HR Managers and Line Mangers guidance on individual work-related stress risk assessment

University of BRISTOL

Safety and Health Services

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2. Introduction

Where a member of staff indicates that they may be experiencing work-related stress or following a period of absence due to work-related stress, an individual stress risk assessment can be undertaken. Line managers can use the individual risk assessment template outlined below as a guide to structuring their discussions with their members of staff. The template is simply a guide of suggested questions that can be used to identify concerns. The template is formulated around the six workplace work-related stressors (as specified in the Health and Safety Executive's management standard for work-related stress) and has space for additional questions to be added that might be useful or more appropriate to an individual's circumstances.

Any meeting to carry out an individual work-related stress risk assessment should be arranged by the line manager and involve the staff member and their representative if appropriate. Advice on this should be obtained through the HR manager. Line managers should schedule regular follow-up meetings with the staff member following the completion of an individual assessment to monitor and discuss any support mechanisms that were put into practice.

The flow diagram below outlines the procedure for both members of staff that have indicated that they are experiencing work-related stress symptoms or where the line manager has identified issues and for those individuals whose long-term sick leave has been attributed to work-related stress. Line managers are advised to seek advice from their HR Manager who will be able to provide further guidance.

3. Definition and symptoms of stress

Work related stress is distinct from reasonable pressure and challenges at work. In the context of the workplace the Health and Safety Executive 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 excessive pressure leads to work-related stress will vary between individuals as each person has different tolerance levels. Also, people will be affected by non-work related issues which may lead them to react to work pressures adversely.

Signs of stress in individuals

If a member of a team is suffering from some of the following symptoms it may indicate that they are feeling the effects of stress.

Emotional symptoms:
- negative or depressive feeling
- disappointment with yourself
- increased emotional reactions - more tearful or sensitive or aggressive
- loneliness, withdrawn
- loss of motivation commitment and confidence
- mood swings (not behavioural).

Mental:
- confusion, indecision
- difficulty concentrating
- poor memory.

Changes from your normal behaviour:
- changes in eating habits
- increased smoking, drinking or drug taking 'to cope'
- mood swings effecting your behaviour
- changes in sleep patterns
- twitchy, nervous behaviour
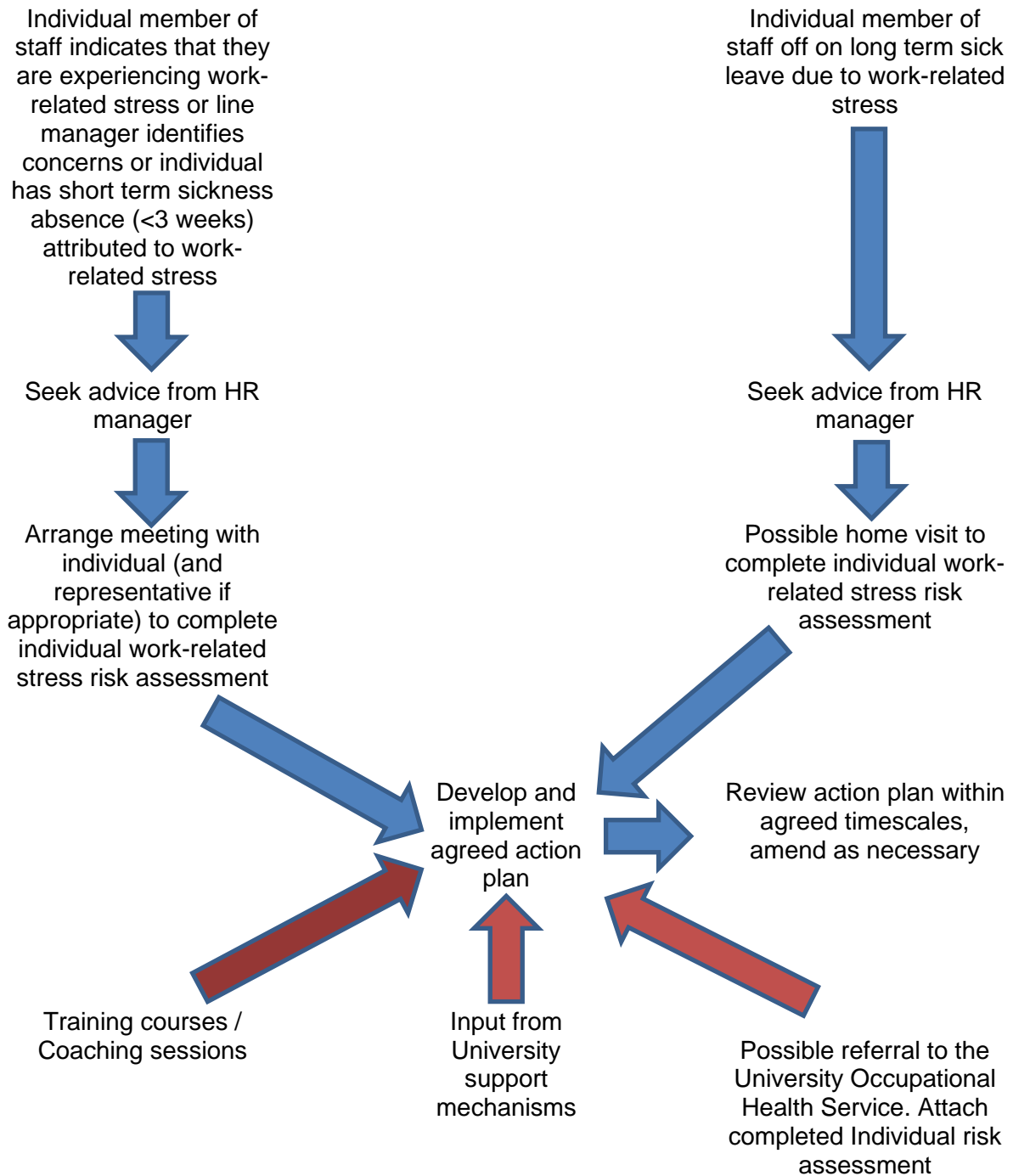- changes in attendance such as arriving later or taking more time off.

Please note these are indicators of behaviour of those experiencing stress. They may also be indicative of other conditions.

Signs of stress in a group:
- disputes and disaffection within the group
- increase in staff turnover
- increase in complaints and grievances
- increased sickness absence
- increased reports of stress
- difficulty in attracting new staff
- poor performance
- customer dissatisfaction or complaints.

It is not up to the line manager to diagnose work-related stress. If you are concerned about a person, recommend they see their GP. The member of staff and manager are simply required to recognise that behaviours have changed, be aware that something is wrong and take prompt action. Take care not to over react to small changes in behaviour – action is needed when these behavioural changes continue. Use the symptoms above (both individual and group) as clues.

4.   Flow diagram for line manager's action

Individual member of staff indicates that they are experiencing work-related stress or line manager identifies concerns or individual has short term sickness absence (<3 weeks) attributed to work-related stress

Individual member of staff off on long term sick leave due to work-related stress

Seek advice from HR manager

Seek advice from HR manager

Arrange meeting with individual (and representative if appropriate) to complete individual work-related stress risk assessment

Possible home visit to complete individual work-related stress risk assessment

Develop and implement agreed action plan

Review action plan within agreed timescales, amend as necessary

Training courses / Coaching sessions

Input from University support mechanisms

Possible referral to the University Occupational Health Service. Attach completed Individual risk assessment

5. Individual work-related stress risk assessment and action plan template

University of BRISTOL	**University Of Bristol** **Individual work-related stress risk assessment**	
	School/Section: **Individual:** **Risk assessment completed by:** **Date:**	
Individual Symptoms and Sickness Patterns (if appropriate e.g. changes in sleeping patterns, feeling more anxious than normal, feeling low and/or uptight and any physical symptoms)		
Potential work-related stressors identified	**Individual Concerns**	**Managers Comments**
Demands		
What causes the individual to feel under unnecessary pressure?		
Are priorities clarified? Reflect on JD, if too generic ask individual to map out key aspects of the role		
Have deadlines been realistic and agreed?		
Does the individual have appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake the tasks?		

Does the individual have sufficient resources?		
Does the individual feel that the work is boring or repetitive?		
Is the individual able to take sufficient breaks?		
Has the individual had to work very intensively?		
Control		
Is there clarity of who does what in the team?		
Has the manager provided enough guidance and support?		
Is there opportunity to develop skills?		
Does the individual feel they need more control over working patterns or the way that they carry out tasks?		
Support		
Is the level of communication appropriate with the manager, one-to-one meetings etc?		
Does the individual feel they are given supportive feedback on their work?		
Does the individual feel further team support would be helpful?		

Are there any external pressures that further support can be offered?		
Is there further training and development that the individual requires?		
Relationships		
Are there any issues or tensions with the team including any unacceptable workplace behaviours?		
Is a supportive team atmosphere and are dynamics between the team are good?		
Is the individual aware of the University support mechanisms available, Staff Counselling Service, Staff Mediation, Dignity at Work Advisors, the Occupational Health Service?		
Role		
Does the individual believe that they have been properly inducted into the role?		
Does the individual understand the key aspects of their role?		
Is there a clear reporting structure?		

Are the standards expected of individuals clearly outlined?		
Are there demands placed upon the individual that are not in line with the role?		
Are the goals and objectives clear for the team?		
Change		
Has the individual has been given opportunity to comment on change?		
Does the individual feel that they have been fully supported through change?		
Has the individual been supported through change by the team?		
Does the individual feel that further information or support is required and aware of support mechanisms?		
Other stressors		
Does the individual have other issues that might be affecting their work?		

Factors outside work

This list of questions has mainly focused on factors at work. However, there may be factors outside work, for example in your family life, which may have contributed to or added to the pressures at work. These may have made it harder to cope with demands at work that you would

normally be able to cope with. You may want to share these issues with your line manager – they may be able to help at work. If you do not feel happy telling your manager about these things, is there anyone else you can speak to such as your HR manager?

Action Plan				
Ref No	**Agreed actions**	**By Whom**	**By When**	**Review date or completed**

		Date
Signature individual		
Signature line manager		