ST CATHERINE'S COLLEGE

STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY: NON-ACADEMIC STAFF

INTRODUCTION

St Catherine's College values its staff, and is therefore committed to protecting their health, safety and welfare in the workplace. This includes maintaining mental as well as physical well-being. The College recognizes that excessive or prolonged pressure in the workplace can have a negative impact on the organisation and individuals, and that this can be prevented and alleviated through appropriate action on the part of individuals and their managers.

This policy applies to all non-academic staff in the College. Employees are responsible for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues, managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy, and the College is responsible for providing the necessary resources to carry it out effectively.

This policy sets out the framework for preventing and managing work-related stress. Neither this policy nor anything contained within it is intended to have contractual effect, and it should be regarded as providing guidelines only.

DEFINITION OF STRESS

The College accepts the definition of stress provided by the Health and Safety Executive, which states that stress is "…*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them – it arises when they worry, they can't cope*…"

This definition helps to distinguish between the beneficial effects of reasonable **pressure** and challenge (which can be considered as positive, motivational and key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction) and **work-related stress**, which is a natural but distressing reaction to the demands or 'pressures' that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.

It should be noted that stress is not the same for everybody, and that what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. However, all members of staff can potentially experience work-related stress.

The feeling of 'not coping' is often seen as a weakness that cannot be acknowledged and people therefore 'soldier on'. Work-related stress is also sometimes worn as a 'badge of office', and can almost be considered a 'status' symbol and/ or part of the territory of particular jobs. Both viewpoints are unhealthy. Work-related stress is not an illness, but if it is prolonged or particularly intense it can lead to increased problems with ill-health.

EFFECTS OF STRESS

Excessive stress can manifest itself in physical, emotional or behavioural effects. These effects are usually short-lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressures recede, there is a quick return to normal. Work-related stress is not therefore the same as ill health. It is only when pressures are intense and continue for some time that the effects of work-related stress can become more sustained and far more damaging, leading to longer term psychological problems and physical ill health.

Long term stress has been associated with conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety and depression. These conditions may arise form other causes and if a particular individual is suffering from one of these disorders, it will be for a medical practitioner to advise on the extent to which it is work related.

Other common symptoms may include the following:

- Behavioural - withdrawal, hostility, complaining unreasonably, excessive eating/ drinking/ smoking, poor concentration, being too busy to relax, evading deadlines and absenteeism;

- Emotional - easily discouraged, lack of self-esteem, nervousness, anxiety, frustration, irritability, apathy, mood swings, crying spells, helplessness;

- Physical - headaches, fatigue, backaches, neck aches, shoulder pains, difficulties in sleeping, colds and reduced immunity generally, digestive problems;

- Mental - forgetfulness, poor concentration, low productivity, negative attitudes, lethargy/ boredom, no longer feeling motivated or challenged;

- Social - isolation, loneliness, lashing out, clamming up, fewer contacts with friends and colleagues, manipulating people.

Displaying some of these symptoms does not automatically indicate that a person is experiencing stress, but they may point to such a possibility.

MINIMISING WORK-RELATED STRESS: RESPONSIBILITIES

Whilst the College has no control over external factors, as a good employer the College wishes to promote the wellbeing of its staff. It is therefore committed to ensuring that – as far as is reasonably practicable – no member of staff is subjected to an excessive and sustained level of reasonably foreseeable work-related stress that is detrimental to their health.

The following section outlines the responsibilities of the College, management and employees in ensuring that excessive pressures are minimised, and in the event that an adverse reaction arises, that stress is managed effectively.

1. The College

- Will provide guidance to managers and staff (see Appendix A & B to this policy) in order to raise awareness of work-related stress, its effects and how to manage it;

- Will provide a framework of employment, health, and safety policies, systems and monitoring to support managers and staff to ensure effective work performance and minimise the risk of work-related stress (including supporting managers in implementing recommendations arising from risk assessments);

- Will work with, and support, managers and individuals to find the best way to handle work-related stress, including (where appropriate) referral to the College Doctor and/ or the University's Occupational Health department;

- Will promote equality of opportunity, and endeavour to provide a workplace free from harassment and bullying;

- Aims to deal with and resolve instances of excessive pressure to avoid sickness absence occurring;

- Aims to continue to develop systems to ensure that - as far as is reasonably practicable – there is good two-way communication between management and staff, particularly during times of organisational or procedural change;

- Will, through the Safety Committee, review and monitor the effectiveness of this policy, and make amendments as appropriate.

2.   Line Management/ Supervisory Staff

- Should conduct (and implement recommendations arising from) risk assessments of work-related stress within their work areas, and should review risk assessments annually (and following any changes in methods of work) to assess the effectiveness of the responses of their areas to work -related stress. Guidance for supervisors can be found in Appendix B;

- Should ensure that good two-way communication processes are in place;

- Should ensure that jobs are properly designed (with realistic demands and workload), that expectations and job role are clear, and that their staff are fully trained to undertake the duties required of them;

- Should ensure that developmental opportunities are available to staff where appropriate;

- Should ensure that there are regular opportunities to discuss the work and obtain feedback on performance (e.g. regular one-to-one meetings and/or team meetings);

- Should monitor workloads, to ensure that people are not overloaded;

- Should monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking;

- Should monitor annual leave allowances and encourage individuals to take their full entitlement;

- Should attend training as requested and be familiar with good management practice and health and safety;

- Should ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated within their team;

- Should be vigilant and offer additional support to members of staff who are experiencing stress outside work (e.g. bereavement or separation).

3.   Employees

- Have a responsibility to minimise their own levels of work-related stress and those of their colleagues who may be affected by their acts or omissions. This includes advising management of any risks that may cause or increase work-related stress;

- Should raise issues of concern with their line manager as soon as possible, and seek constructive solutions. If it is felt to be inappropriate to raise them with the line manager, members of staff should contact either the Personnel Advisor or a senior manager outside their department;

- Should communicate to their line manager as soon as possible if they are feeling under pressure (including being either overloaded or underloaded at work), and should suggest ways to reduce or manage the situation;

- Should take responsibility for proactively managing their own workload and duties;

- Should accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING CASES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

The responsibilities outlined above attempt to prevent work-related stress from occurring, and/ or to identify and manage work-related stress before absence from work occurs. However, in the

event that an employee is absent from work due to work-related stress, the following approach will normally be adopted:

1. The College's sickness absence and reporting procedures will apply;

2. Where it is brought to the attention of a manager or supervisor that a member of staff has symptoms of stress (including frequent short-term absences), or upon receipt of a medical certificate stating "stress", the manager should meet as soon as possible with the employee concerned to discuss the causes of stress;

3. If the cause is related to the employee's personal life, the manager should be supportive and sympathetic as far as is reasonably practicable;

4. If the cause is work related, it should normally be identified by looking at the following areas:

    - Organisational culture;

    - Demands on the individual;

    - The control the individual has on how work is done;

    - Relationships with work colleagues;

    - Change;

    - Job role;

    - Support and training.

5. Where an employee is experiencing excessive work-related stress consideration will be given to adaptations in work and working practices so as to reduce or remove the risk. Proposals relating to changes will be agreed with the member of staff concerned, and the individual's manager should continue to monitor the employee's workload, hours, performance and behaviour.

6. The employee must keep the manager informed of his/ her state of health;

7. At all stages of the procedure the need for medical advice will be carefully considered to ensure all the medical facts relevant to the situation can be obtained. Where appropriate, and normally in consultation with the individual concerned, a member of staff may be referred to the College Doctor and/ or the University's Occupational Health department for a specialist medical opinion and recommendations about remedial action.

If, following a period of counselling, a risk assessment reassures the supervisor that the member of staff could continue in the same position, the member of staff may need to be given training so that should the same stress situation arise again they are better equipped to deal with it.

In the event that a reduction in working hours or a job of lesser responsibility or status is agreed, it is likely that a reduction in salary in line with the new hours/ role will also need to be agreed.

Due to the individual nature of the causes of stress and subsequent symptoms, each case will be treated on an individual basis and the above procedures may be adjusted as appropriate to the circumstances of any particular case.

It is important to remember that in all cases the manager or supervisor is neither expected nor presumed to have specialist knowledge in the area of work-related stress, and should seek assistance accordingly.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS OF STAFF WHO BELIEVE THAT THEY MAY BE EXPERIENCING WORK-RELATED STRESS

There are many informative leaflets that give advice about coping with stress, including those available from the Health and Safety Executive, from GP surgeries and clinics, and from mental health charities.

In addition, members of staff may wish to consider the following suggested guidelines in relation to work-related stress:

1. Firstly identify the problem(s).

2. Take some time to think up a few solutions.

3. Only tackle things you can change - those you cannot are someone else's problem.

4. If possible, talk to colleagues, as they will often be able to suggest different approaches which help them to cope with difficult situations.

5. Talk to supervisors at an early stage about any concerns and see if help or advice can be given.

6. Let managers know if your role is either (1) *overloaded* (i.e. having too much to do, not enough time, etc), or (2) *underloaded* (i.e. not enough to do, overly repetitive, etc).

7. Voice any fears about job security, changes in job structures, etc, with supervisors.

8. Prioritise your workload. Deal with the high priority jobs first, no matter how unattractive. Completing them will create a great sense of achievement and boost your morale.

9. Match your workload and pace to your abilities and training. Do not be afraid to delegate or ask for help.

Keeping yourself healthy and unstressed in other areas of life also helps to keep workplace stressors at a manageable level.

Talking about your feelings with friends, family, a professional counsellor, a GP, or a member of the University's Occupational Health team may give you a new perspective on your situation. Whilst it may be difficult to begin such a conversation, as you may feel ashamed of not coping and be embarrassed to let others know, almost everyone experiences stress in some area of their lives and you are not, therefore, unique.

Often, the act of talking to someone about the problem can be sufficient to clarify your thinking so that you can develop a plan to deal with the stress.

APPENDIX B: GUIDANCE FOR SUPERVISORS ON RISK ASSESSMENT

The *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)* place an obligation on employers to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in their workplace. The purpose of the assessment is to enable the employer to identify what measures it needs to take in order to provide employees with a safe environment in which to work.

In making their assessments, the assessor need only consider the main factors that are likely to cause intense or sustained levels of work-related stress, taking into account precautions that are already being taken. This should serve to identify whether it is reasonable to expect the person to be capable to do the work concerned when provided with adequate information, training, equipment and working environment.

In carrying out the risk assessment, the supervisor should take into account records of sickness absence, timekeeping and productivity. Listen to member of staffs' concerns, enquire about the numbers of hours worked. Long hours may indicate that they are overworked, inadequately trained for the job or being subjected to unreasonable demands. Investigate staff motivation and ask about the quality of working relationships.

In making their risk assessment and unless they have (or could have reasonably found out) evidence to the contrary, the supervisor may assume that their staff are mentally capable of withstanding reasonable pressures at work. Contrary evidence might include past stress-related illness. Such evidence should not necessarily exclude the deployment of a person to a particular post or task if reasonable adjustments to the work can be made that are likely to avoid the member of staff developing work-related stress.

If the initial assessment does not reveal any significant levels of sustained work-related stress, the supervisor need only keep the matter under review.

If factors that could cause intense and/or sustained levels of stress are identified, controls must be put in place to eliminate or reduce them to the lowest levels reasonably practicable. These may include:

a) providing members of staff with the necessary training to carry out the work they undertake. This means that where, for example, a member of staff employee is likely to encounter situations which are likely to induce stress, steps should be taken to ensure that the member of staff's risk to mental injury is reduced by providing training to deal with foreseeable situations which could induce stress.

b) Providing members of staff with adequate information about the nature of the work they are to do and giving the necessary support and supervision to enable them to carry out work in a safe manner.

APPENDIX C: HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

The HSE has identified six key "Management Standards" that represent a set of 'best practice' conditions that reflect high levels of health, well-being, and organisational performance. These management standards provide a practical framework which organisations can use to minimise the impact of work-related stress.

The College has included these standards below, for information. They should not, however, be viewed as a formal part of the College's policy on work-related stress, but rather as providing supplementary information.

The checklist at Appendix D, based on the HSE management standards, is intended to provide managers and staff with guidance on the practical steps they can take to identify and address potential sources of workplace stress.

	HSE management standard
Demands	Staff are able to cope with the demands of the job
Control	Staff are able to have a say about the way work is done
Support	Staff receive adequate information and support from colleagues and superiors
Relationships	Staff are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying or harassment at work
Roles	Staff understand their role and responsibilities
Change	Staff are involved in and consulted about any organisational changes

1. DEMANDS - includes 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.

- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

2. 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.

- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

3. 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.
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

4. RELATIONSHIP - 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, e.g. 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.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

5. ROLE - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that individuals do 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.
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

6. 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.
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

APPENDIX D: CHECKLIST TO ASSIST IN IDENTIFYING THE TYPE OF ADJUSTMENTS THAT CAN BE MADE TO MEET THE HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
DEMANDS 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.	Should tasks be redesigned?	☐		
	Can adjustments (temporary or permanent) be made to working hours or patterns?	☐		
	Can changes be made to the way resources are managed or allocated?	☐		
	Should further training be provided?	☐		
	Can changes be made to the work environment?	☐		
	Other?	☐		
CONTROL 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.	Should the job design be altered to give more control over the pace, organisation or location of the work?	☐		
	Can adjustments be made to working hours or patterns?	☐		
	Can further training be provided?	☐		
	Other?	☐		
SUPPORT 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.	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues?	☐		
	Are systems in place to give and receive regular feedback?	☐		
	Do employees know how to access information, policies and procedures relevant to their concerns?	☐		
	Do employees know how to access the resources necessary to do their job?	☐		
	Should further training be provided?	☐		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the College?	☐		
	Other?	☐		

Standard to aim for:	Potential adjustments to meet the standard:	✓ if relevant	Proposed action/action taken:	Review date:
ROLE Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues?	☐		
	Is the job design clear?	☐		
	Are there conflicting demands which could be minimised?	☐		
	Are systems in place to give and receive regular feedback?	☐		
	Other?	☐		
RELATIONSHIPS Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	Are opportunities available to raise and resolve issues?	☐		
	Is conflict identified and addressed at an early stage?	☐		
	Do employees know where to find information, policies and procedures relevant to their concerns?	☐		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the College?	☐		
	Other?	☐		
CHANGE Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and systems are in place to respond to any individual concerns.	Are employees consulted on proposed changes in a timely manner where possible?	☐		
	Are employees provided with information to help understand the reasons for change, if required?	☐		
	Are systems in place to provide employees with information on the probable impact of change on their jobs?	☐		
	Are systems in place to make employees aware of timescales for change?	☐		
	Can further training be provided?	☐		
	Do employees know how to access support systems provided by the College?	☐		
	Other?	☐		