



Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH

# Managing Stress at Work Policy

<b>Policy Summary:</b>	This policy sets out the University's approach to the management of workplace stress
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	Human Resources
<b>Approved By:</b>	Executive Board: May 2019
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## **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this policy is to outline the University's commitment to supporting staff and managers in preventing and addressing workplace stress.

## **Scope of the Policy**

This policy applies to the University's responsibility as an employer, and applies to all employees of Queen Margaret University. Stress is a complex subject and the University has to deal with its effects, irrespective of its source. Whilst work related stress is addressed, other causes of stress are considered.

## **Equality and Diversity**

Queen Margaret University is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and it is the responsibility of all QMU employees to promote equality and diversity in the application of this policy, ensuring that there is no discrimination on the grounds of disability, race/ethnic origin, sex/gender, age, religion, marital/family status, dependency, sexual orientation or gender re-assignment.

## **Responsibility for this Policy**

Human Resources staff and the University's Health and Safety committee oversee this policy and managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.

## **1.0 Introduction**

We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors. It is the policy of QMU to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that no member of staff is subjected to a level of stress due to work which is detrimental to their health.

The University aims to create an environment where, if workplace stress does occur, it can be dealt with openly and fairly. QMU also commits itself to investigating all claims of ill health due to work place stress to ensure appropriate action is taken to prevent any recurrence of the situation.

It is widely recognised that work related stress is a major cause of occupational ill health in the UK which can cause severe physical and psychological conditions. It can also lead to poor productivity and human error, increased sickness absence, increases in accidents, high staff turnover and poor performance.

The University commits to the following action to prevent and address workplace stress:

- Conduct risk assessments to identify workplace stressors and eliminate or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Consult with trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide training for all managers and supervisors in good management practices.
- Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the University's agreed stress management policy.

## **2.0 Definition of Stress**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be positive if managed correctly, and stress, which is likely to be detrimental to physical or mental health if it is prolonged.

Pressure is part and parcel of work and helps to keep individuals motivated, but if demands and pressures ('stresses and stressors') become too great, they can induce, in anyone, the harmful or potentially harmful mental and physical feelings and reactions commonly known as "stress".

Stress is considered to be a state, not an illness. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical ill health may develop.

## **3.0 Legal Context and HSE Management Standards**

Employers have duties under the following

- (i) Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, to assess the risk of stress related ill health arising from work activities; and

- (ii) The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to take measures to control that risk.

The HSE has provided a set of standards for managing stress in the workplace. Compliance with the management standards is not a legal requirement. However they are recognised as providing an approach that, if followed, will meet the statutory requirements posed by legislation.

<b>Demands</b>	Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demand of their jobs
<b>Control</b>	Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
<b>Support</b>	Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
<b>Relationships</b>	Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work
<b>Role</b>	Employees indicate that they understand their roles and responsibilities
<b>Change</b>	Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisation change

The management standards can be used to identify the primary causes of stress and make the process of managing stress in the workplace easier and more effective. The primary causes of stress are:

<b>Demands</b>	Workload, working patterns and the work environment
<b>Control</b>	How much say a person has in the way they do their work
<b>Support</b>	The encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
<b>Relationships</b>	Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and deal with unacceptable behaviour
<b>Role</b>	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
<b>Change</b>	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

It is recognised that each cause will have potentially different impacts on different individuals and there is not a simple relationship between any on primary cause and the level of stress an individual may experience.

#### 4.0 Responsibilities

##### Managers will:

- conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their area;
- ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;
- ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties;
- ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities;

- monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded or underutilised for a prolonged period;
- discourage work-related contact with staff outside normal working hours or whilst on holiday;
- monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking;
- monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement;
- attend training, as requested, in good management practice and health and safety;
- ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
- be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff experiencing stress outside work, e.g. bereavement or separation.

**The Health and Safety Adviser will:**

- provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress;
- train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments;
- carry out a University stress risk assessment normally every 2 years;
- support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work;
- refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required;
- monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress;
- inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

**Human resources will:**

- give guidance to managers on the Managing Stress at Work policy;
- help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics;
- advise managers and individuals on training requirements and opportunities;
- provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.

**Employees will:**

- raise issues of concern with their safety representative, line manager, Human Resources or occupational health;
- take an active part in the process of assessing the risk, e.g. completing surveys or providing honest feedback when requested;
- accept opportunities for support which may include counselling when recommended.

**Safety representatives:**

- will be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress;
- will be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys;
- will be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process;
- should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from human resources;
- should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any trade union training relating to workplace stress;
- should conduct joint inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are controlled properly. A routine inspection plan should be mutually agreed.

**The Health and Safety committee will:**

- involve representation or represent the views of all elements of the workforce;
- perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented;
- oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

**It is recognised that Senior Management and HR have a joint responsibility to:**

- work together to ensure appropriate plans are in place to support the implementation of the Managing Stress at Work Policy;
- provide managers with the time and resources to ensure appropriate staffing levels are in place across their areas of responsibility;
- ensure that managers and teams are fully aware of the options available to them when teams are affected by unplanned absence, including arrangements for cover for absent staff;
- ensure that where a staff member resigns, and a decision is made to replace their post, the recruitment process is completed within a reasonable timeframe, ensuring excessive pressure is not placed on existing staff members over a prolonged period of time;
- ensure that where proposals for change, within the scope of the Organisational Change Procedure, affect an area of the University the Organisational Change Procedure is followed and completed within a reasonable timeframe.

## **5.0 Further Information and Support**

1. Managing Workplace Stress – A guide for managers
2. Managing Workplace Stress – A guide for employees
3. Employee Stress Risk Assessment