



Stress and Wellbeing Policy



The Stour Federation

1. AIMS

The Stour Federation Trust Board recognise their Health and Safety responsibilities and will take all reasonably practicable steps to address stress related issues.

In dealing with the issues of stress in school the Trust Board will, to the best of their ability, ensure that the following systems are in place, understood and acted upon in an attempt to deal with a problem which is giving increasing cause for concern.

In summary in order to achieve the policy aims the Trust (through the Executive Headteacher) will:

- Ensure that the policy is brought to the attention of all staff who work at schools in the Trust.
- Ensure that a School Risk Assessment is undertaken to identify the scope and causes of stress related to work and the findings shared with staff and the Local Academy Councils.
- Implement control measures to minimise the risk of stress.
- Monitor and audit the arrangements in an effort to continuously improve the quality of the working environment and the implemented stress-minimisation arrangements.
- Encourage staff to report their views and to discuss stress-related issues with the Executive Headteacher or Head of School.
- Ensure equality of treatment of staff.
- Ensure that individuals who have, or have had symptoms of stress-related illness are treated responsibly and fairly at an early stage, that confidentiality is ensured. and that Individual Risk Assessments are undertaken as necessary
- Consider job security, sick leave provision, retention of status etc in accordance with the rights of the individual to employment protection and in accordance with the Trust's sickness absence policy.
- Establish a culture in the Trust where stress is reviewed as a serious issue rather than viewed as a personal weakness.
- Nominate a member of each school's Senior Management Team to be responsible for the coordination of stress management in school.
- Communicate effectively and 'manage change' in a sensitive and responsible manner.
- Review arrangements for managing stress on a regular basis or following changes in the school's Senior Leadership Team, organisation or structure.

A copy of this policy can be found in The Stour Federation Google Drive.

School stress risk assessments will be undertaken following consultation with staff, considering the examples given in the policy. The findings will be communicated promptly to staff, Local Academy Councils and the Trust Board.

Individual Risk Assessments will be undertaken for individuals who have, or have had symptoms of stress-related illness and these will be treated with appropriate confidentiality.

Procedures for monitoring stress in school should be an integral management function and be the subject of a regular review. Changes to the school's Senior Leadership Team, organisation or structure should initiate a review of procedures.

Individuals have a duty to co-operate with their employer in minimising, so far as is reasonably practicable, work-related stress. Individuals have a part to play in making reasonable

adjustments which working practices have to change due to circumstances beyond the school's control.

Anyone who feels they are suffering from stress should, wherever possible, inform the Executive Headteacher or Head of School so they will have an opportunity to resolve the problem. Individuals should also seek advice promptly from their union/professional association.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

Senior Leadership Team Responsibilities

The Executive Headteacher, Heads of School and members of the Senior Leadership Team have a key role to play in considering the workload and health implications of decisions involving staff. It is recognised that the style of leadership and management adopted has an impact on stress levels amongst staff. It is the responsibility of the SLT to:

- Enquire about stress and wellbeing at meetings and offer a listening ear, coaching and advice.
- Ensure that adequate risk assessments are carried out to evaluate stress.
- Ensure that sickness absence and staff turnover is regularly reviewed and monitored to identify any problem areas.
- Be able to identify and respond to issues of work-related stress.
- Be aware that stress is minimised in an organisation where there exists mutual trust, promotion of self-esteem, shared objectives and common goals.
- Act on information/reports received from Human Resources.

Governance Responsibilities

Governors will:

- Give staff comprehensive and relevant information about work-related stress.
- Put measures in place to prevent, so far as is practicable, work-related stress.
- Ensure that adequate resources are in place to support the policy.
- Review and monitor sickness absence levels and staff turnover.

3. WHAT IS WORK-RELATED STRESS?

The HSE definition of stress is "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them".

It is important to note that every job brings its own pressures and demands; these are an unavoidable part of working life. It is also important to distinguish between reasonable pressure and challenge, which are stimulating and motivating, and work-related stress which is a distressing reaction to demands, situations or circumstances that the person perceives they cannot cope with.

There are 3 reasons why Headteachers need to be concerned and to take action to deal with work-related stress - ethical, legal and economic.

Ethical - The Stour Federation wishes to do as much as it reasonably can to control the risk of work-related stress adversely affecting the health and/or quality of life of its employees.

Legal - the law requires employers to consider work-related stress. Health and Safety Law and other legislation require employers to take action.

Economic – taking action on work-related stress makes economic sense too. Costs are reduced due to reduced stress-related sickness levels, reduced labour turnover, lower accident rates, less ill-health retirement, lower insurance premiums and occupational health costs, less “stress” litigation and higher productivity.

Headteachers are not under a legal duty to prevent ill-health caused by stress due to problems outside work. However, health problems and home pressures such as money worries or marital difficulties can reduce a person's ability to cope with work leading to further stress problems and poorer performance. Therefore it may be appropriate to offer assistance or provide information about where such assistance can be obtained.

What are the causes of stress?

There are three principal areas of life that may cause people to experience stress:

- Their personal life (personal stressors).
- Their working environment, which includes culture and style of management used (work related stressors).
- The level of threat inherent in their job, given the difficult situations they often face and the people with whom they have to deal (operational stressors).

Situations/worries at work and/or at home can make people more vulnerable to the effects of stress. Either can exacerbate the other and affect a person's ability to cope.

All work has its pressures but we all vary in our capacity to cope with different types of pressure. Some pressure, even when high, can be motivating and a challenge. Pressures that people can respond to effectively are more likely to lead to job satisfaction. However, pressures at a level we cannot cope with are likely to result in stress. In some cases, too little challenge or pressure will have the same effect.

There is no simple way of predicting what will cause a harmful level of stress to an individual. People respond to different types of pressure in different ways. An exciting challenge to one person may be a daunting task to another, a repetitive job may be viewed by some as boring and monotonous, but others like and feel comfortable with routine. Much depends on the individual's own personality, experience, motivation and coping style paired with the support available from managers, colleagues, family and friends.

Much may also depend on the pressures which people are experiencing outside work in their home and personal lives. People may come to work against a background of bereavement, family illness or worry, marital or other interpersonal problems. Although these factors are beyond the employer's responsibilities, managers should be aware of them since they could make employees more vulnerable to stress at work as well as affecting their performance and judgment.

In general harmful levels of stress are most likely to occur where:

- Pressures **pile on top** of each other.
- People feel **trapped** or unable to exert any control over the demands placed upon them.
- People are **confused** by conflicting demands made on them.
- People feel **vulnerable** and ill equipped to deal with change.

Problems can be triggered or made worse where:

- People feel a high degree of **uncertainty** about their work, their objectives, or their job

and career prospects.

- Work schedules are **inflexible** and over-demanding.
- There is prolonged **conflict** between individuals, including possibly sexual or racial harassment, or bullying, or where staff are treated with contempt or indifference.
- There is a **lack of understanding** and leadership from managers or supervisors. This does not mean that they have to be easy-going and undemanding. People usually welcome clear direction and will often feel less stress if they can see that the manager at least understands the problems they are under and will do what he or she can.

Physical conditions in the working environment can also be stressful. These include:

- Lighting, badly maintained buildings, inadequate or poorly sited equipment.
- Excessive noise, heat, humidity and vibration.
- The presence of toxic or dangerous materials or other workplace hazards which might not be adequately controlled.

Certain kinds of jobs can, by their nature, place heavy emotional demands on employees, which, if not properly addressed, can result in harmful levels of stress. These jobs include those which involve continuous contact with or responsibility for people.

Causes of Stress in the Education Sector

Causes of stress for any individual or groups of staff in particular schools may vary, but there are a number of common factors, any combination of which may result in feelings of stress. These include the effects of rapid and far-reaching changes, time pressures, low perceived status, poor working conditions and poor pupil motivation. Other examples are:

Relationships with pupils

- Inappropriate pupil / teacher ratios.
- Actual or potential violence from pupils.
- Uncertainty about limits of discipline.
- Teaching low ability children in mixed ability classes.
- Challenging pupil behaviour – dealing with pupils, exclusions etc.
- SEND inclusion where this is proving to be problematic.
- Malicious allegations.

Relationships with parents

- Lack of parental support.
- Unrealistic parental expectations.
- Violence and aggression from parents, sometimes under the influence of substances.
- Malicious complaints.

Relationships with colleagues

- Lack of communication.
- Conflicts between members of staff.
- Inequitable distribution of work.
- Lack of contact with peers.
- Pressure arising from supporting colleagues who aren't coping.
- Work place/work related bullying and harassment.

Management and Organisational issues

- Total volume of work.
- Volume of paperwork / administration.
- Ofsted inspection process.
- New policies / initiatives from the DfE.
- Continuous deadlines.

- Lack of support from external agencies.
- Low level of input in the decision making process.
- Change in management style.
- Quality of supervisory support.
- Work overload.
- Covering for absent colleagues.
- Vacancies.
- Teaching unfamiliar subjects.
- Lack of support and understanding from Governors.
- Pressure to deliver on examinations.
- Lack of funding.
- Being set unrealistic targets.
- Breaks/lunch time too short/not taken.
- Inappropriate timetable and room allocation.
- Job security.

Societal Issues

- Poor perceived status and school ethos.
- Changing societal expectations and concern about roles of school.
- Dealing with anxious, aggrieved, or aggressive parents.
- Scrutiny of teachers and Heads, criticism of profession.
- Allegations against staff – increasing trend.
- Dealing with the media.

Personal Perspective

- Conflict between work and family demands.
- Unrealistic expectations.
- Sense of injustice / bitterness.
- Role ambiguity, no clear work objective, no clarity regarding scope of responsibilities.
- Career development difficulties, over / under promotion.
- Long hours of working at home are seldom acknowledged and rewarded.

Alongside the stressors which can be experienced in any organisation (poor communication, conflicts with colleagues, unnecessary form filling, ineffective meetings etc) staff in education are having to adapt to major changes, both organisational and societal, which for some may conflict with their own ideas of the job they are employed to do.

Changes in leadership and management arrangements in schools are seen by some staff as a chance to learn and practise new skills. However, others may feel that their job description has been radically changed. They may feel that adequate consultation has not taken place and that they are being asked to perform tasks for which they have not been trained.

Increased parental involvement in the running of schools is welcomed by some staff as a valuable new resource, but is viewed by others as a threat to their professional position and a potential vehicle for criticism.

Whatever the merits of such changes and their final outcomes, there is no doubt that radical change in itself is a source of stress and its possible effects and consequences for schools need to be positively managed.

For Headteachers, the most observable distress signal is CHANGE.

In individual employees

Changes which may indicate stress may be noticed in one or more of 4 major areas:

Physical	Cognitive
Excessive tiredness	Lowered attention
Tense facial muscles	Memory problems
Increased sickness absence	Poor concentration
Shaking	Confusion
Excessive swearing	Difficulty making decisions
More frequent trips to the toilet	Losing interest in paperwork
Ill health	
Emotional	Behavioural
Becoming moody and sullen	Change in work performance
Becoming angry or aggressive	Withdrawing from others
Overreacting	Becoming less co-operative
Becoming impatient	Accident proneness
Depression	Increased alcohol intake
Tearfulness	Increased smoking
Getting upset and flying off the handle	Increased/reduced food intake

Within the School

There may also be indicators which reveal stress within the school. These include:

Work Performance	Relationships at Work
Reduction in output	Conflict and tension between colleagues
Increase in error rates	Poorer relationships with clients/customers
Poorer decision making	Increase in disciplinary problems
poorer planning and control of work	Increased use of grievance procedure
Sickness and Absence	Staff Attitudes and Behaviour
Increase in overall sickness absence	Loss of commitment/motivation
Increase in other forms of absence	Longer hours worked with less return
Change in pattern of absence, e.g. more short term absences	Erratic or poor timekeeping

Headteachers and SLT need to take action on 3 levels:

Stress Risk Assessment

- Identification of potential causes of stress within the workplace and the taking of action necessary to reduce stress “as far as is reasonably practicable”. i.e. risk assessments – for teams and individuals.

Information & Training

- Raising awareness of stress and helping individuals recognise it in themselves and others.
- Helping individuals deal with their own stress.

Support and Rehabilitation

- Providing support and rehabilitation for individuals and access to professional help for workplace, family or mental health problems.

Health and Safety Law

Under the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974, employers have a general duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health of their employees. This includes taking steps to make sure they do not suffer stress-related ill health as a result of their work. Ill health from stress caused at work has to be treated in the same way as health due to physical causes in the workplace. This means that employers do have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that employees' health is not put at risk through excessive or sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, or from the day to day demands placed upon them in their work.

Also, employers must take account of the risk of stress-related ill health when undertaking their legal duties under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, 1999. These include the duty to assess risk; duty to apply the principles of prevention; the duty to ensure employees' capability and to provide training and specific duties towards young people.

Employment Law

Health & Safety Law is not the only legal reason why action needs to be taken to tackle work-related stress. Examples include:

- Section 4A Public Order Act 1986 makes it a criminal offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour likely to cause harassment, harm or distress. This can be relevant to cases of bullying.
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it an offence for a person to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to the harassment of another person. This harassment does not have to be motivated by a specific factor such as race or sex. This Act again may be relevant in some bullying cases.
- Employers have common law duties to take reasonable steps to ensure their employees physical and mental health at work. An employer will be liable in negligence for an employee's stress related illness provided:
 - It was reasonably foreseeable that the employee would suffer mental or physical illness.
 - It failed to take reasonable steps to prevent the illness.
 - The failure caused ill health.

There have been several high profile cases recently where employees have taken legal action against their employer on the basis that they have suffered physical or mental harm at work arising from stress-related issues.

Within the Contract of Employment (written or otherwise) there is an understanding that employers and employees will behave reasonably towards each other in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence. If an employer breaks this bond of trust by acting unreasonably towards an employee (this may include failing to act to reduce work-related stress) the employee can:

- Sue in the courts for compensation for breach of contract.
- Resign and make an application for constructive dismissal to an employment tribunal.

There are also considerations under the Working Time Regulations governing:

- Number of hours worked.
- Periods of rest.
- Paid holidays and time off for dependants.

The Health & Safety Executive are also clear that employers must take steps to ensure the mental wellbeing of staff and consideration should be given to mental illness / disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and unrecognised mental impairment caused or made worse by work activity.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on account of any disability as defined under the Act. This involves making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or to the way the work is done, if the existing working arrangements or physical features place the disabled person at a substantial disadvantage. Ill health arising from, or exacerbated by, stress at work may constitute a disability under the Act.

Under sex and race discrimination legislation, victims of workplace discrimination or harassment have the right of access to employment tribunals. Stress related illness may result from such discrimination or harassment.

4. GUIDANCE ON IMPLEMENTATION

There is a requirement for employers to consider stress when they carry out risk assessments. In The Stour Federation, this would be the Executive Headteacher/Heads of School and Local Academy Council/Trust Board as the employer.

Stress can lead to ill health and employers must consider factors which are likely to cause intense or sustained levels of work-related stress.

There are likely to be external factors which cannot be controlled by the Trust. However, schools need to ensure that basic systems are in place to control or reduce the level of risk in the workplace.

Some of the common causes of stress in the workplace have been identified. A key issue when looking at stress risk assessment is consultation with staff. Systems need to be set up which give staff an opportunity to let managers know how they feel. This could be done formally on an individual basis or informally at a staff meeting, faculty or departmental meeting.

The Senior Leadership Team and governors need to ensure that their conceptions about stress and the causes are matched against the actual issues raised by staff. Immediate action may be appropriate where serious issues are identified or where several members of staff raise a key area of concern.

Before undertaking the assessment

Talk to all employees about work-related stress and explain that you want to identify whether or not there is a problem within your particular school. Ensure that all employees have received a copy of the HSE's free leaflet – [“Working together to reduce stress at work – a guide for employees”](#).

Give employees the opportunity to nominate representatives to discuss the issue, if required.

The Risk Assessment Process

When undertaking a school stress risk assessment you should use the [HSE Risk Assessment Form](#) to record the findings. It is anticipated that school stress risk assessments will be sufficient in the majority of cases. However, there may be situations where individual stress risk assessments are required especially where an employee is returning to work following a period of absence which may be attributable to work-related stress.

The need for an Individual stress risk assessment may arise from stress-related sickness absence, Harassment and bullying/grievance procedures or performance management/supervision meetings with individuals. Individual stress risk assessments are considered to be most effective when carried out by the Head of School/Executive Headteacher as they are best placed to address any operational issues which may be raised.

Step 1 - Identify the Hazards

The HSE have published [Management Standards](#) to assist managers to determine the causes of stress in their workplace. These standards look at the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress:

- **Demands** – includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support** – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Management Standards will assist Headteachers / managers to measure performance in managing work-related stress. Each standard provides simple statements about good management practice in each of the six areas.

Remember also that each of the six factors does not always operate singly – often they combine or interact.

It must also be borne in mind that as well as work-related stress, people also experience stress in their personal lives. If people have health problems or home worries such as money problems or personal difficulties, their ability to work can be reduced.

Stressor Identification Methods

There are several different sources of information that could help identify if there is a problem with work-related stress, how big that problem is and where the sources of stress (stressors) may be. Headteachers / Managers should start by collecting information that can be used to obtain an initial broad indication of whether stress is a problem for your organisation. For example:

- High levels of sickness absence may indicate a potential problem area. Checking the

- reasons given for absence may help identify the cause.
- Low productivity can be an indicator of problems. Talking to employees should help you explore the reasons behind this.
 - High employee turnover could be an indication of high stress levels. Investigate why people are leaving – conducting exit interviews is one way of doing this.
 - Team meetings and focus groups can help you assess current performance.
 - Survey amongst your staff can also provide you with information, e.g. [HSE Indicator Tool](#).
 - Performance Management and/or supervision offer a regular opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion about work and to explore whether people in your school are experiencing excessive pressure.

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed (School Risk Assessments)

Stress can affect anyone at any time. Some of it may be attributable to work whilst other stress elements may be personal. Some employees are more susceptible than others and some are more vulnerable at particular times of the year or their life.

Step 3 - Evaluate the Risk and decide on control measures/actions

Identify what action is already being taken to control the risk, whether it is possible to do more and if so what action is required.

Developing solutions is often the most difficult part of tackling the possible causes of work-related stress. Each workplace and each worker is different, meaning that it is not possible to describe one set of solutions for all circumstances.

Possible strategies for dealing with stress at work

Staff react more positively when they understand the rationale behind decisions and fully understand what is expected of them. A Head Teacher / Manager who takes time to explain is likely to have better motivated staff than one who does not.

Support from Headteachers and managers can help minimise work related stress. Such support would typically include management issues such as planning, supervision, training and development and a consideration of the person's work / life balance.

- **Planning** - The first stage in the planning process should be to ensure there are sufficient resources in terms of money, people and time to do the work.
- **Communication** - Talk to staff at an early stage to make sure they are involved in the planning and decision making processes. Before setting tasks, discuss the work with staff and encourage them to be realistic about how long things take.
- **Roles and Responsibilities** - Allocate clear roles and responsibilities to team members when it has been decided what the key objectives are going to be for the work required.
- **Training** - If training needs have been identified, make sure that the person receives the training and is comfortable applying the skills before delegating the task.
- **Supervision** - Ensure that adequate supervision is in place to help individuals manage workloads and targets. Actively discourage staff from unhealthy work habits such as working too many hours. Talk to your staff to find out why they are working late. Reassure them that any problems can be overcome through discussion and provide advice where necessary and help the team prioritise their work. Remember that staff need to receive acknowledgement for a job well done.
- **Work-life Balance** - Headteachers / Managers should recognise that staff have to balance their work and home life commitments. Inflexible working arrangements can sometimes contribute to an individual's stress levels and managers should be sensitive to the individual's home circumstances.
- **School Organisation** - If stress is affecting several staff you will need to review whether organisational factors may be a cause, e.g. excessive cover demands,

inappropriate time-tabling, unrealistic targets, inadequate breaks, inadequate facilities, amount/quality of non-teaching support, total volume of work and hours.

Step 4 - Record the significant findings and take the necessary actions

The findings should be recorded and an action plan developed and agreed with the employee(s) concerned.

Step 5 - Review the assessment at appropriate intervals

It is important to check that the risk assessment is still valid so it is essential that any action taken to tackle stress is reviewed. There are two elements to this:

- Monitoring against the action plan to ensure the agreed actions are taking place.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions implemented.

Evaluating the effectiveness of measures to control stress and address stress related problems. This can be done by:

- Comparing sickness and absence levels.
- Comparing accidents and incidents.
- Reviewing complaints and staff turnover.
- Using questionnaires.

Review the risk assessments following changes in staffing, management structure or organisation.

Factors outside of your control

It is important to remember that work-related stress is often the combination of a number of different factors; it is difficult to leave work or social problems at home and is therefore often difficult to separate the work and home factors which may contribute to stress. The Stour Federation signed up to the [Vita Wellbeing Hub](#) through Warwickshire WES Services.