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EPSRC Policy Document

HR4.2 STRESS POLICY

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| 0.1 | 1 April 2011 | Peter Ethelston | EWB Manager | |
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Contents

HR4.2 Stress Policy

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Aim | 3 |
| 2. Purpose | 3 |
| 3. Scope | 3 |
| 4. Responsibilities | 3 |
| 5. Stress | 4 |
| 6. Managing Stress at Work..... | 5 |
| 7. Flowchart | 5 |
| 8. Record Keeping | 5 |
| 9. Related Policies | 5 |
| 10. Responsibility for monitoring this Policy | 5 |
| 11. Responsibility for reviewing this Policy..... | 5 |

[Annex A:](#) Taking the Stress Out of Work – Guidance for Employees

[Annex B:](#) Taking the Stress Out of Work – Checklist for Managers

HR4.2 Stress Policy

EPSRC wants to be an efficient and effective organisation. As part of this, EPSRC wishes to be seen as an employer of choice and to be seen by all as an organisation that operates according to high ethical standards, policies and processes.

EPSRC aims to have a policy framework which is clear, accessible and compliant with current employment law, which conforms to the current ACAS Code of Practice, and promotes equality and diversity in the workplace.

1. Aim

The aim of this policy is to define the EPSRC framework of procedures for the management of stress as part of the overall management of health and safety and to create a safe working environment for all employees and that de-stigmatises stress-related illness.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the HR4.2 Stress Policy is to provide an appropriate framework of information and guidance to managers and employees on the prevention and management of stress.

EPSRC recognises that stress should be managed and implemented using tools, techniques and processes which are consistent with its organisational values and comply with legal requirements.

This policy replaces the following CEMs and supporting policy documentation:

| CEM | Supporting Policy Documentation |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| | No associated documents |

3. Scope

This policy applies to all EPSRC employees.

4. Responsibilities

Line Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring the policy is applied correctly and adhered to in their area.
- Raising issues with EPSRC HR as and when required.
- Managing employees without compromising employee well-being.
- Showing understanding and empathy for employees affected by stress.
- Being alert to changes in performance, attendance or behaviour that might indicate early signs of stress.
- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that all risks associated with stress are identified and measures are taken to mitigate such risks.
- Respecting employee confidentiality.
- Providing the opportunity for employees to raise concerns.

Employees are responsible for:

- Having an awareness of and understanding the policy.
- Seeking support if experiencing stress or feeling to be at risk from stress.
- Raising issues with managers in first instance, or EPSRC HR if unable to approach manager.
- Considering opportunities of support if offered e.g. counselling.
- Being respectful to colleagues who are suffering from stress.

EPSRC HR is responsible for:

- Monitoring the policy and providing advice and guidance to employees.
- Ensuring that EPSRC complies with the HSE standards on work related stress (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>)
- Provision of management reports identifying the levels of reported sick absence identified as stress.
- Coordination with Health and Safety Advisor on stress cases ensuring correct procedures and accurate records are maintained in accordance with Data Protection legislation.
- Publishing and reviewing the policy.

SSC HR is responsible for:

- Ensuring the functionality of Oracle so that submitted Employee Wellbeing documents are logged and processed correctly, and management information generated.

5. Stress

EPSRC is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees and this policy sets out EPSRC's intentions and recommendations for the management of stress at work as part of its overall management of health and safety.

EPSRC seeks to have an organisational culture that is both supportive and empowering, with a management style that reflects this. It recognises the impact of issues associated with stress within the workplace and acknowledges the role of the organisation and all its employees in managing it.

EPSRC acknowledges a duty of care to the mental health and wellbeing of all employees and takes responsibilities for mental health seriously. EPSRC has signed the [Mindful Employer Charter](#) to show a commitment to gain a greater understanding of mental health issues and of best practice management in order to make the organisation a safe environment for all employees.

Employees are encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves at work and support others to do the same. This policy provides guidance and explains what stress is, how it can affect individuals and some of the ways in which stress can be taken out of everyday situations.

EPSRC recognises that stress related problems are rarely confined solely to the individual concerned. The effects may be felt within the team through impaired relationships or the impact on the possible need to cover absences.

6. Managing Stress at Work

There is no specific legislation which deals with work related stress, but EPSRC has duties and obligations under the [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#). These duties are to protect, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have a defined set of [Management Standards](#) which cover the primary source of stress at work. These standards allow assessment of situations, promote active discussion to identify the main risk factors, and provide help to focus on the underlying causes and their prevention. EPSRC fully endorses the HSE's approach to managing stress at work. Guidance on how to apply the HSE standards within the workplace is in Annex A. A checklist to assist managers in discussion on work-related stress is at Annex B.

7. Flowchart

This policy does not have a flowchart as it is a statement.

8. Record Keeping

EPSRC holds employee information, much of which is confidential.

EPSRC holds information about employees which is processed fairly and lawfully and when information is requested from employees they will be informed of the purposes for which it is required.

SSC HR will keep records of stress-related absences as attachments to Oracle personal records. Line managers must ensure that all paperwork relating to absence is completed and electronically sent to SSC HR.

9. Related Policies

HR4 Employee Wellbeing Policy
HR7.2 Bullying and Harassment Policy
HR5 Absence Policy

Guidance for Employees Working Overseas

10. Responsibility for monitoring this Policy

The Responsibility for monitoring this policy rests with the HR Business Partner.

11. Responsibility for reviewing this Policy

| Reviewer | Approver | Frequency |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| HR Business Partner | Associate Director, Operations. | Annually |

Annex A – Taking The Stress Out of Work – Guidance for Employees

Dated 1 April 2011

What is stress?

Stress is talked about frequently and has been a part of life for years. Living conditions people had to endure years ago, the experience of two world wars and the depression show that stress is nothing new.

Pressure is part and parcel of all work and can be motivating and challenging and can lead to improved performance. However 'stress' is taken to mean the negative response to too much pressure, or too many demands, which an individual finds difficulty in coping with. Stress, particularly if it is prolonged, represents a risk to both mental and physical health. Stress can be caused by pressures at home or at work, or a combination of both.

Stress is very individual, what might be stressful for one person may not be for another. This does not mean that one person is stronger or weaker than the other, but that everyone is different. Individuals are conditioned differently from birth; there are different life experiences, personalities, states of health, all are unique to individuals. Often, stress occurs due to an individual's expectation of both themselves and others.

Mental health has been described as 'the emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own, and others' dignity and worth'.

The warning signs

The body gives early warning signs when stress might be experienced. These can be likened to the lights showing in a car when there is a problem like low fuel or oil. In the car these signs are not ignored, but when busy individuals tend to ignore such signs, often at a cost.

Some manifestations are more apparent than others and can be presented in the workplace; for example:

- Irritability.
- Moodiness.
- Obsession with detail.
- Flitting from task to task.
- Poor judgement and decision making.
- Increased errors.
- Weight loss/gain.
- Increased use of support substances i.e. caffeine, smoking, alcohol.

Emotional symptoms are common and can include:

- Guilt.
- Resentment.
- Sense of being "out of control".

- Panic.
- Anxiety.

Withdrawal/ difficulty disengaging

Ill-health is a rare outcome of stress but the more common manifestations described above can still have a major impact on work and family life. Employees are encouraged to recognise the warning signs and to attempt to adopt coping mechanisms and strategies.

Identifying the causes of stress

It is important to identify the causes of stress. It is easy to blame one thing alone when things are going wrong but there are often likely to be many things that contribute. Good, supportive working relationships have a buffering effect against stress; poor working relationships have the opposite effect and can be a cause of stress. Harassment and bullying can cause severe stress and employees should report such cases in line with the HR7.4 Bullying and Harassment Policy.

Managers have a responsibility for the welfare of their teams and concerns related to the stress or the mental well-being of employees. They have a critical role to play in the early identification and prevention of work related stress and in minimising and managing stress risks. They should not ignore issues of concern; all should be dealt with without delay. Managers should seek support from EPSRC HR if in any doubt about what to do about a stress-related issue. Employees also have a duty to communicate with their manager or EPSRC HR if they are experiencing problems associated with stress.

Stress can result from:

- Excessive workloads.
- Insufficient work.
- Not feeling involved or in control.
- Personality clashes.
- Job content.
- Home/ work-life interface.

Dealing with stress in the workplace

Managers should meet employees who are affected by stress at the earliest opportunity to discuss and identify all the issues that are currently causing concern. By grouping these into similar types it may be possible to identify that what originally seemed to be totally unrelated problems have the same underlying cause.

The Individual Risk Assessment Pro-forma at Annex 1 can be used as an aid in the discussion between employee and manager.

Where an individual is feeling stressed consideration should be given to asking the questions '**how do you spend your time**' and '**how would you like to spend your time**'. It is quite easy when there is too much to do and feeling short of time, to lose sight of the goals

and end up just muddling through. To prioritise the items that have been identified as causing concern the following questions should be answered:

- Is this something that **must** be done?
- Is it something that **should** be done, or:
- Is it something that we **want** to do?

Must means must, **should** contains options and **want** is a free choice. Consider situations that waste time, make changes where possible, learn to avoid unnecessary activities, delegate where applicable, schedule time for specific activities.

Ranking the problems and dealing with some of the smaller ones first, will quickly reduce the list and at the same time reduce stress. Consideration should be given to possible alternative solutions, including doing nothing, and for each solution consider all the advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

Doing a small amount of a large task on a regular basis can make it easier to deal with. Employees should be totally honest with themselves as to whether their expectations of themselves and others are too high and whether they actually cause stress by demanding too much of themselves. Many of the situations that individuals have to deal with both at work and in their personal lives cannot be changed. It is however possible to change the way in which they are dealt with, or thought about.

It is important that employees learn to accept the things that they cannot change and only spend energy on what would be beneficial to change. Often individuals worry unnecessarily about things they cannot influence, causing themselves stress and wasting energy that could have been focused elsewhere.

Where employees are experiencing stress which is having a significant effect on their health and well-being, the manager will support and work with the employee to look at reasonable adjustments in order to minimize risk.

Reasonable adjustments would depend on the circumstances but may include:

- Temporary reduction in working hours.
- Temporary adjustment in working duties e.g. reduced workload if appropriate.
- Additional training or support.
- More flexible working arrangements.
- More regular supervision if appropriate.

Once a course of action has been decided realistic targets and timescales should be set which should be sensible and reasonable and should be adhered to wherever possible. Regular meetings to review progress against the targets and timescales should be put in place and notes of all discussions recorded.

Managers are expected to be consistent in their approach to stress-related absences and their support to employees. They are not expected to take on the role of Counsellors; however, they will be expected to use good communication skills when dealing with stress-related issues.

Managers should have an awareness of the support services available to employees and how these can be accessed. They should not hesitate to seek advice and/or support for themselves either from EPSRC HR or from the EAP **FirstAssist 0800 716 017**.

Return-to-work interviews should always take place and be used as an opportunity to discuss stress-related problems when appropriate. Where an absence is or has been stress-related, referral to Occupational Health might be appropriate. Guidance should be sought from Human Resources in this respect.

Individual Management of Stress

Diet

Changes to diet can have beneficial results and can also reduce the effects of stress. Research has shown that those people who skip breakfast are often far more tired at the end of the day. A balanced diet and regularly eating patterns are therefore essential.

Complex carbohydrates such as pasta, wholemeal bread and jacket potatoes can prevent mood swings.

Reduction in caffeine consumption, and the avoidance of alcohol for the wrong reasons and most importantly the drinking of water will ensure dehydration does not occur. These measures provide very positive steps that can be taken to help replacing bad habits with good.

Relaxation

When suffering from stress, relaxation may be the last item on the priority list, even if it is the top of the wish list – it is essential for employees to be able to relax when not working; the act of relaxation is a very necessary part of life. Managers have a duty to ensure that employees have a work life balance that allows for period of relaxation.

Employees are encouraged to separate work from leisure and need to be allowed a period of relaxation every day to enable time to switch off and recharge. Relaxation means different things to different people but this should be something that is enjoyed and that fits into the individual's life style.

Deep breathing is an excellent way of calming down and can be done anywhere and at any time.

Control of worries

Worries should be kept in perspective; a lot of time is wasted and stress created by worrying about unimportant things in the 'what if' cycle. Instead of worrying about the 'what if', thoughts should be about the probability of that thing actually happening and considering if energy is being wasted on something that may not happen.

We all have an inner voice that directs thoughts or actions and it may be necessary to question what the inner voice tells us. For example if a work colleague snaps in response to a question, the inner voice says to snap back whereas if thought is given to the situation, the colleague may be having a bad day and this will only add to by snapping back. Is it worth getting worked up about it? Do not forget that one of the best stress busters is laughter.

Exercise

Often at the end of the working day, exercise is the last thing on the mind. Research has however shown that twenty minutes of exercise, three or four times a week can be very beneficial in managing stress. Individuals report feeling recharged, sleep better and feeling fitter which in turn can build up self-esteem.

Leave

Holidays are vital, even if this does mean that travel is no further than home. Days off should be relaxing and as far away from work routines as possible. Managers have a duty to ensure that employees use the annual leave to which they are entitled and that it evenly timed to allow employees to relax and recuperate.

Time Management

A combination of having too many things to do and bad time management can waste time. Consideration should be given to:

- Identifying situations where time is wasted and how it can be altered.
- Learning to drop unimportant activities; to say “no” or delegate.
- Scheduling some daily “non-interruption” time.
- Having a “to do list” of goals that are really achievable.

Learn to say no

It is so easy to say ‘yes’ when really we want to say ‘no’. Individuals do not always find it easy to say what they really mean and poor communication is frequently a cause of stress at work. If under a great deal of pressure, individuals may find themselves being aggressive towards others and may find themselves agreeing to do something because it seems the easy, or only, solution. This will in turn add to the workload and will increase stress levels as feelings of frustration and annoyance will come into play for making things worse.

Learning to be assertive (not aggressive) can assist with this problem. Assertion is based on a philosophy of personal responsibility and an awareness of the rights of other people. It is all about the ability to negotiate, having the confidence to say what is wanted, but this must not be at the expense of others.

In many work roles acceptance of tasks takes place without question. It is only when a burden gets unmanageable that individuals will complain or try to achieve the impossible? Employees should talk to managers if, when given a task, feel that they already have more than they can cope with.

Bullying or Harassment

Bullying or harassment is an unacceptable behaviour that can cause stress and should not be tolerated. Any employee who feels they are being subjected to such treatment should consider taking action as detailed in the HR7.4 Bullying and Harassment Policy.

Work versus home life

With the long hours many employees work plus the demands of home, they have less and less time to enjoy being with friends and family, let alone having time for themselves.

Individuals should communicate with those at home and at work to discuss any problems they have and how things might be changed. Often, when an individual is under excessive pressure, they do not tell anyone how they are feeling, leading to them becoming even more frustrated when others add to their problem without being aware.

Employees who are experiencing problems with work-life balance should seek support from their manager, HR or family. Consideration should then be given to possible actions that may be required to alleviate such pressures, either in the short-term or long term.

Support

There may be a point in all our lives where help and support of other people is required. Employees who feel that they are unable to cope or are unsure of which way to turn, should consider talking their problem over with someone. The choice of who to confide in is very important.

If the problem is being caused within the workplace, they should consider discussing this with their manager or EPSRC HR. Close friends and family can be very helpful but they may have problems of their own. The Employee Assistance Programme **FirstAssist 0800 716 017** is also available to offer support about home and life issues where such issues are causing stress or anxiety.

It must not be forgotten that GPs provide an important role in times of stress and a consultation should be sought at the earliest opportunity to discuss options.

Employees have a responsibility to themselves and others to minimise excessive pressures and demands by behaving responsibly, acting reasonably and reporting any concerns regarding stress to managers. Managers cannot be expected to act on stress-related problems they do not know about. Employees are strongly encouraged not to suffer in silence and to seek help and support at the earliest possible opportunity.

Annex B – Taking the Stress Out of Work – Checklist for Managers

Dated 1 April 2011

Individual Risk Assessment Proforma

If an employee appears to be subject to stress the manager should meet with the individual and use this checklist as an aid to identify any points which may be causing concerns. The checklist will aid them to identify stress related issues, agree action and then enable appropriate follow up action to take place.

Timescales for review should also be agreed to ensure the agreed action is appropriate and effective. *The manager should be aware of their own interactions with the individual and be prepared to suggest an alternative manager to undertake this meeting.*

Could the source of the Stress be Home Based?

| Consider the following measures | Action/Comments | Review Date Set |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Flexible working (Temporary/permanent change in working pattern) | | |
| Special Leave (See the HR5.5 Special Leave Policy) | | |
| Attendance (See the HR5 Absence Policy) | | |
| Suggest EPSRC's EAP Provider FirstAssist for | | |

| Consider the following measures | Action/Comments | Review Date Set |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| counselling if appropriate | | |
| Suggest additional support that may assist eg debt counselling | | |

Could the source of the Stress be Work Based?

This checklist is based on the Health and Safety Executive's Standards on Work related Stress

| Standard | Issues identified | Action Agreed | Timescale for Review |
|--|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Demands – Can the Individual cope | | | |
| Workload | | | |
| Deadlines | | | |
| Work pattern/hours of work | | | |
| Working environment | | | |
| Systems in place for appropriate support | | | |
| Do their skills match demands | | | |
| Control – How much say does the individual have in what they do | | | |
| Do they have a say in what they do | | | |
| Encouraged to use their skills and initiative | | | |

| Standard | Issues identified | Action Agreed | Timescale for Review |
|--|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Where possible develop new skills | | | |
| Support – What support, resources and feedback is given to the individual | | | |
| Encouragement by line management and colleagues | | | |
| Receives adequate information | | | |
| Aware of relevant policies procedures | | | |
| Aware of how to access policies procedures | | | |
| Receives regular feedback | | | |
| Relationship - Issues | | | |
| How to deal with conflict and promote fairness | | | |
| Clear what is unacceptable/acceptable behaviour from colleagues | | | |
| Awareness of the HR7.4 Harassment and Bullying Policy | | | |
| Role – Whether they understand their role within the organisation/team | | | |
| Conflict of roles | | | |
| Understand their role and responsibilities; | | | |
| Systems in place so can raise concerns | | | |

| Standard | Issues identified | Action Agreed | Timescale for Review |
|---|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| about their role | | | |
| Change – How change is managed | | | |
| Engages frequently when undergoing organisational change | | | |
| Timely information to understand the reasons for proposed changes | | | |
| Consultation on changes opportunity to influence proposals | | | |
| Probable impact of any changes on jobs training available | | | |
| Timetables for changes | | | |
| Support during changes | | | |