

# Guidance for Managing Work Related Stress within the Higher Education Sector

supporting  
partners



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# FOREWORD

This guidance on managing work related stress is being launched at the time of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic lockdown.

The pandemic has created an environment of uncertainty and has led to massive changes in working and home life. It has also provoked a wave of anxiety across large swathes of society.

Colleagues have been asked to completely change their way of working in days, they have been subject to uncertainty and in some cases had to suspend activity which is vitally important to them with no idea about when they may resume that activity. All this has happened at the same time that they have been isolated and disconnected from their normal support mechanisms.

Taking this into account, not surprisingly, this has meant that mental wellbeing and stress have been key themes in the response to the pandemic.

Through the pandemic we have learned some important lessons. We have learned that our professional networks add a tremendous amount of value at this time, facilitating the rapid dissemination of information, the generous sharing of best practice and the rapid testing and refining of ideas.

The pandemic has also taught us the importance of cross functional working, of structure, of planning and of proportionate risk based responses.

This guidance applies those same principles structure, cross functional working, planning and risk and evidence based responses.

The fact that mental wellbeing has featured large throughout the biggest health crisis for the last century underlines the changes in society and the perception of stress and mental health. We have seen stress and mental ill health move from subjects that were taboo, to the point where they are recognised as a key health concern and discussed in the mainstream media.

The team that have developed this guidance have done an exceptional job and I would like to thank them for their hard work and to commend this guidance to you.

**Professor Neil Budworth  
(BSc, MSc, FIOSH, FIIRSM, HonFFOM)  
Chair and Executive Board member of USHA**

# INTRODUCTION

The Universities Safety & Health Association represents Health & Safety professionals employed within the higher education sector. Although it initially focused on UK institutions, its' membership now incorporates international universities and it has close links with both CSHIEMA (USA) and AUSA (Australasia).

The project group who developed this guidance were:

- Cathy Day (lead author) – Director of Institutional Risk, Health & Safety at the University of Southampton.
- Selina Woolcott – Director Health, Safety & Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow.
- Paul Veevers – Director Health & Safety Services at the University of Leeds.
- Monica Kanwar – Director for Health, Safety & Sustainability at the University of Hertfordshire.

This guidance has been produced for those within each higher educational institution who have a responsibility for the mental health of their employees. This includes the governing body, the executive team, senior managers, line managers and those who have a professional role to play.

The guidance suggests actions for each tier of the institution and identifies the role and support they can expect from their professional advisors. These actions are colour-coded and matched to plan, do, check, act to make them as easy as possible to follow.

This guidance, produced by USHA, is therefore aimed specifically at enabling universities to support their staff but it uses principles which could just as easily support the student experience and thus helps to provide a holistic approach.

**Cathy Day**  
**(BSc Hons, MSc, APDMS, Dip NEBOSH, F.ISRM, CMIOSH, CMIRM)**  
**Chair of the Stress Management Guidance Project Group**  
**Past-Chair and Executive Board member of USHA**

# BACKGROUND

According to a report by the Health & Safety Executive in 2018, entitled *'Work related stress depression or anxiety statistics in Great Britain, 2018'* the Labour Force Survey identified 595,000 workers suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing) in 2017/18 which equated to 15.4 million working days lost and a prevalence rate of 1,800 per 100,000 workers. The Labour Force Survey were further quoted in the report as highlighting those industries with a higher than average absence rate of stress, depression or anxiety during the period of 2015/16–2017/18 (when collated together). The highest on the list was the education sector at over 2,000 per 100,000 workers. In the same report, stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 44% of all work-related ill health cases and 57% of all working days lost due to ill health in 2017/18.

According to the Higher Education survey 2018–19 produced by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), there was a small increase in the average working days lost from 6 days in 2017–18 to 6.2 days in 2018–19 for the higher education sector. The primary reason for days lost was mental health, which accounted for 25.6% of days lost and was the top reason for long-term absence. Half of mental health-related absence was reported to be attributable to stress and up to a third of that was work related.

According to UCEA the average cost of sickness absence per employee based on 2018-19 data was £1,043.00, a slight increase from the previous year (£996.00) excluding on-costs and back-filling. The estimated cost of sickness absence to the sector was £447 million in 2018-19, or 2.2% of total staff expenditure.

## Legislation

Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

- Employers have a duty to ensure so far as reasonably practicable health and safety of their employees and anyone else who may be affected by their work activities.

- Employees have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, to cooperate with their line managers and not to do anything which may adversely affect others.

Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999

- A suitable and sufficient assessment of risks must be carried out for the health and safety of those to whom the employer is responsible.

## Stevenson-Farmer Review

The report ['Thriving at Work'](#) produced as part of a government review carried out by Stevenson-Farmer in 2017 suggested each institution should adopt a number of mental health core standards:

- Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan.
- Develop mental health awareness among employees.
- Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling.
- Provide your employees with good working conditions.
- Promote effective people management.
- Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.

The report recommends that all public sector employers should:

- Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.
- Demonstrate accountability.
- Improve the disclosure process.
- Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help.

The report stated that 'all organisations, whatever their size, will be: equipped with the awareness and tools to not only address

but to manage mental ill-health caused or worsened by work; equipped to support individuals with a mental health condition to thrive from recruitment, and throughout the organisation; aware of how to get access to timely help to reduce sickness absence caused by mental ill health’.

## Whole University Approach

The vision developed and promoted by Universities UK (updated May 2020) is ‘for UK universities to be places that promote mental health and wellbeing, enabling all students

and all staff to thrive and succeed to their best potential’. It calls on universities to ‘adopt mental health as a strategic priority, to see it as foundational to all aspects of university life, for all students and all staff’.

There are four domains identified by UUK as key to their Step change approach, two of which have been replicated in the left hand side of the table below to demonstrate how those leading Health & Safety within the sector could be used to support staff and students as identified by USHA in the right hand side of the table.

Domain of Support – identified by UUK	Health & Safety input – identified by USHA
<p>Set within a whole university mental health strategy, alongside wider support for staff and students such as support for disability, harassment and bullying, faith, housing, and finance, learning and work.</p>	<p>A strategy suitable for both students and staff which uses Health &amp; Safety legislation and good sector practice as its’ foundation.</p> <p>Strategic implementation plans which are used by Health &amp; Wellbeing professionals to drive positive mental and physical health through their actions.</p> <p>The Health &amp; Safety team working collegiately with Human Resources, the students union and student services to ensure an all encompassed approach to wellbeing for all.</p>
<p>Designed through co-production with students and staff, delivered according to need, and responsive to changing need.</p>	<p>Wellbeing forums provide an opportunity to discuss mental and physical health to help inform the right level and type of support.</p> <p>Wellbeing champions help to promote and adapt good practice locally depending on need.</p> <p>Support is one of the HSE’s management standards which is understood and integrated as part of the Health &amp; Safety management system.</p> <p>Decisions around staff health and safety are made at committees where minutes are taken and then published locally. Employees are represented at those committees by selected representatives. The inclusion of student representatives on these committees would help ensure that they have input in the decision-making process.</p>

**Domain of Support – identified by UUK**

Safe and effective interventions that are regularly audited for safety, quality and effectiveness.

Properly resourced, staffed and managed.

Accessible to all members of the university community, and appropriate to culture and context.

Prepared for a mental health crisis and suicide by having clear plans in place.

Working in partnership with local NHS and care services with effective working relationships and information sharing agreements in place.

**Health & Safety input – identified by USHA**

Line managers and student facing staff are provided with the tools and training they need to recognise adverse mental health and know how to address this with the individual or know where to go for further help and support.

Health & Safety professionals routinely carry out wellbeing specific audits or include wellbeing as part of their management system audits.

USHA recognises the important and unique role that Health & Safety professionals can undertake in respect of wellbeing and urge universities to resource this area of expertise accordingly.

Health and Safety information is accessible to both students and staff as part of the University community. Equalities legislation is taken into account when producing such information and as part of Health & Safety practice.

Health & Safety professionals support policies which reflect upon all aspects of work related health including suicide and ensure that clear plans are in place.

USHA recognises the benefits of utilising existing resource and expertise both within and external to the University.

Health & Safety teams can provide valuable input in any such arrangement and can act as a key coordinator and/or influencer.

**UUK Domain – Live**

Health promotion: promote ways to improve staff and student wellbeing to encourage healthy behaviours (physical activity, healthy eating and sleeping) and to discourage unhealthy behaviours such as abuse of alcohol and drugs.

**Health & Safety Support**

Risk assessment supported by Health & Safety professionals should be key in enabling fun activities and sport to be enjoyed in as safe a way as possible which will, in turn, improve mental health.

Health and Safety campaigns which focus on wellbeing and lifestyle apply to both students and employees and as such can have a much greater impact when done holistically especially when supported by Health and Wellbeing expertise.

**UUK Domain – Live**

**Healthy culture:**  
create safe and open cultures that encourage inclusion and diversity and actively oppose bullying, harassment and marginalisation.

**Healthy environment:**  
design work, learning and living spaces that promote good mental health, encourage access to nature and reduce physical risks.

**Healthy community:**  
work in partnership with students' unions and guilds to actively support the social integration of students, support academic achievement and retention, and reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing.

**Visible leadership:**  
senior leaders promoting open and supportive conversations is essential to bring about and sustain change.

**Health & Safety Support**

Health & Safety policies are specific to employees but also apply to those who use university premises or undertake activities on behalf of the university. They benefit students and staff by clearly identifying the way that the university will address health and safety in an inclusive and fair way, including for example; violence and aggression at work, welfare, mental health, stress management etc.

Risk assessments and workplaces are routinely checked via audit to ensure a safe and healthy environment. These workplaces are used by employees and students alike and thus both benefit.

Health & Safety information and advice is not restricted to just employees but provided openly to all, linking and signposting to specialist organisations and services where relevant.

USHA promotes the inclusion of staff and students.

Health & Safety legislation already exists to provide the framework to enable consideration of suitable space and the working/study environment. The input of Health & Safety expertise at the early design and decision-making stage can help to ensure new buildings and spaces are created to support positive health (physical and mental) and a safe environment.

The promotion of positive Health & Safety on campus will have a positive impact on the surrounding community. Health & Safety professionals can support student wellbeing by working with the students union and student services teams to help develop a healthier campus environment and build a closer University community.

Health & Safety professionals encourage open conversation to identify areas of concern and implement change to reduce the risk. They provide coaching and mentoring to support knowledge development.

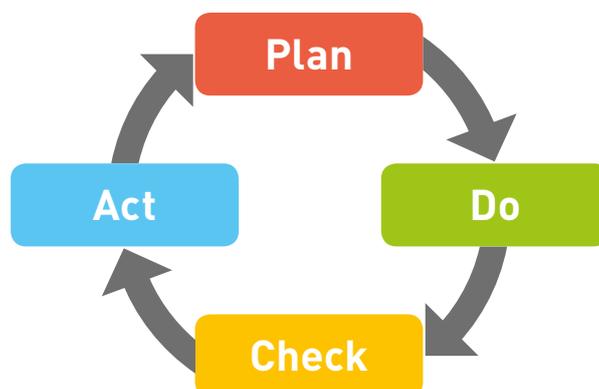
Wellbeing forums provide an opportunity to openly discuss mental and physical health in a safe and non-stigmatised way.

# A STRUCTURED UNIVERSITY APPROACH

## Alignment to ISO Principles

This document uses the Plan: Do: Check: Act principles to provide a robust structure and

to comply with the aims of ISO 45001:2018. To make it as easy as possible to follow this guidance, each section has been colour coded.



Principles of ISO 45001:2018

<b>Plan</b>	Identify and analyse the problem, identify potential root causes, and decide what to do about them.
<b>Do</b>	Pilot the approach in a selected area and measure the results.
<b>Check</b>	Review the effectiveness of the pilot and measures taken, decide whether the approach needs further amendment.
<b>Act</b>	Make any changes necessary and roll out more widely.

## Alignment to USHA Leadership Guidance

This guidance is aligned to the USHA document 'Guidance on Leadership and Management within the Higher Education Sector' produced by USHA and endorsed by UCEA. It recognises that each higher education institution (HEI) is unique in terms of its structure, size, risk profile, composition and management structures. As such the document states that 'it is important to take a holistic approach to health and safety with, consideration of occupational health

and workplace wellbeing matters linked with institutional health and safety arrangements to enable a joined-up approach'.

The document uses a model based on five tiers of management, identified as 'pivotal to securing good health and safety management'. It further states that 'Health and safety performance should be recognised as an integral aspect of HEI management and leaders and managers at all tiers are best placed to influence this by visibly demonstrating their commitment'.

The principles and how they can be related to stress management are as follows:

The same principles apply to workplace stress and the management of it.

- ‘Enabling innovation and learning and not stifling them’
  - This is aligned to the management standard of control by providing sufficient autonomy to enable the employee to have some say in the way that their role is carried out and to encourage an innovative way of working.
- ‘Ensuring that workers and the public are properly protected’
  - This includes protection from the triggers that can cause workplace ill-health such as stress. These triggers can be identified initially by way of an institutional risk assessment.
  - Local assessments may be used to supplement this approach and identify the need for further adjustments
  - The triggers identified by the Health & Safety Executive focus on Demands, Control, Role, Relationship, Support and Change which are detailed later in this document.
- ‘Providing overall benefits to society by balancing benefits and risks, with a focus on reducing real risks – both those which arise more often and those with serious consequences’
  - Institutions have a moral duty to help ensure that employees leave their workplace each day in the same or better state of health that they started. This benefits the individual, the institution, their families, the local community and the wider society.
- ‘Ensuring that risks are managed responsibly and understand that failure to manage real risks responsibly is likely to lead to robust action’
  - Failure to protect staff from mental health risk including stress and bullying is as important as minimising exposure to physical risks.
  - The institution therefore has a duty to assess the risks to their staff and others who may be affected by their work activities.
  - Reasonable measures must be identified and implemented to control those risks.
- ‘Enabling individuals to understand that as well as the right to protection, they also have to exercise responsibility’
  - Employees have their own duty of care in law, to themselves and to others which means they do have to take action to maintain their state of health.

## Complementary to HSE (Health & Safety Executive) Guidance

This guidance aims to complement but not repeat the step by step workbook for stress management provided by the Health & Safety Executive. As such it approaches stress management from the perspective of Health & Safety and thus utilises the process of risk assessment. It is anticipated therefore that

Health & Safety professionals will either be leading on wellbeing or recognised as a key stakeholder in any institutional approach to stress management.

The Health & Safety Executive have identified six Management Standards which indicate the primary causes of stress related illness. These standards can be used both proactively and reactively to provide the foundation of a stress risk assessment. The Standards are:

Standard	Condition
Demands	Workload, work patterns and the work environment.
Control	Autonomy. How much say the person has in the way they do their work.
Support	Encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
Relationships	Positive approach to avoid conflict. Dealing with unacceptable behavior.
Role	Clear understanding of the role and its place within the organisation. Not duplicated or conflicted with others.
Change	How well organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated within the organization.

## Risk Assessment

Fundamental to any stress management approach is risk assessment which should be conducted to identify potential stressors and to highlight any measures already in place which might mitigate them. A risk assessment could be produced at institutional level initially to provide a general overview of the scale of the issue.

Further assessments can be undertaken at Faculty, School, Department or team level to determine those at higher risk and to implement local controls. It's useful to base the

assessments on the Management Standards and include controls which either are, or could be, implemented across all areas where possible. This might include for example, an annual appraisal scheme, attendance management policies, line management training etc. The assessments should be accompanied by SMART action plans outlining any additional work which needs to be carried out.

The steps which follow are aligned to the HSE's guidance on [Tackling Work Related Stress using the Management Standards](#). It both supports and informs the risk assessment process.

# A STEP BY STEP APPROACH

## Plan

### Step 1 – Data Evidence

The Labour Force Survey is a good source of data for all sectors as are the reports mentioned in this guidance and referenced at the end of this document. The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) produce an annual report on sickness data, which provides a good national overview specifically of the HEI sector.

Within each institution there will be a reporting system for capturing sickness absence, the data of which can be analysed to identify the levels of absence which are stress related. This data can help identify whether there are key areas, teams, roles or grades which would benefit from specific support or whether the issue is consistent across the institution. Such data can help inform the risk assessment, gain buy-in for the business case and will be useful later on in assessing the impact of any changes made. It does need to be borne in mind that sickness absence in universities is often subject to under-reporting especially within the academic community.

A staff survey is a good data source, providing clear responses and direct comments on a range of targeted questions which can help inform the risk assessment. This data is very useful but can be more compelling if mapped against the HSE's Management Standards and compared year on year. Ideally the questions should be written in such a way to directly map to each of the standards e.g. any analysis carried out in the survey against the 'Demands' standard should help inform the 'Demands' part of the risk assessment. Mapping is more challenging but still possible if the questions are fixed by the survey company and cannot be changed. More importantly the questions should stay the same for each survey so that the

mapping is comparative from one survey to the next. However, in order for this to be credible and representative it will need a good response rate from all areas and levels of the institution.

### Step 2 – Secure Senior Management and Colleague Commitment

The importance of positive health and wellbeing is now widely recognised within the HEI sector so getting senior management support for carrying out an institutional stress risk assessment should not be too onerous. Senior managers, especially those on the executive board will however want to see the evidence that the risk of stress related ill-health is something they need to act upon and prioritise because demand on University resources is always high. The use of analysed sickness absence and staff survey data provide a good starting point. However, a stronger business case would be to link stress related sickness absence to cost, need for legal compliance and the benefits of positive wellbeing on production and performance. It's also worth using additional rationale for the approach by linking it to the UUK agenda on mental health, the Stevenson-Farmer report and/or the HSE's report, Tackling work-related stress.

Inclusion of the following key risks may help to demonstrate the benefits of taking action to combat stress:

- **Student experience** – think about the negative impact that stressed staff have on the student learning, living and socialising experience e.g. reduced productivity, lack of motivation, poor concentration etc. Focus on the positive reverse side of this.

- **Financial sustainability** – sickness absence is expensive as is backfilling but what about the longer-term costs of low institutional morale, loss of innovation and 'turned off' enthusiasm for change leading to difficulties in recruitment and retention. Support for positive mental health as illustrated in this guidance can help reduce sickness absence, increase motivation and encourage peer support.
- **Legal compliance** – all institutions have a duty to manage risk which includes that which could cause work related ill-health. The HSE can inspect any workplace and take enforcement action against any organisation which does not comply with Health & Safety legislation. The penalties can be both financially and reputationally severe.
- **Reputation** – high levels of stress related ill-health can damage reputation and make it difficult to recruit and retain high quality staff. A reputation as a caring employer with positive wellbeing initiatives and benefits can help do the opposite.

### Step 3 – Establish a Steering Group

Establishment of a steering group can help engage with key stakeholders, utilise available expertise, enable a more coordinated approach and spread the workload. It helps if the steering group is chaired by a senior academic with expertise in the field or by a Health & Wellbeing champion at executive level who can give it gravitas and ensure the work of the steering group is taken into account at senior level – right people in the right place. The HSE guidance provides clear steps in the development of such a group.

The steering group can help produce the institutional risk assessment or could act as a group to challenge and scrutinise it. It should identify the goal or vision that the group wants to achieve, which should be aligned to the University's strategy.

Universities are uniquely placed to take advantage of experts within their academic communities in addition to other colleagues who may have a professional interest and expertise, helpful in achieving the objectives of the group. It's important that the steering group is representative of the University and inclusive without being unwieldy. Getting the membership of the steering group right is therefore vital and might include the following:

- Senior academic or executive lead – Chair.
- Wellbeing lead for the institution.
- Health & Safety advisor (could be Health & Wellbeing Manager/Advisor).
- Occupational Health Manager or representative.
- Human Resources Manager or representative.
- Union representatives.
- Academic Faculties or Schools representatives.
- Professional Services representative.

The role of existing Health & Safety Committees could also be utilised. Part of their remit would include health so for some institutions this might be their primary discussion group. For others, the committees could supplement and support the work of the steering group.

### Step 4 – Risk Assessment

The institutional risk assessment should follow the approach promoted by the HSE, treating the causes of stress as hazards. The assessment should identify how the stressors identified by the Management Standards could affect people in the institution. It should include any available data and information to identify the extent of the issue at this level.

The assessment should identify the inherent risks and any existing controls which are already broadly in place. It should then identify the residual risk and any further controls necessary. An example of an Institutional risk assessment for stress is attached at [appendix A](#).

## Step 5 – Develop an Action Plan and Communicate it

Accompanying any risk assessment should be a SMART action plan. For institutional stress management, a plan will set out the actions necessary to implement the additional controls identified by the assessment. Each action should have an owner, be measurable, realistic and achievable. As such the plan should identify the level of resources required and highlight any foreseeable hurdles including cost. It should include a timeline which will allow a staged approach because trying to achieve too much too quickly can easily result in a poor unsustainable solution. Small manageable outputs are easier to deliver, resource, support and monitor. If the plan is unrealistic then it's likely that people will lose interest along the way which means the plan will probably fail.

Once the plan is ready, it will need to be communicated so that those within the institution understand why this is important and what the plan aims to achieve.

## Step 6 – Develop a Clear Policy or Standard

A policy or standard provides a legal background and impetus, outlines key roles and responsibilities in addition to laying down a clear message of intent and expectations. It can focus on stress management specifically or take a wider remit such as Health & Wellbeing. The policy should be subject to employee consultation via the Health & Safety Committee and approved by the decision-making body for that institution to demonstrate senior management commitment.

### Do

## Step 1 – Data Analysis

Sickness absence data can provide a broad overview to inform the institutional risk assessment but can also be further analysed to identify risk at Faculty, School, department and team level. Such data should be considered alongside the rate of staff turnover for those areas and any local arrangements in place such as whether wellbeing and stress management in particular are discussed as part of annual appraisals, regular team meetings and one to one meetings.

Data obtained from the staff survey can usually be broken down into Faculty, Schools or Departments which will help inform local risk assessments. It might be possible for the data to be analysed in different ways to provide a clear indication as to those people/teams most at risk from work related stressors although this will depend on the team/company carrying it out.

## Step 2 – Local Process

Clear process can help drive consistency of approach across the institution and make it easy for others to follow. Any process for the management of stress should be subject to wide consultation to try and get as much support as possible. The steering group if you have one or the Health & Safety Committee is a good starting point.

## Step 3 – Develop Guidance

You can choose to adopt this USHA guidance as part of your stress management framework/toolkit but you will still need to provide guidance on your own agreed risk assessment and escalation process. This will give detail to your process diagrams and help ensure a more consistent approach across all areas.

## Step 4 – Training

The provision of training is likely to be a key control measure identified by the institutional risk assessment.

Two types of training are needed to:

- Support line managers in carrying out a local risk assessment for identifying and managing the causes of stress;
- Raise awareness about the causes of stress and encourage self-help among employees.

The delivery of training will depend on what resources are available and how many people need to have it. A simple option for raising awareness among employees is to use e-learning which can be accessed at any time and used repeatedly if required. This can be supplemented with videos or by those who have suffered from stress related illness and are willing to talk about it openly. The HSE site provides some videos for this purpose. If you're working on a very tight budget you could even do this via PowerPoint presentation.

Training for line managers is best undertaken face to face because it enables a practical workshop session to take place alongside a more formal presentation. Training line managers within a large organisation is challenging and might mean the programme has to be broken down into bite-size chunks. Institutional data could help identify how this is prioritised.

The training should focus on the role of line managers in assessing and managing local work-related stressors to enable them to proactively monitor the wellbeing of their direct reports, to implement controls, to support team members and to escalate for further support (e.g. to Occupational Health) as and when necessary.

## Step 5 – Local Risk Assessment

Local risk assessments for stress can be very useful especially when produced in alignment to the institutional assessment. The level at which local assessments are carried out could be determined by the steering group using the data evidence available. This might mean Faculty, School, Department or team level and only in areas which have been identified by the data as a 'hotspot'. Similar in many

ways to other workplace hazards, the process should aim to be as proactive as possible and easy to follow. Using existing risk assessment practices means that this should already be embedded and won't be therefore perceived as yet another new task for busy line managers.

The risk assessment process which line managers will already be familiar with from the HSE is:

Stage 1 – Identify the hazards.

Stage 2 – Decide who might be harmed and how.

Stage 3 – Evaluate the risk and determine the control measures.

Stage 4 – Record anything which is significant.

Stage 5 – Review the assessment and update accordingly.

## Step 6 – Open and Honest Discussion

Enabling open and honest conversations can be difficult but are essential. Some ways in which you might do this are as follows:

- Include stress management and wellbeing as part of each local Health & Safety Committee or management board. Encourage the attendance of the local wellbeing champion to initiate open discussion and discuss the local activities in place.
- Establish local focus groups to openly discuss the possible causes of stress within their area of work and what they believe could be done to address it.
- Nominate wellbeing champions in each School, College, Department to promote positive wellbeing in accordance with the institutional stress management plan.
- Provide facilitated meetings or events where employees can share their views and openly discuss their feelings or the way they manage their own stress. Anonymous information from the meetings can be used (with permission) to help others or to inform future activities.

Such discussions can be challenging so it might be worth providing a link to the [HSE's talking toolkit](#).

## Check

### Step 1 – Monitoring

As with all other Health & Safety, monitoring is a key activity to help identify whether the implemented controls have been successfully implemented and whether this has had a positive impact on the risk.

At institutional level such monitoring would mean continued analysis of the sickness absence and trend data, comparisons with the next staff survey and qualitative improvements in those areas which were specifically targeted.

Local monitoring should be carried out by the line manager to check that any controls which have been implemented have helped to reduce the potential for work related stress or its' impact. Such controls might include task rotation, change in work pattern, workstation changes, increased autonomy over timescales and way of working, access to counselling etc. Monitoring at this level would form part of the one to one and team meetings.

### Step 2 – Audit

Two types of stress audits can be carried out by the Health & Safety team. The first is an early stage one prior to any changes, to get honest feedback from members of a pilot group (one identified service area) as to how stressed they might feel and what they believe causes that stress. The staff survey is an example of this type of audit.

The second type of audit is a late stage one carried out after control measures have been implemented. Its' aim is to check that those controls are effective, the process put in place for local risk assessment is being followed by line managers and that employees are accessing the information and support available to them. The audit can also be used to check which management standards have been most successfully addressed by the control measures and which may need more consideration.

## Act

### Step 1 – Review

Carry out a review of everything put in place up to now. A review at this stage will allow a more objective view of whether the policy, plan, process, training, assessment template etc is working or needs further amendment. The steering group can help with this and provide both challenge and scrutiny especially in respect of actions where they were not the lead.

### Step 2 – Take Action

The review should provide some key insight as to the next course of action e.g. tweaking the policy or amending the local risk assessment

process. The steering group should provide a useful source of ideas and feedback. Focus groups and wellbeing champions may also be helpful in getting feedback on the effectiveness of the training, information provided and any improvements already implemented.

Some key points to keep in mind:

- Stress management is often cyclical so be prepared to re-visit and re-assess. Over time the causes of stress may change and thus controls need to change with them.
- Line managers need to accept that they might not be able to control everything.
- Not all stress at work is work related.

Stress can be an accumulation of a number of different triggers, some of which can be personal, home or family related. Those relating to employees for work such as demands of workload, relationships, role, level of support, change in practice or environment and level of control an employee may have (i.e. HSE Management Standards) should be recognised and addressed as part of the risk assessment

process. Non-work related stress is not within the scope of the employer but a sympathetic approach can help to demonstrate support albeit that level of support may be limited e.g. flexibility in working pattern or location. EAP (Employee Assistance Programmes sometimes provide advice and counselling for those who have personal as well as work related stress so can be a useful source of support.

# KEY ROLES IN STRESS MANAGEMENT

## Overall Structure

The following roles reflect those within the USHA Guidance on Leadership and Management and are as follows:

- Governing body
- Executive/Leadership team
- Senior managers
- Line managers

A further role for Employees has been included in this guidance to show the important role they play in their own health management.

For each tier or role there are a number of actions or responsibilities which have been divided according to the stage i.e. plan, do check, act and colour coded for ease of use.

For each tier there is a table showing what the University can expect from their key professionals.

## Governing Body

The Governing Body has strategic oversight of all matters related to health and wellbeing for their institution and should seek assurance that effective arrangements are in place and are working.

### Plan

- Ensure health and wellbeing matters are communicated in a timely fashion from and to the Governing Body.
- Review your HEI's Wellbeing Policy on a regular basis.
- Review your HEI's wellbeing objectives/KPIs on a regular basis.
- Ensure that wellbeing appears regularly on the agenda of governing body meetings.
- Be aware of significant wellbeing risks faced by the organisation.
- Consider the wellbeing implications of strategic change proposals such as large projects and ensure that risks associated with change are part of decision making and employee consultation.

### Do

- Seek assurances that:
- Wellbeing arrangements are adequately resourced;
- There is a means for consulting with the recognised trades unions on matters of Health & Safety;
- Risk control measures are in place and acted on;
- There is an effective process to identify wellbeing training and competency needs in keeping with health and safety responsibilities;
- there is a process for auditing health and safety performance.
- There is a forum for discussing employee wellbeing, championed by a senior member of the leadership team.
- Your HEI has access to competent wellbeing advice in respect of stress as a potential workplace hazard.
- There is a process for employees or their representatives to be involved and engaged in decisions that may substantially affect their wellbeing including consultation with the recognised trades unions.

**Check**

- Ensure there is a committee of Council to receive and reasonably evaluate leading and lagging data relevant to wellbeing; and where appropriate, ask for data on process and competency indicators.
- Ensure that management systems allow the Governing Body to receive assurances about all University activities including wellbeing.

**Act**

- To be satisfied that there are regular independent reviews of wellbeing management across the HEI. Regularly review your HEI's health and safety risk profile.
- Regularly review your HEI's wellbeing risk profile.

Support to the Governing Body.

<b>Specialist</b>	<b>Stress Management Role</b>
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing Champion at Executive level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates high level support for stress management and mental health.</li> <li>• Can help demonstrate that board level decisions have considered the impact on mental health.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing/ Mental Health Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide updates on progress to the governing body.</li> <li>• Be the key point of contact.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides data on the management of stress and use of Occupational Health.</li> <li>• Provides assurance to the governing body that H&amp;S policy and practice is in place.</li> <li>• Provides assurance that trade unions have been consulted on health safety in line with Section 2(6) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Safety Reps and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides data on sickness absence.</li> <li>• Provides assurance to the governing body that HR policy and practice is in place.</li> </ul>
<b>Academics with Health &amp; Wellbeing expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can help influence the governing body.</li> </ul>

## Executive/Leadership Team

It is reasonable to expect you will demonstrate the same leadership qualities in health and wellbeing as you do in your academic/professional field. Accountability for ensuring that staff, students, visitors and contractors

leave your place of work as healthy as when they arrived, will rest with you, although the operational aspects of this will probably be delegated to other tiers of managers. However, you must implement a process to gain assurances that these responsibilities are being fulfilled.

### Plan

- Ensure a wellbeing commitment is included as part of HEI's health and safety policy statement as a demonstration of ownership and support.
- Agree how wellbeing will be measured, monitored and reported, through the development of appropriate KPIs.
- Allocate sufficient resources to the management of wellbeing.
- Set wellbeing objectives for your institution.
- Ensure that the occupational health service is integrated into your HEI's health and safety management system.
- Determine what wellbeing risks should be included in your institutional risk register.
- Consider the wellbeing implications of strategic decisions of change proposals such as large projects.
- Support the development of a university wide wellbeing strategy
- Ensure there is a process in place for consulting recognised trade union representatives on matters of Health & Safety in accordance with legislation and/or local policy.

### Do

- Identify a senior manager to lead on employee wellbeing.
- Ensure there are campaigns to raise wellbeing awareness and behaviour change.
- Discuss wellbeing issues and performance with your direct reports and at performance/development reviews. Lead by example e.g. take an interest in wellbeing and stress management activities.
- Promote positive behaviours identified by the HSE Management Standards to reduce the risk of employee stress.

### Check

- Confirm that your direct reports are aware and have implemented the wellbeing process in their departments.
- Receive and review performance data such as sickness absence and wellbeing KPIs. Check if you are delivering on your own objectives and those set by your leadership team. Use your performance development process for this.
- Review deployment of resources e.g. are they sufficient, competent and effective.

**Act**

- Review wellbeing performance.
- Celebrate positive achievement, and take corrective action where targets are not being met.
- Share the results with staff and students – seek their views on improvements.
- Respond to reports, audits, health and safety committee recommendations trade union safety representatives, regulators, central human resources and health and safety advisors.

Support to the Executive/Leadership Team.

**Specialist****Stress Management Role****Health & Wellbeing Champion at Executive level**

- Ensures mental health and stress management is considered as part of executive decision-making.
- Promotes positive mental health at executive level and sets a good example to colleagues.
- Helps to secure funding and resources.

**Health & Wellbeing/ Mental Health Lead**

- Key liaison role with the executive team.
- Present findings, data and business case to gain support.
- Provide updates from the steering group.
- Get leadership buy-in.
- Maintains holistic overview of wellbeing/mental health.

**Health & Safety**

- Fulfills role of Competent Person and thus provides professional advice on the management of stress.
- Promote the benefits of stress management.
- Get support for the process, templates and policy.
- Deliver stress awareness and stress management training
- Advise the executive on the legal, moral and financial benefits/disbenefits of stress management.
- Provide assurance to the executive that the risk of stress management is part of the H&S management system.
- Provides professional advice to the Health & Safety Committee/s.
- Lead or lend professional expertise to support any health and wellbeing campaigns.

Specialist	Stress Management Role
<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interprets and maps staff survey data into the HSE Management Standards.</li> <li>• Analyses sickness absence data to identify incidents of stress in order to target wellbeing support (could also be undertaken by HR).</li> <li>• Promote good Health &amp; Safety practice through line managers to identify potential stressors and implement risk assessments as appropriate.</li> <li>• Provides advice to ensure that the recognised Trades Union H&amp;S representatives are consulted in accordance with legislation or local policy.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops policies and process to manage sickness absence.</li> <li>• Support line managers in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities including the identification and management of sickness absence through good management behaviour.</li> <li>• Promote good HR practice such as annual appraisals and regular one to one meetings</li> <li>• Leads the staff survey.</li> </ul>
<b>Academics with Health &amp; Wellbeing expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lend weight to support the institutions' chosen approach to stress management.</li> </ul>
<b>Union Reps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can influence executive teams to take action on stress management.</li> <li>• Can challenge executive groups for not taking action.</li> </ul>

## Senior Managers

As a senior manager you are expected to implement your local wellbeing management

arrangements and manage risks to protect staff, students, visitors and contractors working in your faculty/school or department.

### Plan

- Align any local wellbeing objectives and plans to the institutional wellbeing plan, policy and process.
- Ensure you have competent support from specialist advisors in respect of wellbeing including Occupational Health, Health & Safety and Human Resources.
- Ensure there are arrangements to discuss and manage wellbeing via a local health and safety committee/forum or as part of senior management meetings.
- Establish wellbeing objectives for your faculty/school/department.
- Ensure staff consultation about wellbeing involves all appropriate stakeholders including trade unions representatives.
- Ensure wellbeing is considered as part of the risk register for your faculty/school/department and escalated as necessary to the executive.

### Do

- Ensure responsibilities are delegated and understood for tasks related to wellbeing, such as the completion of sickness absence monitoring and wellbeing assessments.
- Seek advice from relevant wellbeing advisors e.g. Occupational Health, Health & Safety and Human Resources.
- Maintain oversight of sickness absence due to stress.
- Agree wellbeing training needs of all your staff and set a training objective e.g. using a training matrix.

### Check

- Check that wellbeing training is provided and undertaken.
- Analyse local sickness absence data to identify emerging trends in the faculty/school or department. Keep staff informed by monitoring progress and actively seek their views on improvements e.g. via your local safety committees.
- Keep staff informed of any wellbeing initiatives and actively seek their views on improvements e.g. via your local health & safety committees/forums.
- Check that all actions and recommendations from the institutional wellbeing risk assessment is implemented.

### Act

- Review the wellbeing risk management process regularly.
- Take action to implement wellbeing recommendations from the institutional risk assessment.
- Review your own wellbeing and that of your direct reports and celebrate their achievements.
- Use the information to review your local process.

Support to Senior Managers.

Specialist	Stress Management Role
<b>Executive Health &amp; Wellbeing Champion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influences senior managers to embed the stress management process.</li> <li>• Sets a good example.</li> <li>• Engages with senior managers whenever the occasion arises to promote the benefits of positive mental health.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing/ Mental Health Lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key liaison role with senior managers.</li> <li>• Engage as members of the steering group.</li> <li>• Get local leadership buy-in.</li> <li>• Encourages oversight of wellbeing/mental health for each Faculty/School/ College/professional service.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support senior managers in ensuring both policy and process are followed.</li> <li>• Help senior managers to assess risk management performance.</li> <li>• Work with senior managers in identifying local hotspots and developing suitable solutions.</li> <li>• Provide professional health and wellbeing support.</li> <li>• Help to interpret Occupational Health reports.</li> <li>• Provides professional Health and Safety expertise to support stress management.</li> <li>• Promote good management behaviours and provide support on identifying the actions or inactions that can cause stress in the workplace (could also be undertaken by HR).</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports senior managers in understanding the level of sickness absence within their Schools/departments due to stress.</li> <li>• Provides support to senior managers in ensuring poor performance and behaviour is managed.</li> <li>• Supports senior managers by providing the means to enable good HR practice such as annual appraisals and regular one to one meetings which can help reduce the risk from key stressors.</li> <li>• Provides professional HR expertise to support employee management.</li> </ul>

Specialist	Stress Management Role
Academics with Health & Wellbeing expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good source of local information to help promote the institutions approach to stress management.</li><li>• Specialist input at the local Health &amp; Safety Committee.</li></ul>
Union Reps/ Safety Reps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Represents employees at local and institutional Health &amp; Safety committees chaired by senior managers.</li></ul>

## Line Managers

As a line manager in a faculty /school or department you are expected to implement your local health and wellbeing management

arrangements, and to monitor and check their effectiveness. The HSE and USHA recognise that the positive management of stress can be heavily influenced by the behaviour of line managers.

### Plan

- Promote positive wellbeing within your team using any tools and techniques available to you.
- Be aware of your behaviours and management style and the impact this may have on your employees.
- Plan regular one to one meetings and team meetings throughout the year.
- Familiarise yourself with the Management Standards and this guidance.
- Set reasonable wellbeing objectives to cover your area of responsibility.
- Develop or use existing communication processes (e.g. team meetings) to keep your team informed, and receive information back from team members.

### Do

- Implement University policy within your team or area of responsibility
- Attend any stress management and line management training provided to you.
- Carry out regular one to one meetings with each team member and listen to their concerns.
- Make all team members aware of any stress awareness training and tools available.
- Carry out a wellbeing assessment for those who need it.
- Implement your local health and safety policy and arrangements.
- Carry out the health and safety plan and objectives.

### Check

- Monitor sickness absence within your team.
- Carry out back to work meetings and identify any reasonable adjustments necessary.
- Seek advice from your HR and/or H&S professional.

### Act

- Provide feedback to the team on the action you have taken.
- Review progress.

Support to Line Managers.

Specialist	Stress Management Role
<b>Executive Health &amp; Wellbeing Champion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets a good example to all line managers by following the institutions agreed way of managing the risk of stress. Demonstrates senior commitment by attending and supporting health campaigns and events.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the process, templates and policy.</li> <li>• Support line managers in the production of stress related risk assessments including the development of templates and process and the implementation of mitigation measures.</li> <li>• Deliver training on identifying and managing stress.</li> <li>• Provide advice to line managers on the impact of stress and identification of stressors.</li> <li>• Explain the management standards.</li> <li>• Deliver and communicate wellbeing campaigns and initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Occupational Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clinical advice upon request.</li> <li>• Suggest reasonable adjustments.</li> <li>• May support wellbeing initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support line managers in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities including the promotion of positive management behaviours and good practice, the management of sickness absence, management of poor performance and behaviour.</li> <li>• Supports the line manager in making a referral to Occupational Health.</li> <li>• Promotes good HR practice such as annual appraisals and regular one to one meetings which can help line managers to reduce the risk from key stressors.</li> </ul>
<b>Academics with Health &amp; Wellbeing expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be line manager.</li> <li>• Can use their specialist research knowledge to influence line management colleagues.</li> </ul>
<b>Union Reps/ Safety Reps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps promote the union perspective.</li> <li>• Supports a joint approach to reduce conflict between line managers and employees.</li> </ul>

## Employees

### Plan

- Familiarise yourself with the policies and process available within your institution for managing positive mental health and stress management.

### Do

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Be alert to changing work environments and seek to adapt or raise concerns with your line manager.
- Practice mindfulness or calming techniques.
- Seek help and support if you feel you need it from your GP.
- Seek help and support if you feel you need it from your recognised trades union representative or other staff representative.
- Participate in a stress risk assessment if asked to do so or if you request one.
- Cooperate with your line manager if he/she is trying to implement positive changes to support you.
- Identify and use coping mechanisms.
- Make line managers aware of any potential stressors in the workplace.

### Check

- Monitor your own wellbeing by taking the stress self awareness test routinely.
- Be aware of your changing surroundings and potential stressors.
- Look out for your colleagues and the impact that change or the work environment may be having on them.

### Act

- Don't delay in seeking additional help if you need it.
- Follow the recommendations provided by your GP or counsellor.

## Support to Employees.

Specialist	Stress Management Role
<b>Executive Health &amp; Wellbeing Champion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates that the Executive group takes the issue of stress management very seriously and includes the impact within decision-making.</li> <li>• Attends stress/mental health promotions and participates in campaigns.</li> <li>• Speaks up and support the mental health/stress management agenda.</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides signposting to helpful resources.</li> <li>• Provides clear guidance, policy and process to support positive mental health and stress awareness.</li> <li>• Supports employees in enabling confidential discussions about their work environment.</li> <li>• Delivers training on stress awareness and self-management.</li> <li>• Explains the management standards.</li> <li>• Delivers and communicates wellbeing campaigns and initiatives.</li> <li>• Provides professional advice and guidance on Health &amp; Safety policy and practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Occupational Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clinical advice upon request based on self-referral.</li> <li>• Supports positive mental health by suggesting reasonable adjustments.</li> <li>• May support wellbeing initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides clear guidance, policy and process to support the employee lifecycle.</li> <li>• Provides professional advice and guidance on HR policy and practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Academics with Health &amp; Wellbeing expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can use their specialist research knowledge to influence colleagues.</li> <li>• Credibility among other academics.</li> </ul>
<b>Union Reps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can help influence their members to adopt and use the process provided.</li> </ul>

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