non discriminatory rules and workplace conduct standards. Discuss the problem openly with individuals Follow complaint procedures
▪ Bullying or confrontational communication styles	Encourage constructive and positive communications between staff. Managers should discuss and address bullying and/or confrontational communication styles with members of staff who display these behaviours. Consider training and policy guidance.
▪ Bullying, racial or sexual harassment	Set up effective systems to prevent bullying and harassment. Ensure staff are aware of the Company's Dignity at Work Policy which covers equal opportunities, stress problems, harassment etc., and that they know how to get support or make a complaint. Practise by example and make it clear that these behaviours are not acceptable in your team. Provide details of any empirical evidence: absence trends, complaints etc.
▪ Lack of support or fear culture within from management and co-workers.	Support and encourage staff, protect them from reprisals. Consider introducing a mentoring and counselling scheme. Investigate and take action as appropriate as soon as possible.

E. ROLE WITHIN ORGANISATION	
▪ clear lines of accountability and responsibility	Ensure good communication systems exist and are in place from top to bottom. Management standards set to ensure best practice in: clarity of job function, responsibility for staff management and welfare. Open door policy in management to ensure that worried staff know their problems will be handled sensitively and at the appropriate level of management.
▪ Lack of communication and consultation	Communicate clear business objectives, good communication and close employee involvement, particularly during periods of change or high pressure.
▪ A culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems ▪ Failure to celebrate success	Be honest, set a good example, and listen to and respect others. Acknowledge and reward successes.
▪ A culture that considers stress a sign of weakness	Approachable management– that wants to know about problems and will try to help to resolve.
▪ An expectation that people will regularly work excessively long hours or take work home with them.	Avoid working excessively long hours. Lead by example. Schedule work in a way that allows recovery time after unavoidable busy periods
MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE	
▪ Fears about job security ▪ Poor communication -uncertainty about what is happening ▪ Not enough time allowed to implement change ▪ Inexperience/fear of new technology ▪ Lack of skills for new tasks ▪ Not enough resource allocated for change process ▪ Dysfunctional teams	▪ Provide effective support for staff throughout the process. ▪ Consult with staff likely to be involved in a change management programme – fear and uncertainty can lead to increased anxiety, unfounded gossip, poor employment relationships and increased absence. ▪ Getting together as a team can help people feel less isolated with their concerns ▪ Ensure effective two way communication throughout process – knowing exactly what is going to happen when can help people feel less anxious about a change ▪ Consider training needs – do people have the tools and skills to effect change? ▪ Consider environmental factors. ▪ Consider changes in group dynamics – a small change e.g. a different positioning of desks can have a major impact on communication and work relationships