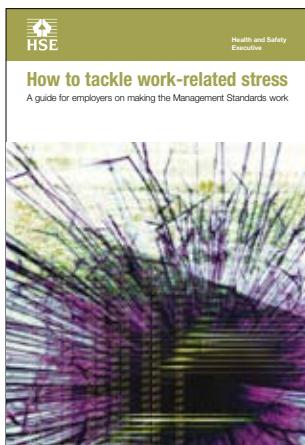


How to tackle work-related stress

A guide for employers on making the Management Standards work



This is a web-friendly version of leaflet INDG430, published 10/09.

Introduction

Going to work is generally good for us, but only if our health, safety and welfare are protected. Preventing ill health because of work-related stress is part of creating a good working environment for your employees.

What is stress and why do we need to tackle it?

People get confused about the difference between pressure and stress. We all experience pressure regularly – it can motivate us to perform at our best. It is when we experience too much pressure and feel unable to cope that stress can result.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates the costs to society of work-related stress to be around £4 billion each year, while 13.5 million working days were lost to stress in 2007/08. By taking action to reduce the problem, you can help create a more productive, healthy workforce and save money. Many organisations have reported improvements in productivity, retention of staff and a reduction in sickness absence after tackling work-related stress.

As an employer, you are also required by law to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and take action to control that risk.

What help is available?

HSE has designed the Management Standards approach to help employers manage the causes of work-related stress. It is based on the familiar ‘Five steps to risk assessment’ model, requiring management and staff to work together. The Standards refer to six areas of work that can lead to stress if not properly managed. They are reproduced in full at the end of this leaflet, or you can look at HSE’s stress website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress.

This leaflet will help you tackle work-related stress using the Management Standards. It takes you through the process step by step and offers practical ‘What works at work?’ advice based on case studies and discussions with managers. It emphasises the importance of an effective line manager and the behaviours needed to successfully manage the causes of stress at work.

This leaflet has been produced by HSE and the International Stress Management Association^{UK} and is backed by Acas, CIPD, LGE and the TUC.

What is the Management Standards approach?

The Management Standards approach requires managers, employees and their representatives to work together to improve certain areas of work, described in the Standards, which will have a positive effect on employee well-being.

Under each area there are 'states to be achieved', which organisations should work towards.

The approach is aimed at the organisation rather than individuals, so that a larger number of employees can benefit from any actions taken.

Figure 1 The Management Standards approach



Before you start: Prepare the organisation

Before you introduce the Management Standards approach, remember to plan ahead and prepare the organisation.

Start by thinking about securing the commitment of senior managers, line managers and employees. It is also good practice to set up a project or steering group to oversee the work.

This group will typically include senior and line managers; health and safety managers; trade union health and safety representatives or employee representatives; human resources and occupational health representatives.

What works at work?

Securing senior management commitment

The senior management team should be briefed so that they understand the rationale and business case for stress management, as well as their legal duties. Successful programmes depend on commitment from senior managers. This might be demonstrated by, for example, a director being the project sponsor, visible support from the boardroom, or senior managers attending stress management training.

'The Board acknowledging stress and mental health problems was an important step and created the framework for success.'

Clive Harker, Occupational Physician, United Biscuits

Support for staff

Before the Management Standards approach is introduced, you need to make arrangements to support your staff. This may be support for line managers wanting more information about the Management Standards process, or employees wanting help to complete surveys. The steering/project group may be able to provide such support.

Step 1 Identify the risks

Understand the Management Standards

There are six areas of work that can have a negative impact on employee health if not properly managed. These are outlined in the Management Standards, along with descriptions of good practice.

The Management Standards approach and how it applies in your workplace should be explained so that everyone understands it. Some organisations have incorporated or made reference to the Standards in their stress policy documents. This can help explain the reasons for using the approach and can define the roles and responsibilities of those involved in making the policy work.

The six Management Standards cover:

Demands – includes workload, work patterns and the work environment.

Control – how much say a person has in the way they do their work.

Support – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Relationships – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

What works at work?

'All managers in the directorate received a stress policy briefing, which they communicated to their staff. This informed managers of their role in implementing the stress policy and the intention to conduct a stress audit.'

Birmingham City Council

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how

Gather data

You probably already have a lot of data that can be used to identify areas of good and poor practice. Try not to rely on one set of data as this might not provide an accurate picture of your organisation. It is better to use a number of sources and look for relationships within the data to get a more accurate view of the current state of your organisation.

Annual staff surveys and/or the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool (a questionnaire available on the HSE stress website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress) can be used to gather the views of employees. These can be used as a source of data, but should not be the only data used to assess those at risk.

The analysis of your data helps you to understand your organisation's current situation. If you have used the HSE Indicator Tool, then you can start to evaluate your data with the freely available analysis tool on the HSE stress website. This can be used as a starting point, working with employees to improve health, well-being and performance.

Typical data available includes:

- Surveys
- Sickness absence data
- Staff turnover rates
- Exit interviews
- Number of referrals to occupational health
- Information from existing staff forums

What works at work?

Communication is crucial

If staff do not understand why a survey is being done or are sceptical about its motives, they may not return questionnaires. A good return is essential to get a representative sample of the organisation. Initial communication is very important. Where there are trade union and employee representatives, they can help communicate with staff. Ways of improving response rates include delivering questionnaires with pay slips to ensure all staff get a copy and setting time aside for completion of surveys.

Existing data

Organisations with existing data tend to use this as a way to monitor progress and effectiveness. The data can then be used to strengthen arguments for activity and future initiatives.

Step 3 Evaluate the risks

Explore problems and develop solutions

Use the results from Step 2, along with the Management Standards, to help you decide what to do in this step. Identify hot spots and priority areas. Check the results of the analysis with your employees. Then work with them to determine how to address the gap between current performance and the 'states to be achieved' within the Management Standards.

Make sure you involve employees and their representatives in discussions as they are often the ones closest to the issues and best placed to suggest improvements. A good way to consult is through focus groups – the number of groups will depend

on things like the size and structure of the organisation, available resources and, most importantly, the results of your data analysis from Step 2.

The outcomes of the focus group discussions should be a set of suggested actions aimed at addressing specific issues. If you have used multiple focus groups then it is normally the role of the project team or steering group to collect and prioritise the suggested actions.

Example Standard: Demands

Demands covers issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.

The Standard here is that employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs, and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

To reach this Standard, each risk area includes several points under 'What should be happening/States to be achieved'. For **Demands** these are:

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

What works at work?

'Those who attended the focus groups said it was good to have a chance to talk about this aspect of their working lives and some said they found it cathartic. The focus groups also proved useful in giving practical suggestions for making simple organisational improvements.'

Gwent Health Care NHS Trust

Step 4 Record your findings

Develop and implement action plans

It is often the case that the actions from Step 3 are aimed at different levels of the organisation such as team, department, or division and will deliver in different timescales (short, medium or long). So, when compiling your action plan, consider how you intend to evaluate each action and how you will know whether it has been successful. Ask yourself: How will we know if this is working and what measures can we use?

When complete the action plan should be communicated to employees. Some examples of popular actions are:

- Giving specific groups of employees more control over aspects of their work.
- Improving communication up and down the management chain, and between groups.
- Management development, particularly in interpersonal skills.
- Job reviews/task analysis using the Management Standards as a framework.
- Updating a specific policy or procedure shown to have failings.

What works at work?

Test decisions and policies on pilot groups

This will help you avoid the common problem that decisions made in theory can be difficult to put into practice. Also, different departments may have different problems and these need to be taken into account.

Split action plans into the six Management Standards areas

This can help you link actions back to the process, addressing 'states to be achieved'. Ensuring 'quick-wins' is also a popular option, so staff can see action is being taken.

'Action plans were developed into key themes for action around the six HSE stress risk factor categories. A leaflet outlining the results of the stress audit and focus groups was distributed to all staff and an article written for the in-house magazine.'

Birmingham City Council

Step 5 Monitor and review

Monitor the actions in your plan to ensure they are having the desired effect in the appropriate timescale.

At this stage reflect on what you have found out. In particular, consider what the types of activities you have put in your action plan can tell you about the underlying issues in your organisation.

Think about what you can do in the future to prevent the problems identified happening again so you are able to deal with them in a proactive rather than reactive way. Explain to managers that good stress management is not about a survey, but is an ongoing process of continuous improvement.

Remember, as with all risk assessments, record what you have done. As part of your monitoring process, you may be required to repeat the Management Standards approach again.

The essential role of the line manager

Line managers play a vital role in identifying and managing stress within the organisation. They are likely to see the problems which cause stress first hand and will often be the first point of contact when an individual is feeling stressed. It is essential that they have the skills and behaviours to be able to manage these situations.

HSE has worked with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Investors in People (IiP) to commission research into the behaviours needed for an effective manager. If you have line manager responsibilities, visit HSE's stress website to try out a self-assessment survey and see if you have what it takes to manage stress at work: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm.

You can also visit the CIPD website for the full Line Manager Competency report: www.cipd.co.uk/guides.

The Management Standards

Demands

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- the organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- employees are consulted over their work patterns.

Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, eg bullying at work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- employees share information relevant to their work;
- the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- the organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- employees are aware of timetables for changes; and
- employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Find out more

Five steps to risk assessment Leaflet INDG163(rev2) HSE Books 2006
(single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 978 0 7176 6189 3)
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf

Managing the causes of work-related stress: A step-by-step approach using the Management Standards HSG218 (Second edition) HSE Books 2007
ISBN 978 0 7176 6273 9

Working together to reduce stress at work: A guide for employees Leaflet INDG424
HSE Books 2008 (single copy free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 978 0 7176 6320 0)
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg424.pdf

Visit HSE's stress website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Further information

HSE priced and free publications can be viewed online or ordered from www.hse.gov.uk or contact HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 10 from HSE Books, ISBN 978 0 7176 6378 1. Single copies are free and a web version can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf.

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