STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

1.0   Introduction

Stress related illness accounts for a significant proportion of sickness absence in workplaces in the UK. Stress can also be a contributing factor to a variety of other absences and performance issues. The effects on the individual can be profound and enduring. In addition there can be a knock on effect for colleagues. It is in our interest to try to introduce measures to identify, prevent or reduce potential triggers for stress in the workplace. To this end, acknowledging that stress management is a collective responsibility, managers and all employees have a role to play.

2.0   How to use this document

This policy is intended to act as a framework to ensure that the relationship between colleagues and the University of Bolton operates effectively for the benefit of all. It is intended to give a basic understanding of work related stress, how to tackle it and our respective responsibilities.

The policy also aims to make clear the actions required when faced with evidence of work related stress.

3.0   What Is Stress?

Stress is defined as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them." There is a difference between pressure (which can be a positive state if managed correctly) and stress, which can be detrimental to health.

Stress is not, in itself, a medical condition, though it may lead to medical conditions. Stress can arise from a variety of stressors or combination of stressors which may originate from personal, domestic, social, or work factors. A stressor is any event, circumstance or demand (external or internal to the individual) which places pressure on the individual and may result in stress. Individuals can have different susceptibilities and coping mechanisms.

It is reasonable to assume that:

- Employees at the University are psychologically capable of withstanding reasonable pressures at work;
- Employees are subjected to periods of pressure at work;
- Short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern.

However sustained and/or excessive pressure over long periods of time can result in anxiety, depression and poor lifestyle patterns. This is commonly referred to as stress and can lead to serious illness.

3.1   Stress versus pressure

Stress and pressure are different but related concepts. Most people respond to increased pressure in a positive way, it can lead to improved performance, greater creativity, increased and better directed energy, and improved morale and motivation. When this increased level of pressure exceeds the ability of individuals to adapt, then the stress that results is unpleasant, potentially harmful and damaging to performance.

4.0   Statement of Intent

The University is committed to promoting the wellbeing of all employees and creating a healthy and safe working environment for all its employees and recognises that this duty of care extends to mental well-being as well as physical health and safety at work. The University recognises that there may be stressors in the work environment and it is therefore committed to managing work-related stressors proactively to reduce the personal impact of these on its employees.

4.1   Responsibilities

4.1.1   The University of Bolton:

- Support all of its employees in fulfilling their obligations under this policy.
- Undertake to provide appropriate advice, training and guidance for all employees to enable them to avoid risks (including stress risks) and positively contribute to their own health and safety.
- Committed to safeguarding employees' health, so far as is reasonably practical and will work in partnership with them to reduce levels of stress risk and sources of "negative" pressure.
- Views all stress issues, whether work-related or arising from the employee's social or domestic circumstances as being potentially damaging to the individual and the University.
- Will appropriately challenge employees and offer employees sufficient positive pressure to ensure that they remain stimulated and effective in the workplace and are constantly developing.

4.1.2   The Line Manager's responsibilities:

- Ensure the communication of this policy to all employees through the normal communication and consultation channels.
- Take steps to ensure their management practices and style do not contribute to occupational stress (Managers can assess their competency by using the HSE's Stress Management Competency indicator Tool at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm)
- Identify and respond appropriately to stress issues within their team. This includes:
  - o conducting and keep under review stress risk assessments
  - o addressing potential stressors (e.g. planned changes to working practices)
  - o taking proactive action when they notice changes in staff behaviour or sickness absence patterns that may indicate a stress-related problem.
- Monitor workloads, working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking, and ensure that staff take their full holiday entitlement
- Ensure the managers that they are responsible for are meeting their management responsibilities in relation to stress.
- Refer to Human Resources or the Specialist Services Manager any employee who presents with stress related ill health
- Ensure good communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes
- Ensure that employees are appropriately trained to fulfil their roles and are provided with appropriate opportunities for personal development
- Tackle incidents of bullying and harassment when they occur
- Offer appropriate support to employees who are experiencing stress outside of work

4.2.3   HR responsibilities:

- Give guidance to managers on the Stress Management Policy.
- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics and ensuring work related stress is included in any Employee Engagement Surveys undertaken
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to Employee Assistant Programme and/or Occupational Heath where appropriate.
- Liaise with the Specialist Service Manager on issues relating to work related stress.

4.2.4   Specialist Service Manager responsibilities:

- Provide advice, guidance and training to line managers on work related stress
- Provide training and guidance on how to undertake stress risk assessments
- To report to the HSE any work relate stress in line with HSE requirements,
- Work with HR on issues relating to work related stress
- Provide an annual report to the H&S Committee and Executive Board regarding incidents of work related stress

4.2.5   Employee responsibilities:

- Take responsibility for their own physical and psychological wellbeing.
- Be aware of the factors that may contribute to their stress and take personal preventative actions in terms of stress management for colleagues and self.
- Identify work related stress related hazards at the earliest opportunity to their line manager and co-operate in solutions to resolve them.

5.0   Stress Indicators

All line managers should assess the risks arising from work hazards (e.g. through the use of stress risk assessments). The assessment should include those risks that may pose a threat to psychological health as well as physical health and safety. The Health and Safety Executive have set six management standards as the main risk factors to take into account when undertaking stress risk assessments - these standards provide the University with a useful benchmark to identify whether they are meeting their obligations by assessing how their staff feel in six key areas:

Demands – includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment
Control – how much say the person has in the workplace
Job Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
Support – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line manager and colleagues
Relationships within the workplace – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
Change – how organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Employees can access the services of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider. The University may refer the employee to the EAP provider or seek advice through the Occupational Health service to provide early access to support networks, dialogue with managers and/or HR.

6.0   Procedure for Handling Cases of Work Related Stress

Employees who notice symptoms of stress in themselves or experience any health issues which affect their work, should consider discussing this with their line manager in the first instance.

When it is brought to the attention of a line manager that an employee has symptoms of stress which is affecting their work, there should be a joint discussion with the person concerned in the first instance.

If both the line manager and the employee consider that the matter requires additional professional guidance, reference should also be made to Human Resources who may, depending upon circumstances, suggest to the employee that they be assessed by the Occupational Health provider.

Wherever reasonably practicable, an employee experiencing excessive and sustained work-related stress will have their work adapted, including the possibility of alternative employment within the University, so as to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level. A joint strategy will be agreed with the person concerned, their line manager, Human Resources (informed by OH if appropriate). If there is no suitable alternative employment within the University which would not involve the risk of reasonably foreseeably exacerbating their condition, an employee should recognise that, ultimately, it may be necessary, for sufficient reason, to terminate their employment.

Line managers must keep records of the advice and action they have taken in relation to an employee suffering from work-related stress. In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the employee has the right to access such information. Progress should be recorded, monitored and reviewed appropriately.

Employees who do not feel able to speak to their line manager about stress, or do not feel that their manager is addressing their concerns, can speak to their Department's HR Business Partner or the Specialist Services Manager. If appropriate, employees may also seek advice and support from their Trade Union representative

6.1   Guidance on how to deal with instances of stress

How might an individual become aware of and recognise stress for themselves?

- unable to concentrate or remember things
- losing sleep through worrying
- feeling anxious, irritable and/or depressed
- feelings of panic
- increased level of sickness absence
- avoidance of social situations
- a colleague, manager, or friend letting the individual know that they appear stressed

Please note the above is not an exhaustive list and any one of these indicators might be a sign of stress

How might a manager recognise stress in others?

- individual or someone else informs manager directly
- individual or someone else expresses concerns about an individual
- change of behaviour, such as moodiness, irritability, falling out with colleagues
- pattern of frequent absence
- pattern of poor timekeeping
- individual working excessive hours/'overdoing it'
- standard of work falls and/or deadlines not met
- lack of motivation
- appearance of fatigue

Meeting between employee and Line Manager:

- the manager is there to listen to the individual and to understand the points being made
- during the meeting the manager is to gather information, handle emotions, give and receive feedback, agree action
- discuss support the individual is receiving
- more than one meeting may be needed to give time for reflection
- may devise action plan

If an action plan is to be considered it might include

- recognition that there is a situation which requires managing
- commitment of both individual and manager to the plan
- agreed specific actions with timescales
- agreed sources of support for individual
- agreed level of confidentiality as to who should be informed and by whom
- agreed timescale for follow up meeting(s)

7.0   Further Information

HSE's management standard:
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf

HSE information on work-related stress:
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

NHS Guidance on Beating Stress at Work
http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/workplace-stress.aspx

8.0   Document Control

Stress Management Policy	
Procedure Ref	
Version Number	3
Version Date	January 2016
Name of Developer/Reviewer	Chris McClelland / Graham Kearsley
Procedure Owner (School/Centre/Unit)	Human Resources / H&S
Person responsible for implementation (post holder)	HR Director
Approving Committee/Board	Executive Board / Board of Governors
Date approved	tbc
Effective from	tbc
Dissemination Method	Published on HR Web site
Review Frequency	January 2017 (every five years thereafter)
Reviewing Committee	H&S Committee and Trade Unions
Document History	n/a

Appendix 1

The HSE Management Standards

DEMANDS; includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment.

The standard to aim for 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:
• 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 to aim for 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:
• 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, support and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

The standard to aim for is:
• 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:
• 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 to aim for is:
• 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:
• 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 to aim for is:
• 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:
• 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 is managed and communicated in the organisation

The standard to aim for is:
• 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:
• 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.