



Joint working groups: implementing the stress management standards

THE HSE STRESS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

There is clear guidance available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which will help organisations identify practical solutions to the problem of work-related stress. This is the management standards approach.

If implemented properly, the management standards could significantly reduce levels of illness caused by work-related stress. The management standards, and the approach were launched in 2004 following extensive development and piloting. They are an effective tool for assisting organisations to identify the causes of work-related stress and implement practical solutions to manage the risks. They are now the main standard in use in the UK.

The management standards represent a set of conditions that, if present:

- demonstrate good practice through a step-by-step risk assessment approach
- allow assessment of the current situation using pre-existing data, surveys and other techniques
- promote active discussion and working in partnership with employees and their representatives, to help decide on practical improvements that can be made
- help simplify risk assessment for work-related stress by:
 - identifying the main risk factors
 - helping employers focus on the underlying causes and their prevention providing a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress

The first step for an organisation implementing the management standards approach is to set up a joint (workload & stress) working group with the recognised trade unions to oversee the organisational risk assessment process.

H&S COMMITTEE AND WORKLOAD WORKING GROUP

Framework for the audit and review of work-related stress risk management

- 1 Review relevant stress management policies to ensure that they are detailed and site specific, outlining who will be responsible for what, how they will achieve their aims and how they will measure successes.
- 2 Ensure the integration and involvement of occupational health into the health and safety management system. Clear reference to responsibilities of occupational health within the safety, health and wellbeing policies. Ensure maximum staff involvement in the planning of management of work-related stress at both organisational and local team level.
- 3 Ensure implementation of robust and effective procedures for managing work-related stress and that managers at all levels are committed to managing this within their departments.
- 4 Review corporate audit process to ensure effective monitoring of the management system for work related stress ie scrutiny of the content and quality of the departmental work-related stress risk assessments and assessment of the implementation of action plans.
- 5 Ensure that work-related stress risk assessments at team and departmental level are reviewed following an individual case of stress if work related stress factors are signalled by the employee.
- 6 Review the corporate health and safety risk assessment to ensure it includes proper assessment of institution-wide issues that may pose a risk of work-related stress to employees, for example organisational change and redundancies.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The University of Liverpool stress code of practice represents sector best practice. In particular, it contains a clear policy statement, links stress risk assessments with controls, and prioritises the elimination and minimisation of stressors. The code of practice sets out a robust and comprehensive approach to managing work-related stress using a H&S framework and the management standards, and has supportive elements for individuals. The responsibilities for senior managers and university council are robust. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9601/University-of-Liverpool-code-of-practice-on-stress-in-the-workplace/pdf/University_of_Liverpool_Code_of_Practice_Stress_in_the_Workplace.pdf

The Sussex Coast College Workload Committee terms of reference represents sector best practice for a workload working group. The employer commits to tackling workload intensification and work-related stress at an organisational level and to joint work with recognised trade unions. https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9600/Sussex-Coast-College-workload-working-group-terms-of-reference/doc/Sussex_Coast_College_workload_working_group_terms_of_reference.docx

RISK ASSESSMENT – A KEY DUTY

Employers have no option but to use risk assessment as the primary tool for identifying and controlling hazards and risks in the workplace; it's what the law requires. This makes risk assessment something that has a substantial impact on the health, safety and welfare of employees and that means safety representatives must be consulted in the process of risk assessment right from the start.

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA) is an enabling Act which sets a framework of general duties on employers in respect of health & safety. The Act broadly requires them to ensure the health, safety & welfare at work of their employees; The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR) set out the steps that the employer must take to manage health & safety in the workplace:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made> Both the approved code of practice to the MHSWR and the booklet L21 were withdrawn in December 2013, but HSE give guidance links here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg65.htm>

MHSWR Regulation 3 imposes a key duty on employers to make a 'suitable and sufficient' assessment of risks to their employees whilst at work, and to anyone else who may be affected, arising out of their undertaking. The assessment should take place before the work begins – it isn't something you do once a problem arises. The risk assessment is now the statutory foundation on which safe workplaces and safe working practices are built.

Health and safety representatives (including workload reps) should gather and assess information and data on work-related stress hazards through joint working with their employer on an organisational risk assessment process and by conducting workplace inspections. See UCU guidance: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11447/Stress-toolkit/pdf/UCU_stress_toolkit.pdf

and here: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9892/Health--safety-factsheet-workload-inspections/pdf/ucu_workloadinspections_factsheet_oct18.pdf

For more information please refer to the joint HSE / TUC guidance:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tacking-workplace-stress-guide.pdf>

And the HSE resources at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>