

# Stress Management Policy

Responsibility for Review: School and college trust leaders  
Date of Last Review: February 2025

## Stress Management Policy: document provenance

<b>Approver</b>	School and college trust leaders
<b>Date of approval</b>	February 2025
<b>Policy owner</b>	School and college trust leader: people
<b>Policy authors</b>	Head of HR centre of excellence
<b>Version</b>	1.0
<b>Date of next review</b>	February 2027
<b>Summary of changes in this review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes to nomenclature and reporting line but no other significant changes</li></ul>
<b>Related policies and documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional conduct policy</li><li>• Dealing with allegations of abuse by staff</li><li>• Child protection and safeguarding</li><li>• Teachers' Standards</li></ul>

Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, the policy will be reviewed as by the review cycle. Should no substantive change be required at this point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.



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## 1.0 Policy statement

We have a moral and legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our employees as far as reasonably practicable and to have reasonable care for the health and safety of our employees. This includes taking steps to minimise the risk of stress or stress-related illness.

This policy sets out our approach to managing stress in the workplace.

Also contained within the policy is practical guidance for managers and employees on how to manage potentially stressful situations as set out in Appendix 1.

This policy applies to all staff in our trust, referred to as the employees within this document.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time following review and consultation with recognised trade unions.

## 2.0 Scope and purpose of this policy

2.1 We are committed to identifying, tackling and preventing the causes of work-related stress and aim to promote a culture of care and mutual support to minimise stress and to ensure all employees are able to do their job to the best of their ability. This in turn will help us provide high quality teaching and learning for our students.

2.2 This policy covers all employees at all levels and grades regardless of status.

## 3.0 What is stress?

3.1 The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work'. They state that stress is not an illness but a 'state' and that illness, whether mental and / or physical, develops as a result of stress which is prolonged and excessive.

3.2 A certain amount of pressure is a normal part of most jobs, and it can be beneficial in helping to keep an individual motivated. However, there is an important distinction between working under pressure and when the pressure becomes excessive and produces stress, which can be detrimental to health. We recognise that what triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person.

3.3 Stress may be experienced as a result of the workplace, external factors or a combination of both. Workplace factors could include the nature of the employee's work, the volume of work, working hours, environmental factors, changes such as a restructure or redundancy programmes, or bullying or harassment by colleagues or third parties.

3.4 The Management Standards for work-related stress define the way an organisation manages the risks from work-related stress. There are six key areas that cover the primary sources of stress at work that, if not managed effectively, could lead to poor health, reduced productivity and increased absence. These are demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. An examination of these areas' forms part of the stress risk assessment process that demonstrates good practice in managing stress.

## 4.0 Signs of stress

4.1 Some common signs of stress are listed below. However, experiencing one or more of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress:

- persistent or recurrent moods, for example anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness, mood swings (being tearful or over sensitive)
- physical effects e.g. aches and pains (headaches, back ache, neck ache), raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders
- poor and / or changed behaviours, for example, increased absence levels (including arriving late at work), difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, loss of motivation, making more errors (poor performance), double checking everything, covering up mistakes by lying, working long hours / not taking a break, changes to sleeping or eating habits, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs, poor attitude, behaviour and relationships with colleagues
- prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic diseases such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety or depression



- 4.2 Signs that an individual is experiencing stress will vary according to how the individual reacts to stress. Changes in an individual's behaviour that are more than just a 'one-off' incident are key for the line manager to be aware of.
- 4.3 These should be acted upon promptly and discussed with the employee. This will include offering support, such as encouraging the employee to seek advice from his or her GP, who will be able to make a diagnosis.

## **5.0 Support**

- 5.1 We will monitor sickness absence and workloads and ensure that there is clear communication within our trust to promote a culture of open communication and encouragement. We will create reasonable opportunities for employees to discuss areas of concern in an environment where stress is not considered as a weakness or a failure. We will also hold return to work interviews with any employee who has been absent in line with our staff absence monitoring policy to establish whether there is any underlying problem and, if so, what the employer could do to address it.
- 5.2 We have measures available to support staff who may be suffering from stress:
- referral to our independent occupational health provider
  - employee assistance programme, provided by our partners Simply Health
- 5.3 We will be alert to the possibility of stress as set out in section 4. However, employees who believe they are suffering from stress should also ask their line manager for help and support in the first instance. If they feel unable to do so, they should speak to a school and college trust leader or functional lead for advice.
- 5.4 Once an issue affecting an employee's health is brought to our attention, steps will be taken to support the employee to minimise the risk of harm and to identify additional arrangements to reduce the risk of work-related stress to as low a level as reasonably practicable. This may include the measures set out at 5.2 and in addition we may:
- carry out further investigations
  - review job descriptions to identify tasks that may involve stressors
  - carry out a risk assessment to evaluate the risk of work-related stress, considering the existing arrangements that are in place and ensure that significant findings of the risk assessment are recorded
  - carry out a stress risk assessment with the employee to identify whether stress is an issue with a view to addressing the situation.
  - provide information and training, such as identifying opportunities for development relevant to the employee's position
  - refer the employee to occupational health in line with our absence monitoring policy if an employee is absent from work due to sickness and apply the absence monitoring policy as applicable
- 5.5 If stress is having a negative impact on an employee's performance, and his or her performance does not improve, despite the manager having taken reasonable steps to alleviate pressure on the employee, it might be necessary for the academy to follow the capability procedure.

## **6.0 Record keeping and confidentiality**

- 6.1 Information in relation to the management of stress at the academy will be kept to ensure an accurate record is available of what was discussed, actions taken and for monitoring purposes.
- 6.2 Records will be kept on the employee's personal file or with the academy's health and safety records. All records will be treated as confidential and kept no longer than necessary.

## **7.0 Review of policy**

This policy has, at its formation, been subject to consultation with recognised trade unions, unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed every two years; this will include consultation on any changes with recognised trade unions. Should no substantive change be required at this point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.



## Appendix 1: Guidance for managers and employees on dealing with stressful situations in academies

There are many different times in the academy year that create additional pressure for our employees. These may include:

- dealing with poor behaviour
- Ofsted inspections
- report writing
- parent consultation / open evenings
- meeting with / calling parents
- accountability (targets)
- finance (particular issue for the principal)
- premises matters (particular issue for the principal and facilities staff)
- recruitment / staffing issues
- conflict in the workplace

It is strongly advised that in order to combat these areas of pressure, employees should:

- attend all relevant induction / training / INSET sessions that are provided so that they are aware of all academy processes
- make themselves fully aware of the procedure to follow for each circumstance, for example, the academy's behaviour policy, our trust grievance procedure
- know who to call on for support if they need it
- admit that they are struggling before it becomes too difficult to cope, and seek help and advice

Other things that can help you at work and therefore deal with stress include:

- drinking plenty of water throughout the day
- a good diet (e.g. eating breakfast and lunch)
- learning to manage your time effectively
- exercise (including yoga and relaxation)
- taking time out (e.g. do not work all weekend and evenings)
- avoiding procrastination

All employees who are members of a union or professional association are advised to contact them for support and guidance.

All leaders should take the following steps to help prevent stress:

- **encourage communication within the team:** where employees feel that they can discuss problems with their colleagues this can help reduce the risk of stress. This could be achieved by holding regular team meetings and encouraging staff to approach their manager and colleagues informally with any issues they may have
- **foster good relations with employees:** line managers should take the time to get to know their team members so that changes to their normal behaviour are easier to spot
- **ensure that employees have an appropriate amount of work to do:** where employees feel that they are unable to cope with their workload, this can cause stress. Managers should regularly review the amount of work employees have, for example at regular appraisals. They should consider the impact of absences and departures on remaining staff and how the work can be shared fairly within the team



- **have regular meetings with employees:** having regular meetings with team members about their work will give line managers a good idea of what employees are doing and any problems that they have
- **provide appropriate training:** line managers should conduct regular reviews to identify training needs for the members of their team. Employees could be involved in identifying their own training needs. Where training needs are identified, the line manager should provide training. Training is particularly important for employees who have additional responsibilities following a promotion
- **be alert during periods of change:** line managers should keep employees well informed and encourage them to raise concerns during periods of change, for example when the organisation is going through a restructure
- **recruit employees who have the skills to perform the role:** when recruiting, line managers should consider what the duties of the job will be and what skills and experience the successful candidate will need. This will help to ensure that the right person is recruited to the job, so the employee does not feel out of his or her depth
- **do not delay:** line managers should take immediate action when they suspect that an individual is stressed or when an employee informs them that he or she is experiencing stress. This should help to avoid the problem escalating; avoid liability if the employee ends up making a claim; and help the employee to make a swift recovery

If the line manager becomes aware that an employee is experiencing stress they should arrange to meet with the employee. This meeting should be held in private and be kept informal in nature. The line manager should ask the employee whether or not he or she has been experiencing stress and what the employee considers to be the contributing factors.

Questions that may be appropriate to ask include:

- I am concerned that you appear to be under pressure. Can we talk about it?
- One of your colleagues has told me in confidence that she is worried about you
- Are there any problems at home that you want to talk about?
- I want to help resolve this issue. Do you think that some extra training or support might help?
- Have you mentioned this to your GP? I will send you some information about the organisation's counselling service in case this is something that you might find helpful
- I think we should meet again in a couple of weeks to see how things are going but in the meantime please come and talk to me if you have any concerns

After the meeting, the line manager may need to conduct a more detailed investigation to establish the causes of, and contributing factors to the stress, particularly where the employee alleges that it is a result of poor management or bullying, for example. Once the line manager has established the reason behind the stress, he or she should explore what steps the organisation could take to alleviate the situation. Our HR Centre of Excellence will support with the following actions:

- a phased return to work (following sickness absence)
- temporary or permanent flexible working arrangements, for example reduced hours
- redistribution of some of the employee's work
- a temporary or permanent change in duties
- providing training for the employee
- referring the employee for counselling
- putting a mentoring arrangement in place

What action is appropriate will depend on the circumstances, including the reasons for the stress, the nature of the job and what is considered reasonable.



## Appendix 2: Guidance notes on completing the stress risk assessment form

Things to consider when assessing the role:

### 1.0 What job does the individual do and at what level? Examples:

- SLT
- Teacher
- Main scale
- Upper Pay Scale
- Teaching assistant
- Office – front line and back office
- Site supervisor
- Cleaner
- Cook
- Catering assistant
- Invigilator
- Manager – teaching or non-teaching

### 2.0 What are the potential hazards and stressors? Examples:

#### **Demands:**

- long hours
- unreasonable deadlines
- client expectations (e.g. that they'll solve the problem)
- excessively busy periods
- inadequate rest and holidays
- inadequate staffing
- inappropriately qualified for the job
- over promotion
- skills not recognised – promotion prospects not fulfilled
- boring or repetitive work
- too little to do
- employees experiencing excessive workloads
- employees working under excessive pressure
- inability to cope with key aspects of the role

#### **The physical working environment:**

- poor temperature control
- noise
- lack of facilities for rest / breaks
- poor lighting
- poor ventilation
- badly placed or designed workstations





### **the psychological working environment:**

- threat of aggression or violence
- disruptive, angry or stressed children
- angry or stressed parents / members of the public
- difficult colleagues
- verbal abuse
- poor management practices

### **Control**

- lack of managerial support through emotionally demanding work
- inadequate inductions
- reaction to post disciplinary, grievance, capability or suspension procedures
- lack of adequate training

### **Relationships:**

- poor relationships with others
- staff complaints or rising absence trends
- perception of bullying or confrontational communication styles from others
- bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- Lack of support or fear culture from management and co-workers

### **Role:**

- lack clear lines of accountability and responsibility
- lack of communication and consultation (both sides)
- perception of a culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems
- failure by the organisation to recognise success
- a culture that considers stress a sign of weakness
- personal risk in relation to the role (e.g. money, lone working)

### **Change:**

- fears about job security / grading
- poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening
- not enough time allowed to implement change
- inexperience / fear of new technology
- lack of skills for new tasks
- not enough resources allocated for change processes
- other personal fears, relocation

### **3.0 Is there a high, medium or low risk of stress and why?**

- Does the type of job in combination with the working environment and organisation result in a high, medium or low risk?
- What does history / experience tell us?
- What are the worst problems?



#### 4.0 What control measures can be put in place?

- Training for job
- Job organisation
- Rest and meal break arrangements
- Job rotation
- Good working environment
- Security measures such as alarms or buddying
- Local policy defined and upheld
- Counselling (last resort as this is not a preventative action)

#### 5.0 Priority and timescale

Some suggested goals:

**High risk: Priority 1 (fix first)**

Initiate simple actions immediately and devise a plan to review other long-term actions within three months

**Medium risk: Priority 2 (fix after all Priority 1 actions have been attended to)**

Systematically review and initiate actions within 12 months

**Low risk: Priority 3 (fix last)**

Document the risk assessment and revisit after 12 months

