



Document Title:	Stress at Work and Mental Health Policy & Procedure.
Audience:	All staff
Document Date:	February 2021
Document Revision Date:	October 2025
Document Location:	N Drive: HR/All Users/Policies and Procedures PeopleHR / Company Documents

1. Introduction

As a responsible employer Royal Holloway Students' Union (RHSU) is committed to a healthy and safe working environment for employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplaces stressors.

There are multiple statutory provisions within law covering stress at work, with no single point of reference, instead protection comes from a wide range of regulations:

- Section 2 of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 places a general duty upon all employers to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees.
- Section 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a duty on employers to make suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to health and safety of their employees to which they are exposed at work.
- The Working Time Regulations 1998 sets out a clear link between long working hours / shift work as a cause of work place stress, and provides clarity on the entitlement of employees in relation to management of working hours.
- The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (SRSCR 1977) sets out the duty for all employers to consult with safety reps or committees to make or maintain arrangements so that employees can co-operate effectively to promote a healthy and safe work place; and to review the effectiveness of measures implemented. Provision is made to permit safety reps or committee members to investigate potential hazards and dangerous occurrences, and to examine the causation of accidents in the work place.
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Race Relations Act 1976 set out the clear link between stress and any exhibited behaviours of an underlying sexual or racial nature. Where these behaviours are evident the employer is vicariously liable for the actions of a harassing or bullying employee, even when the employee is unaware of the situation.

All too often stress is not managed until after an individual has taken leave of absence due to ill-health, this is not acceptable. It is preferable for the individual, and RHSU, if such issues can be managed prior to causing ill-health. One of the main reasons individuals do not seek help for stress or mental health issues is the stigma around these topics. The main way to tackle such stigma is to talk openly and honestly about mental health and to treat those doing so with empathy and respect. All RHSU employees have a part to play in reducing stigma.

There are a range of HR policies supporting issues around stress and mental health that both employees and line managers may want to refer to:

- Grievance and Appeals policy
- Disciplinary and Capability policy
- Sickness Absence policy and procedures
- Flexible Working policy
- Shared Parental leave policy
- Partners leave policy
- Dignity at Work policy
- Equality & Diversity policy

Managing performance, capability or invoking disciplinary procedures may be a cause of stress, however this should not prevent managers moving forward with a legitimate employment issue in

line with the procedures listed above. Where stress or mental health concerns are raised these should be shared with the HR team for additional support.

2. What is stress and mental health?

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Stress affects people differently – what stresses one person may not affect another, factors like skills, experience, age or ability may all affect the extent to which an employee can cope.

Mind, the mental health charity, states that, in many ways, mental health is just like physical health: everybody has it and we need to take care of it. Good mental health means being generally able to think, feel, and react in the ways that you need and want to live your life. Traversing a period of poor mental health you might find the ways you're frequently thinking, feeling or reacting become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with. This can feel just as bad as a physical illness. Or in some cases worse.

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

3. Employer Responsibilities

RHSU is committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment for all employees. The complex regulatory landscape means that RHSU must approach its responsibilities in relation to work-related stress by adopting the HSE's 'Six main areas of work design':

- i. Demands – RHSU will not place excessive demands on its employees at work, ensuring workloads are manageable, work patterns are monitored, work environment maintained and tasks allocated appropriately within the teams. Risk assessments will be conducted to identify all workplace stressors and eliminate or control the risks from stress.
- ii. Control – RHSU will provide adequate instruction and training to all employees in relation to the work tasks required, where H&S criteria must be followed this will be prescriptive, but in all other areas employees will be encouraged to own their working processes. Meaningful developmental opportunities will be provided to enhance knowledge and skills
- iii. Support – RHSU will provide suitable induction to the organisation for all employees, reflecting on role and responsibility, enable access to all policies and procedures, and provide on-going line management support through regular 121s, along with access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for permanent staff and access to the Advice Centre for student staff. Adequate resources will be provided to enable line managers to implement agreed stress management procedures
- iv. Relationships – RHSU will encourage positive working relationships by fostering cooperation, trust and fairness between employees. Where practicable RHSU will support formal and informal social interactions aimed at cultivating strong positive relationships at work.

- v. Role – RHSU will provide every employee with a Job Description, clearly identifying the expected experience, knowledge and skills for their role. The job description will state their responsibilities and their position within the RHSU structure.
- vi. Change – RHSU will consult with employees wherever practicable on matters which directly affects them, and will provide a mechanism via which employees are able to raise concerns in relation to their work environment.

RHSU will ensure that departmental work-related stress risk assessments are completed and reviewed annually, whenever changes to the workplace are anticipated, and after changes are implemented.

RHSU will ensure that Mental Health 1st Aiders are provided, suitably trained and with details shared to the wider staff team. Coaching and support will be provided to line managers and the wider staff team to raise awareness of work-related stress and mental health issues.

4. Line Management Responsibilities

Heads of Departments and respective line managers must incorporate the following good practice principles into their departmental procedures:

- i. Ensure that incidences of stress and mental health are treated in the same way as they would physical health issues. When incidences occur line managers should talk to the individual, where this is declined the line manager should recommend they speak to someone else (EAP, GP or another professional).
- ii. Proactively assist staff in managing stress and mental health issues, in order to mitigate the consequences of ill-health on the person and RHSU. Line managers should focus on making reasonable adjustments at work, rather than understanding the diagnosis, advice can be obtained from a senior manager or professional guidance.
- iii. Ensure all incidences of stress and mental health are managed with sensitivity and empathy, and recognise that each individual is unique.
- iv. Work-related stress risk assessment has been completed for the department and where required individual teams. Where line managers are told, or believe, that an individual is suffering from stress they must carry out an individual work-related stress risk assessment. (appendix 1)
- v. When undertaking structural reviews or significant changes to workload the stress impact on staff must be considered.
- vi. When an employee is on sick leave, lack of contact or engagement may result in a sense of isolation, line managers should seek support from HR to set a framework for contact during these periods.
- vii. Use scheduled work meetings (121s), appraisals or informal chats about progress to facilitate discussion and enable staff to raise concerns, include H&S on every team meeting agenda.

5. Employee Responsibilities

All employees have a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure that they do not place themselves or others at risk of harm, staff would be expected to inform RHSU if they suffered a physical injury at work or that would be exacerbated by their work; the same principle applies to stress or mental health. Stress and mental health should not be treated any differently to a physical concern.

Employees must inform their line manager if they are suffering from work-related stress or poor mental health so that assistance can be provided. Staff would be expected to discuss any reasonable adjustments required with their line manager so that work-related stress can be mitigated. It is possible that a mental health issue is not work-related, but there can still be adjustments made to ease the pressure on staff.

It is the responsibility of all employees:

- i. To raise work-related stress issues with their line manager at the earliest opportunity to enable appropriate support and action to be taken.
- ii. To be aware of their environment and the individuals within it, and should they be concerned about someone's mental health, take the time to speak with them or share the concern with a line manager.
- iii. To identify when reasonable adjustments need to be made to support them in the workplace, notably on returning to work after ill-health, or where they are suffering from poor mental health.

6. Training

Mental Health awareness training is conducted annually by RHSU to support both Mental Health 1st Aiders, employees who are required to coach volunteers within the autonomous student groups, and employees who engage with members of the public accessing RHSU facilities and events.

Training records are maintained and refresher courses conducted as required.

Support resources (appendix 2).

7. Monitoring, Reporting and Record Keeping

RHSU will maintain centralised records for all training, and will review risk assessments annually. Implementation of this policy will be monitored at departmental level with any incidences being reported and recorded centrally by HR.

The Health & Safety Committee will receive an annual report on work-related stress for consideration, actions required will be elevated via the governance process to Management Committee and where required Trustee Board.

Appendix 1

Work-Related Stress Risk Assessment Form

Name of Person Undertaking Assessment		Date Conducted	Department / Area (including description of what is being assessed)					
Ref No	Hazard under review	Team (number of staff), individual.	Existing Controls	Assessed level of risk			Further Action Required	By Date & Review Date
				L	M	H		
	Demand Are they able to cope with the demands of their job?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workload – work planning, regular meetings, absence and leave arrangements, resources, prioritising, deadlines, stimulating tasks Competency – training, development plans, monitoring performance / achievement, inexperience Working Pattern – working hours, shifts, flexibility, breaks, leave Physical Environment – workplace, customer engagement, training 					
	Control How much say do they have over the way they do their work?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation / Ownership – staff consulted on work patterns, prioritisation of tasks, pace of work, leave Responsibility – Team or individual Regular 2-way meetings Opportunity – projects, transfer of skills, tasks Development – skills, knowledge, experience 					
	Support Do they have the resources required, are they encouraged and supported?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular 2-way meetings, with defined structure / agenda, Team meetings How would staff like to be managed, what support do they require Resource – adequate staff allocation to tasks, appropriate equipment and time for tasks Flexibility – hours, breaks, shifts etc 					

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of support structures, internal / external, EAP etc Training required, refresher courses, personal development plan 					
	Relationships Is the workplace a positive environment for them?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line Management – team and organisational Communication – meetings, catch-ups, coffees etc Competency – team and individual, training Physical environment, culture Opportunity – projects, cross team working Social activities – informal / formal Impact of workload Reporting process – HR and policies 					
	Role Do they understand their role in the organisation / team, do other roles conflict in any way?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team meetings, delegation of tasks, 2-way Communication of targets, visibility Appraisal – expected standards Work plan, performance management plan Review job description Induction, buddy system, mentoring training 					
	Change How are changes at work communicated to them?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular 2-way meetings, team and individual Have changes been explained clearly? Communication – identify and utilise all methods, confirm preferred method Review annually Engage when requested 					
	Domestic Are there any issues outside of work that are impacting on their ability to cope at work?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family – relationships, dependents, care arrangements Accommodation – moving, condition, cost Travel – method, duration, cost Health – personal, general concerns 					

Appendix 2: Sources of Support

- RHSU Human Resources

To discuss or raise any concerns about work: suhrteam@su.rhul.ac.uk

- Access to an Employee Assistance Programme is provided by both RHUL and RHSU, you can opt to access either as an employee:

Employee Assistance Programme (RHSU)

www.legalandgeneral.com/eap

Username & Password is – worklife

Confidential support App – Health E-Hub

Confidential phone service – 0800 316 9337

Employee Assistance Program (RHUL)

Telephone: 0800 085 1376 or +44 (0)207 938 0963

Email: assist@cic-eap.co.uk

Skype: using 'Confidential Care Adviceline'

Text relay: access for hearing impaired – 1800 0800 085 1376

Online / live chat: www.well-online.co.uk – log in details are Username RHUL;
Password Wellbeing

- Mind – the Mental Health Charity

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

- The Mental Health Foundation

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

- NHS

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