Stress at work

HSE

acas

booklet

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Foreword
by the Health and Safety Executive

Stress is much in the news at present but it isn't a new problem. Pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated. But *excessive* pressure can lead to stress which undermines performance, is costly to employers and can make people ill.

HSE estimates that 13.5 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2007/08. Each new case of stress leads to an average of 31 days off work. Work-related stress costs society about £3.7 billion every year (at 1995/96 prices).

If organisations can reduce stress they can reduce these costs, and effective management is the best way of doing this. Recent research links effective people management to good performance and productivity.

The need to tackle stress is also recognised in law. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and

Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are obliged to undertake a risk assessment for health hazards at work – including stress – and to take action to control that risk.

However, for many people 'stress' still represents something of an unknown quantity. HSE has addressed this problem by developing Management Standards to help employers measure their performance in managing the key causes of stress at work and identify areas for improvement.

The Standards look at the **demands** made on employees; the level of **control** employees have over their work; the **support** employees receive from managers and colleagues; the clarity of an employee's **role** within the organisation; the nature of **relationships** at work; and the way that **change** is managed.

The Standards are based on extensive research. During their

development, HSE has consulted widely with employers, employees, trade unions and other interested organisations. HSE is not trying to take the 'buzz' out of work or set impossible targets. The Management Standards approach is about helping and encouraging organisations to continuously improve the way they tackle work-related stress.

HSE is delighted to be working in partnership with Acas. We know that the causes of stress at work can be alleviated by good management and improved employment relations. Acas has a wealth of practical experience helping employers and employees work together to improve the quality of working life and productivity.

Chris Rowe, Head of Stress Policy Team, Health and Safety Executive

Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them". Recent research shows that this 'adverse reaction' can seriously undermine the quality of people's working lives and, in turn, the effectiveness of the workplace.

Stress takes many forms. As well as leading to anxiety and depression it can have a significant impact on an employee's physical health. Research links stress to heart disease, back pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and alcohol and drug dependency.

This guide aims to help organisations and individuals reduce stress at work – as well as preventing it happening in the first place. This means doing something about the main underlying causes of stress – like poor communication and lack of training, and coping with the symptoms of stress – like anxiety and ill health.

Policies and behaviour
To tackle work-related stress Acas focuses on the two factors that often determine the nature of the relationship between employers and employees:

> For further information on the Health and Safety Executive's Standards and more detailed guidance on risk assessments, using focus groups and involving managers and employees, visit the HSE website at **www.hse.gov.uk/stress**.

Policies: the channels we set up for effective communication and consultation and the policies we have for managing the workplace such as written policies for absence and discipline; and

Behaviour: the way that these policies are implemented and the way we behave within the framework of organisational procedures.

HSE have identified six main causes of stress or 'stressors' in organisations. In this booklet we describe how it feels to experience the symptoms of each of these stressors and offer three practical solutions for resolving the stressful situations and preventing future work-related stress.

Some of the solutions overlap. For example, although consultation is not

listed until the final chapter on 'change' it is relevant to many of the earlier sections on job design, flexible working and involving staff. Also, while some solutions apply largely to the organisation, others are more concerned with the individual.

However, common themes do emerge. These themes – such as setting objectives, clear policies, effective communication and working together – can help organisations prevent the underlying causes of stress from emerging.

Benefits of tackling stress

There are clear benefits to preventing work-related stress:

- quality of working life: employees feel happier at work and perform better

- management of change: introducing a new pay system or new patterns of work is easier when 'stress' is managed effectively

- employment relations: problems can be resolved at work rather than at an employment tribunal

- attendance and sickness: attendance levels go up and sickness absence goes down.

Not all employers will have the time or resources to follow all of the guidance in this booklet. For example, small firms may not be able to offer counselling to employees or to develop very formal induction systems. However, the principles still apply and all employers should be aware that they have a legal obligation to take work-related stress seriously. The Health and Safety Executive have the power to act against employers who do not take steps to reach the Management Standards. For further information on these visit www.hse.gov.uk/stress.

Acas help

Acas runs training sessions on a variety of subjects in many local areas. These deal specifically with many of the issues – like communications and absence – that help you tackle stress at source. Check the training section of our website for more details at www.acas.org.uk/training.

Acas also has a network of expert advisers who can help you look in-depth at some of the bigger issues affecting your workplace – such as the systems for informing and consulting employees. We also have a helpline which can give information and advice on a wide range of employment relations issues – 08457 47 47 47.

Acas can help you to achieve the HSE standards (see Appendix 3). We can work with you to secure the commitment of the workforce and to come up with practical solutions to the problems you have identified.

Summary

- Stress is an adverse reaction to excessive pressure or demands.

- Stress can affect people mentally – in the form of anxiety and depression – and physically – in the form of heart disease, back pain and alcohol and drug dependency.

- HSE estimate that work-related stress costs about £3.7 billion a year.

- Employers have a legal duty to assess the risk of work-related stress and to take measures to control these risks.

- This booklet relates Acas advice to the Health and Safety Executive's six Management Standards concerned with the main stressors at work.

Main causes of stress	What you can do about it?
Demands: employees often become overloaded if they cannot cope with the amount of work or type of work they are asked to do	Pay attention to the way the job is designed, training needs and whether it is possible for employees to work more flexible hours
Control: employees can feel disaffected and perform poorly if they have no say over how and when they do their work	Think about how employees are actively involved in decision making, the contribution made by teams and how reviewing performance can help identify strengths and weaknesses

Main causes of stress	What you can do about it?
Support: levels of sick absence often rise if employees feel they cannot talk to managers about issues that are troubling them	Give employees the opportunity to talk about the issues causing stress, provide a sympathetic ear and keep them informed
Relationships: a failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust can lead to problems related to discipline, grievances and bullying	Check the organisation's policies for handling grievances, unsatisfactory performance, poor attendance and misconduct, and for tackling bullying and harassment
Role: employees will feel anxious about their work and the organisation if they don't know what is expected of them	Review the induction process, work out an accurate job description and maintain a close link between individual targets and organisational goals
Change: change needs to be managed effectively or it can lead to huge uncertainty and insecurity	Plan ahead so change doesn't come out of the blue. Consult with employees so they have a real input, and work together to solve problems

Demands:
getting the balance right

Most employees need a certain amount of challenge and pressure in their work – it keeps them motivated and gives them a sense of ambition. However, when does this pressure become stressful rather than stimulating?

Employees can feel overloaded by both the:

● **amount of work** they are asked to do: they simply cannot do the work in the allotted time

● **difficulty of the work** they are asked to do: they are not capable of carrying out the work.

Each individual is different and only by talking to employees can employers get the balance right between challenging demands and stressful demands. Also, circumstances change – at work and at home – so employers need to maintain the communication.

Employers need to consider three issues when weighing up the

demands placed on their employees:

● the way the **job is designed** – in terms of its specific goals, overall importance and the structure of the workflow

● the personal abilities of an individual and the **level of training** needed to carry out specific tasks

● **flexible working** – would the introduction of more flexible working hours help manage the demands on employees?

Look at job design
Job design is about the way a job fits into the wider picture: how it contributes to producing a product or service, how it is linked to other jobs and the variety, pace and nature of the work itself.

Employees often have a very good idea how their job works best in terms of organisation and work-flow. They will usually know what causes the bottlenecks and how work

Example

Two employees work doing the same job as part of a small team. When a new manager arrives one of the employees is given the more difficult work, while the other is given the more routine repetitive tasks.

The employee with the challenging work begins to work longer hours in order to get his work completed on time. After a few weeks he is frequently off sick due to the pressure of work.

The other employee does the routine work easily and has time left with nothing to do. She soon feels bored and starts to make mistakes and not complete tasks due to lack of motivation.

The manager holds a meeting with the employees to discuss the problems. The manager agrees to look at the job design and reorganise work duties. Training is arranged so that both employees can undertake some of the more challenging work and the routine work is distributed more fairly.

patterns can be improved to increase productivity or save time. Job design may be harder to vary with jobs based on routine or repetitive tasks. In these cases, employers should make the most of other ways of tackling stress referred to in this booklet.

Meet

Employers need to hold regular meetings with employees to discuss work plans. This is a good time to talk about any likely problems and individual workloads. At these meetings patterns may emerge in terms of how employees or teams cope with particular tasks and it may be possible to improve the variety and flow of work to an individual employee.

Managers should also meet with employees individually. This may happen routinely as part of a reporting or appraisal system (see p20 for more details) but these meetings should highlight problem areas in the way a job is designed. For example, an employee may have concerns about the level of responsibility they are given for completing a task or may want to suggest changes in the speed at which work is processed.

As part of an effective appraisal system employees should have specific objectives they are working towards. The more directly these objectives are linked to those of the organisation the more focused the job design. Employees will feel more motivated and less stressed if they feel their job is part of a coherent whole.

Change

New technology and employee turnover mean that job designs must often be fluid. Computer systems and software are frequently being upgraded and new employees will often bring different levels of experience and expertise.

So job designs need to be regularly monitored to ensure that they fit any changes in workloads or personnel. Change can be quite threatening and stressful so employers need to involve employees in planning ahead (see p35) and making decisions.

Employers should also consider the impact that job design has on team building – if job descriptions don't change to match changing circumstances it can affect the relationships between team members and how effectively they work together.

Support

The design of jobs should allow scope for people to develop and give of their best. It is not enough to create jobs and then just walk away or set up training courses and assume everyone will know what they are doing. The process of good job design will include an ongoing dialogue between the employer and employee.

The way a job is designed may be particularly important to employees with disabilities. Employers should be aware of the possible impact of physical and environmental factors in causing stress-related illness. Reasonable adjustments should be made, where appropriate, to help those with disabilities to perform their jobs as effectively as possible.

Training

One of the causes of stress is a mismatch between a person's ability and the requirements of the job. Good training can ensure that someone is capable of performing their job effectively. To be successful training needs to be relevant, timely and, where appropriate, backed-up by the relevant support network.

Review training

Employers should start by asking themselves some questions:

- does the business plan to introduce any major changes, like new products, in the near future?

- what is the current state of the labour market – is it easy to recruit trained employees?

- how experienced and skilled are existing employees?

These questions will help employers to assess future training needs. Employers should also get the views of managers, employees and employee representatives. Raise the subject of training at team meetings and talk to individuals about development needs. Use appraisals to help identify areas where an employee's ability to do a job is compromised by a lack of adequate training.

Methods of training

Training may be carried out in a number of ways including:

- *on-the-job training* where employees sit with experienced colleagues who have been trained to pass on their skills

- *planned work experience* where an individual is moved around the organisation (or perhaps seconded to another organisation) in order to gain the necessary skills and knowledge

- *in-house training courses* run by the organisation's own trainers or training consultants

- *external courses* at colleges or training centres

- *open-learning* or *distance-learning* where the trainee is provided with study material, often including audio, video or computer based aids.

The success of training should be assessed against measurable objectives. This helps to ensure that the standard of training is satisfactory and to determine the future training needs of individuals.

Human resource development

Some companies, recognising that employees are their greatest asset, are introducing human resource development (HRD) programmes to:

- ensure that employees have the skills and knowledge needed by the organisation

- encourage the personal development of individuals

- help employees to be well motivated and adaptable.

HRD usually involves planned activities – such as secondments or special projects – offering opportunities for development. Individual development programmes may be agreed which set out the training and experience required.

Consider flexible working

Organisations are under constant pressure to produce goods and services, of the right quality and the right price, as and when customers want them. This pressure can lead to stress – for both the organisation and the individual – unless new ways of working are found to make the best use of staff and other resources.

Many employers are adopting flexible working to alleviate the pressure on their businesses, while employees are often shifting the balance between work and home life. The results can often be beneficial to both employers and employees. For example, a new piece of expensive equipment may only be economical if it is running beyond the usual office hours. Flexible working can keep the machine going longer while employees have more choice in the hours they work.

Benefits of flexible working

Flexible working takes many forms including part-time working, flexi-time, staggered hours, job sharing, shift working and homeworking. Flexible working can help employers to:

- maximise available labour

- increase productivity

- reduce absenteeism, sickness and stress

- increase employee commitment and loyalty

- increase the organisation's ability to cope with change.

Employees also have their own reasons for preferring one pattern of working to another. For example, people with responsibilities to care for children, the sick or the elderly may not be able to work certain shifts, weekends or during school holidays.

Some people with particular disabilities may be unable to work full-time; and those who have retired may only be available to work on a part-time or temporary basis.

The right to request to work flexibly

Parents of children 16 and under (disabled children under 18) and carers of adults have the right to request flexible working. Employers have a duty to give serious consideration to such requests from employees and to refuse them only if they have clear business reasons for doing so.

Employers should also be aware of other employment rights relating to parents at work, including those for maternity leave, paternity leave and adoption leave (for further information see the Acas advisory booklet *Flexible working and work-life balance* and Acas advisory leaflet *The right to apply for flexible working, A short guide for employers, working parents and carers).*

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More control =
more interest

Many employers feel they must have total control over everything that goes on in the workplace. It is true that developing clear rules and procedures on certain issues is important. For instance, procedures for handling discipline and sickness help to promote good standards of behaviour and attendance.

However, if employees are to perform well it is desirable for them to have control over elements of how and when their job is done. This applies to all levels – from the production line to the management board. A lack of control over their working life is one of the most common causes of stress for employees and can lead to disaffection, alienation and poor performance.

Employers can give employees a degree of control by:

- encouraging them to give feedback and **involving** them in decision making and the way work is carried out

- building effective **teams** in which employees are given responsibility for outcomes

- reviewing **performance** with employees to identify strengths and weaknesses and, agreeing personal objectives and training and development plans to help meet them.

Involve employees
Employers who involve employees in making decisions often generate better ideas, make the most of people's talents and, by increasing motivation, reduce stress and improve performance.

Employee involvement can also:

- improve management performance by helping to ease the introduction of new work practices and make decisions more readily accepted by the workforce as a whole

- build trust by developing a culture based on open expression and regular dialogue between employers and employees.

Example

A new manager is concerned about one of her teams. Their level of performance is not as good as other teams and they seem poorly motivated.

She speaks to the team leader who says the team doesn't really feel as though they are fully included in what is going on. The manager decides to hold a 'clear the air' meeting with the team and they have an ideas session in which they try to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities facing the team. It is clear that the team would like to be more involved.

The manager suggests a weekly half hour meeting at which plans and work can be discussed and questions raised. A whiteboard is installed outside the meeting room so that items or problems can be written down by team members as they occur.

The new meetings are not an instant success but the manager makes sure that useful information is provided and questions are always answered. Gradually team members are more forthcoming and the meetings become an integral part of the weekly routine. The manager notices an improvement in morale and a number of suggestions made by staff at the meetings are successfully implemented.

How should employees be involved?
Staff involvement does not always have to be formal. Employers and employees often meet on a daily basis and 'having a chat' about how things are going can be a very positive way of keeping employees interested in their own work and the success of the organisation.

However, employers may find that certain forms of communication – such as emails, newsletters and team meetings – are worth setting up on a routine basis. For example, team meetings held say, every Monday morning – or monthly newsletters – mean that employers have an established way of communicating with employees, and employees can rely on regular sources of information or feedback.

Meetings of any kind – whether between individuals, teams or larger groups – are very important because they give staff and managers the chance to exchange ideas and

discuss projects face to face. Smaller meetings are useful for discussing the work of a particular group – and give plenty of opportunity for employees to contribute. Large-scale meetings are often used by senior managers to present information to employees, but there is limited chance for employees to respond.

Managers can also involve employees more formally through consultation. In larger organisations this may mean setting up procedures for employers to discuss major issues affecting the organisation – such as business transfers, redundancies, health and safety etc – with trade unions or elected employee representatives. In organisations where there is no recognised trade union employers should talk to employee safety representatives about health and safety issues.

Committees or councils are a common way of consulting with employees. The committees are made up of managers and employee representatives who come together on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. Employers should listen to employees, trade unions or other employee representatives about what form of consultation works best. For more information on consultation see p37 in this booklet and the Acas advisory booklet *Employee communications and consultation*.

Information

Employees must have access to the right information, and at the right time, in order to make an effective contribution to decision-making.

As well as information relevant to the individual – such as terms and conditions of employment and job description – employers need to provide information about the organisation. The type of information will depend on whether the organisation is in the private or public sector, in manufacturing, construction or services and on its size and structure. However, management should normally report to all employees on the organisation's objectives and policies, past and present performance and future plans and prospects.

For more details on the kind of information to communicate to employees see the Acas advisory booklet *Employee communications and consultation* and the section on 'consultation' in this booklet (p37).

Build teams

Giving teams responsibility for individual projects is a good way of involving staff and increasing commitment. Managers talk about 'teamwork' when they want to emphasise the virtues of cooperation and the need to make

use of the various strengths of employees.

Teams can be made up of a random selection of people working in the same work area. They could be the people in the same office, the people who carry out the same function – such as sales or finance – or they could represent one small discipline within a bigger team – such as one specific part of a production line.

Teambuilding can address stress by helping to share experience and expertise amongst employees. It can promote:

- **independence and initiative** – by giving responsibility for projects and decision-making teams can be a great tool for personal development

- **flexibility** – individuals in a team can quickly identify each other's strengths and respond quickly to changes in demand

- **joint problem-solving** – teams help employees express themselves in a safe environment and reach practical solutions.

Improving quality
The focus on quality and customer satisfaction has been the driving force behind many team-working initiatives. This outward looking characteristic can help to tackle stress by concentrating on positive outcomes and identifying shared values.

Increased autonomy together with training in problem-solving allows teams to take more responsibility for quality. This can lead to reductions in waste and product or process innovations. Where teams develop their own recommendations for improvements or solutions to problems, they are much more likely to implement them successfully.

Motivation
Production line work has traditionally been characterised for many by monotony and boredom. Jobs are broken down into small repetitive tasks which require little skill and provide minimal job satisfaction. Consequently motivation levels can be low and stress levels high.

Modern production and service industries require workers who, apart from being multi-skilled and well trained, are able to make many of their own decisions. To do this properly, it is better if workers are motivated by the desire to do a good job and be recognised for their contribution to a successful organisation. This has led to a new emphasis on redesigning jobs to provide greater job satisfaction and improved quality of working life.

The organisation of work into teams provides an opportunity to fulfil many

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of the principles of good job design identified by researchers – see p39 for more details – including having a say in the way things are done and being accountable to each other for what is produced.

For further information on teams see the Acas advisory booklet *Teamwork: success through people*.

Review performance

Employers need to review the performance of their employees. It gives them an opportunity to have a frank exchange – letting employees know where they stand in terms of the standard of their work and listening to any problems.

The way that these reviews are carried out often depends on the size of the organisation. Many large organisations set up appraisal systems, while smaller firms often rely on more informal systems for reviewing performance.

The main objectives of an appraisal system are to review employees' performance and potential. For appraisal schemes to work effectively employers need to consult with managers, employees and trade union representatives about the design of the scheme. The scheme should be as simple as possible and managers appraising staff need to be given adequate training. More details of how to implement an appraisal scheme can be found in the Acas advisory booklet *Employee appraisal*.

The appraisal interview
Regular appraisal interviews give employees the chance to discuss their job in some depth. By agreeing future objectives and looking at current and past performance development needs can often be identified.

Employees will feel more involved in an organisation if they see that their individual job targets are part of wider organisational objectives. They will also feel better motivated if they can help set these targets themselves.

Appraisal is not just about formal interviews. An appraisal system should encourage day-to-day dialogue between managers and employees. This dialogue is an important ingredient in tackling stress but employers need to be open and honest: there should be no surprises for employees when they are formally appraised at the end of the reporting period.

Support:
strength or weakness?

An organisation that has systems for providing regular and sustained levels of support to staff will be more effective and less likely to suffer the effects of stress. This means:

- talking about possible stressors

Example

Managers of a small non-unionised plastics factory had noticed that incidences of short-term absence had risen and that there were more petty disagreements between staff. An independent survey was carried out which revealed that staff felt poorly informed about company prospects and rumours of job cuts were circulating. Many staff pointed to the fact that the once regular staff meetings had not been held for some months.

Managers acted by holding a company-wide meeting at which the healthy state of order books was revealed and the job cut rumours dispelled. At the same time volunteers were called for to help set up a small management/worker group to look at how communications could be improved.

Following two meetings of the group, regular staff meetings were re-introduced with an assurance that they wouldn't be cancelled. At the same time a small permanent consultative group was set up at which management plans could be discussed and worker views taken into account. At the first meeting of the group problems of stress were aired and the company agreed to provide access for employees to a confidential counselling service.

The new communications and consultation arrangements worked well and helped develop higher levels of trust between managers and employees. Absence levels have also fallen.

- providing a sympathetic ear and specialist support, where necessary

- being open about giving information.

Over two-thirds of organisations who took part in a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) say they are taking steps to identify and reduce work-related stress. The survey, published in 2007, shows that many employers are responding to rising levels of sick absence. However, the report also reveals that one of the main causes of work-related stress is a lack of employee support from line managers.

Talk about stress

Regular meetings can help to defuse stressful situations and address underlying problems. Managers and staff can learn to identify possible stressors before they emerge rather than waiting for the crisis to happen.

The sorts of issues causing stress can be easily added to the agenda of most meetings and can cover issues like communication, health and safety issues, and flexible working patterns. Managers and supervisors should remember to simply talk to employees. In many workplaces the increasing use of emails has resulted in a reduction in the level of face-to-face communication. Homeworkers can feel particularly isolated unless they are in regular contact with their managers.

Personal stress

Individual meetings with staff – for reporting or appraisal purposes – can be used to try and identify any personal stress. Personal stress might include money worries, illness, bereavement, or family problems.

Many of the outward signs of stress in individuals may often be noticed by managers and colleagues. Managers should be particularly sensitive to changes in an individual's behaviour, such as worsening relationships with colleagues, indecisiveness, absenteeism, accident proneness, inability to delegate or a general deterioration in performance.

The responsibility for identifying stress does not just rest with the employer. Individuals can learn to recognise pressure and take action before it builds up to harmful levels. Stress can manifest itself in a range of physical and emotional symptoms including hopelessness and high blood pressure. Regular health checks or contact with a counsellor can help employees recognise these symptoms and take steps to reduce stress.

For further information see the Acas advisory booklet *Health, work and wellbeing.*

Be supportive
Individuals are more willing to admit that they are suffering from stress if they can expect to be dealt with sympathetically. In some cases good counselling may be all that is needed. Managers and supervisors should be trained to help individuals cope with stress and to recognise when expert help is needed.

Larger organisations can also help by providing health information and education, keep fit and relaxation classes and access to stress counselling. Smaller organisations may find it easier to direct employees to the appropriate facilities in the area.

Employee assistance programmes
Some organisations operate Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs). These are confidential personal counselling services sponsored, and usually paid for, by employers. Typically, EAPs provide professional counsellors to discuss with individuals their work or non-work related problems. Such problems may be emotional, financial or legal, and may be linked to alcohol or drug misuse, etc. EAPs can be run in-house, wholly contracted out to counselling

organisations, or managed from within the organisation using external counsellors.

For further information see the Acas advisory booklet *Health, work and wellbeing.*

Provide information
People often feel stress because they feel left out of the loop. Being supportive to staff can be as much about providing information as counselling.

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How to inform
To promote good relationships between employers and employees – and reduce stress – employers need to work on the 'how' just as much as the 'what' when it comes to communications. If relationships with employees are conducted in an authoritarian or confrontational style then the message will not be properly conveyed. The basic principles of good communications are:

- **clarity:** meetings, newsletters – and especially emails – should be clear and as brief as possible

- **objectivity:** employees need to feel that the information communicated is accurate and unbiased

- **timing:** all forms of communication should be regular and systematic

- **relevance:** employees will respond better if they can relate to the information they are given

- **openness:** communication is a two-way process and involves a dialogue between employers and employees.

There are many ways of communicating with employees. These take the form of face-to-face meetings and written and electronic exchange of information. For more information on how to develop an effective policy on communication in your workplace see the Acas advisory booklet *Employee communications and consultation.*

Other sources of support and advice

There are many organisations that can offer support and advice to employers or employees suffering work-related stress. These include:

- The International Stress Management Association (www.isma.org.uk) exists to promote sound knowledge and best practice in the prevention and reduction of human stress

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (www.hse.gov.uk) for what the HSE are doing about stress at work, plus information, resources and further contacts

- NHS plus (www.nhsplus.nhs.uk) has advice for individuals about workplace stress

- For a fuller list of possible contacts see p48.

Clear policies can
build relationships

Relationships are central to our experience of being at work. How well we get on with bosses, colleagues or people we manage can have a huge impact on our physical and mental wellbeing.

Employers cannot always control relationships – personality clashes will occur and employers and employees often have very personal reasons for preferring to work with one person rather than another. However, employers can be very pro-active in helping to encourage relationships based on good behaviour and respect.

Some of the most frequent problems between individuals at work arise

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Example

An employee in a shop was frequently late for work. This created more work for others who had to cover for her. The manager spoke to the employee on a number of occasions but things did not improve. The other employees were annoyed and thought the late employee was getting away with blue murder.

The manager called the employee to a formal disciplinary meeting and informed the employee of her right to be accompanied. At the meeting the employee was unable to give a satisfactory reason for lateness, saying she kept forgetting to set her alarm. The manager issued a formal written warning and told the employee that if the late arrivals continued she would be given a final written warning.

The warning demonstrated to the employee the seriousness of the situation and her timekeeping improved to a good standard. The other employees were happy that firm action had been taken and this improved working relationships all round.

because employers don't have clear rules and policies on dealing with grievances and disciplinary issues. These help set boundaries and promote awareness of equal opportunities and diversity.

Employers need to ask themselves:

- **grievances:** how can employees complain about issues like a lack of equal opportunities at work?

- **discipline:** how does the organisation deal with unsatisfactory performance, poor attendance or misconduct?

- **unacceptable behaviour:** what is the organisation doing to tackle bullying and harassment or to prevent them happening in the future?

Agree policies on discipline and grievances

'Discipline' and 'grievances' can be stressful for both employers and employees. They concern broken rules, unsatisfactory performance and problems between individuals in the workplace.

Effective procedures can have a positive effect on stressful situations by offering clarity, fairness and understanding in resolving problems.

Clear disciplinary rules help employees to know where they are when it comes to timekeeping, absence, conduct, performance, discrimination, bullying etc. Grievance procedures are equally important because they can help prevent disagreements between employees and employers developing into major disputes.

Discipline

Disciplinary rules will be more effective if they are drawn up in consultation with those covered by them and those who operate them. The Acas guide *Discipline and grievances at work* gives details of how to draw up a disciplinary procedure. One of the key principles of the advice given in the guide is that "in most cases employers should aim to improve and not to punish" employees.

If the rules are broken or an employee's performance doesn't reach the necessary standards organisations should follow the full advice in the *Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures* and the Acas Guide. Employment tribunals are legally required to take the Code into account when considering relevant cases. Tribunals will also be able to adjust any compensatory awards made in these cases by up to 25 per cent for unreasonable failure to

comply with any provision of the Code. Briefly a disciplinary matter should be handled in the following ways:

- **informal action:** a 'quiet word' in private can often be the best way of resolving problems. For example, by talking to an employee about being late for work you may find that personal issues – perhaps to do with childcare or other responsibilities outside work – can be easily solved;

- **formal action:** where problems cannot be resolved by informal action or if they are sufficiently serious employers should follow a formal procedure. Procedures must be fair and give employees their full rights;

Grievances

Grievances are concerns, problems or complaints that employees raise with their employers. In order to make the issue of grievances as stress free as possible, employees need to feel confident they can take their concerns to their manager in the knowledge that:

- the problem will be dealt with confidentially and sympathetically

- there are effective grievance procedures in place for dealing with the problem fairly and speedily.

Employers should try and settle grievances informally wherever possible. *Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures* sets out principles for handling disciplinary and grievance situations in the workplace. Employment tribunals are legally required to take the Code into account when considering relevant cases. Tribunals will also be able to adjust any compensatory awards made in these cases by up to 25 per cent for unreasonable failure to comply with any provision of the Code.

The way meetings are conducted is crucial in managing the likely build up of stress. Employers can often take the sting out of very emotional situations by remaining calm and objective and allowing the employee chance to give their point of view. It is also vital to keep the organisational procedures up-to-date – and to make sure they are communicated to all staff.

Agree policies on bullying and harassment

Some of the most severe forms of work-related stress can be caused by bullying and harassment. Employers should make it very clear that they are totally unacceptable forms of behaviour. Incidents of bullying and harassment at work often reflect an organisation that is built on a lack of trust and understanding.

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It is best to have a formal policy on bullying and harassment. This does not have to be over-elaborate but it should be supported by a clear commitment from management to take it seriously.

The key to most policies is clarity – so be clear about what behaviour is unacceptable, what steps will be taken to stop bullying and who is responsible for managing the policy. Employers should also be aware of the link between poor relationships at work and disciplinary and grievance issues (see previous page).

What employers need to do
Employers need to do the following five things to tackle bullying and harassment:

- **write a formal policy.** This should make it clear that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated, set out the steps to be taken to prevent it happening and clarify the responsibilities of supervisors and managers. The policy should also make reference to disciplinary and grievance procedures, the training provided and the protection that will be given from any possible victimisation;

Bullying may be characterised as "offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient".

- **set a good example.** An authoritarian style of management can often create a culture where bullying and harassment thrive. Employers should try to develop management practices based upon consultation with employees and regular communication where problems are discussed openly within a supportive environment;

- **maintain fair policies for dealing promptly with complaints from employees.** Complaints of bullying and harassment can usually be dealt with using clear grievance and disciplinary procedures. These should ensure confidentiality and inform both parties of the right to be accompanied;

- **set standards of behaviour.** Written guidance and training sessions can help promote awareness of what behaviour is acceptable and the damaging affects of bullying and harassment;

● **be supportive.** Employees need to be sure that they will get a sympathetic response if they make a complaint. Managers should let them know that all complaints will be dealt with fairly and sensitively. Counselling can play a vital role in helping employees deal with often very emotive and complex issues.

The legal position

Although employees cannot complain to an employment tribunal about bullying itself they are protected under laws covering discrimination and harassment.

It is unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion or belief. Employers should have an 'equality policy' (see above) which includes a clear commitment to counter all forms of discrimination. For more information see the Acas advisory booklet *Deliverying equality and diversity.*

For further information on this and other issues relating to bullying at work see the Acas advice leaflet *Bullying and harassment at work – a guide for managers and employers.*

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Role –

what part do you play?

Stress often thrives where people don't fully understand their role in a team or section, where they are unclear about their job description, or about the overall goals of the organisation.

Managers may fail to pick up on the ambiguities surrounding an individual's role which can be triggered by:

- **poor induction** that leads employees and employers to

Example

A new member of staff joins a busy sales team. He receives off-the-job training in sales and then joins his new colleagues in the team. There is no formal induction process and he is expected to pick things up as he goes along.

He soon realises there are a lot of things he doesn't know so he asks colleagues but they are very busy and can't spend much time explaining things. He has to make some photocopies and rather than ask for help again decides to just go ahead. Half way through the photocopying a supervisor berates him for using an expensive colour photocopier for standard document copy records. Later the same day he discovers that he has used the wrong computer application to save records and the work has to be redone.

The new employee becomes increasingly demoralised as similar mistakes occur on following days. At the end of the week he decides the work is not for him and hands in his notice.

The company had wasted the expensive sales training and a potentially good employee because of the lack of help they gave him to settle in.

assume that job details will be made clear later

- lack of planning by managers who do not sit down and work out **accurate job descriptions**

- **organisational change** which fails to consider the impact on the individual's role in the team.

If employees do not know what is expected of them – or have conflicting demands made on their time – they will feel anxious about their work and the organisation. To help avoid work-related stress employers should continually monitor:

- the induction process

- individual job descriptions

- objectives and goals.

Look at induction

The employment relationship – between an employee and their work – starts with the selection process. However, the future of that relationship depends to a large extent on how the new employee is settled into the job. This settling in process is called induction and, if planned effectively, it can help employees to quickly adjust to their new environment.

The induction timetable
An induction timetable will vary depending on the size and type of organisation. However, an effective programme might contain the following elements:

- an **'information pack'**. This may be supplied before the employee has actually started and is particularly important in jobs of a technical nature, where the new starter may want to be as well informed as possible about that side of the work. Any information an employer can give to an employee before they start generally helps them to 'mentally prepare' for starting work;

- a **written statement of employment particulars,** or a company handbook, can also provide essential information about the organisation and the job. Most employees are entitled by law to be given a written statement within two months;

- a **good reception,** with the line or personnel manager spending time with the new employee, is important on the first day;

- a general round-up of **training,** development opportunities and the working practices of the organisation – particularly any health and safety requirements;

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- a **'buddy' system** which uses an experienced worker to assist the new recruit in all the day-to-day questions that may arise.

It is useful to have a written checklist of the items that need to be covered in the induction programme (an example of such a list can be found in the Acas advisory booklet *Recruitment and induction*). It is worth remembering that people can take in only so much information at any given time, and should not be overloaded. After all, at the end of the induction process the new starter should have a good feel for the organisation, and should continue to feel that they made the right decision in joining the firm.

Focus on the individual
Starting a new job can be more stressful for some employees than others. The new member of staff who has considerable recent work experience and is a confident, out-going individual may have a different induction need from the person with little or no experience, and who may be shy or reserved in this new work setting.

Employers should be particularly sensitive towards certain new starters, such as:

- **school and college leavers.** For school or college leavers, who may be nervous but excited at their first job, it is particularly important for the employer to encourage a positive attitude to work, and to allay any fears the new recruit may have;

- **people returning to work** after a break in employment, or changing their work situation. Men or women returning to work after some years caring for children or other relatives may feel apprehensive about the new job – even when they may have worked for the company in the past. They may feel out of touch with developments, and in need of re-establishing themselves;

- **employees with disabilities.** Careful pre-planning can reduce the problems which may arise for employees with disabilities, whether in terms of access, equipment or dealing with colleagues;

- **minorities.** Employers may need to be aware and take account of any particular cultural or religious customs of new employees who are part of an ethnic or religious minority so that misunderstandings do not occur.

For further information on how to establish an effective induction system see the Acas advisory booklet *Recruitment and induction.*

Review job descriptions

Job descriptions are often taken for granted or forgotten about. An employee can sometimes be given a very vague job description when they start because a manager simply decides to wait and see what jobs they need doing once the person has been in post for a while. Or an employee's job may evolve over time and the written documents haven't kept pace with the changes.

The content of job descriptions

Employers should ensure that job descriptions are always accurate and up-to-date. A good job description should include:

- main purpose of the job – try to describe this in one sentence

- main tasks of the job – use active verbs, like 'writing', 'repairing', 'machining', 'calculating', instead of vaguer terms like 'dealing with', 'in charge of'

- scope of the job – expanding on the main tasks and the importance of the job. Job importance can be indicated by giving information such as the number of people to be supervised, the degree of precision required and the value of any materials and equipment used.

A good job description is useful for all jobs. It can help with induction and training. It provides the basis for drawing up a person specification – a profile of the skills and aptitudes considered essential and desirable in the job-holder. It enables prospective applicants to assess themselves for the job and provides a benchmark for judging achievements. An example of a job description is given in the Acas advisory booklet *Recruitment and induction.*

For further information on job descriptions and the part they play in effective recruitment see the Acas advisory booklet *Recruitment and induction* and for sample forms see the Acas advisory booklet *Personnel data and record keeping.*

Monitor the effect of change on individual roles

Change is dealt with in detail in the next section but employers should remember that it can have a huge impact on the way an individual is expected to do their job (see the section on change p35). Managers and supervisors can limit the disruption caused to individual roles by keeping employees in the loop about any future changes.

Employees can often feel that what they do is pointless if they can't see how it fits into the bigger picture. Managers and supervisors should maintain the connection between the

organisation and the individual by reviewing personal work plans.

Work plans can be relatively informal arrangements between managers and their staff, where they meet on a weekly basis to agree the main priorities for the week ahead. They can also be part of more structured reporting and appraisal systems (see p20 for more details).

Managers need to review work plans and personal objectives to ensure they are still relevant. This is particularly important if new members of staff have joined or new teams have been created or merged with each other.

Change:
opportunity or threat?

Change is one of the more obvious causes of stress. It alters routines and can make employers and employees uncertain about the future. It can mean a massive upheaval – with the threat of possible re-location and redundancies – or a minor re-adjustment – like a new office plan or corporate branding.

Change is often seen as a positive attribute associated with being competitive and flexible. Over the past decade many employers have had to embrace change in order to survive.

However, change also offers a real challenge to employers and employees. It can often indicate whether employers have the right procedures in place to communicate and consult with their staff.

To help make change an opportunity rather than a threat employers need to:

● **plan ahead** so that changes are well signposted in advance and managers and employees can be well prepared

● **consult** with employees about the changes. Employees need to be able to ask questions before, during and after the change process

● **work together** to identify potential problems and involve employees in the introduction of any new procedures.

Plan ahead
Change is far more stressful if it is sudden. Employers have little control over external factors which dictate change – such as the emergence of new technology – but they can have long-term goals which anticipate changes in market demands and labour supply.

Business plans
Most organisations plan for the future. Many larger organisations draw up detailed business plans – setting out their targets for the year and the key objectives for each area of work operation. Smaller firms may have less elaborate systems but will usually have sales targets and forecasts based on staffing levels, profit levels and equipment costs.

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In terms of human resources alone, many employers use 'human resource planning' (HRP) as a way of making the best use of their employees. It can help organisations assess future recruitment needs, likely requirements for premises and training needs. It means getting the right people for the right jobs at the right time and involves:

- forecasting labour requirements

- assessing labour supply

- matching the available supply against the forecast demand.

Planning for teams and individuals
Business plans may seem remote and rather irrelevant to many employees. In order to make the connection between what happens to the organisation – in terms of markets, new products and recruitment levels – employers need to make sure business plans are relevant to the day-to-day work of all employees.

Employees will feel much more involved in their work and motivated if they can see what they are doing makes a contribution to the organisation. At a team level managers need to make sure employees are aware of the purpose of their specific tasks and how they can help work towards the objectives set out in the business plan.

Team meetings can also keep employees aware of less far-reaching changes. For example, if desks or work-stations are being moved or new stationery is being introduced, employees need time to prepare. Even on issues which might appear trivial – such as decorating the canteen or restricting the number of car park spaces – it is always better if employees find out about any changes through their managers or supervisors.

On an individual level, appraisal meetings can be a useful time to discuss any changes that might affect the work of an employee. For example, the introduction of any new equipment will need to be planned – and time made for the relevant training. Also, managers need to continually assess the individual's personal development. Even very positive changes – like promotion or training opportunities – can be stressful if employees are not given the necessary training and support.

Contracts of employment
Employers often overlook the fact that organisational changes affect an employee's contract of employment. A contract of employment is a legally binding agreement between the employer and the employee which is formed when the employee begins work. Employers are not required to set out in writing all the terms of the contract but they must provide the

employee with written details of his or her main terms and conditions of employment within two months of that person starting work. These will cover things like details of pay, hours, holidays etc.

As a general rule, alterations to the contract can only be made with the agreement of both parties either verbally or in writing. Confusion surrounding contracts of employment can lead to friction, misunderstandings and claims to civil courts, or to employment tribunals for breach of contract.

Consult

The natural reaction to change is to ask questions – what, when, how? It is important for employers to channel this natural reaction so that employees can make a positive contribution to change. If the views of employees are not listened to – or they are heard but ignored – it can lead to frustration and work-related stress.

The best way to involve staff in the management of change is through consultation. Consultation involves managers actively seeking out the views of their employees and then

Example

A new computer system was introduced in a firm of insurance brokers. A training programme was developed for staff on all the new software commonly used in the company. Once the software had been in use for a while a manager noticed that the one of his employees had become quiet and uncommunicative.

The manager spoke to the employee and asked him about possible problems that may be affecting performance. The employee said he hadn't got to grips with the new software but on discussion it turned out that he had particular difficulties with special applications that only he and a few others were required to use. These applications hadn't been covered in the training. The employee hadn't wished to make a fuss as he felt he was just being a bit slower than the others to pick things up.

Further training was provided for the employee and other employees that used the special applications. This resolved the problem.

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taking these views into account before making a decision.

What to consult on

Employers and employees generally agree among themselves the subjects to be covered by consultation. They normally cover broad issues of interest to the whole organisation, such as working conditions, staffing levels and training.

However, employers are legally obliged to consult with employees or employee representatives on the following subjects:

● health and safety

● redundancies

● business transfers

● works councils

● occupational pensions.

The Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations aim to give employees a voice in critical decisions affecting the future of the place where they work. The regulations give employees the right to be:

● informed about the business' economic situation

● informed and consulted about employment prospects, and

● informed and consulted about decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or contractual relations, including redundancies and transfers.

The regulations apply to businesses with 50 or more employees. For more information, visit www.acas.org.uk/informationandconsultation

How to consult

Committees and councils are the most commonly used method of employee consultation for larger organisations. These committees are made up of managers and employee representatives and meet regularly to discuss the kind of issues listed above.

The size of the committee will vary according to the size of the organisation but should be kept as small as possible. There are some basic principles of how committees should be run:

● a **senior manager** should be present to give credibility to the group

● **employee representatives** should be elected by the employees they represent

- if there is a mixture of **union and non-union representatives** discuss this with the recognised trade union first

- **meet regularly** – say, once a month

- the committees need to be **well chaired:** with focused agendas and someone to act as secretary to take the minutes etc

- the committees should **report back** to employees as soon as possible.

Small organisations will naturally rely more on personal communication to consult with employees.

Consultation does not mean that employees' views always have to be acted on – but any reasons for rejecting their views should be carefully explained. The role of managers and supervisors is important in maintaining an effective system of consultation. They often act as a conduit for the passing of information between employers and employees and can help to monitor the extent of employee cooperation and the level of involvement by senior managers.

Trade union safety representatives can also play a useful role by keeping in touch with staff opinion. They can act as sounding boards and help to keep managers better informed.

For further information see the Acas advisory booklet *Employee communication and consultation.*

Work together

One of the best ways of combating stress is to promote an organisational culture based on cooperation rather than confrontation.

Joint working groups are a common way of getting employers and employees working together. They are similar in make-up to consultative committees but they are usually set up to consider and suggest ways of resolving specific issues affecting the organisation, for instance a high rate of employee turnover or problems with the pay system.

The benefits of joint working

Joint working groups have many of the advantages of other sorts of representation and provide the opportunity for maximum involvement of both management and employee representatives in considering particular issues. They also:

- secure greater commitment to recommendations because worker representatives have been involved in the decision-making process

- emphasise dialogue, not conflict, by developing solutions which are acceptable to both sides

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- utilise the skills and knowledge of employees

- improve relationships and attitudes.

In many organisations where trade unions are recognised, management and unions are working closely together on the principle of common interest. These collaborative relationships can take the form of partnership initiatives. A partnership can mean anything from a statement of intent to pursue a cooperative approach to formal agreements involving new structures and systems for consultation and representation. Partnerships are usually based on a shared commitment to the success of the organisation and a recognition by both the union and employer that they each have different and legitimate interests.

For further information see Acas advisory booklet *Representation at work.*

Appendix 1:
What is stress – your questions answered

What is stress? The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them".

There has been much confusion between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor, and the negative experience which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive and the individual is unable to cope.

Why is stress talked about so much today? The increasing focus on the individual in the workplace – combined with a growing awareness of the importance of health and safety and environmental issues – has brought stress to the fore. However, stress is not new – psychologists have been studying stress since the 1950s.

Why do we need to tackle stress? Although the great majority of UK workplaces do not have a serious stress problem, the incidence of work-related stress appears widespread. About one in five people indicated that they found their work either very or extremely stressful [Bristol Stress and Health at Work Study (SHAW), undertaken in 1998]. This also reflects both the rising awareness of the issue and the lessening stigma associated with mental ill health.

HSE estimates that work-related stress costs society between £3.7 billion and £3.8 billion a year (1995/96 prices). Latest figures estimate 21.8 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2004/5.

How is stress caused? Stress can be triggered by either organisational or individual factors. Organisational factors include poor communication, bad working environment and ineffective job design. Individual factors include personal problems such as bereavement, money worries and illness.

Work-related stress (WRS) can also be caused where there is

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"a mismatch between job requirements and the individual's abilities, resources or needs".

What form does stress take?
Although work-related stress is not an illness the psychological impact of stress can contribute to problems with ill health. As well as anxiety and depression, stress has been associated with heart disease, back pain and gastrointestinal illnesses.

Is my organisation now required by law to tackle stress? Employers already have duties under the '*Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations*,' 1999, to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities; and under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, to take measures to control that risk. The HSE Standards and supporting guidance are intended to help and encourage employers to meet these existing legal obligations.

Can stress be cured? Some forms of stress can be prevented – for example, the kind of organisational stress caused by poor management or the lack of company policies for dealing with bullying or discipline. Individual stress-relating to relationships or personal problems – can also be reduced with the right kind of understanding and support.

What's the government doing about stress? The government aims to work with employers, employees, trade unions and others in achieving a 20 per cent reduction in the incidence of work-related ill health by 2010. For more information visit the Health and Safety Executive website at www.hse.gov.uk.

Appendix 2:
Job design principles

It is rarely possible for jobs to be designed to incorporate all the characteristics listed. Some will need to be traded off against others. Ideally, however, jobs should:

● form a coherent whole, either independently or with related jobs. Performance of the job (or jobs) should make a significant contribution to the completion of the product or service, a contribution which is visible to the job holder

● provide some variety of pace, method, location and skill

● provide feedback of performance, both directly and through other people

● allow for some discretion and control in the timing, sequence and pace of work efforts

● include some responsibility for outcome

● provide some opportunity for learning and problem-solving (within the individual's competence)

● be seen as leading towards some sort of desirable future

● provide opportunity for development in ways that the individual finds relevant.

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Appendix 3:

Health and safety management standards for tackling work related stress

DEMANDS

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:
- 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; and

- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

CONTROL

How much say the person has in the way they do their work

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;

- 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 have a say over when breaks can be taken; and

- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

SUPPORT

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

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:

- 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; and

- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

RELATIONSHIPS

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

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, eg bullying at work; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:
- 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; and

- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

ROLE

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:
- 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; and

- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

CHANGE

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and

- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/states to be achieved:
- 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; and

- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

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Reading List
and other sources of advice

FERRIE, Jane
Work, stress and health: the Whitehall II study
London, CCSU/Cabinet Office, 2004
www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology/
Whitehall/Whitehallbooklet.pdf

HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE
Real solutions, real people: a managers' guide to tackling work-related stress
London, HSE, 2003
ISBN: 0717627675

HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE
Working together to reduce stress at work – a guide for employees

INCOMES DATA SERVICES
Managing stress
London, IDS, 2004, (IDS Study: 775)

INCOMES DATA SERVICES
Stress at work
London, IDS, 2003
(IDS Employment Law Supplement Series 2: 9)

JAMDAR, Smita and BYFORD, Jane
Workplace stress: law and practice
London, Law Society, 2003
ISBN: 1853288373

JORDAN, Joe and COOPER, Cary
Managing stress
Sutton, Reed Business Information, 2005
(Personnel Today One-stop guide)

JORDAN, Joe et al
Beacons of excellence in stress prevention
Sudbury, HSE Books, 2003
(Research Report 133)
ISBN: 0717627098

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
Stress at work – a trade unionist's guide
London, Labour Research Department, 2006
(LRD booklets)

STRANKS, Jeremy
Stress at work: management and prevention
Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005
ISBN: 0750665424

TEHRANI, Noreen
Managing organisational stress: a CIPD guide to improving and maintaining employee well-being
London, CIPD, 2003
www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/manorgstrs.htm

Useful websites

Work Positive – prioritising organisational stress
www.hebs.com/workpositive is developed by NHS Scotland and the Health and Safety Authority (Ireland) to help organisations address stress at work

The International Stress Management Association
www.isma.org.uk/ exists to promote sound knowledge and best practice in the prevention and reduction of human stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
www.hse.gov.uk/stress for what the HSE are doing about stressat work, plus information, resources and further contacts. Includes advice on the Management standards for work-related stress

NHS plus
www.nhsplus.nhs.uk/your_health/stress.asp has advice for individuals about workplace stress

The Stress Management Society
www.stress.org.uk provides training to help manage stress

The UK National Work Stress Network
www.workstress.net campaigns on the issue of stress at work

Centre for Stress Management
www.managingstress.com offers training for HR professionals, stress audits and counselling services

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Other Acas material that might be of interest includes:
  Acas Advisory Booklet – *Health, work and wellbeing*
  Acas Advisory Booklet – *Recruitment and induction*
  Acas Advisory Booklet – *Employee appraisal*
  Acas Advisory Booklet – *Teamwork: success through people*
  Acas Advisory Booklet – *Managing attendance and employee turnover*
  Acas Advisory Handbook – *Discipline and grievances at work – the Acas guide*
  Acas Advisory Leaflet – *Bullying and harassment at work*

Acas Training

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Look at the Acas website for up-to-date information about all our training or if you want to book a place online.

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● Managing absence at work

● Essential skills for supervisors

● Employment law update

● Contracts of employment - how to get it right

● Having difficult conversations

We also have free online learning to help you – just go to www.acas.org.uk and click on e-learning to look at the topics covered.

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