

Work-Related Stress Risk Assessment Guidance

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1. Overview

Stress can negatively affect individual wellbeing, performance, attendance, retention, and the wider organisational culture, if not effectively managed.

In accordance with the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#), the University is committed to ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees. This includes the identification and management of psychosocial hazards, including work-related stress. The University will take all reasonably practicable steps to prevent work-related stress through proactive risk assessment, effective management practices, and meaningful consultation with staff and recognised trade union safety representatives.

This guidance explains the arrangements for identifying, assessing, controlling and reviewing risks associated with work-related stress. It establishes a structured, risk-based approach aligned with [the Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) Stress Management Standards](#), [the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#) (in relation to risk assessment duties), and [the Equality Act 2010](#) where stress-related conditions may meet the definition of disability.

2. Definitions

“Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards” - A framework identifying six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence (Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role, Change).

“Institutional Stress Risk Assessment” - A University-wide assessment of psychosocial hazards and stress risks that analyses related organisational data (such as absence trends, staff survey results and workforce metrics) to identify systemic risk factors and inform strategic control measures at faculty, directorate or institutional level.

“Psychological Hazards” - Aspects of work design, organisation or management, and the social or organisational context of work, that have the potential to cause psychological or emotional harm. Examples include excessive workload, lack of role clarity, poor communication, inadequate support, workplace conflict, or poorly managed change.

“So far as is reasonably practicable” - A legal standard under health and safety law requiring the University to take measures to reduce risk unless the time, cost or effort required to do so would be grossly disproportionate to the risk. This involves balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control it and implementing all controls that are reasonably achievable.

“Stress” - The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.

“Work-Related Stress” - Stress experienced where work demands and pressures are not matched to knowledge, abilities, or resources, and which challenge an individual’s ability to cope.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. Governing Body

The Governing Body has ultimate accountability for ensuring that appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place across the University. This includes providing strategic oversight of organisational risks, including those relating to work-related stress.

3.2. Vice Chancellor (VC)

The VC is responsible for providing leadership and ensuring that adequate resources, systems and governance arrangements are in place to support effective management of work-related stress. The VC must ensure that senior leaders integrate stress prevention and psychosocial risk management into operational planning and institutional strategy.

3.3. University Secretary

The University Secretary is responsible for ensuring that governance and compliance arrangements support effective oversight of stress risk management. This includes ensuring that appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place and that relevant committees receive accurate information regarding stress-related risks.

3.4. Senior leadership

Senior leaders are responsible for promoting a proactive and preventative approach to stress management within their areas of responsibility. They must ensure that faculties and directorates undertake suitable and sufficient work-related stress risk assessments and implement action plans where required. Senior leaders must also ensure that organisational changes are communicated clearly, consistently and in a timely manner, recognising the potential impact of change on staff wellbeing.

3.5. Managers

Managers play a central role in preventing and managing work-related stress. Where necessary (see 4.2.1), managers are responsible for completing and maintaining suitable and sufficient stress risk assessments for their teams. They must monitor workloads, working hours, overtime, annual leave usage, training needs and workplace relationships to identify potential risk factors.

Managers must consult with staff and recognised trade union safety representatives on matters relating to stress risk and ensure that staff have regular opportunities to raise concerns, including through one-to-one meetings. Where stress risks are identified, managers must develop and implement proportionate actions and seek advice from Health and Safety, the People Directorate, or Occupational Health where appropriate.

Managers must also recognise early signs of stress, take prompt and supportive action, and facilitate referrals to Occupational Health or counselling services when required.

3.6. Health and Safety Services (HSS)

HSS are responsible for developing, maintaining and reviewing this Code of Practice. They may provide specialist advice and guidance on stress risk assessment and the application of the HSE Management Standards. Health and Safety Managers will support faculties and directorates in implementing stress risk controls, monitoring trends, and escalating significant concerns to the Associate Director of Health & Safety, where appropriate.

3.7. Health and Safety Local Officers

Health and Safety Local Officers are responsible for supporting any local implementation of stress risk assessments and associated control measures.

3.8. All staff

All staff have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and wellbeing and to cooperate with measures implemented to reduce stress risks. Staff are expected to raise concerns about excessive workload, unsafe working conditions or other stressors with their manager or safety representative at the earliest opportunity. Staff should also participate in data gathering, consultations and risk assessments and engage with support services where recommended.

3.9. Students

Students and postgraduate researchers must follow supervisory guidance and raise concerns that may affect their wellbeing or progress where stress risks arise from supervised work activities.

3.10. Trade Union Safety Representatives

Trade union safety representatives must be consulted on changes to work practices or organisational arrangements that may affect stress risk. They may participate in stress-related risk assessments and consultations and may access anonymised data relating to stress incidence where appropriate. Safety representatives may also conduct joint inspections and raise issues requiring remedial action.

4. Guidance

The following guidance is intended to help staff understand how to use the contents of the institutional stress risk assessment when considering whether additional local and / or individual risk assessments might be required.

4.1. Identification of Stress Hazards

Managers must proactively identify potential sources of psychosocial risk within their teams. These should be considered in the context of the six HSE Management Standards (Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change) including, but not limited to:

- Excessive workload or unrealistic deadlines
- Role conflict or role ambiguity
- Poor communication
- Lack of control or autonomy
- Workplace conflict or strained relationships
- Inadequate managerial or peer support
- Poorly managed organisational change

Hazards may be identified through a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources, including:

- Local observations and supervision
- One-to-one meetings and team discussions
- Sickness absence and turnover data

- Staff survey results
- Reports from the People Directorate or Occupational Health
- Feedback from trade union safety representatives

4.2. Local Work-Related Stress Risk Assessments

Managers should review the [institutional stress risk assessment](#) to determine whether it accurately reflects the circumstances present at a local level.

The institutional risk assessment follows the [general principles of risk assessment](#), identifying, at an organisational level, the circumstances that might occur under each of the management standards (the hazards), who might be affected by them and how, and the organisational arrangements that are in place to manage / control / prevent them from occurring. This assessment uses a 5 by 5 scoring matrix to determine the institutional residual risk score, for each of the six HSE management standards.

Residual risk = likelihood of hazards occurring x potential harm if they do

A copy of the matrix and associated scoring / definitions is included towards the end of the institutional risk assessment document.

4.2.1. Local stress risk assessments

The institutional risk assessment is comprehensive and has been written to cover measures in place in the University as a whole. It should not normally be necessary to complete a local risk assessment. However, where exceptional local or individual circumstances differ from those described in the institutional assessment, and / or there is evidence suggesting a higher risk of harm (residual risk), managers must undertake a separate work-related stress risk assessment informed by the institutional stress risk assessment.

Where necessary, using the information provided in the institutional risk assessment as a guide / template, managers should create a local risk assessment, documenting the specific circumstances applicable to their operational area. For each of the six HSE management standards, this local risk assessment must include:

- A description of who may be affected and how
- An evaluation of the level of risk (likelihood x severity)
- Consideration of existing control measures and whether additional controls are reasonably practicable. Where additional controls are required, responsibility for their implementation and a realistic timescale for action must also be documented.

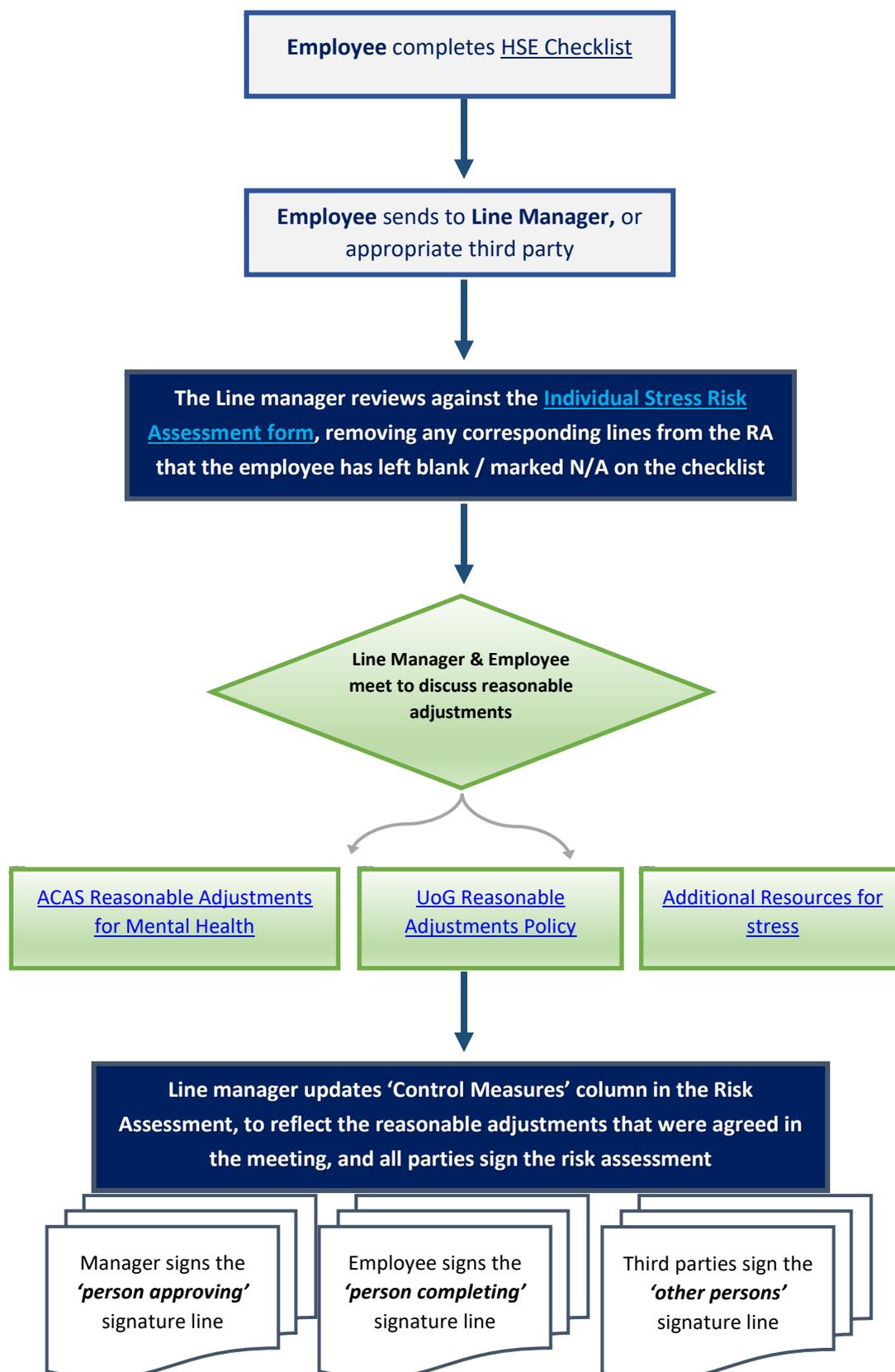
The resultant risk assessment must then be signed off by the relevant Senior Management Team (E.g. Pro-Vice Chancellor or Executive Director) and approved by Vice Chancellor's Executive.

NOTE: Risk assessments must be reviewed at least annually or sooner, if:

- There has been significant organisational change
- Patterns of stress-related absence or concerns emerge
- Incidents or formal complaints linked to workload or organisational factors occur.

4.2.2. Individual stress risk assessments

Where an individual reports stress or cites it as the cause of sickness / absence, or where signs of stress are observed, managers must take early and supportive action. This should be documented in an individual stress risk assessment.



The local Health and Safety Manager / Advisor and the Employee Relations and Change Manager should be informed once the individual stress risk assessment has been completed (signed by all parties).

NOTE: Individual support measures do not replace the requirement to assess and manage underlying team or organisational risks.

5. Further Guidance

5.1. Related Legislation:

In addition to the general duties contained in the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, further general guidance on Management of Work Related Stress can be found on HSE web pages: [Stress and mental health at work - HSE](#)

5.2. Related University documents:

- [Guidance for completing risk assessments](#)
- [Institutional stress risk assessment](#)
- [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#)
- [Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure](#)

5.3. Other related guidance:

- [Better Health Mind Plan](#)
- [Citizens Advice](#)
- [Employment Rights Act 2025](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [MIND – Wellness Action Plan](#)
- [NHS - Accessing therapy sessions](#)
- [NHS - Self Help CBT Techniques](#)
- [Request Mental Health Support Services via Access to Work \(Maximus\)](#)
- [Reasonable Adjustment for Mental Health \(ACAS Guide\)](#)
- [Stress and Mental Health at Work-HSE](#)
- [Stress and mental wellbeing resources for Higher Education Institutions- Publication](#)
- [USHA Stress Management Guide](#)

6. Document History

Details of previous reviews are as follows:

Review Date	Reviewer	Summary of Review
05-Mar-26	Michelle Owusua Appiah-Agyekum / Vikki Wood Health and Safety Services	v26.1 - Replaces individual stress risk assessment process flow and Stress Policy (previously owned by People's Directorate)

This document will be reviewed at least annually, hereafter.