Newcastle University Stress Policy

May 2010

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Approval by

This document should be approved by the following:

- EB
- University Staff Committee
- University Safety Committee

It is the opinion of the stress steering group that this policy document should initially be a stand alone document (as the current policy is) and then become subordinate to a Wellbeing Policy once one has been completed and approved by the necessary bodies. A draft Wellbeing Policy has already been drafted to the initial consultation stages by the University Occupational Health Service.
**Preamble**

The University is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue. Stress is a complex subject and the University has to deal with its effects irrespective of its source. Whilst work related stress is addressed, other aspects are considered.

The policy aims to reduce the levels of stress so far as is reasonably practicable. The University provides access to advice and support for individuals who are experiencing stress, as well as training and support to managers and employees to assist them in preventing workplace stress from arising, and supporting employees when they are experiencing stress.

While stress can occur among employees and students, there are considerable differences between the two groups. This policy applies to the University's responsibility as an employer. Managers are responsible for the implementation and providing the resources required under this policy.

This policy is related to the University Safety Policy, and other University Human Resources policy statements, and should be read in conjunction with them. The following documents are relevant.

- University Safety Policy (and supplements)
- University Human Resources Policies
  - Dignity at work (bullying and harassment)
  - Flexible working
  - Sickness
  - Capability
  - Recruitment
  - Performance and Development Reviews

**Definition of Stress**

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as: "Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they perceive that they are unable to cope with those demands. It is not a disease in itself, but if stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental or physical ill-health"

This makes a distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Different primary causes of stress are distinguished as they have different potential management approaches, but they are all matters that the University is committed to addressing at work.

**Primary causes of stress**

The HSE have provided a ‘standard’ for examining the stress in the workplace. This can be used to identify the primary causes of stress and make the process of managing stress in the workplace easier and more effective. The primary causes are:
Demands – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.  
Control – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work.  
Support – such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.  
Relationships – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.  
Role – such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.  
Change – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

However, as each cause will have different impacts on different individuals there is not a simple relationship between any one primary cause and the level of stress that individuals experience.

Stress will also arise in individual’s personal lives, over which we have no control or responsibility and may affect work performance.

Policy

The following is the University Stress Policy.

Main points

The University will:

- Identify workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to endeavour to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress (risk assessments will be regularly reviewed).
- Provide training for all managers and supervisors in good management practices.
- Consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Ensure (so far as is practicable) that employees have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their roles.
- Provide access to confidential occupational health support and where necessary counselling.
- Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the policy.

Implementation of Policy

To implement the policy the University will integrate the management of stress into its arrangements for health, safety and staff management. Implementation is the responsibility of Staff Committee in consultation with Safety Committee.

To achieve the goal of a well-managed institution where occupational stress is minimised, the University will:
communicate to Senior Managers, Heads of Unit, and front line managers the stress policy

offer its managers, training, which will help them identify and control stress levels within their units

encourage employees to access and attend stress awareness and stress management courses so they are better able to self manage stress

assist employees to recognise and self manage the pressures they encounter as much as practicable

ensure that where problems have developed, managers provide support and, where necessary refer stressed individuals to the University Occupational Health Service

require its managers to regard organisational features which create stress as deficiencies to be addressed and reported through the management chain in the same way as any other significant deficiency which cannot be resolved locally

assess the risk arising from possible enhanced levels of stress within Units due to any substantial alteration in work organisation and conditions of employment

operate reporting procedures (via the Occupational Health Service) with proper safeguard for confidentiality

regularly review key indicators related to stress

maintain awareness of best practice in the sector and elsewhere

The day to day oversight of this policy shall be the responsibility of Human Resources, who shall monitor the implementation of the policy (including input from the OHS and USO), and who shall report annually to the University Safety Committee and the Staff Committee.

Responsibilities

The University Executive Board gives its full support to this policy and to the effective management of work related stress, in which the following parties all have key roles.

Managers

All University managers shall:

• Conduct, and implement recommendations from, risks assessments within their jurisdiction

• ensure good communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes

• ensure employees are adequately trained and have the necessary skills and abilities to discharge their duties

• ensure, as far as is practicable, that employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities

• monitor workloads to ensure that staff are not overloaded

• monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that individuals are not overworking

• monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their entitlement

• attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
• ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction
• be vigilant and offer additional support to employees experiencing stress whether arising inside or outside work e.g. bereavement or separation
• ensure that employees are recruited to/employed in roles for which they are suited

Occupational Health Service
The OHS shall provide:
• specialist advice and support to employees suffering with stress
• advise managers in implementing stress risk assessments
• Monitor and report on any high levels of work related stress cases in specific work locations.
• support those employees at work with stress and advise them and their managers on the actions required to enable them to remain at work
• support individuals absent from work with stress, and advise them and their management on the actions required for a planned return to work
• initiate case conferences where appropriate to address employee stress issues
• with the employee’s consent liaise with the employee’s GP or other practitioners
• refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required
• monitor and report on the effectiveness of occupational health measures to reduce stress related absence
• inform the University Safety Committee and Staff Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
• report periodically to the University Safety Committee and Staff Committee, in conjunction with the HR teams, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements
• provide specialist advice and input into awareness training on Stress as required

University Safety Office
USO shall:
• support managers in implementing stress risk assessments
• monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress
• inform the University Safety Committee and Staff Committee of any substantive changes and developments in the field of stress at work
• report to the University Safety Committee and Staff Committee, in conjunction with the HR teams, on the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy and arrangements

Human Resources
The Human Resources teams shall:
• give guidance to managers on the stress policy
• assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics
advise managers and individuals on training requirements
provide continuing support to managers and individual staff and encourage referral to occupational health where appropriate
provide awareness training on stress for staff and managers

Employees

Employees shall:
- raise issues of concern with the relevant Line Manager, Dignity Support Volunteers, the Occupational Health Service, the University Safety Office, the relevant HR team or their Trade Union Safety Representative.
- accept opportunities for counselling and training when recommended.
- take responsibility for their own health and well being and also develop an awareness of their own abilities and coping mechanisms.

Function of Trade Union Safety Representatives

Under the Heath and Safety legislation the University has a network of Trade Union Safety Representatives. These are people appointed by the Unions and recognised by the University. The representatives assist in the development of health and safety solutions and includes that they:

- must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress
- must be able to consult with members of staff on the issue of stress
- must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process
- should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR
- should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend appropriate Trade Union training relating to workplace stress
- should conduct joint inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled, e.g. excessive temperatures at work

None of the listed roles above are any different from the Trade Union Safety Representatives roles, rights and responsibilities for any other part of their health and safety role.

Role of Staff Committee and the University Safety Committee

Staff Committee is responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this policy in consultation with the University Safety Committee.

Final Version approved by Staff Committee 9 November 2009 (Am’d 10 May 2010) Reported to Executive Board 24 November 2009.

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