

Work-related stress

Guidance on completing a preventative departmental/team risk assessment

Introduction

This guidance is designed to help managers complete a preventative work-related stress risk assessment. The assessment can cover large or small groups of staff within a department or team.

We can all feel stressed at times, often this is the result of factors in both our personal and working lives. The process outlined in this guidance will help you identify issues causing work-related stress and practical steps that can be taken to tackle it.

Visit the [support and wellbeing services](#) website for links to a range of internal and external resources on work-related stress and general wellbeing.

To find out more about risk assessments, please view the [Safety and Health Services risk assessment guidance](#).

Please note: there is a [separate process](#) for *individuals* experiencing work-related stress which includes an individual action plan.

Definition

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as:

'... the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.'

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

Stress is not a medical diagnosis. However, where stress is prolonged, it can lead to both physical and psychological damage including anxiety and depression.

Work-related stress can also aggravate an existing mental health problem, making it harder to control.

According to [HSE data](#) the most significant cause of work-related ill health in the UK is stress, depression or anxiety.

Overview

There are four main stages to completing a work-related stress risk assessment:

Gather information
about key stressors for
your area/team

Complete the template risk
assessment, adding local
controls

Complete the
action plan

Review the risk assessment
and action plan regularly

Completing the risk assessment and action plan

Step one: Gather information and data on key stressors for your area/team

Before you start, it's helpful to gather the following types of information:

- exit interviews
- local action plan for your area from the most recent staff survey
- most recent staff survey results for your area (if available)
- notes from team meetings where stress has been discussed
- information from 1 to 1 conversations
- number of referrals to the University's Occupational Health Service
- staff absence data
- staff reviews.

Step two: Complete the risk assessment adding in local control measure specific to your team

Use the partially completed risk assessment template, which includes organisational-level control measures, and add your own more specific local control measures.

Local control measures to help manage risk could include things like team away days, flexible working, regular team meetings or an agreed process if someone is experiencing potential work-related stress.

You can view the full list of possible control measures at the end of this guidance. Select and add them to your risk assessment. You can also add your own controls that are not included in the list.

The risk assessment template considers each of the six areas of risk from the HSE's management standards in turn. They are:



Demands: issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment



Change: how large or small organisational change is managed and 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 fits in the organisation

Step three: Complete the action plan

Once your risk assessment is complete, think about what changes are needed. Do you need to introduce extra control measures? Add these to your action plan.

Prioritise the areas you feel have a higher level of risk; focusing on these will have the greatest impact.

Both the risk assessment and action plan should be discussed with the team being assessed, as they may be able to offer valuable insights and suggestions for additional controls or the actions required.

Step four: Review the risk assessment and action plan

We recommend that you review your risk assessment every 12 months. However, some circumstances will require a review sooner. These could include:

- increasing numbers of staff experiencing work-related stress
- increasing staff absence
- staff survey results indicating concern or an area requiring investigation
- when the team will experience, or has experienced, significant change.

Department/team work-related stress risk assessment and action plan (preventative)					
Area covered: Date completed: Completed by:					
Hazards	Control measures in place	Action plan	Person responsible	Target date	Done
Demands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload demands in relation to the agreed hours of work are not adequate or achievable • Competency, where skills and abilities are not matched to the job demands. • Working patterns like shifts, tight deadlines, or excessive hours expected • Physical environment or violence and concerns not addressed 	Controls: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload allocation principles (academic staff) • Working Time Regulations Guidance for Managers (for staff grades A-I) • UoB workload agreement grade J+ • Staff review process • Flexible working policy • Email charter in place and staff encouraged to adopt • Use of video conferencing tools encouraged • Planned maintenance and reporting processes for maintenance issues • Risk assessment processes in place to manage risks associated with work activities 				

	<p><i>Add your own local controls relating to demands.</i></p>				
<p>Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and reasons changes are not understood • Consultation on changes and opportunities for employees to influence proposals • Impact of changes to jobs not understood • Timescales not clear so staff unaware of timeline of changes 	<p>Controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UoB Change Management team provide support and advice • UoB communications systems and processes in place (e.g., internet and emails) <p><i>Add your own local controls relating to change.</i></p>				
<p>Relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unacceptable behaviour risking conflict, unfairness and low morale • Lack of sharing information reducing collaboration and colleague support 	<p>Controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable workplace behaviour policy • Processes in place for staff to raise concerns both formally and informally (report and support webpage) • Network of Acceptable Workplace Advisers • Reporting system for unacceptable behaviours • Professional behaviours • Equality and diversity training 				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of video conferencing tools encouraged <p><i>Add your own local controls relating to relationships.</i></p>				
<p>Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate support from colleagues • Inadequate support from managers • Employees unaware of support available, how or when to access it • Employees do not know how to access resources required to do their job • Regular and constructive feedback not received 	<p>Controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff mental health and wellbeing strategy and action plan • Range of support and advice from HR website • Regular communications to all staff • Employee Assistance Programme • Staff review process • Network of Acceptable Workplace Advisers • Network of Local Mental Health Champions • Range of staff support networks available • Range of training available from Staff Development • Staff Counselling Service • Occupational Health Service • Wellbeing programme in place including events, training and online resources <p><i>Add your own local controls relating to support.</i></p>				

<p>Control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate pace of work, including when breaks are taken • Employees not encouraged to use their skills and initiative • Employees not encouraged to develop new skills and undertake new or challenging work • Employees not consulted over their work patterns 	<p>Controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working policy • Staff surveys carried out and action plans developed • Staff review process in place <p><i>Add your own local controls relating to control.</i></p>				
<p>Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting requirements placed on employees. • Job role and responsibilities not understood • Unclear requirements placed upon employees 	<p>Controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff review process • Induction training for all new staff • HR job description template and advice • Range of training available from staff development to support staff in their role <p><i>Add your own local controls relating to role.</i></p>				

List of possible control measures

You can also include control measures that are not listed.



Risk assessment: Add controls that are already being implemented



Action plan: Add controls not yet in place

Demands

- One-to-one meetings held [*frequency*] where outcomes are agreed and recorded.
- Guidance over prioritisation of tasks provided.
- Risk assessments for work activities are in place and reviewed annually and when required.
- Staff training/coaching/supervision in place to ensure that staff are competent in their role.
- Team meetings held regularly [*frequency*].

Change

- Adequate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones, staff reviews and team meetings).
- Ensure adequate employee consultation on changes (reasons, benefits and timescales) and staff provided with opportunities to influence proposals.
- Employees reminded by their line managers how to access relevant support during change.
- Trade Union representatives and staff representatives consulted on possible change.
- Staff training as necessary.

Relationships

- Adequate communication mechanisms in place, operating effectively (individual or team meetings).
- Equality and Diversity Training completed by all members of staff as part of their induction and reviewed as appropriate.
- Management training available through Staff Development.
- Team away days, celebrations and socials organised [*provide details of what, when, etc*].

Support

- Effective one-to-ones, group team meetings and staff review process in place
- Employees are reminded regularly what support is available and how to access it (Staff Counselling, HR, Occupational Health Service, Sports Centre, etc).
- Managers advised to provide regular and constructive feedback on pieces of work.
- Reference to appropriate existing policies and procedures within the University
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.
- Training available using Staff Development for managers and individuals.

Control

- Appropriate communication mechanisms in place for both the individual and team.
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.

- Flexible working patterns considered where possible.
- One-to-one meetings to clarify individual workloads and agree timetables.
- Review of work timescales agreed and followed.
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.
- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work.

Role

- Clear team structures in place.
- Ensure appropriate communication mechanisms are in place and operating effectively (individual one to ones, staff reviews and team meetings).
- Induction process in place that is signed off by the individual and their line manager.
- Mechanisms in place to update any job description when appointing a new member of staff to that role or when there are significant changes to the role.
- Communicate team or department targets / objectives to help clarify individual and unit roles.

Summary

Remember to:

1. involve the team in developing the risk assessment and action plan,
2. communicate the risk assessment and action plan once complete, and
3. review the risk assessment and action plan in 12 months (or sooner).

Contact [Safety and Health Services](#) if you need further advice: bristol-safety@bris.ac.uk.