

Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach

A step-by-step workbook



WBK1

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Stress is a major cause of sickness absence in the workplace and costs over £5 billion a year in Great Britain. It affects individuals, their families and colleagues by impacting on their health but it also impacts on employers with costs relating to sickness absence, replacement staff, lost production and increased accidents.

This workbook will help your organisation meet its legal duty to assess the risks to its employees from work-related stress and gives advice and practical guidance on how to manage work-related stress. It promotes the Management Standards approach to tackling work-related stress – a systematic approach to implementing an organisational procedure for managing work-related stress. It uses a clear step-by-step method which includes checklists to help you make sure you have completed a stage before you move to the next step. HSE's stress webpages support the workbook with other guidance and tools.

The workbook will also be useful to organisations choosing to use an alternative approach, and provides advice on ensuring their approach is suitably equivalent – many of the practical solutions may also be applicable.

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Introduction

What is work-related stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be motivating, and stress, which occurs when this pressure becomes excessive.

More information about work-related stress, how to identify it, how it impacts on people, and what to do if you identify a problem can be found on the HSE stress webpages.¹

Why tackle work-related stress?

Work-related stress is a major cause of occupational ill health which can cause severe physical and psychological conditions in your workers. It can also lead to poor productivity and human error, increased sickness absence, increases in accidents, high staff turnover and poor performance in your organisation.

HSE statistics show that work-related stress is a significant issue with more than 11.5 million working days lost as a result of stress, anxiety or depression at a conservative estimated cost of £5.2 billion to industry, individuals and the government.²

In addition, health and safety legislation requires you to assess the level of risk from hazards in the workplace and to take all reasonably practicable measures to prevent or sufficiently reduce that risk. The purpose of the risk assessment is to find out whether existing control measures prevent harm or if more should be done.

What are the Management Standards?

The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work.

1 Demands

Includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

2 Control

How much say do the people have over the way they work?

3 Support

Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

4 Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

5 Role

Do people understand their role within the organisation and does the organisation ensure roles are not conflicting?

6 Change

How is organisational change (large and small) managed and communicated?

For each Standard there must be systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. These Standards are aspirational and define a desirable set of conditions for organisations to work towards. For more details about the Standards see HSE's webpages³ and Appendix 6.

What is the Management Standards approach to tackling work-related stress?

The Management Standards approach is an organisational, preventative process for managing the risks to your employees from work-related stress. It is a free-to-use toolkit that helps employers prepare for and conduct an appropriate risk assessment and gives ideas for what to do when you have the results.

You do not have to use the Management Standards approach, but following it will show you have met your legal duties. If you do not use the Management Standards approach you must use a suitably equivalent approach. To establish whether your current process is equivalent see the equivalence checklist.⁴

Applying the Management Standards to your organisation

If you are using the Management Standards approach, it is important to understand how the Standards apply and translate to your workplace. This includes looking at how they fit into your existing risk assessment process.

The six key areas of the Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. They do not always act on their own but often they combine, overlap or interact. Consider the 'job' as a whole and avoid taking action on one element of work at a time as this may just move any problem further down the line – a global approach is likely to produce the best result.

There may be organisational 'hot spots' you want to concentrate on, but these can best be identified by carrying out a systematic risk assessment. Your aim is to find out the potential work causes of stress in your workplace and the likelihood of injury.

Good management practice

The Management Standards help measure how well you are managing the potential causes of work-related stress. Each Standard provides simple statements about good management practice in each of the six areas. These include the Standard itself and, in particular, the statements of 'What should be happening?' These are outlined in full in Appendix 6.

The Standards represent targets for the organisation, goals that employers should be working towards in an ongoing process of risk assessment and continuous improvement. The Management Standards approach aims to help identify where your organisation is in terms of performance and sets realistic targets for improvement.

Organisational-level issues

When assessing the risks to which your employees may be exposed it is important to focus on organisational-level issues that have the potential to impact on groups and large numbers of employees, rather than individual employees.

Managing the root causes

It is important that those involved in the Management Standards approach understand the need to focus on prevention and on managing the root causes of work-related stress, rather than trying to deal with problems only after they occur and people are suffering from exposure to excessive pressure. This will stop the problem from developing to the position where people are negatively affected. As with most things, prevention is better and more cost-effective than treatment.

Keeping records

Generally, organisations are legally required to record actions they have taken during and subsequent to a risk assessment. Smaller organisations may not be required to record actions taken but documenting what you have done provides an audit trail and helps you demonstrate to inspection authorities that you have done a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. It will also give you a benchmark for future assessments, particularly where you are comparing some of the data such as sickness absence records.

You can use this workbook as a record of your progress.

Top tip

The following are tips from other organisations that have implemented the Management Standards approach:

- **Start small and grow:** As a large organisation we found it useful to pilot the approach in a controlled area so we could iron out problems before rolling it out more widely.
- **Don't use change as an excuse to do nothing:** Change is almost constant in some sectors but it should not be used as an excuse for not taking action.
- **Get the timing right:** Ensure that key activities in the process are not scheduled at peak holiday or busy periods where employees may not be able to participate.
- **Planning experience:** If available, co-opt someone with project planning experience onto the steering/focus group.
- **Forward plan:** It is important to think about what is involved in each step of the process and plan ahead to prevent future delays – break the process down into manageable chunks.
- **Resource:** Failure to adequately resource the project results in unnecessary delays and lost momentum. Ensure there is adequate management and administration resource allocated. Most importantly, ensure interventions and solutions are adequately resourced.
- **Be realistic:** Make sure the plan is achievable and that dates for completion and the deliverables are realistic. Don't plan to fail!
- **Be open:** Communication is vital; talk to your employees and listen to their feedback and views – if they have input in solutions they understand and support their implementation.
- **Don't re-invent the wheel:** You will already be doing some of the things the Management Standards approach will take you through (eg collecting sickness absence data) or you may have a health and safety committee that can be used as the working group, with some minimal changes.

Part 1 Prepare your organisation

Secure commitment

Senior management

Remember

Senior managers are employees too. You need to include them in the risk assessment process.

The Management Standards approach relies on senior management commitment and worker involvement throughout the process. Staff are more likely to take part if they see senior managers are committed to managing the causes of work-related stress.

Many employers are already committed to managing stress at work as they recognise that this brings benefits for the organisation. One of the major issues is the cost of work-related stress, which is not simply the cost of paying someone who is off sick but lots of other less obvious costs. Preparing a simple business case on these costs and benefits can help you get your senior managers on board. Remember, there is a legal duty to take action that you should include and you can make an ethical case, too.

Activity

Prepare a business case on the need to assess and manage the causes of stress at work. The following resources may help.

Appendix 1 Business case preparation

Appendix 2 Costs of work-related stress, anxiety or depression

Checklist

If you are able to check off the following, you will know that senior management commitment has been secured.

- Senior managers visibly demonstrate support and participate in communication activities. This can be by:
 - directly producing some communication to all staff;
 - providing quotations in an article in staff magazines;
 - chairing initial meetings of a project/work group;
 - acting as the 'project champion';
 - promoting campaign material such as that relating to removing the stigma related to stress or mental health conditions.
- Resources have been allocated, eg extra funding or time. Remember:
 - it's not just the process that needs resources, you need commitment for the time others will spend taking part and to fund the interventions that are proposed;
 - the process is an ongoing one; you need to reassess the risk periodically and where measures are put in place these too need to be monitored (this ongoing monitoring also needs to be resourced).
- Authority has been delegated either to an individual in a smaller organisation or to a steering group for larger ones. Remember:
 - oversight of the project should be maintained to ensure co-operation from other senior managers.

Employees and their representatives

Employers are obliged to consult employees or their representatives on matters of health and safety. There are a number of ways to get employees on board. You may want to consider the following:

- Demonstrate commitment to the project – ensure the project is adequately funded and get senior managers to show support and lead by example. You could initiate awareness sessions dealing with issues of stigma or prejudice, communicating the purpose of the project positively, eg to protect the physical and mental health of workers rather than reducing costs of sickness absence.
- Involve employee representatives (eg trade union and health and safety representatives) early in the process.
- Involve employees and their representatives in any work groups you set up to take the project forward.
- Make sure all your employees are involved:
 - If you use email or electronic methods of communication, will everyone be able to access and see it?
 - Are there employees for whom English is not the first language or where there may be other communication issues, eg due to visual or hearing impairment? How will you involve them?
- Explain the reason for the project and the benefits for the employees.
- Explain how they will fit into the project and keep them informed as things develop.

- Ensure communication goes both ways – don't talk at them; involve them and listen to them.
- Remember, if you promise to do something make sure you do it and tell them you have.

If you decide to test the project on a discrete area or confine your efforts to a limited section of your organisation initially, consider how best to inform other employees of the reason for any limitations, eg targeting priority areas.

Remember

Involve employees at every stage.

Checklist

If you are able to check off the following, you will know that senior management commitment has been secured.

- **Effective communication – have you made everyone aware of the project?**
 - Use several communication methods, eg email, posters, newsletters, hard copies of leaflets or information sheets, talking about it at team meetings.
 - Ensure senior management commitment is demonstrated, eg having senior staff speaking at an event, circulating an article or email from a senior manager promoting and supporting the project.
- **Do employees understand the project and their role in it?**
 - Work with trade unions and other groups containing employees to ensure the messages reach everyone.
 - Get managers to check understanding during one-to-one or team meetings and to feed back.
 - Involve staff in working groups discussing the identification of problems and potential solutions.
- **Have you listened to feedback from staff and taken action?**
 - Ensure communication is carried out both ways.
 - Set up a mechanism for feedback, eg suggestion scheme, dedicated email account.
 - Respond to feedback.

Set up a steering group

Do I need to have a steering group?

For smaller organisations there may be no benefit; the approach works equally well if you decide you don't need one, as long as the communication is conducted in ways that allow all staff the opportunity to get involved in the process.

But having a steering group to manage and drive the process forward, with representatives from across the organisation, can be a good way to secure involvement and commitment. It allows wider representation on the decision-making group, eg employees or others with specific/ specialist knowledge like occupational health professionals. It also gives an opportunity to share the workload so the project does not become a burden to, or reliant on, a single individual.

Who should be part of a steering group?

The membership will be determined by your organisational needs and structures. Remember that the Management Standards approach promotes a 'partnership' with all employee groups involved in the process.

There will be some obvious people to involve, such as someone from human resources, the health and safety manager, someone from the occupational health team and a representative of the union(s).

You need to be sure that the group is satisfactorily representative but try to make sure it's not overly large or cumbersome. You may be able to get wider representation by delegating tasks to sub-groups where the organisation is particularly large or based on several sites. These sub-groups can send a member to represent that workstream at the steering group.

Activity	
Consider who will be part of the group. The table below may be helpful.	
Typical members of a steering group	Names of people in your organisation
Senior management representative	
Health and safety manager	
Employee representative(s)	
Trade union representative(s)	
Line manager(s)	
Human resource representative	
Occupational health person	

What are the key activities of a steering group?

The main function of a steering group is to oversee and facilitate the process, acting as a project management group or board. Key activities include:

- project naming;
- project management;
- planning;
- data gathering and analysis;
- securing and managing resources;
- marketing;
- managing communications;
- monitoring and reporting progress;
- approving action plans;
- generating and approving management reports.

Top tip

You don't need to start from scratch. If you already have a mechanism in place that's working, use it. Existing working groups can take on some or all of these responsibilities, and you may already have appropriate communication routes, a staff newsletter or a staff satisfaction survey which can be adapted.

What are the key roles within a steering group?

Activity

Define exactly what your steering group is supposed to do.

Some roles will be decided quite easily – the person tackling the data gathering and analysis would most likely be from human resources since most of the data relating to sickness absence would be held by that team and this would limit the need to share personal information about those employees who have had problems.

The table below may help you to delegate responsibilities within the steering group.

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Do staff involved in the steering group have experience in:	Who, and what experience?
Project management?	
Data analysis?	
Other approaches to consulting with staff (such as focus groups or trade union representatives)?	

There are two key roles within a steering group.

1 The project champion:

- represents the project at board or senior management level;
- updates the board on progress;
- ensures the project is adequately resourced;
- may be a human resources director or facilities director, as these normally have responsibility for sickness absence and/or health and safety.

Our project champion is:

2 The day-to-day champion:

- takes the role of project manager;
- organises and facilitates meetings;
- documents decisions to provide an audit trail;
- keeps the project on schedule and on budget;
- is typically a health and safety manager or an occupational health or human resources professional.

Our day-to-day champion is:

In smaller organisations the project champion and the day-to-day champion may be the same person.

For a detailed guide to setting up and running steering groups, see the HSE guide to steering groups.⁵

Following the setting up of a steering group, the project should be planned, resources allocated and communication strategies set out with details of how you will engage with staff.

Develop a project plan

A well-developed project plan and timeline will help you to avoid some common difficulties in implementing the Management Standards approach.

Be prepared

Knowing how you will deal with potential problems will help you to avoid them. The following table offers some solutions.

Potential problems	Solutions
Difficulties in getting senior managers to attend steering group meetings.	● Identify whose input is needed when, so that work plans can be arranged accordingly. ● Don't have a meeting for the sake of it; only hold them when there is a purpose/need. ● Produce an agenda with a timetable and keep to it – if it's necessary to have someone there for only part of the meeting try to put these at the start or end to encourage attendance. ● If feedback is essential ask for something that can be read or presented to the group and included in the minutes – and provide feedback on comments to the senior manager.
Difficulties in getting people together at the same time for steering group meetings.	● Determine whether there are any particular periods when certain activities should not take place, eg during holiday times, known busy times. ● Consider the agenda – who must be at the meeting to take things forward? Try the solutions for senior managers above. ● Suggest they send a deputy with any required data or feedback.

Potential problems	Solutions
Losing momentum, particularly: ● when there has been a long gap between the distribution of surveys and follow-up work; ● when resources needed to implement the Management Standards were diverted to other priorities.	● Keep the communication going – remember to have reminders scheduled between distribution of the survey and the closing date for replies. ● Get managers to talk to teams to encourage responses and involvement in the process.
Underestimating how much work would be involved in implementing the Management Standards approach.	● Review the planning and timescales for other initiatives and help to identify any areas of potential overlap. You don't need to start from scratch; if something is already in place that can be used, use it. ● This can reduce effort and duplication and help to integrate risk assessment for work-related stress into existing management practices.

Secure adequate resources

You need to assess the impact of the process on the organisation's resources, eg the people involved will be taking time away from their normal duties. You may need to consider any additional costs if you involve occupational health or employee assistance programme (EAP) in the process. The costs will depend on what new processes need to be developed, what pre-existing systems are already in place and how you intend to implement the process. This may be affected by the way the organisation works, the number and distribution of employees, the means of communication and the steps required to gather sufficient data to complete both the business case and the feedback from staff.

Working through the process to assess the level of the impact will help you plan the project, identify the steps involved and assess the length of time that you expect it to take.

Be aware of common problems:

- **When gathering data** – if you choose to use a staff survey you may want to outsource data entry to a data-warehousing organisation.
- **During staff consultation** – whatever the method of consultation, it needs to be planned to ensure staff are available to participate.
- **During periods of high workload** – avoid planning project actions at expected busy times, eg inspection, exam times and holiday periods.

Activity	
The following list of stages can be used to help allocate resources. It is not exhaustive. Further stages may be required for your organisation, or some listed may not be relevant or could be combined into a single step. It may be that for some staff the work done as part of the process would have been done anyway, eg compiling sickness absence data.	
How much time commitment do you need from:	Hours/days
Health and safety/human resources staff to prepare the business case	
Senior staff to agree the process, commit to it and resource it	
The steering group members to develop the action plan	
Managers and staff for specific project discussions/meetings	
The employees to complete the staff/stress survey	
Those analysing data gathered to identify the extent of any problem	
Staff producing communications about the process, updating staff etc	
The steering group members to implement the action plan	
Staff implementing those changes	
Health and safety/human resources staff monitoring the implemented changes	
Health and safety/human resources staff periodically reviewing solutions made for effectiveness	
Health and safety/human resources staff integrating the process into policy documentation and setting review date	

Develop a communication strategy

Your communications plan should:

- raise awareness of work-related stress and how the organisation defines it;
- explain the organisation's commitment to tackle it. This can include a statement from the senior staff recognising the problem, and making a commitment to make improvements. Two-way communications are essential to the process and to managing expectations of staff. It is important to distinguish between top-down communication (often the provision of information) and effective two-way communications.

Top tip

To ensure an effective communications process, it is important to record what you have done for each step of the process as you go along.

Action

Develop a communication strategy. The following resources may help.

Appendix 3 Communications
HSE's webpages Communications and policies⁶

Stress policy

You may find it helpful to develop an organisational stress policy to show that you take the issue of work-related stress seriously and to set out what you plan to do. You can read the HSE stress policy in Appendix 4.

Checklist

Have you:

- Secured senior management commitment?
- Secured commitment from employees and their representatives?
- Set up a steering group?
- Developed a project plan?
- Secured adequate resources – in particular, staff time?
- Developed a communication strategy?
- If appropriate, developed an organisational stress policy?

Now, you're ready to start!

Part 2 Identify the risk factors

Decide who might be harmed and how

As a starting point you need to recognise that any of your employees could be working under conditions that could cause undue pressure and so be at risk from work-related stress – including the CEO or board members – so data should be gathered from all employees. There are several different types of information or data that you can use to help identify, in broad terms, whether work-related stress is a potential problem for your organisation and, if so, which of your employees are most likely to be harmed and how. The main sources include:

- existing sources of data that you will already be collecting;
- surveys;
- other ways of obtaining information about groups;
- common stress factors list (see Appendix 5);
- other initiatives you may be involved in.

Whether you are using the Management Standards or are adopting your own approach, it is important that you make use of the various sources of information available to you.

Existing sources of data

Top tip

Your organisation will already collect information that can be used to give an initial broad indication of whether work-related stress is a problem. This information may suggest 'hot spots' and what the likely underlying causes may be.

Sickness absence data

It is helpful to take an overview of sickness absence data in your organisation. High levels may indicate a problem, particularly if the high levels are in a specific class of employee or in a specific work area. You should investigate the reason for the absences to check whether working conditions are causing increased levels of work-related stress, which in turn is leading to sickness absence.

Top tip

It is worth bearing in mind that stress-related sickness absence is sometimes not reported as such, because of perceived stigma. Being open and honest within your organisation about work-related stress helps to reduce stigma and improve the reliability of data.

Productivity data

Where productivity data indicates lower than expected performance (when compared with previous years or between similar parts of the organisation), it is worthwhile examining the reasons, through discussions with employees. Working methods or conditions could be causing work-related stress and affecting performance or one may have developed an effective solution that could be shared.

Staff turnover

If your organisation, or a part of it, has a higher rate of staff turnover than you would expect, this may again point to a hidden problem with work-related stress. You could think about holding exit interviews to see if there are common reasons why people have decided to leave and if work-related stress was a factor. If it was, try to find out the exact cause of the problem so you can intervene to protect your staff and prevent further losses.

Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal could offer an opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion about work and to explore whether people are experiencing excessive pressure. These can be used as a chance to discuss how the individual is coping with their workload, identify any potential stressors, and discuss solutions, including reasonable adjustments required by the equalities legislation.

Team meetings

Your organisation may already hold team meetings. These can provide very useful opportunities for team members to identify and share views on current issues that may be potential sources of undue pressure. Identifying and exploring these issues during routine team meetings can help to emphasise the point that dealing with work-related stress should be an everyday part of good management practice.

Top tip

It may be useful to have 'stress' as a regular topic on the agenda at meetings so that potential problems are better understood, and staff are used to talking about it and therefore more likely to report problems. You don't have to call it 'stress', but talking about team workloads or forthcoming demands (especially where work is seasonal or where holiday periods are coming up) will give the opportunity for discussions.

Informal talks to staff

You can try to find out the mood of individuals or a team by having informal chats; if people seem continually unhappy or are not performing well, ask if there is a problem. This can be done during regular team meetings, or in the form of a 'walk-through' or 'talk-through'.

A walk-through is when a manager or supervisor walks through a section observing work processes to assess whether there are any obvious aspects of the job (the way work is done, the pace of work, or working conditions etc) which may cause problems. This is most effective if done in combination with a talk-through, which involves someone describing what happens when a task is being carried out. It can be used to get employees to think about tasks in terms of the potential they have to lead to problems.

Surveys

As well as the other sources mentioned, the Management Standards approach suggests, particularly for larger organisations or those dispersed across a number of sites, using a survey. These can be a useful source of information on whether work-related stress may be a potential problem for your workforce and, if so, who is likely to be affected and how.

The validity of self-report and questionnaire-based surveys is often called into question because they are dependent on how people 'feel' about issues. However, evidence suggests that individual perceptions play an important role in predicting stress-related ill health. Therefore, gathering the opinions of employees can be a useful indicator of the health of your organisation, and can form a useful part of an overall strategy to identify and address potential sources of work-related stress.

The HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool

The HSE Management Standards indicator tool⁷ is a survey that can be distributed to all employees. It includes 35 questions that ask about the six stressors of the Management Standards. The employee answers according to how they feel about these aspects of their work. All responses can then be entered into the HSE Management Standards analysis tool.⁸

This Excel-based analysis tool produces an average figure for each of the six Management Standards for your workforce, or particular part of your workforce. The analysis tool also gives detail on each question so you are able to see whether there is a specific aspect of the Standard that is causing more problems.

These tools provide advice on levels and locations of potential stressors which should then form the basis of discussions with staff. You need to establish that the results represent the position on the 'shop floor' – don't simply assume that these results are accurate, particularly where response rates have been poor. For example, where you have workers over several sites you may have a good manager encouraging his staff to

respond but another less capable manager may discourage it, slewing the figure to some degree.

The indicator tool can be used with 'demographic' questions, which will allow you to look at the final results by different topics. For example in a hospital you may ask the responder to identify whether they are a doctor, nurse, nurse assistant, or ancillary and which department they work in – this data will allow you to compare scores across grades and across departments but also allow you to compare how nurses in paediatrics compare with nurses in oncology or geriatrics or A&E.

Top tip

You can incorporate some of the Management Standards survey tools into your own customised approach, tailoring it for your organisation.

Using your own surveys

Many organisations make use of their own annual employee surveys or their own specific survey of working conditions. If you plan to use your own survey, it is important to assess whether it covers all the relevant areas that are potential causes of stress for your workforce.

One way of doing this is to assess the extent to which the questions in the survey cover each of the six Management Standard areas, eg which questions are about Demands? If there are gaps, you may need to ask additional questions or you may wish to gather information about these areas in different ways, eg by discussing them with your employees.

Whether you use your own survey approach or the HSE Management Standards survey approach, the next step, communicating the results, is equally important.

Communicating survey findings

Once you have conducted the stress survey and processed the data, it is important to accurately communicate the findings to the board, the workforce and their representatives.

A survey is only the start of the risk-assessment process and a broad indicator of the situation in an organisation. It is intended to provide a starting point to work from in managing potential sources of work-related stress within an organisation, rather than giving a clear diagnosis of all the likely sources. The results should be presented as a development tool for the future of the organisation, not a judgement on its past.

Organisations should not use survey results in isolation. When the survey results indicate that the organisation has a number of areas that require action, these can form the basis of discussions with focus groups and a useful guide for future actions. They can also be measured with the other available data to see whether these are comparable, eg seeing whether a team with high sickness absence also identified in the survey as having more issues. Considering the results alongside information from other

sources such as sickness absence data, return-to-work or exit interviews and staff appraisals should present a more informed picture.

Managers, staff representatives, trade unions and employees should be consulted and informed throughout the survey process so that the results do not come as a shock, particularly if there is a wide variation between departments.

Other ways to obtain information about groups

'Toolbox talks'

In places with relatively few employees, it may be more appropriate to explore issues related to working conditions in small groups. You may already have arrangements in place for encouraging participation and consulting with employees. For example, routine practical talks when work is planned, sometimes referred to as 'toolbox talks', can be an opportunity to inquire about potentially stressful issues with workers. Managers can also make use of their own work, planning meetings to explore potential sources of excessive pressure for themselves and their staff.

Focus groups

Focus groups can provide an opportunity to explore work-related stress issues in more depth, with more time set aside for discussions than may be available within standard team meetings. They also allow you to explore common issues across groups with shared interests that might not normally come together as members of teams. They allow you to explore issues in considerable depth and are particularly useful if you want to find out what specific groups of people think about their work.

The Management Standards approach suggests that focus groups are used to evaluate the risk by exploring problems and developing solutions. However, none of this is written in stone and it is best to use techniques that have proved most useful within your particular organisation.

Smaller organisations, in particular, may find it more useful to use such group approaches as part of the earlier stage of the risk assessment process.

Other initiatives you're involved in

Your organisation may already be involved in other initiatives that include your own approach to gathering information on who may be harmed and how. In this case you may find it useful to integrate some parts of the Management Standards approach into your existing initiatives.

Preliminary analysis

All data needs to be systematically collected and analysed to enable you to assess where your organisation is today in terms of performance. The next step is for you or the steering group to carry out a preliminary analysis on the basis of this data.

A good way of doing this is to produce a report that:

- lists all the sources of data used;
- identifies what appear to be areas of current good practice to build on;
- identifies areas where the organisation appears to be doing less well;
- compares the current level of performance of your organisation in terms of the Management Standards;
- identifies appropriate actions to take to close the gap between the current state and the target state.

Top tip

Whatever means you use to assess the risk of work-related stress, you should not just rely on one source of information. Try to put together an overall picture by considering data from several sources. It is not advisable to use surveys in isolation. When you have the results check them with employees and other data sources to see if they agree this represents the true position.

Checklist

If you are following the Management Standards approach, before you begin the next stage you should have:

- acknowledged that work-related stress has the potential to affect any member of staff;
- considered the data available to you to indicate any potential problem areas;
- carried out preliminary analysis comparing your performance against the Management Standards;
- identified areas of current good practice and areas where your organisation appears to be doing less well;
- recorded what you have done.

Evaluate the risks

When you have collected the initial information for your risk assessment, you should confirm your findings, explore what this means locally, and discuss possible solutions using a representative sample of your workforce.

Consult employees to explore problems and confirm or challenge initial findings

It is important not to treat the initial broad picture and the gap between where you are now and where you want to be as definitive. You should view them as suggestions of areas that need to be confirmed, challenged or explored further with your employees and their representatives.

In larger organisations a useful way to consult your employees may be to bring them together in focus or discussion groups, or use team meetings that may already take place. Talking to a selection of employees with shared interests, eg from the same work group or involved in doing similar work across the organisation, will allow issues to be explored in more detail. It will also provide an opportunity for you and your employees to assess findings from an earlier stage, taking into account shared perspectives on local influences.

Experience from focus group discussions suggests that:

- issues that appear ‘top of the heap’ during the previous data-gathering phase may not turn out to be the most important issues for your employees;
- even when the data appears to suggest clear hot spots, it is important to check this out with your employees;
- new issues often emerge during these group discussions. This may reflect more recent changes in working conditions (eg as a result of organisational change). However, it can also be because group techniques such as focus groups allow employees to discuss, analyse and articulate issues in ways that they may not previously have had the opportunity to do.

In smaller organisations it may be possible to confirm the findings by simply speaking to a selection of your employees, but don’t just concentrate on the areas where there appear to be problems; speak to others as well.

Link problems to solutions using focus groups

Focus groups, or similar discussion groups, allow you to explore and confirm with your employees the main potential sources of excessive pressure in the workplace. They also provide an ideal opportunity to discuss possible solutions.

It is critical that your employees and their representatives participate in this process as:

- they are often closest to the issues identified;
- they can be invaluable sources of knowledge of what will work and what will not work in practice;
- they may already have some informal work-around;
- employees who have taken an active part in developing and agreeing solutions as members of such a group are more likely to help ensure the success of any agreed actions.

HSE’s experience suggests that groups of between six and ten people work best. This is particularly true where the topics are likely to be sensitive or complex and you are looking to move on to develop solutions. The numbers of employees involved in this stage will depend on the size of your organisation and local circumstances.

During the focus group or discussion group, you may find it useful to consider the Management Standards, and whether this good practice is actually happening in your organisation. You may find that this can help provide structure to some of your discussions.

You may have developed your own approaches to consultation with staff and their representatives and choose not to use focus groups. What is important, however, is that all stakeholders (management, employees and their representatives) are represented in any consultation process and have a route into any forum used.

Develop solutions

The process of developing solutions is often seen as the most difficult part of managing the possible causes of work-related stress. The ideal to aim for is the development of locally-developed solutions that take into account the particular context of your workplace.

This section contains some suggestions in the form of prompts on how to develop solutions.

You may find that these could help you and your employees as you work through the process. The idea is not to offer pre-packaged 'off-the-shelf' solutions, but rather to offer a resource you can use to develop your own solutions.

Prompts to solutions

When talking about work-related stress it may help to consider the following:

- Make sure enough time is spent clarifying what the problem is. It is important to be as specific as possible as this will help you develop effective solutions.
- Ask how this area of work activity became a problem. What happened? Has it always been a problem? If not, what has changed?
- What would be the mechanisms for introducing suggested improvements? Who will take the work forward? Who needs to be involved? What are the first steps? How will you monitor progress?
- Is the problem a one-off? Is any action really required? If it is, how will suggested solutions solve identified problems?
- Finally, it is important not to take on too many actions at once. You may need to prioritise, but if you do make sure you explain to staff why things have been prioritised as they have.

Develop focus group action plans

The overall aim of each focus group, or similar forum, is to explore problems and to begin the process of developing solutions. The Management Standards approach suggests that a key output from the focus group would be a proposed or preliminary action plan, containing suggestions and recommendations for action at different levels of the organisation. For example, this might contain:

- suggestions for actions the organisation as a whole needs to take, or issues it needs to address;
- suggestions for actions the department/division/section of the organisation needs to take, or issues it needs to address;
- actions the team agrees need to be taken forward and has within its power to influence.

Since there are likely to be a number of different preliminary action plans produced by different focus groups, it is likely that these will have to be reviewed and turned into an action plan for the organisation.

Communicate the results

It is important that you communicate with management, employees and their representatives. You should keep them updated as you go through this process. For example, it is unrealistic to expect employees to participate in focus groups to discuss problems without a commitment to at least share the outcome with them soon afterwards.

Checklist

If you are following the Management Standards approach, before you begin the next stage you should have:

- consulted employees to discuss problem areas in more detail;
- worked in partnership with employees and their representatives to develop actions to take;
- ensured that issues affecting individuals are addressed;
- fed back to managers, employees and employee representatives, with a commitment to follow up;
- recorded what you have done.

Develop an action plan

By this stage in the Management Standards risk assessment approach you will have consulted your employees, explored areas of concern and taken some initial steps to develop some proposed solutions. It is important that you record your findings. The Management Standards approach suggests that the best method of achieving this is to produce and disseminate an action plan. An action plan will:

- help you set goals to work towards;
- help you to prioritise;
- demonstrate that you are serious about addressing employees' concerns;
- provide you with something to evaluate and review against.

Preliminary action plans

The Management Standards approach suggests that a key output from each of the focus groups, or other discussion groups, should be a preliminary action plan. In developing these action plans it is useful to try to bundle together actions into:

- strategic, organisational actions that they wish to flag up to the steering group;
- actions that members of the focus group may be able to influence and take forward within their team/unit.

Overall action plan

The Management Standards approach suggests that the steering group should be responsible for collating the relevant sections of the various preliminary action plans into an overall action plan for the organisation, or part of the organisation. It is likely that the steering group will want to focus on the strategic, organisational actions in developing an overall action plan, though you may find it useful to have sections aimed at different levels of the organisation depending on the nature of your organisation and the problems you have identified.

Whether you are using the Management Standards or an alternative approach to risk assessment, action plans are a key part of your risk assessment and should at least include the following:

- what the problem is;
- how the problem was identified;
- what you are going to do in response;
- how you arrived at this solution;
- some key milestones and dates for them to be reached;
- a commitment to provide feedback to employees on progress;
- a date for reviewing against the plan.

When formulating your action plans it is important to ensure that the actions suggested:

- are given an order of priority;
- have sufficient resources allocated to them;
- are assigned to an individual or function;
- have an agreed timescale for completion.

You might find it useful to make use of the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-bound) acronym.

There is no prescribed method or format for an action plan but HSE's example template⁹ may be useful. The action plan needs to be agreed with employees, senior management and employee representatives. The final plan should be shared with employees.

Implement your action plan(s)

To realise any benefits, the agreed and approved overall action plan and any lower level plans should be implemented as planned. Depending on the level of the plans (eg board, department or team), actions may be implemented at the appropriate levels within the organisation.

Procedures should be in place to record actions taken, plans developed and to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of specific actions.

Checklist

If you are following the Management Standards approach, before you begin the next stage you should have:

- created and agreed with senior management, employees and their representatives an overall action plan for the implementation of solutions;
- shared your action plan with all employees, including dates for monitor and review;
- begun the process of implementing the action plan and any lower level plans;
- recorded actions taken.

Monitor and review

It is essential that you review any action you take to tackle the sources of excessive workplace pressure. You need to:

- monitor against your action plan to ensure the agreed actions are taking place;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions you implement;
- decide what further action or data gathering, if any, is needed.

Periodically check that agreed actions are being undertaken, eg that meetings are being held, or that there is evidence that certain activities have taken place. It is important to make a record of this progress against your action plan.

Timescale

The timescale within which you evaluate any solutions will depend on what kind of solutions you have developed. How long actions take to deliver their expected 'measurable' outcomes can vary greatly. It is likely some will be aimed at quick-wins. For example, something simple like an adjustment to the physical environment could take only days. It could take months to pilot a complicated long-term solution (such as a new rostering system) and much longer still for something aimed at delivering long-term culture change.

The timing of your reviews will depend on how long it will take to implement each action and how long the focus group and the steering group expect it will take to have any impact.

Gathering information and data

The methods of gathering information and data to evaluate the effectiveness of solutions will again depend on the kind of solutions you have developed.

Ask your employees

It is important to ask those involved whether they feel the solutions are having the desired effect. You may decide you only need to speak to a sample of those involved. Alternatively, you may feel it is important to ensure that the solutions are working for everybody. You may find it useful to use a mixture of approaches to consult staff, for example:

- set up specific meetings to review progress on major actions;
- set up regular sessions to talk with your staff about sources of work-related pressure, eg as part of team meetings;
- make use of informal contacts with staff to ask about the effectiveness of solutions.

Gather data

Another way to demonstrate the effectiveness of your plan is to collect data on such things as employee turnover, sickness absence and productivity, and to measure progress against emerging trends or changes in this data.

Follow-up surveys

One way to measure progress is to repeat the Management Standards approach survey or other survey you may have used earlier. The Management Standards approach suggests that you do this after a period of time as part of the 'continuous improvement' model. You may wish to set this up as an annual survey or as part of an annual survey.

Checklist

By this point you should have:

- monitored against your action plans to ensure agreed actions are taking place;
- evaluated the effectiveness of the solutions you implemented;
- decided what further action or data gathering, if any, is needed.

You have now completed all the steps in the HSE Management Standards risk assessment approach. While the main focus of your risk assessment will have been on potential sources of stress for groups of employees, you should ensure you have also addressed individual concerns.

Part 3 Deal with individual concerns

The main focus of the Management Standards risk assessment approach described in the previous sections is on issues that are likely to be potential sources of stress for groups of your employees.

The surveys and focus groups may identify that some individuals are experiencing problems that the majority of employees are not. The solutions you develop for the majority of your employees may not address these problems. However, you have a duty of care to protect the health and welfare of these individuals too.

It is essential that you develop ways for employees to raise their concerns. These could include the following:

- Create an environment where employees are encouraged to talk, both formally and informally, to their manager or another person in their management chain.
- Remind employees that they can speak to trade union representatives, health and safety representatives, or human resources personnel.
- Encourage employees to talk to someone in the organisation or seek advice from occupational health advisors, or their GP if they are concerned about their health.
- Introduce mentoring and other forms of co-worker support.
- Provide employee assistance (counselling) services.

Reacting to individual concerns

Possibly the most critical 'take-home message' to come out of recent civil claims for compensation for suffering work-related stress is that where stress is 'foreseeable', action must be taken to limit the problem. So what should the line manager do when an employee reports that they are under excessive pressure or feeling stressed?

While it is not expected that line managers be experts on stress, it is expected that they should be able to do enough to generate action towards limiting the harm to the individual when it is directly drawn to their attention.

At the organisational level it should be clear who has the responsibility to progress the report or complaint of work-related stress.

Suggested actions

First of all it is important to speak to the person involved, to find out what has led to the complaint, and what can be done about it. This should not be unduly delayed, although in some cases it may be necessary to include other people who might be involved in the issue in a formal meeting. Always take complaints seriously, and ensure that the employee is not fobbed off, or belittled in any way.

Where the distress is serious, fault is cited, and things have clearly gone beyond what the line manager can deal with, ask for expert assistance, perhaps from your occupational health team.

When the complaint involves relationship issues with the line manager, or other team members, it is very useful to involve human resources, occupational health and a representative for the employee (trusted colleague, union representative etc) when working through the problem.

Where it is possible to identify a clearly work-related problem, it is essential to rectify the situation as swiftly as possible, even if this involves compromise on either side. It is much easier to intervene successfully when the employee remains at work, than after they have gone off sick.

Follow this with a wider formal appraisal of the working conditions in the relevant area, which should include other employees and, where appropriate, their representatives. This should be documented. The risks of stress should be controlled, and an action plan agreed.

Even where 'home' influences are impacting on the employee's performance and perceptions of their work (eg care-giving responsibilities limiting work hours/energy levels), and this is a major contribution to the complaint, it is generally in the employer's interest to support the employee, rather than dismiss the problem as irrelevant to the business. If an employee is not working well, for whatever underlying reason, it will impact on their performance at work and may also affect their colleagues.

Some organisations have found it helpful to use the Management Standards to structure discussions with individuals who are known to be vulnerable to stress or who are potentially vulnerable.

Dealing with home-related stress

People do bring home-related stress into the workplace. Although you are not legally responsible for stress that originates in the home, well-managed organisations will have arrangements that allow them to address it. This might include such things as access to counselling services, adaptations to the work or changes to working hours.

Managers often say it is difficult to identify what stress is caused by problems at home and what is caused by work. Using the Management Standards can help to tease this out.

Top tip

Stress can be managed but the sooner action is taken the better. It is best to identify as early as possible if pressure/stress is impacting on an individual. This will minimise the damage caused and help to get the individual healthy again. If their health is impacted encourage an early referral to occupational health or suggest they see their GP.

Part 4 What next?

What do I do after I have completed all the steps and addressed any individual issues?

Review your organisation's policies and procedures

It is useful to consider the reasons behind the issues that have been identified and the solutions put in place. You should examine whether your organisation's policies and procedures need to be reviewed in the light of the findings from your risk assessment. For example, was there some element of the policy causing or aggravating a situation or have new measures meant the policy needs revision?

It is often the case that policies and procedures do not adequately reflect the current ways of working, due to the continuous change that organisations experience. This can increase the pressure experienced by employees. The Management Standards approach can help this process of organisational learning by providing your organisation with a framework for working with employees to address the gaps in your current performance.

Top tip

If you change a policy make sure you let people know how it's changed and why. Where possible, evaluate the impact of the change before making it.

Make the Managements Standards part of everyday processes

The Management Standards are concerned with the prevention and management of common health problems and the drive towards good jobs to enhance the performance of your organisation.

The Management Standards approach, as with any risk assessment, should be concerned with making steady improvements in the way you manage risks to your organisation's performance. It is critical that you are committed to continuously working with employees to identify and address the problems in your workplace that could lead to their ill health and adversely affect the performance of your organisation.

Since the process is continuous, it is sensible that the evaluation and monitoring activities it requires are merged naturally into everyday management.

Whether you use the Management Standards or an alternative risk assessment approach, it is important that this is seen as part of the normal day-to-day activities of your line managers, and is integrated into their role as far as possible.

Identify and develop the competencies your managers need to manage potential sources of work-related stress

HSE commissioned research to identify and develop the management behaviours associated with the effective management of potential sources of work-related stress. The findings from this research indicate that there is considerable overlap between the management competencies required for preventing and reducing potential sources of stress at work and general management competencies. This supports the central message of this guidance that good management is the key to managing the causes of work-related stress.

Appendix 1 Business case preparation

As you know your organisation best, you should have some idea about what factors will secure commitment to tackling stress at the highest level in your organisation. This information may help you when developing a business case for senior managers.

1 The legal case

The law requires employers to tackle hazards including work-related stress. Employers have a legal duty to:

- assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities;
- take measures to control that risk.

Organisations need to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for work-related stress, and take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment.

2 The business case

Research has shown work-related stress to have adverse effects for organisations in terms of:

- employee commitment to work;
- staff performance and productivity;
- attendance levels;
- staff recruitment and retention;
- accident rates;
- customer satisfaction;
- organisational image and reputation;
- potential litigation.

It is also worth thinking about the impact that work-related stress could have on your unit or team. For example, losing one colleague for an extended period with a stress-related illness can have a dramatic impact on the workload and morale of the rest of the team.

By taking action to tackle the causes of stress in your workplace, you can prevent or reduce the impact of these problems on your organisation.

Work-related stress, anxiety and depression were responsible for the loss of more than 11.7 million working days in Great Britain at a conservative cost of £5.2 billion.

3 The moral/ethical case

There is now convincing evidence that prolonged periods of stress, including work-related stress, have an adverse effect on health. Research provides strong links between stress and:

- **physical effects** 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 or alcohol, misusing drugs or smoking.

Tackling the causes of stress before they lead to ill health can prevent this from happening.

Appendix 2 Costs of work-related stress, anxiety or depression

Using the table below, enter the source of the data, the number of staff involved and an assessment of the direct cost attributable.

Evidence	Days or hours lost	Cost
Sickness absence where stress or mental health disorder is identified		£
Lost productivity due to absence, eg time to replace individual off sick		£
Costs for replacement staff, eg bank, supply, or agency staff, overtime		£
Employee Assistance Programmes or occupational health service appointments/cost		£
Absence administration costs – manager’s time, human resources’ involvement		£
Disciplinary administration costs		£
Recruitment, replacement, training costs where staff member has left employment		£
Litigation, legal or settlement costs		£
Costs related to accidents or incidents involving those identified as ‘stressed’		£
Cost of reasonable adjustments required under the Equalities Act		£
Increased insurance premium costs		£
Additional training costs for managers to manage individuals experiencing problems		£
Additional training costs for staff to cope with or support those with stress		£
		£
		£
		£
		£
		£
		£
		£

		£
		£
		£
		£
		£
Total cost to organisation		£

This list is for guidance. There may be other costs that accrue or some of these may not be relevant.

Appendix 3 Communications

The Management Standards approach requires the participation and input of different groups of employees. Effective communications play a vital part in engaging with employees, providing them with timely information and a conduit for their views. This last point – the need to listen to the views of employees – is important as it is something that is often overlooked in communication initiatives.

Many users have developed a ‘communication strategy’ to run throughout their implementation of the Management Standards approach. The communication strategy typically includes consideration of ‘what’ will be communicated, ‘how’ it will be communicated and the ‘timing’ of the communication activities.

What to communicate

What information is communicated will to some extent depend on your organisation’s structure and the way you choose to implement each step of the Management Standards approach. Some of the information that is often communicated is as follows:

- project objectives and terms of reference;
- the project plan;
- timetable for employee involvement (surveys, focus groups etc);
- names of steering group members;
- how to volunteer to participate in activities;
- nominated contact person for the project;
- results from staff surveys;
- action plans;
- progress updates.

How to communicate

The methods used to communicate information to employees needs to consider what access each group of workers will have to any particular method. What needs to be considered is both the ease of the method and, more importantly, its effectiveness. The golden rule is not to use a single method of communication: use multiple channels and ensure the message is rich in content. The list below includes methods of communication you might want to consider:

- briefings via existing networks (team meetings etc);
- intranet bulletin board;
- email;
- notice boards;
- existing staff newsletters;
- leaflets;
- individual memos or letters.

Timing communications

The judgement of when is the appropriate time to communicate information to employees will need to be considered as part of a communication strategy. An important point to consider is that whatever schedule you decide, 'stick to it'. Leaving an information vacuum can seriously undermine a project as the vacuum will be quickly filled with rumours and misinformation that may be hard to counter.

Appendix 4 Example stress policy (HSE)

Introduction

We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health-and-safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

This policy will apply to everyone in the company. Managers are responsible for implementation and the company is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

Definition of stress

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 positive if managed correctly, and stress, which is likely to be detrimental to physical or mental health if it is prolonged.

Policy

The *organisation* will:

- conduct risk assessments to identify all workplace stressors and eliminate or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed;
- consult with trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress;
- provide training for all managers and supervisors in good management practices;
- provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors;
- provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company’s agreed stress management strategy.

Responsibilities

Managers will:

- conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their area;
- ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;
- ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties;
- ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities;
- monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded or underutilised;
- discourage work-related contact with staff outside normal working hours or whilst on holiday;
- monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking; monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full 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 a member of staff experiencing stress outside work, eg bereavement or separation.

Occupational health and safety staff will:

- provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress;
- train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments;
- support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work;
- refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required;
- monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress;
- inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

Human resources will:

- give guidance to managers on the stress policy;
- help monitor 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 individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.

Employees will:

- raise issues of concern with your safety representative, line manager or occupational health;
- take an active part in the process of assessing the risk, eg completing surveys or providing honest feedback when requested;
- accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

Safety representatives:

- must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress;
- must be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys;
- must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process;
- should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from human resources;
- should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any trade union training relating to workplace stress;
- should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every three months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

The safety committee will:

- involve representation or represent the views of all elements of the workforce;
- perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented;
- oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

Signed by

Managing Director:

Date:

Employee Representative:

Date:

Appendix 5 Common stress factors

Answering 'yes' to any of the following questions may indicate that the role includes work-related stressors.

- 1 Is the role vocational, eg nurse, doctor, teacher etc?
- 2 Does the organisation offer a service?
 - Does the role involve dealing with 'customers', or 'service users'?
 - Do relatives/family members of those customers have direct access to employees?
 - Does third-party violence, or the threat thereof, present a problem to employees?
 - Do employees deal with complaints as a large percentage of their role?
- 3 Is the work reactive, ie does workload depend on customers and their individual issues?
- 4 Are employees issued mobile equipment that makes them contactable out of normal working hours?
- 5 Do customers (think they) have a right to the service, benefit, or product?
 - Will customers be worse off if they do not receive the service?
 - Are you imposing the service on customers?
 - Does this limit their freedom of action in some way?
 - Is the role 'regimented' for the customers?
 - Is the employee's intervention unwelcome?
- 6 Are changes imposed on the work of the employee by outside regional or national bodies, authorities or 'headquarters'?
- 7 Is the organisation subject to periodic external scrutiny or inspection of performance?

8 Does the organisation have strictly imposed rules on sickness absence and/or performance?

- Are pay rises linked to performance/attendance?

9 Does the organisation have a 'macho' approach to stress or mental ill health?

10 Has the organisation recently been subject to changes that have:

- increased the workload;
- reduced the size of the workforce but not the amount of work;
- resulted in areas being understaffed;
- changed the type or rate of work;
- changed the way in which the work is completed?

Appendix 6 The six Management Standards

1 Demands

The following list of stages can be used to help allocate resources. It is not exhaustive. Further stages may be required for your organisation, or some listed may not be relevant or could be combined into a single step. It may be that for some staff the work done as part of the process would have been done anyway, eg compiling sickness absence data.

The standard	Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.
What should be happening	● The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work. ● People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands. ● Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees. ● Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.
Ways to achieve the standard	
Workload	● Develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what their job involves. ● Hold weekly team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload for the forthcoming week (and to deal with any planned absences). ● Hold regular meetings with individuals to discuss their workload and any anticipated challenges. ● Adjust work patterns to cope with peaks and staff absences (this needs to be fair and agreed with employees). ● Ensure sufficient resources are available for staff to be able to do their jobs (time, equipment etc). ● Provide training (formal or informal) to help staff prioritise, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities.

Competency	● Devise a system to keep training records up to date to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job. ● Consider implementing personal development/ training plans which require individuals to identify opportunities which can then be discussed with management. ● Link training to performance monitoring arrangements to ensure it is effective and sufficient.
Working patterns	● Review working hours and shift work systems – have these been agreed with staff? ● Consider changes to start and end times to help employees to cope with pressures external to the organisation (eg child care, poor commuting routes). ● Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours.
Physical environment and violence	● Ensure your risk assessments for physical hazards and risks are up to date. ● Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse. Take steps to deal with this in consultation with employees and others who can help (eg the police, charities). ● Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations (eg difficult phone calls, aggressive customers).

Do:

- allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding;
- set realistic deadlines;
- design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills to keep staff motivated and interested in their work;
- attend to the physical environment – take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels, vibration, dust etc where possible;
- assess the other inherent risks of the work, eg physical and verbal abuse, MSDs, and take steps to deal with them; these may be stressful and add to the problems;
- provide support to those less experienced or under pressure;
- if you're a team-leader – learn to say no to work if your team is already at full capacity.

Don't:

- ask people to do tasks that they are not capable of or trained to do;
- allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it;
- allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours, starting earlier, finishing later, taking work home or working through breaks and lunch;
- contact staff by phone or email (even when they have equipment provided by the employer) outside of working hours or when they are on leave or otherwise 'off duty'.

2 Control

How much say does the person have over the way they do their work?

The standard	Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.
What should be happening	● Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work, eg have a say over when breaks can be taken. ● Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work. ● Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work. ● The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills. ● Employees are consulted over their work patterns.
Ways to achieve the standard	● Agree systems that enable staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, eg through project meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews. ● Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working. Provide opportunities for discussion and input. ● Allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward: ● discuss and define teams at the start of a project; ● agree objectives and roles; ● agree timescales; ● agree the provision of managerial support, eg through regular progress meetings. ● Talk about the way decisions are made – is there scope for more involvement? ● Talk about the skills people have and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect. ● How else would they like to use their skills?

Do:

- allow staff some control over the pace of their work;
- allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making, especially where it affects them, eg those about the way they work;
- negotiate shift-work schedules that do not impose on staff.

Don't:

- monitor employees' movements in detail (including breaks);
- monitor working style, unless necessary (eg where there are child-protection needs);
- ask staff to stay late without notice.

3 Support

Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

The standard	Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.
What should be happening	● The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees. ● Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff. ● Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues. ● Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it. ● Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job. ● Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Ways to achieve the standard	● Hold regular one-to-one and team meetings to talk about any emerging issues or pressures. ● Include 'work-related stress/emerging pressures' as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews. ● Seek examples of how people would like to, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the unit? ● Ask how employees would like to access managerial support, eg 'open door' policies or agreed times when managers are able to discuss emerging issues or pressures. ● Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments. ● Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up to date and appropriate for the core functions of employees' jobs. ● Talk about ways the organisation could provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside work. ● Disseminate information on other areas of support (human resources department, occupational health, trained counsellors, charities). ● Offer training in basic counselling skills/access to counsellors.
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Do:

- ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job;
- provide constructive, supportive advice at annual appraisal;
- provide flexibility in work schedules, where possible;
- allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence;
- hold regular liaison/team meetings;
- provide opportunities for career development;
- deal sensitively with staff experiencing problems outside work.

Don't:

- trivialise the problems of others;
- discriminate, or allow other to discriminate, against people for any reason.

4 Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

The standard	Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, eg bullying at work.
What should be happening	● The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness. ● Employees share information relevant to their work. ● The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour. ● Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour. ● Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.
Ways to achieve the standard happening	● Develop a written policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour and grievance and disciplinary procedures for reporting incidents – communicate these to staff. ● Agree and implement a confidential system for people to report unacceptable behaviour. ● Agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work – communicate this to staff. ● Encourage good communication and provide appropriate training to aid skill development (eg listening skills, confidence building). ● Select or build teams which have the right blend of expertise and experience for new projects. ● Discuss how individuals work together and how they can build positive relationships. ● Identify ways to celebrate success (eg informal lunches).

Do:

- encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams;
- provide opportunities for social interactions among workers;
- provide support for staff who work in isolation;
- create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other;
- agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure people are aware of these and how to report incidents.

Don't:

- allow any bullying behaviour or harassment.

5 Role

Do people understand their role within the organisation? Does the organisation ensure the person does not have conflicting roles?

The standard	Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.
What should be happening	● The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible. ● The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities. ● The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear. ● Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.
Ways to achieve the standard	● Hold team meetings to enable members to clarify their role and discuss any role conflict. ● Display team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual role. ● Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks and review periodically. ● Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the outputs of the unit. ● Introduce or revise job descriptions to ensure the core functions and priorities are clear. ● Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months. ● Develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff – make sure all members of the team understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit.

Do:

- provide a clear job description and define work objectives (eg through a personal work plan);
- define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why;
- give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation;
- avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the business and the customer.

Don't:

- make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (eg at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what is required of them, and accepts it.

6 Change

How is organisational change (large or small) managed and communicated?

The standard	Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.
What should be happening	● The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes. ● The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals. ● Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs. ● Employees are aware of timetables for changes. ● Employees have access to relevant support during changes.
Ways to achieve the standard	● Ensure all staff are aware of why the change is happening – agree a system for doing this. ● Define and explain the key steps of the change. ● Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme. ● Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly. ● Agree methods of communication (eg meetings, notice boards, letters, email, feedback forums) and frequency (eg weekly, monthly). ● Ensure staff are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs. ● Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change, eg for staff who want to raise their concerns. ● Review unit and individual work plans after the change to ensure objectives are clear and workloads are appropriately distributed.

Do:

- explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) takes place;
- consult staff at an early stage, and throughout the change process;
- involve staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in;
- explain timescales and how changes will impact directly on them.

Don't:

- delay communicating new developments;
- underestimate the effects of minor changes.

References

- 1 Work-related stress www.hse.gov.uk/stress
- 2 Statistics www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/index.htm
- 3 The Management Standards www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm
- 4 Risk assessment checklist www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/checklist.pdf
- 5 Steering groups www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/steeringgroups.pdf
- 6 Communications and policies www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/communications.htm
- 7 HSE Management Standards indicator tool www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/indicatortool.pdf
- 8 Tools and templates: HSE analysis tool www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm
- 9 Action plan template www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/actionplan.pdf

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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