

Group policies – Workplace policies

Our stress management policy

We are committed to maintaining a working environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle.

We recognise that we have a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that employees' health is not placed at risk through excessive and/or sustained levels of stress at work. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to assess the nature and extent of risks which may contribute to unacceptable levels of stress within the workplace and to implement and maintain suitable measures to control them.

Definition and causes

It is important to be aware that stress is a state and not an illness. The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them".

Workplace demands that lead to stress can include:

- Excessive targets and workloads
- Insufficient resources
- Long working hours
- Rapid change
- Conflicting priorities
- Uncertainty or insecurity
- Poor communication
- Lack of involvement
- Inappropriate management style
- Lack of control
- Inability to effectively monitor and manage workload.

Symptoms of stress

Common symptoms of stress include:

- Poor or erratic time keeping
- Persistent short term absenteeism
- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Increased irritability, anxiety or depression
- Lack of concentration
- Reduced output or productivity.

Other issues may be:

- A general increase in disciplinary or employee relations issues
- Increasing staff turnover
- Increased error rates
- An overall reduction in the team's output or productivity.

As well as impacting on individuals and teams, these outcomes may have a wider adverse effect on efficiency and performance.

Risk assessment

A stress risk assessment forms part of our wider health and safety risk assessment process, which is based on the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards. We also use workplace studies, staff surveys and consultation processes to identify areas of the business where workplace stress is an issue.

Organisational framework

The management framework we use to maintain a healthy and effective working environment includes:

- Clearly defined business strategy and objectives
- Organisational structure which supports the needs of the business plan
- Appropriate framework for internal and external communications
- Encouragement of employee involvement
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Clear contractual terms and conditions of employment
- Regular appraisal and feedback on employee performance
- Provision of relevant training and development opportunities
- Effective management of change.

Management responsibilities

All levels of management have a responsibility to ensure that they deal with staff in a fair and consistent manner.

In particular, management is responsible for:

- Organising work tasks and jobs to ensure that potential stress is minimised
- Ensuring that employees have the skills, resources and training to do their jobs properly
- Setting realistic and achievable performance targets for both individuals and teams
- Encouraging ideas and two-way communication, especially on issues which directly impact upon employees at work
- Ensuring that employee performance is regularly appraised and that appropriate and constructive feedback is given
- Maintaining an open management style that encourages employees to discuss issues affecting their work.

Group policies – Workplace policies

Our stress management policy cont.

Where ongoing problems are identified which cannot be resolved locally, such as excessive hours, persistent tension and conflict or consistently reduced productivity, managers are expected to seek appropriate advice and guidance from HR or, where appropriate, occupational health.

Departmental responsibilities and support

HR, health and safety, occupational health and management development all have a role to play in providing and implementing effective procedures and giving suitable advice and guidance to managers and employees.

These include:

- Health and safety policy and risk assessment
- Discipline and grievance procedures
- Absence management procedures
- Appropriate job and organisational design
- Support on reviewing working practices
- Recruitment and selection procedures
- Appraisal, training and development opportunities
- Policy on equal opportunities and bullying/harassment
- Communications framework
- Monitoring of the working environment and physical working conditions.

HR is responsible for monitoring specific organisational data and taking action as necessary in conjunction with appropriate line management. Depending on the business area, such data may include:

- Labour turnover and stability data
- Sickness and absence data
- Feedback from exit interviews
- Feedback from disciplinary or grievance interviews
- Employee survey data
- Corporate social responsibility data.

As far as we can within reason, we support any employees who are suffering from stress-related ill-health or absence to maintain standards of performance at work or facilitate their return to work following absence. This may include referral to specialist counselling.

Employees

In addition to the above, our employees have a responsibility to manage their time at work effectively and raise any issues in the workplace that may lead to stress at the earliest opportunity.

We encourage employees to discuss issues of stress with their line manager or HR before they get out of control. Our equal opportunities policy and bullying and harassment policy provide further information.

In addition, management are encouraged to treat all non-work related matters affecting performance at work sympathetically, constructively and confidentially.