

# Work-related stress policy



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## 1. Introduction

An employee's mental and physical health can be affected by a number of factors which may or may not be work-related. Work-related stress is a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence and staff turnover. Work-related stress also has a negative impact on individual teams and the organisation as a whole.

This policy is also accompanied by two separate guidance documents:

1. Carrying out a preventative team/departmental work-related stress [risk assessment and action plan](#).
2. Dealing with individual cases through a [work-related stress individual action plan](#).

The University's approach to managing work-related stress is based on the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) [management standards for work-related stress](#). These standards identify six areas of risk and establish a framework for employers to use to tackle work-related stress.

The six areas of risk identified by the HSE's management standards 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

Stress is one aspect of overall mental health and is not a medically diagnosed condition itself. Where stress is prolonged, it can lead to both physical and psychological ill health including anxiety and depression. Stress can also aggravate an existing mental health problem, making it harder to control.

Stress can however be tackled by adopting a preventative approach and effectively managing the factors that can cause work-related stress.

Further information on the University's approach to mental health and wellbeing at work can be found in [Mental Health and Wellbeing: Our Staff Strategy](#).

## 2. 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.

Employees may also be affected by issues outside work that can increase the likelihood of them experiencing stress. Using an approach based on the HSE's

management standards can be helpful in these circumstances to identify the workplace aspects of any stress and the appropriate actions.

### 3. Policy statement

It is the policy of the University of Bristol to take all reasonable and practicable steps to safeguard the health and safety of employees while at work.

The University is committed to:

- Identifying workplace sources of stress through a process of risk assessment.
- Reducing the risk of work-related stress as far as reasonably practicable through the development of good working practices, based on the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards.
- Supporting managers, supervisors and individual employees to recognise work-related stress and the appropriate actions to take.
- Providing central and local support to employees who are experiencing work-related stress to enable them to remain in work or support them in returning to work; and
- Defining responsibilities in relation to the management of work-related stress.

### 4. Responsibilities

#### Heads of school/service

Heads of school/services are responsible for ensuring that arrangements for risk assessments are suitable and are communicated effectively, including a preventative team/departmental risk assessment for work-related stress. This risk assessment should use the Health and Safety Executive's management standard as a framework and follow the [work-related stress risk assessment guidance](#) accompanying this policy.

#### Line managers/supervisors

Line managers/supervisors have a duty to ensure that risks associated with activities undertaken are assessed, effectively managed, and controlled. They are therefore responsible for identifying, where possible, and responding appropriately to work-related stress issues within their teams. This may include:

- carrying out a preventative work-related stress risk assessment for the local area (further advice on this can be found in the [guidance on completing a preventative work-related stress risk assessment](#));
- addressing potential causes of work-related stress;
- taking appropriate action when a member of staff indicates that they may be experiencing [symptoms of work-related stress](#);
- proactively managing employee absence and gaining appropriate advice from HR.

## Employees

All employees are responsible for:

- taking reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions;
- informing their line manager if they believe that they are experiencing work-related stress or have concerns regarding other team members;
- working with their line manager to identify causes of work-related stress and possible control measures that may be put in place to manage the associated risks.

Members of staff who do not feel able to speak to their line manager, or who feel that their manager is not adequately addressing their concerns may speak directly to HR. Employees may also seek advice and support from their Trade Union representative or the Staff Counselling Service.

## 5. Useful information

### University of Bristol resources

- [Staff Mental Health Strategy](#)
- [Local work-related stress risk assessments](#): Guidance on completing a preventative team/departmental work-related stress risk assessment
- [Work-related stress individual action plan](#): Guidance for line managers and individual members of staff experiencing work-related stress
- [Staff mental health and wellbeing resources](#)
- [PositiveWorking@Bristol](#)
- [Professional Behaviours](#)
- [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion resources](#)
- Training courses available through [Develop](#)

### External resources

- [HSE's management standards](#)
- [HSE information on work-related stress](#)
- [NHS advice and resources on work-related stress](#)
- [Advice and resources from the charity Mind on work and stress](#)

Contact Safety and Health Services if you need further advice.

Website: <https://bristol.ac.uk/safety/>

Email: [bristol-safety@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:bristol-safety@bristol.ac.uk)