

Title	Stress Management Guidance
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Version	Date	Description
0.1	Feb 09	First draft in line with Corporate Health Standard requirements
0.2	March 09	Management Board approval
0.3	April 09	Health and Safety Group approval
0.4	May 09	Works Council endorsement with minor amendments
0.5	11/06/09	HRC approval
1.0	June 09	Policy EIA'd

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this guidance document is to acknowledge that levels of stress exist in individuals' lives and to provide general information regarding the identification of some of the possible causes of stress, suggest ways of avoiding or minimising it, particularly in the workplace and identify support mechanisms available to employees.

1.2 This policy aims to encourage a supportive framework for line managers and employees when dealing with stress. Employees will not be treated less favourably or discriminated against because of suffering from stress.

1.3 This guidance document should be read in conjunction with the Stress Management policy, which outlines the definitions of stress and responsibilities of HEFCW, line managers, employees and committees.

2. Signs and causes of stress

2.1 It is important to recognise that the causes and symptoms of stress will vary for different individuals and may be displayed in different ways.

2.2 Some signs of stress are outlined below, however this list is not exhaustive and such symptoms may not always be related to stress:

- irritability
- frustration
- dissatisfaction
- back pain
- heart disease
- muscle tension
- excessive drinking/smoking
- headaches/ migraines
- depression
- chronic tiredness
- anxiety attacks
- 'out of character' behaviour
- sleeplessness
- reduced productivity
- symptoms of mental illness

2.3 The Health and Safety Executive identify the following sources as some issues that can potentially cause stress in an individual's life:

- poor communication;
- very long hours;
- too much/little work;
- boring/repetitive work;
- bullying/harassment;
- poor working environment;
- poor working relationships;
- problems balancing work/life commitments;
- lack of training and support;
- uncertainty of role;
- change in work/home life.

This list is not exhaustive.

2.4 If you feel you are stressed as a result of any of the above or other factors in your life there are some useful steps that you can take.

2.4.1 Be aware

Just simply being aware of the potential sources of stress in work can help individuals deal with them. If individuals know what they are they can put measures in place to deal with them or minimise them.

Here is a brief check list for self-assessment of stress:

- are you clear about your objectives and others' expectations of you?;

- are you able to plan, prioritise and delegate work effectively?;
- can you say 'no' when demands are too high?;
- are you eating and sleeping well? Do you exercise regularly?;
- can you 'switch off' at the end of the day? Are you regularly taking work home?;
- are you taking your full annual leave entitlement?;
- do you frequently fall ill the moment you take leave?

Example

If an individual knows that demanding work, work overload and time pressures are something that causes them stress they should make sure that their line manager is aware of this, set aside time each day to deal with unexpected work and minimise interruptions as far as possible to allow the task to be completed. This could be through simply turning off emails or working from home.

2.4.2 Know the symptoms

In some situations individuals may not know the specific issue that is causing them stress, however if individuals know their own symptoms of stress this will help highlight that there may be something in their life causing them stress.

Line managers should be observant of changes in behaviour amongst individuals' as these could indicate levels of stress.

In either case, if symptoms of stress are highlighted it is then possible to seek to identify possible work related causes of stress and assess how these could be addressed, for example:

- review workload and work approach;
- job description and job design;
- establish regular meetings with line manager to discuss work;
- consider a 'clear desk' policy i.e. only have the piece of work you are doing within view;
- review communication systems;
- identify any training opportunities.

Example

If experiencing anxiety or irritability, if these are the individual's symptoms of stress then discussing with their line manager or an impartial individual via the Employee Assistance Programme may help identify the specific reason causing the stress. Once this is highlighted steps can then be taken to manage the stressor.

3. Mechanisms in place to manage stress

HEFCW encourages employees to speak with their line manager and discuss any difficulties they are experiencing as it is extremely difficult for a line manager to provide support if they are not aware of individual circumstances. HEFCW also acknowledges that it may not always be possible to do so. HEFCW has a variety of policies, procedures and schemes in place that employees can draw upon to help manage stress in life, details of which can be found below.

3.1 Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

3.1.1 The EAP is a practical telephone based information system and short term telephone or face to face counselling support available to employees, and those close to you, such as your partner or a family member.

3.1.2 The key benefits of the EAP are:

- available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, to speak with a professional
- unlimited support - it can be used as often as needed
- independent, impartial source of support
- completely free of charge

3.1.3 The EAP can provide support on a wide range of work and personal issues. Although there is no exhaustive list, some examples include:

- relationship problems (personal and at work);
- financial/ debt issues;
- legal matters;
- consumer issues;
- pressure/ stress;
- anxiety/ depression;
- work overload;
- bullying;
- bereavement.

3.1.4 This service is paid for by HEFCW, however no information or detail is provided to HEFCW on who has used the service, why or for how long.

3.1.5 Contact details can be found on posters around the office and on the intranet under [HR/ Staff Support/ EAP](#).

3.2 Work Life Balance policies

3.2.1 Work-life balance (WLB) is about individuals having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, organisation and society.

3.2.2 Some of these policies can help you in one way or another to deal with stressful situations in your life and support you in having a work-life balance:

- Absence
- Adoptive Leave
- Annual Leave
- Career Break
- Childcare Voucher Scheme
- Flexible Working Patterns
- Flexible Working Hours
- Flexi Timesheet Completion Notes
- Foster Leave
- Home working
- Maternity Leave
- Parental Leave
- Paternity Leave
- Purchase of Additional Annual Leave
- Special Leave

All of these policies can be found on the [intranet](#).

3.3 Fair Treatment and Dignity at Work

3.3.1 HEFCW accepts that all individuals have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and will not tolerate any form of harassment by any of its staff. The Fair Treatment and Dignity at Work policy acknowledges this and puts in place support for staff through Fair Treatment Advisers (FTAs).

3.3.2 The FTA provides the opportunity for staff to speak to a trained individual regarding unfair treatment. The FTA is there to provide an independent and confidential service to staff to help them feel reassured and supported when it's needed most.

3.3.4 The FTA is the first point of contact in these instances and will offer support and provide options in an unbiased way. They are also there to support those members of staff against whom a complaint has been made. At all times the individual will be in control of their own situation and will be supported to help them achieve their chosen resolution.

3.3.5 Further details on the [role of the FTA can be found on the intranet along with a list of current FTAs](#).

3.4 Disability Equality in Practice and Reasonable Adjustment guidance

3.4.1 In some cases stress can cause long term illness which could fall under the category of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

3.4.2 HEFCW has implemented the Disability Equality in Practice and Reasonable Adjustment guidance to deal with the practical implications of the legislation and allow employees to request a reasonable adjustment at work to help manage the disability.

3.4.3 Full details of the policy can be found on the [intranet](#).

3.5 Occupational Health Services

3.5.1 HEFCW has an outsourced occupational health service to provide impartial specialist advice and support to staff and HEFCW as an employer. It can assist with absence management, stress management, and specific health advice to support employees in work.

3.5.2 Referrals may be made for employees who are still working or absent from work and are arranged via HR.

3.5.3 Further details are available on the [intranet](#) or you can contact HR directly.

3.6 Health and Well-being initiatives

3.6.1 HEFCW has various initiatives in place that can help cope with stress. The [Health and Wellbeing pages](#) on the intranet holds details on the following areas:

- Alcohol
- Back pain
- Employee assistance programme
- Environmental awareness
- Eye tests
- Health and learning
- Keeping well at work
- Mental health
- Nutrition
- Stress
- Personal safety
- Physical activity
- Smoking
- Work life balance
- Volunteering

These all relate to the Corporate Health Standard initiative which is part of [Health Challenge Wales](#).

4. Queries and review of the guidance

4.1 Any queries on this guidance document should be directed to HR.

4.2 The policy will be reviewed when the Corporate Health Standard initiative is launched to ensure that the information aligns. The guidance will then be reviewed annually.