UCU guidance on workload risk assessments in FE

This factsheet is intended to help UCU reps in FE make the case to their employers on how to conduct risk assessments on workload and excessive working hours issues. It includes sample risk assessment questions and a checklist of management actions, which can be used to construct new risk assessment questions to ensure workload does not become a dangerous hazard in the FE workplace.

This factsheet sets out suggested ways in which employers can undertake effective risk assessments on workload, and therefore put effective control measures in place.

Who is responsible for risk assessments?

The duty to undertake risk assessments is imposed on **employers** by Regulation 3 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

The legal standard for risk assessment is "suitable and sufficient".

The risk assessment process must:

- **identify hazards and their causes,**
- **calculate the level of risk they pose to the health of employees,**
- **put control measures in place to protect workers from the identified risks.**

The employer must record the main points of the assessment, and this record should be capable of being used to evaluate whether-or-not the assessment was "suitable and sufficient".

Assessments should be kept under review and a re-assessment where there have been changes that mean the original assessment has been invalidated in some respect.

Who should conduct the assessment?

Employers should appoint "competent persons" to assist them in undertaking this, and other functions. They are required under Regulation 4A(1)(b) of the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations to consult with trade union safety representatives about how such competent persons are appointed.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has issued guidance for employers on general stress risk assessments and a toolkit that helps employers undertake suitable and sufficient risk assessments in order to meet the stress management standards and reduce the risks related to stress factors. Part of this toolkit is guidance on recommended procedures, which includes establishing a steering group with union representation, and Focus Groups to inform employer about problems. The guidance says that employers and worker representatives should work together to resolve the problems; i.e. control the risks to prevent harm.

It is important that UCU health & safety representatives are involved in the process in a constructively critical role, ensuring that the assessor identifies all the potential hazards, applies a justifiable approach to the evaluation of the level of risk the hazards pose to employees, and in determining appropriate control measures to eliminate, minimise or otherwise manage the risks identified.

Who should see the assessment?

Employers must give employees to whom the assessment relates information about the assessment, the risks identified and what measures have been taken to ensure these do not adversely affect their health.

Identifying and assessing risk

UCU has a number of existing guidance and advice documents for members that relate directly to workload issues; the Workload Questionnaire and Safe Working Practices docs (FE Toolkit); hours monitoring forms (FE Toolkit); and documents in the Stress toolkit.

FE Workloads Toolkit
http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/5/m/fe_workloadtoolkit_oct12.doc

UCU Stress Toolkit
http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2562

Issues covered by these documents can be used to develop questions that target local issues directly. The documents identify factors that represent hazards - things that can cause harm including:

- Number of weekly teaching hours, and associated admin and other work including preparation, materials production, lesson planning, marking, assessing, reporting, advice & guidance.
- Increased numbers of students on a course multiplies teaching-associated work
- Workload accumulation as the year progresses

- Scholarly and academic activity – reading, thinking, keeping up to date.
- Staff/professional development, meetings, courses, conference attendance
- Course development work.
- Placement visits, open days, other recruitment activity.
- Other administrative tasks within the department, college etc.
- The need to take work home regularly
- The need to work in the evenings and weekends to complete work and prepare
- Front loading of teaching early in the year

Some general risk assessment workload questions:

These sample questions relate to general across the board issues and should be tailored to issues that are relevant to your institution.

	Workload factor	Response		Action needed	Date
1	Is there an agreement on workload, including hours?	Yes	No		
2	Is the relationship between teaching and other tasks and duties clearly defined?	Yes	No		
3	Are there agreed limits on class sizes?	Yes	No		
4	Does your job description clearly define your responsibilities?	Yes	No		
5	Do you have an agreed personal work plan?	Yes	No		
6	Has your workload been increased unilaterally by management?	Yes	No		

Some more specific sample risk assessment questions

Here is a set of risk assessment questions that managers should ask in circumstances where employees are coming under pressure. Depending on the specific circumstances in a college or department some of these questions may or may not be relevant and other questions which target the specific local issues may be necessary to add. You should use the safe working practice checklist in this factsheet and local experience to determine other questions that need to be added in order to check that safe working practices are being observed.

	Workload factor	Factor rating					Level of risk posed	Action needed to minimise risk	Action date
1	Are you given sufficient guidance by management to ensure correct task prioritisation??	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
2	Is there regular consultation so you know what is expected of you?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
3	Are there sufficient numbers of staff to cover the expected departmental workloads?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
4	Are targets reasonable and manageable?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
5	Are there agreed limits on class sizes?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
6	Have agreed limits on class sizes been exceeded?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
7	Are there adequate resources for teaching and a proper resource provision service	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			

8	Do the procedures in place to resolve case-loading disputes work?	Never 1	Seldom 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Always 5			
9	The procedures for union negotiation are established and working effectively	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
10	There is adequate provision for union reps to meet with staff whenever necessary	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
11	There is provision in place to deal with unexpected events?	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
12	Managers are well-equipped to manage workloads effectively	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
13	Managers have the necessary support to manage workload without creating undue risk to health of members of staff	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
14	There are sufficient opportunities for individual members of staff to question managers about excess workloads	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
15	There is a forum for staff to make suggestions to management about workloads	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			
16	Staff and managers understand the procedures in place to deal those who display a more extreme reactions than average	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5			

Safe working practice checklist

In order to ensure that the workload does not place undue or potentially damaging conditions on members of staff, management should attend to the actions listed in the checklist below, as a minimum.

Where existing practices do not cover sufficiently any of these actions then risk assessment questions should be suggested that will expose where failures are occurring.

Organisational culture

- Institutional culture should ensure there is mutual respect and inspire confidence and trust.
- Recognise the contribution that staff make to the job and the institution.
- Have effective communications so staff know what is happening.
- Establish consultation practices that enable staff and their unions to participate meaningfully.
- Consider staff views before decisions are made.
- Value all staff equally.
- Have procedures in place to enable quick and effective response when problems are raised.
- Create a climate in which staff can raise problems without fear.

Demands

- Ensure that job descriptions are clearly defined.
- All staff to have an agreed personal work plan defining their role and responsibility.
- Guidance from management to ensure correct task prioritisation by staff.
- Regular consultation so staff know what is expected of them.
- Employ sufficient staff to cover expected section or departmental workload.
- Hold end of academic year meetings to provisionally case-load staff for new year.
- Finalise agreed case-loading early in the new academic year.
- Ensure targets that are reasonable and manageable.
- Agreement between individual staff and manager on workload, including hours.
- Ensure procedure in place to resolve case-loading disputes.
- Monitoring of individuals workload to ensure it does not become unreasonable.
- No increase in tasks without consultation and agreement.
- Increased workload should trigger appointment of additional staff.
- Agreed limits on class sizes.
- Timetable allowance for travel between sites - not in peoples own time.

- Timetables to minimise need to travel between sites.
- A place in an office to work and keep materials.
- Adequate resources for teaching and a proper resource provision service.
- Sufficient administrative and clerical support for non-teaching tasks.
- Ensure staff welfare facilities suitable and adequate for all staff.
- Ensure staff take their lunch break.
- Ensure staff do not take work home habitually - only in exceptional circumstances.

Control

- Establish a culture that allows and encourages staff to participate in the planning and organisation of the work.
- Encourage staff to be flexible in deciding how work should be completed.
- Provide appropriate job enrichment opportunities.
- Restrict close monitoring of individuals.
- Organise regular meetings to review what is happening, allow staff to share experience and ideas, and to provide opportunities to discuss problems.
- Use meetings to provide practical support and encouragement when necessary, and ensure staff are coping.
- Make sure staff are confident of continued management support even when things go wrong.

Relationships

- Aim to create a culture of trust and confidence.
- Encourage staff and management to recognise each individuals contribution.
- Managers should lead by example and good practice.
- Work in partnership with staff to ensure that bullying and harassment do not arise as issues.
- Ensure suitable and effective procedures are in place to deal with unacceptable behaviour.
- Draw up effective policies on bullying, harassment and discrimination in consultation with trade unions.
- Make all staff aware of the policies, and emphasise senior management support for them.
- Ensure all grades of management understand their duties and responsibilities under the policies, and that they are implemented.
- Ensure effective investigation of complaints, and that complainants will be protected.
- Communicate the consequences of a breach of the policy.
- Ensure managers are trained in management and interpersonal skills.

Support, training etc

- Ensure positive support mechanisms in place, especially when things go wrong.
- Make sure that staff are valued.
- Listen to staff and work out solutions to problems jointly.
- Involve staff in day-to-day matters.
- Make sure that task allocation reflects peoples skills, knowledge and strengths.
- Encourage a healthy life-work balance - ensure staff not working excessive hours by workload "creep".
- Ensure mechanisms in place so that staff can raise concerns/problems.
- Joint determination of training needs.

Links to further useful resources:

HSE Work related stress - resources and useful links page
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/resources.htm

HSE tools and templates for tackling workplace stress
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm

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