Stress and Mental Health Policy – Version 1

Key Requirements:

- Line Managers will treat incidences of stress and mental health in the same way as they would physical health issues.

- Where Line Managers are told or believe that an individual is suffering from stress, they must carry out an Individual Stress Risk Assessment.

- Mental health support will be provided to all staff through an Employee Assistance Program.

- All staff must inform their Line Manager if they are suffering from work-related stress or poor mental health, so that assistance can be provided.

Definitions:

Mental Health. Mind, the mental health charity, states that, in many ways, mental health is just like physical health: everybody has it and we need to take care of it.

Good mental health means generally being able to think, feel, and react in the ways that you need and want to live your life. However, if you go through a period of poor mental health, you might find the ways you're frequently thinking, feeling, or reacting become difficult or impossible to cope with. This can feel just as bad as a physical illness or, in some cases, even worse.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) notes that work-related stress and mental health problems often go together, and the symptoms can be similar. Work-related stress can aggravate an existing mental health problem, making it more difficult to control. If work-related stress reaches a point where it has triggered an existing mental health problem, it becomes hard to separate one from the other.

Stress. The HSE defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health.

Wellbeing. This is related to stress and mental health but is a separate issue owned and managed by Human Resources (HR). Further information can be found here.

Introduction

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), over 11 million days are lost at work per year due to work-related stress. There is a complex relationship between stress and mental health, with a significant overlap. For this reason, both topics will be covered in this Policy.

Royal Holloway is committed to ensuring a healthy and safe working environment for its staff, including measures to reduce stress and improve mental health. While this policy will focus on occupational stress and mental health, it must be understood that often many factors can be home-related. The college has limited agency over staff's home lives, but will look to support them as much as possible.

| 1. | Line Managers must treat incidences of stress and mental health in the same way as they would physical health issues. |

| 2. | Line Managers must proactively assist staff in managing stress and mental health issues. |

All too often, stress is not managed until after an individual returns to work following a long absence. This is unacceptable. It is preferable for the individual, and the college, if such issues can be managed prior to causing ill-health.

| 3. | Line Managers must treat stress and mental health issues with sensitivity and empathy. |

One of the main reasons individuals do not seek help for stress or mental health issues is the stigma surrounding these topics. The main way to tackle such stigma is to talk openly and honestly about mental health and to treat those doing so with empathy and respect. All college employees have a part to play in reducing stigma.

There are a range of HR policies supporting issues around stress and mental health that Line Managers may want to refer to:

- Grievance policy
- Absence Management policy
- Flexible working policy
- Emergency time off for dependant's policy

On occasions, Line Managers may have to manage performance, capability, or invoke disciplinary procedures, which in themselves can be a stressful situation for those involved. However, this should not prevent managers moving forwards with a legitimate employment issue, in line with the above noted procedures.

In addition, Line Managers can refer staff to Occupational Health for an assessment through their HR Business Partner. Staff would then be expected to attend the appointment so that the appropriate help and support can be provided.

Stress

| 4. | The Director of Health and Safety will complete a general stress and mental health risk assessment for the college. |

This general assessment will outline the key controls applicable across the college; this is not designed to cover every specific issue but to outline the basic procedures and signpost both Line Mangers and staff to further help and support.

The assessment should be completed collaboratively with the HR Director and will be submitted to the Health and Safety Consultative Group for comment by trade unions and other staff representatives.

5. Where Line Managers are told or believe that an individual is suffering from stress, they must carry out an Individual Stress Risk Assessment.

The tool for completing this assessment is the HSE Stress Management Standards and identifies six broad reasons for stress: demands, controls, support, role, change, and relationships. Once identified, these issues can then be dealt with. The survey is easy to complete and requires no training to administer.

A copy of the assessment form can be found here, and further information on the implementation of the assessment can be found here. Any identified actions should be logged, with agreed dates for action, using the form at Appendix 3.

If further advice or guidance on individual assessments is required, your HR Business Partner is the first point of contact.

Where there are high degrees of stress in an entire team or department, a stress survey can be performed using the Management Standards. The Health and Safety Office is the first point of contact.

6. Where Line Managers are undertaking restructuring or significant changes to workload, the stress on staff members must be considered.

The management standards are clear that change is one of the six broad reasons for stress. As such, it should be managed through the entire process, not after the change has occurred. It will not always be possible to reduce the impact, as the change may need to occur, but any possible mitigation should be applied.

Mental Health

7. Mental Health support will be provided to all staff through an Employee Assistance Program.

This will be a confidential and anonymous service. The college will be aware of the number of people requesting support, but not be privy to any personal details.

All Staff

8. All staff must inform their Line Manager if they are suffering from work-related stress or poor mental health, so that assistance can be provided.

All staff are expected to inform the college if they suffer a physical injury at work or are suffering from one that is exacerbated by their work. They are also expected to discuss any reasonable adjustments required until the issue is resolved. Stress and mental health should be treated no differently. Even if the cause is not work-related, there may still be adjustments that can be made to ease the pressure on staff.

Training and Awareness

9. The Director of Health and Safety will provide stress awareness training for roles or individuals, as required by the stress risk assessment.

    This will involve close collaboration with HR and other stakeholder groups within the college.

10. The HR Director will provide Mental Health training for roles or individuals as required by risk assessment, policy, or other agreements.

    This could involve a range of formal courses, such as the Mental Health First Aider course, or informal events and campaigns designed to reduce and remove stigma.

Douglas Searle
Director Health and Safety
Version 1

Approved by: Executive Board
Date: 25 May 2021
Review Risk: Medium (3 years)
To be reviewed: before May 2021

Appendix:

Appendix 1. Information on Stress
Appendix 2. Sources of Support
Appendix 3. Stress Risk Assessment Actions

Roles and Responsibilities

All Staff	
8	All staff must inform their Line Manager if they are suffering from work-related stress or poor mental health, so that assistance can be provided.

Line Managers	
1	Line Managers will treat incidences of stress and mental health in the same way as they would physical health issues.
2	Line Managers will proactively assist staff in managing stress and mental health issues.
3	Line Managers will treat stress and mental health issues with sensitivity and empathy.
5	Where Line Managers are either told or believe that an individual is suffering from stress, they must carry out an individual stress risk assessment.
6	Where Line Managers are undertaking restructuring or significant changes to workload, stress on staff members must be considered.

Director of Health and Safety	
4	The Director of Health and Safety will complete a general stress and mental health risk assessment for the college.
9	The Director of Health and Safety will provide stress awareness training for roles or individuals, as required by the stress risk assessment.

Human Resources Director	
7	Mental Health support will be provided to all staff through an Employee Assistance Program.
10	The HR Director will provide mental health training for roles or individuals, as required by risk assessment, policy, or other agreements.

Appendix 1: Information on Stress

There are numerous examples that can cause trigger a stress response. The list below is not exhaustive:

- An event or context that elevates adrenaline.
- Any job can cause stress and it is not just about overwork – boredom and monotony can also be stressful.
- Abuse from or dealing with customers or the public.
- Budget reductions, reorganisations, and lack of job security.
- Poor working conditions.
- Threats of or actual violence, harassment, and bullying.
- Lack of childcare or flexibility to deal with domestic matters.
- Lack of control over work.
- Too demanding a job or too high a workload.
- Monotonous or boring work.
- Lack of training.
- Excessive hours and shift work.
- Working in isolation.
- A poor working environment.
- Dysfunctional working relationships.

There are strong links between stress and:

- Physical symptoms, such as heart disease, back pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, or various minor illnesses.
- Psychological effects, such as anxiety and depression.

Stress can also lead to other behaviours that are harmful to health, such as skipping meals, drinking too much caffeine, smoking, or substance misuse.

Appendix 2: Sources of Support

1. **For all staff:**

Royal Holloway – Staff Wellbeing Portal

https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/staff/your-employment/human-resources/organisation-development/working-well-from-home/staff-wellbeing.aspx

Employee Assistance Program

Telephone: 0800 085 1376 or +44 (0)207 938 0963
Email: assist@cic-eap.co.uk
Skype: using 'Confidential Care Adviceline.'
Text Relay (for people with hearing or speech impairments): 1800 0800 085 1376
Online and Live Chat: www.well-online.co.uk the log on details for Well Online are: Username: RHUL; Password: wellbeing

UCU Members

Further advice and guidance can be obtained via your UCU Representative
Education Support: https://www.ucu.org.uk/educationsupportpartnership

GMB Members

Further advice and guidance can be obtained via your GMB Representative

UNITE Members

Further advice and guidance can be obtained via your UNITE Representative

Mind – the Mental Health Charity

For general advice and support: https://www.mind.org.uk/

The Mental Health Foundation

For general advice and support: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/

NHS

For general advice: https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/

Access to Work Mental Health Support Service

A confidential service funded by the Department for Work and Pensions available at no charge to any employees with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work. https://www.remploy.co.uk/about-us/current-programmes/access-work-mental-health-support-service

2. **For Managers**

Stress can be extremely personal. As such, any controls for reducing stress for staff will likely require a series of conversations around the specific issues and their remedial actions. These could be short-term changes, such as a temporary reduction in working hours, or long-term, such as changing their job description or providing changes.

There is no single source of advice, but useful resources are provided by many organisations. In addition, advice can be sought from HR Business Partners or the Health and Safety Office.

CIPD

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has a range of suggestions for managers as to how to recognise and reduce stress in their teams. https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/stress-factsheet#8223.

HSE

The Health and Safety Executive has provided a workbook on the use of the management standards: https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wbk01.pdf. In addition they have provided a talking toolkit based around each of areas of the management standards: https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/stress-talking-toolkit.pdf.

Appendix 3: Stress Risk Assessment Actions

This document outlines controls required to reduce sources of stress identified as part of a stress risk assessment completed using the Management Standards. Due to the nature of stress, it should be treated as a confidential document.

Name of employee	
Name of Line Manager	
Date assessment completed	
Date of next review	

HR representative (if present)	
H&S representative (if present)	

Management Standard question no.	Control Required	Responsible Person	Date Required