

ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

STRESS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

(Version 1)

SECTION 1 – Policy Statement

The College's commitment to meeting its formal obligations to employees in respect of their physical health is reflected in a range of health and safety-related policy and procedure, code of practice and guidance documents. This Policy defines the College's position with respect to the mental health of staff and its commitment to the management of workplace stressors.

The College's key aims and objectives relating to workplace stress may be identified as:

- Increasing the general awareness of stress and the methods of managing it
- Taking action to combat workplace stressors
- Assisting staff to manage stress in themselves and others
- Managing problems that occur and providing a confidential referral service
- Managing the return to work of those who have had problems

Organisation and Arrangements

The College places emphasis on the importance of taking action at a departmental level under the direction of heads of department. It supports this process by the provision of the resources necessary to meet the requirements of this Policy, principally by way of the measures defined in Section 2, including the provision of information, instruction, training and counselling.

Monitoring the Operation of the Policy

The operation of this Policy and Procedure will be monitored by the Health & Safety Adviser during the College's departmental audit programme and he/she will present a formal report of its operation to the Principal on an annual basis.

SECTION 2 – Introduction

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and subordinate legislation, places a duty on the College to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees. In Section 2 of its Health and Safety Policy, the College identifies the organisational framework within which it will meet these formal obligations, and in this Policy and Procedure, it identifies specifically how it will manage the subject of stress in the workplace.

Furthermore, the College is also committed to incorporating the content of the Health and Safety Executive document "Managing the causes of work-related stress, a step-by-step approach using the Management Standards" in its approach to stress management.

In consideration of the above duties, the measures the College will implement to assist with workplace stress management will include those identified in (i) – (vii) below.

- (i) Produce a College web site containing information to enable staff to develop an awareness of stress, identify individual stressors and have access to simple self help methods for dealing with stress. Other effective means of communication will also be introduced for those without access to the website.
- (ii) Develop an employee assistance programme which could include, for example, contact with a counsellor.
- (iii) Implement a College health campaign to promote mental health wellbeing.
- (iv) Provide stress workshops for managers and staff as necessary, to enable them to learn specific techniques to cope with stress.
- (v) Consider other methods that may be employed to raise awareness of and assist staff to cope with stress, such as exercise and relaxation exercises.
- (vi) Support managers to appreciate the risks associated with stress.
- (vii) Allocate reasonable resources as necessary to meet (i) – (vi) above.

With these duties in mind, the remainder of this Policy and Procedure has been developed and divided into the following three sections:

Section 3 – what is stress, and how to recognise it from both an employee and managers perspective?

Section 4 – managing stress in the workplace, including what the College will do to assist with the management of the subject;

Section 5 – the role of the individual and the manager in stress management.

SECTION 3 – What is Stress?

This Section provides general information on stress; what it is, causal factors and how it can be detected. This information is intended both for those who may experience it and those with whom the individual may work and, therefore, recognise the symptoms. In this way, problems can be brought to the attention of the respective line manager, the Human Resources Department or the Occupational Health Physician.

Stress is more than just worry, being a state experienced when a mismatch between perceived demands and the perceived ability to cope with them occurs. It is the balance between how we view demands and how we think we can cope with them that determines whether we feel stressed.

Stress is also a feeling of being unable to cope and is the reaction that occurs when people feel that excessive demands and pressures are being placed on them without the provision of an appropriate level of support. Stress may also be a consequence of work/life balance issues.

Examples of factors giving rise to stress in the workplace are:

Uncertainty – Lack of influence over the organisation/pacing of work, lack of variety, lack of clear objectives, interpersonal conflict, jobs that impose heavy emotional demands, physical conditions e.g. excessive heat, noise and vibration.

Stress may become evident in the following ways:

Physical – Raised heart rate, increased sweating, headache, dizziness, aching neck and shoulders, lowered resistance to infection.

Behavioural/Psychological – Increased anxiety, irritability, poor concentration, increased drinking/smoking.

The Signs to look for include:

Changes in staff attitude and behaviour, changes in work performance, relationships at work, sickness absence, long hours worked, low morale.

SECTION 4 – Managing Stress in the Workplace

Under the direction of each head of department, identify stressors in the workplace and particular areas of concern to staff, which may include issues such as change management and sickness absence rates. Once such stressors and patterns of stress have been identified, solutions can be addressed which may include measures such as training, team building, job redesign, and the home-work life balance.

To facilitate this process, it will be necessary to undertake:

1. A workshop to provide heads of department with stress management skills;
2. A stress audit of each department;
3. The development of strategy/strategies to enable each department to manage stress issues.

From this process, departmental plans will be developed to tackle identified sources of stress. The plans will be driven by those factors causing the stress and may include interventions directed at work-life balance improvements, workflow planning activities, team building, job design/redesign, performance management issues and specific training.

In undertaking their role, managers must combine a wide range of different attributes, in a balanced way, if they are to achieve success, particularly in maintaining a successful and committed workforce. A key role will be the need to consider the workload and health implications of strategic decisions and to identify, where stress may arise, the need to take appropriate remedial action before adverse affects arise.

The College does, therefore, look to its managers to take appropriate action. In support of that requirement, it has established the following three levels of intervention to assist:

a) Awareness Raising and Support

The College will run workshops and provide sources of advice in the form of newsletters and information sheets. It may also require the subject to be promoted at departmental meetings.

The process of raising awareness will be undertaken throughout the College and as with other Health and Safety-related formal documents, this Policy and Procedure will be made available to all staff. In this way, they will see that workplace stress is on the management agenda, being taken seriously and that a culture is being fostered that respects and cares for staff while providing support, should it be needed.

b) Developing Management Strategies

The early identification and management of stress is important and the training and other information sources identified above should facilitate early recognition of the existence of stress and stress issues in the workplace. This, together with action to minimise stress, will reduce the likelihood of adverse health effects. Part of the training process will include guidance for individuals on appropriate ways of coping with pressure in order to reduce the likelihood of ill health and to assist them to develop resilience to pressure at work while maintaining the balance between individual and organisational responsibilities.

c) Support in the Event of Stress Occurring

Where a member of staff is/has already suffered from workplace-related stress, the College will, through the Human Resources Department, provide appropriate support, which may include the provision of a limited counselling service. Support will also be provided to the department via the head of department.

SECTION 5 – The Role of the Individual and Manager in Stress Management

The Individual

Staff will be encouraged to take ownership of their own workplace stress and to make the lifestyle changes necessary to reduce stress, including personal exercise regimes which will complement organisational efforts to deal with underlying stressors.

Stress management is, therefore, a partnership between the College, its managers, and staff in which:

- Employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own physical and mental well being
- Employees who identify excessive pressure at work are encouraged to inform their line manager/another manager or Trade Union/Professional Association representative or Human Resources Officer at the earliest opportunity, and familiarise themselves with College policies such as those relating to Harassment and Verbal and Physical Abuse
- From the information available, employees will understand how workplace stress can develop and the personal actions they can take to reduce stress in themselves and others.

The Manager

Managers will:

- Focus on preventing unwanted and unnecessary stress through good management
- Develop plans to address and support stress prevention/awareness

- Ensure that any pressure placed on staff is kept under review and assessed at least annually with a view to making improvements
- Identify sources of workplace stress and ensure action is taken to eliminate excessive pressure
- Ensure stress issues are treated in complete confidence
- Act promptly, bringing to the attention of the Human Resources Department any issues requiring remedial action.

Conclusions

Where any doubt exists as to the action to be taken, or services available, clarification should be sought from the Human Resources Department.

In line with other College Health and Safety-related Policy and other documents, this Policy will be the subject of periodic reviews undertaken by the Health & Safety Adviser, as will the content of accompanying training events, following which amendments will be made as may be identified to be necessary.

Dr Richard Fisk
Health & Safety Adviser
20/07/2009

'In accordance with the College's commitment to equality and diversity, this Policy has been written and screened to avoid discrimination and promote a positive approach to race, disability and gender issues. Comments on the content of this document should be directed to Mrs Leanie Du Toit in the College Health and Safety Office.'