

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT

1. The College seeks to maintain a positive and supportive working environment for its entire staff. It recognises that excessive or prolonged pressure in the workplace can have a negative impact on individuals, and that this can be prevented and alleviated through appropriate action on the part of individuals and their managers.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

2. This policy aims to establish standards for managers and staff on the prevention and management of work-related stress. It provides guidance to managers and supervisors to facilitate the implementation of these standards, as well as information on sources of support available to individuals experiencing feelings of stress.

DEFINITION

3. The definition of stress used by Health and Safety Executive (HSE), is "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them", and which draws a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when pressure becomes excessive.

Stress is a state, not an illness, where stress lasts for only a short time there is usually no lasting effect. However, if the stress is sustained over a longer period it can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, work performance, and morale. Reducing and preventing work-related stress therefore brings clear benefits to the employer as well as to staff. The College has adopted the approach to the management and prevention of stress recommended by the HSE, which is based on the HSE's 'management standards'.

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

4. The College recognises that it has a duty of care towards its staff and a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment.
5. The College aims to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that staff work in a positive, safe, and supportive working environment by seeking to:
 - promote sound management practice;
 - provide a framework of employment, health, and safety policies systems and monitoring to support managers and staff to ensure effective work performance and minimise the risk of work-related stress;
 - provide advice and information to staff about stress in order to promote preventative measures and ensure early intervention in cases of work-related stress;
 - promote equality of opportunity, and provide a workplace free from harassment and bullying;
 - foster effective workload allocation and give feedback on performance;

- promote good communication throughout the College;
- provide information and training to enable staff to develop their skills and maximise their contribution to the success of the College;
- provide employee support, appropriate to the employee.

6. **Managers' responsibilities**

Managers and supervisors play an important role in facilitating and supporting staff to carry out their jobs effectively and to contribute to the success of the College. In order to minimise the risk of work-related stress, managers should:

- ensure good communications, particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes;
- ensure that jobs are properly designed, with realistic demands and workload, and that expectations and job role are clear;
- ensure that staff are sufficiently trained/briefed to undertake the demands of their job and are able to contribute to decisions about how the job is done;
- ensure that there are regular opportunities to discuss the work and obtain feedback on performance, eg. regular one-to-one meetings and/or team meetings;
- monitor working hours and holidays to ensure that staff are not overworking and are taking appropriate breaks;
- identify or respond to issues of concern promptly and seek constructive solutions;
- ensure staff are provided with meaningful development opportunities;
- ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated behaviours;
- be alert to signs of problems and offer additional support to any member of staff who is known to be experiencing stress;
- seek advice and support at an early stage from Human Resources if difficulties arise.

7. **Employees Responsibilities**

It is essential that staff play an active role in contributing to their own well-being and development by using the resources available to carry out their role effectively. In order to minimise the risk of work-related stress, staff should:

- ensure good communication with colleagues and their line manager;
- support colleagues by providing appropriate information and by sharing knowledge and resources where appropriate;
- engage in discussion about their performance and act on feedback;
- raise issues of concern at an early stage and seek constructive solutions;
- ensure that harassment and bullying are not tolerated;
- seek appropriate advice and support at an early stage if difficulties arise.

It is hoped that a proactive approach will mitigate the occurrence of potentially harmful levels of stress. However, where a member of staff feels under undue pressure, they should alert their line manager, or another appropriate person (who may be able to speak on their behalf), as soon as possible.

LINKS WITH OTHER PROCEDURES

8. It is sometimes necessary for managers to invoke disciplinary procedures to address poor performance or conduct, and to protect other staff from the adverse effects of such under-performance. It is recognised that the prospect of disciplinary proceedings or the proceedings themselves may be stressful for the staff involved. This should not of itself prevent managers

from pursuing legitimate management action: indeed lengthy delays in the disciplinary process may aggravate stress.

Managers should, however, seek advice, as necessary, from Human Resources as to how to support the member of staff concerned while the disciplinary process is in progress to mitigate the effects of any stress. Similar advice may be necessary in the context of the grievance procedure.

9. Nothing in this policy should prevent or delay the operation of other relevant procedures, where they should be invoked.

RISK IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

10. All staff may experience periods of pressure at work at some time, and short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern. It is the risk from sustained and/or excessive pressure, without the opportunity to recover, that needs to be assessed and measures put in place to control the risk of adverse effects.

Major initiatives will always include a consideration of the potential for work-related stress, and whether this can be mitigated for example, by ensuring effective and timely communication, by giving consideration to the timing of new initiatives avoiding conflicting deadlines where possible, by ensuring the demands on staff are not otherwise excessive, and by seeking to ensure a supportive management culture.

Similarly, departmental managers should have arrangements in place to identify and address potential stressors in the workplace - for example, regular review of sickness absence records/certificates, particularly those indicating stress, data on staff turnover, trends emerging from personal development reviews (appraisals), and issues raised in individual and staff meetings.

The College is committed to improving management practice through the provision of guidance, training and support, the promotion of harassment prevention policies, as well as supporting positive initiatives such as personal development reviews and the performance related bonus scheme.

MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL CASES OF STRESS

11. Where cases of workplace stress are identified, managers should seek information from the individual as to the contributory factors perceived by the individual and possible remedies.

The early detection of individuals experiencing related health difficulties is vital, and managers and individuals are encouraged to seek advice and assistance at as early a stage as possible. The management of persons severely affected by work-related stress will be the responsibility of the managers, supported by Human Resources.

MONITORING

12. Human Resources will regularly review the operation of this policy. This will include monitoring the incidences of work-related stress, sickness absence, complaints of harassment or bullying and staff turnover.