

## NSS Stress and Mental Health Policy



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## 1 Introduction

National Services Scotland (NSS) is committed to ensuring the health, safety, wellbeing and resilience of all its staff.

This Policy sets out the Organisation's intentions for the management of mental wellbeing and resilience at work to ensure a healthy, motivated and committed workforce which in turn will deliver high quality services.

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) definition of work related stress is "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures, or other types of demands placed upon them".

The HSE emphasises that well designed, organised and managed work helps to maintain and promote individual health and wellbeing. However, where there has been insufficient attention to job design, work organisation and management the benefits and assets associated with 'good work' could be lost. One possible result is work related stress. The term work related stress is the process that arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. It is a significant cause of illness and disease and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence and other indicators of organisational under performance including human error.

NSS seeks to have an organisational culture that is both supportive and empowering with a management style that reflects this culture.

Staff are also encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves both in and out of work and support others to do the same. By implementing this policy, it is expected that awareness of the causes of stress will increase, as will awareness of the support available. This will lead to a reduction in the overall levels of stress within the organisation, which is a significant reason for sickness absence in the NSS.

NSS provides a range of services and support for staff experiencing work and/or personal stress. Information is available on the Healthy Working Lives Pages on HR Connect. Information includes Occupational Health Services, Employee Assistance Programme.

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/healthy-working-lives/>

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/healthy-working-lives/employee-support-programme.htm>

## **2 Purpose and Scope of this Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction and guidance for NSS staff and managers on the management of work related stress, promotion of mental wellbeing and resilience and the processes for risk assessment based on the HSE's Stress Management Standards.

The anticipated benefits from implementing the Stress and Mental Health Policy include:

- Improve working climate and culture
- Greater openness about sources of pressure at work at all levels
- Better awareness about stress and mental wellbeing in all employees
- The continuing importance of trying to ensure a good work-life balance for all employees
- Greater consistency of approach from managers in dealing with mental wellbeing
- Early identification of stress supporting prompt resolution
- Greater awareness of support available to staff
- Improved stress risk management skills in managers
- Overall reduction in key stress indicators including reduction in sickness absence

## **3 Development of this Policy**

The lead Director for this policy is the Director of Human Resources and Workforce Development. This policy was developed by the Healthy Working Lives Team and approved by the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (OHSAC)

It included representation from Strategic Business Units (SBUs), Staff Side, and Occupational Health, final approval is by NSS partnership forum

## 4 Definition and Causes of Stress

### 4.1 What is stress?

There are many definitions of stress. For the purpose of this policy, the HSE definition is used:

**“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”.**

[Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 2004]

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/whatisstress.htm>

Stress is not an illness, nor is it a diagnosis; it is a state of being. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

The HSE states that work is generally good for people if it is well designed.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/whatisstress.htm>

There is a difference between challenge and stress. Challenge can be motivating and positive; challenge is often essential in a job and improves performance. However ‘stress’ is taken to mean the negative response to too much challenge or pressure, or too many demands, which the person finds difficulty in coping with. Stress can be caused by pressures at home or at work, or a combination of both.

The HSE advises that everyone can in principle, experience stress, as no one is immune. Work-related stress exists where people perceive they cannot cope with what is being asked of them.

### 4.2 Definitions of Mental Health and Resilience

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

*World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health: a state of wellbeing, October 2011* [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/)

Resilience can be defined as the ability to bounce back from setbacks and keep going in the face of tough challenges. Resilience at work can be described as the capability to maintain high performance and positive wellbeing.

Resilient individuals are able to sustain successful performance and positive wellbeing in the face of adverse conditions, and to recover from or adjust easily to

misfortune or change.

## 5 Legal Obligations

NSS acknowledges that it has a duty of care for the mental health and well-being of its employees.

The following legislation applies to stress in the workplace:

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 impose specific legal duties on employers, and in particular, to assess the health and safety risk to employees and to identify measures to reduce risk. This policy describes how the organisation will meet its legal obligations in this respect.

Stress will be treated in the same way as any other health hazard and risks to mental health and well-being will be assessed when necessary. Where an employee becomes disabled through stress-related illness, reasonable adjustments will be made where practicable.

It is acknowledged that NSS should act reasonably to prevent risks that are reasonably foreseeable. Any recording of information will conform to the latest data protection regulations.

## 6 Health and Safety Executive Standards

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has set standards covering the main factors which can lead to work related stress, these are:

- Demands - are staff able to cope with the demands of the job?
- Control - do staff have some say in the way they do their work?
- Support - do staff have adequate information and support?
- Relationships - are staff subject to unacceptable behaviours e.g. bullying?
- Role - do staff understand their role and responsibilities?
- Change - are staff kept informed during periods of organisational change?

More information on these important standards can be found at the Health and Safety Executive's web site:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

This includes a number of helpful resources, including hints and tips for staff, manager's indicator tool and action plan template.

To deal positively with stress at the workplace, NSS recognises the importance of:

- the link between home and the workplace;
- identifying particularly vulnerable groups; and
- the effects of prescribed medication on work performance.

These key points will be highlighted in:

- mentally healthy workplace training for managers;
- mental health first aid training
- health education for staff;
- corporate induction programmes for new staff;
- specific training for occupational health practitioners; and
- feedback (for sorting out any problems with the policy).

## **7 Duties and Roles under this Policy**

### **7.1 Roles of NSS**

The Director of Human Resources and Workforce Development is the lead Director for this policy and will be responsible for reporting to the Board and EMT regarding the implementation of this policy.

### **7.2 Role of Occupational Health and Safety Action Committee (OHSAC)**

OHSAC will play a pivotal role in ensuring this policy is implemented across the organisation. OHSAC will oversee the implementation of the health and well being action plan which includes this policy and utilise advice from the Health and Safety Executive.

### **7.3 Healthy Working Lives (HWL)**

HWL provides a specialist focus in relation to promoting and sustaining positive mental wellbeing and resilience. The teams remit is to scrutinise work related stress information from workforce data, occupational health data and staff surveys. The HWL team will monitor the effectiveness of the policy and report to OHSAC.

### **7.4 Role of Managers**

Managers have a critical role in the prevention of work related stress but also to minimise and manage stress risks. Using regular supervision and appraisal meetings is an opportunity for managers to discuss an individual's wellbeing and to identify any stress.

Managers have a key role in identifying stress and should be alert to signs of stress such as,

- Confusion, indecision
- Difficulty in concentration
- Poor memory
- Changes in eating habits
- Increased smoking, drinking or drug taking 'to cope'
- Mood swings effecting behaviour
- Twitchy, nervous behaviour
- Changes in attendance such as arriving later or taking more time off

Managers should offer support to employees or facilitate support from elsewhere as necessary. Managers are not expected to take on the role of counsellors however; managers will be expected to use effective communication and core skills of warmth, genuineness and empathy in their management of stress-related

issues.

Managers are encouraged to attend the Mentally Healthy Workplace Training course available by contacting NSS Healthy Working Lives. Details can also be found on the Healthy Working Lives pages on HR Connect.

Managers should be flexible where appropriate, especially where reasonable adjustments are required for staff with mental health problems or where phased returns to work are necessary following stress-related absence.

Reasonable adjustments would depend on the circumstances and service needs but may include:

- A temporary reduction to starting and finishing times
- Temporary adjustment in working duties e.g. reduced workload if appropriate
- Additional training/coaching support
- More flexible working arrangements
- More regular supervision if appropriate
- Be aware of employee's learning and development needs, especially when an employee is taking on a new or changed role.

NSS has a range of flexible working arrangements and advice can be sought from Line Manager, Occupational Health, HR and Staff Side representatives.

If having undertaken the above, problems continue, managers should;

- Maintain good communication at all times, and this should be 'face-to-face' communication whenever possible. Good communication reduces unnecessary uncertainty and prevents stress, especially during organisational change.
- Use positive feedback and any negative feedback should be constructive. They should seek to consult and involve staff at the earliest appropriate stage in decisions that affect them.
- Monitor and review the workload and working time of staff, to ensure that neither becomes excessive.
- Manage poor performance and attendance effectively in order to prevent unnecessary pressures on colleagues in teams in accordance with the NSS Performance and Capability Procedures.
- Not regard stress as a weakness or illness, and should encourage open discussion of work pressures at team meetings.
- Be clear about the role, responsibilities and expectations of staff.
- Refer employees with stress to Occupational Health as soon as it is identified or within the first 5 days of absence.

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/capability.htm>

Appropriate support and guidance will be available for managers in order to implement this policy. Its main aim will be to assist managers in identifying stress-

related problems and to minimise associated risks.

Managers should not hesitate to seek advice and/or support if they feel they need guidance on addressing stress related issues. Advice can be provided by HR Services and the Healthy Working Lives Team.

Managers should also be aware of all other relevant policies (e.g. Harassment and Bullying, Flexible Working, Promoting Attendance Policy). Such awareness enables better planning and decision making. For example, acknowledgement of the Flexible Working Policy will enable the manager to discuss appropriate options when discussing and developing plans to deal with stress-related problems. Information on policies is widely available on the HR Connect.

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/absence-management.htm>

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development have, in conjunction with the HSE, developed practical help for line managers in examining their own behaviour in preventing and reducing stress in those they manage. This guidance can be found at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/strwklmgr.htm> also available on HSE site

Where a manager has concerns that a member of their staff appears to be showing signs of stress, they must meet with that individual to discuss their concerns.

Managers should not hesitate to seek support from HR Services and/or Occupational Health if in any doubt about what to do about a stress-related issue. Managers should not ignore such issues if they have a concern related to stress or the mental well-being of staff.

The management of stress and the effectiveness of interventions and approaches should form part of ongoing managerial supervision and be discussed at line management meetings.

## **7.5 Employee's Responsibilities**

Stress is not a sign of weakness nor is it an illness itself however, it can cause serious illness if not properly addresses.. Anybody at any time may experience stress for a variety of reasons. Sometimes people have previously coped effectively with challenges however excessive pressure for example, where a number of issues arise at both home and work may result in stress.

Employees should not hesitate to seek support if they are experiencing stress, or feel they are at risk of stress.

Employees should approach their manager for support in the first instance and are strongly encouraged to do so, but can approach their Human Resources Manager, their Trade Union or Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Service directly if, for whatever reason, they feel they cannot approach their manager.

Employees are strongly encouraged not to suffer in silence and to accept

opportunities for support if offered.

Evidence suggests that it can be therapeutic and beneficial for long term mental wellbeing to avoid absence due to work related stress and remain in work with appropriate organisational support. Avoidance of addressing stressors in the workplace by being absent from work may not aid resolution and may cause further stress.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/hwwb-working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow.pdf>

Lack of skills, in a new role for example, can cause stress, and employees should approach their manager to discuss learning and development needs at any time.

Where employees are experiencing stress that is having a significant effect on their health and well-being, Line Managers, HR and Occupational Health will support and work with the employee to look at reasonable adjustments in order to minimise risk. Further information on stress and how to manage it is available on the HSE website as before and HR Connect

Employees may also get support and advice from their Trade Union/Staff Organisation Representative.

## **7.6 Role of Occupational Health Service**

Occupational Health offers an impartial, confidential service. They appreciate that individuals suffering stress, may in the short term, be distressed however remaining at work and working towards resolution of identified stressors is strongly advised. This may include temporarily working in another area.

The role of the Occupational Health Service in relation to work related stress will be to;

- Ensure employees who are referred with stress are offered a timely appointment
- Advise managers regarding any fitness to work issues
- Recommend any reasonable adjustments to facilitate / maintain “workability” of individuals
- Provide statistical data regarding OH activity relating to stress and mental health.
- Support employees who feel unable to complete a HSE Stress Standards Management tool with their line manager
- Provide advice and support to managers/ employees regarding issues with risk assessments/ action plans

### **7.6.1 Interventions Available via Occupational Health & Wellbeing Living Life to the full computerised CBT programme.**

This is a self help programme and is recommended by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and consists of 8 one hour sessions. Similar self help programmes can be accessed from home:

<http://www.lltff.com/>

<http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome>

<http://nww.swyt.nhs.uk/wellbeing/i-resilience/Pages/The-i-resilience-tool.aspx>

**The i-resilience tool can also be accessed via the following link:**

<http://www.robertsoncooper.com/>

Occupational Health will work with employees to utilise the i-resilience tool

### **7.7 Employee Assistance Service**

All employees have access to the Scottish Government Employee Assistance Programme. This service is free and confidential, and independent of NHSNHS. Employees are encouraged to use this service, whatever the nature of the stress-related problem.

Counselling is provided in a supportive and confidential environment and can offer:

- Alcohol and drug / legal highs misuse
- Bereavement
- Bullying and harassment
- Childcare/eldercare
- Debt
- Legal issues
- Relationships
- Retirement
- Sickness Absence
- Career/job stress
- Trauma
- Work life balance

Employee Assistance Service staff are experienced and professionally trained to advanced levels in a wide range of counselling and psychotherapeutic approaches, including, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and integrated approaches.

Further information on the Employee Assistance Service can be found on Healthy working Lives Pages on HR Connect <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/healthy-working-lives/employee-support-programme.htm> or by visiting <https://sg.helpeap.com/>

### **7.8 Role of Human Resources**

Human Resources will provide guidance and support to managers on the Stress and Mental Health Policy and support the implementation of the management standards for work related stress. The Human Resources department will also provide regular management reports identifying the levels of reported sickness absence identified as stress to the SBU

### **7.9 Role of Health and Safety Representatives**

Health and Safety Representatives will consult with their members, be involved in the risk assessment process, identification of possible interventions and the implementation of action plans.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

Risk assessment has been described as “a process of looking forward, to anticipate and prevent harm before it occurs”. The risk assessment process identifies hazards, assesses the risks to health and safety, prevents the hazards/risks from occurring, or if they cannot be avoided, controlling the risks so they are reduced to a minimum.

When assessing the risks of work-related stress, it is important to consider the following:

- The assessor needs to be aware of the basic facts about work-related stress and how to undertake a risk assessment
- The hazards to be assessed are the ‘stressors’ and work-related stress is the harm that can occur as a result of occupational stressors.
- The assessor should examine any hazards and indicators of stress e.g. high levels of sickness absence due to stress. High staff turnover, discussion at team meetings etc
- Health and safety representatives should also be involved in this process

The harm that can result from occupational stressors can affect both physical and mental health and can involve both health and safety. This can also vary with the level, duration or frequency of exposure.

The risks that are associated with violence and lone working can also be contributory factors when considering work-related stress and therefore must be included in the assessments when appropriate.

Risk assessments should be undertaken by the manager in consultation with the individuals involved undertaking the activities, as they will have valuable information to contribute and this process will reassure them that action is being taken.

Where managers are concerned that an individual is showing signs of stress, they need to meet with the individual and use the risk assessment form, to help identify the issues and address them as appropriate.

The form can be found on the HWL pages on HR Connect or by or visiting the HSE website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/returntowork.pdf>

Where a team or SBU area is identified as experiencing higher levels of stress an action plan must be developed by the senior manager. Advice from occupational health, health and safety managers, and human resources should be sought as required. The action planning process should involve discussion with a representative sample of staff and their representatives.

## **9 Management of Stress-related Absence**

Managers should be consistent and follow the agreed absence management procedure as clearly laid out in the Promoting Attendance Policy available on HR Connect. In particular, managers should be aware that increased or more frequent absence may indicate an underlying stress problem.

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/absence-management.htm>

Return-to-work interviews cover all aspect of absence and enable managers to discuss stress related problems where appropriate.

Where an absence is identified as stress-related, an early referral to Occupational Health is essential and be undertaken within the first 5 days of absence.

Managers are encouraged to complete a Stress Management Standards tool with the employee and provide a copy of the results to Occupational Health. Managers should seek advice from Human Resources or Occupational Health if in any doubt. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm>

## **10 Working Relationships**

Good, supportive working relationships have a buffering effect against stress. Managers should be supportive and all employees are encouraged to be supportive of each other.

Poor working relationships can be a cause of stress in the workplace.

If conflict arises in the workplace it is now well recognised that early intervention by managers and with support from colleagues is critical if work related stress is to be avoided.

Bullying and Harassment, in particular, can cause severe stress.

Employees should report cases of bullying or harassment in line with the Bullying and Harassment Policy. Details of where employees can access support if they feel they are being bullied or harassed are on the HR Connect.

Employees should not hesitate to discuss their concerns directly with Human Resources or Occupational Health if they feel they cannot approach their own manager.

## **11. Related Policies**

NSS Preventing and Dealing with Bullying and Harassment Policy.

<http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/bullying-and-harassment.htm>

NSS Capability Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/capability.htm>

NSS Dependency Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/dependency.htm>

NSS Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/equality-diversity-and-human-rights.htm>

NSS Flexible Working Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/flexible-working->

[policy.htm](#)

NSS Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/healthy-working-lives/health-and-safety.htm>

NSS Organisational Change. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/organisational-change.htm>

NSS Redeployment Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/Archive%20Pages/employee-relations-direct/redeployment.htm>

NSS Referrals to Occupational Health during Employment Policy. <http://www.nssscotland-hr.scot.nhs.uk/healthy-working-lives/referrals-to-occupational-health.htm>

**Other Useful Resources**

Breathing Space. [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

Mind. [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Scottish Recovery Network. [www.scottishrecovery.net](http://www.scottishrecovery.net)

**12. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed two years from its effective date to ensure that arrangements put in place are appropriate to the operating requirements of National Services Scotland (NSS)

**Date policy is effective:**

**Reviewed by:**

Agreed by:

  
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Chair, Staff Governance Committee

Date:

  
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