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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

DRAFT

Update on the Work-related Stress Priority Programme

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Issue

1. Progress with a programme of work to deliver the Commission's strategy on work-related stress. Strategic issues regarding the development and further resourcing of the programme have been reserved for the Commission's meeting on 29 April 2003.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendation

3. That the Commission:
 - a) Notes the progress made to date (paragraphs 8 to 31);
 - b) offers views on and supports the approach HSE has adopted in developing management standards to tackle work-related stress (paragraphs 8 to 11); and
 - c) offers views on and agrees the next steps for consultation on the proposed draft standards (paragraphs 13 to 14).

Background

4. The Commission last received a paper on work-related stress in December 2000 (HSC/00/257) where HSE presented plans for implementing HSC's strategy for tackling work-related stress. The strategy (agreed in May 2000 – HSC/00/97) was developed following publication of a discussion document in 1999 setting out options, including a regulatory approach. The comments received helped the HSC to decide that a firm

evidence base was needed before recommending either Regulations or an Approved Code of Practice.

5. The four strands of the strategy are:

a) to work with partners to develop clear, agreed standards of good management practice for a range of stressors;

b) to better equip HSE inspectors and local authority officers to be able to handle the issue in their routine work, for instance by providing information on good practice and advice on risk assessment and consultation in the light of the above work;

c) to start a project that would seek to involve others actively in developing a more comprehensive approach to managing stress; and

d) to launch a publicity drive to help educate employers. To underpin this, HSE would develop additional detailed guidance, drawing on the findings from HSE's research and adopting a particular focus on risk assessment.

6. In January 2002 the Commission received an oral update on stress, covering the priority programme, communications and small firms. Points raised during the discussion, together with subsequent actions (where applicable) are at **Appendix 1**.

Argument

7. The aims of the stress priority programme are twofold; first, stopping people being made ill and then, getting those people who have been made ill back to work. Progress to date has been in a series of incremental steps which all contribute to these overall aims. The following paragraphs report key activity so far under the five *Securing Health Together* programme headings:

Compliance

8. The key block of work under this heading is the development of standards of good management practice by which employers can gauge their performance in tackling work-related stress. HSE met with stress partners (organisations who offered to help with developing standards following the 1999 discussion exercise) in August 2002. The partners considered an example of a detailed, process driven standard, based on work commissioned by HSE in the major hazards industry, They concluded the example was not suitable and came up with the following 'vision' of what the standards should be like:
 - Practical and easy to use;
 - geared towards identifying the problem and providing guidance on how to put it right;
 - flexible and adaptable to business needs;
 - generic and applicable to businesses across the board; and
 - supported by a business case - involvement is needed at board level.

9. As a result of the meeting it was clear HSE needed to rethink its approach and move away from the detailed technical standards towards a more generic IIP-type standard or adopt an approach like that used in HSG65. Having considered the key evidence from Whitehall II we decided to developed a model based on a population approach ie if we know what health effects are observed when given percentage of the population report exposure to a stressor, we can work out what percentage shift in reporting is needed to give the corresponding shift in number of cases of ill-health. This percentage forms the basis for the standard which is supported by a series of statements derived from the evidence base eg Whitehall II question set. A fuller explanation is set out in **Appendix 2**.

10. At the request of our partners, we also set about developing tools to help organisations judge their performance in meeting the standard and develop their business case. In January 2003 HSE held a second meeting with the stress partners where we issued the suite of draft management standards (also contained in **Appendix 2**). The partners supported our approach and liked the simplicity and elegance of the population model.

11. We recognise that the draft standards are not perfect and still may change considerably but we need to move on to the next phase of development ie actually trying them out to see what impact they have on pilot organisations. We have now issued the stress partners with the pack attached at **Appendix 3** in the hope that they will shortly sign up to become pilots. We will also be making the supporting tools available to pilots via the web site and on CDROM over the coming weeks. Initially these will be available only to pilot organisations via a password-protected area of the site but we hope to make these, along with the draft

management standards, available to all on the main site (see paragraph 13 below).

12. The project plan for the Stress Priority Programme agreed by HSC at their meeting on 5 December 2000 (HSC/00/257 Annex 3) included a timetable for the development and adoption of the Management Standards. The first phase of standards were expected to be piloted in May 2003 and adopted in September 2003. The second phase were due to be piloted August 2005 and adopted December 2005. This development process has been dynamic and the original expectations and plans have changed slightly. We are now in a position to pilot all of the standards from April 2003.
13. However, it is clear that wider consultation is necessary on our approach. So far consultation has been limited to organisations interested in developing or piloting standards, or those supporting such organisations. But now that we have something to try out ie the draft standards, our other stakeholders expect to be engaged in the development process. Our view is that informal involvement during this key development stage will be crucial to eventual 'buy in' of the standards. Further suggestions for widening the debate include putting the draft standards on the main HSE web site, contributing to journal/trade press articles, giving talks and presentations and organising focus group meetings.
14. Ultimately we anticipate a formal consultation exercise but first we need to be confident that the standards will work. We also need to use the pilot phase to gather information to support Regulatory Impact Assessment. Therefore, we hope to be able to put forward detailed proposals towards the end of this year for consultation on proposed standards.
15. Since April 2002, FOD has been undertaking a limited programme of proactive inspection of those industries where stress is a well recognised hazard and where there is scope for making effective interventions at management systems or work organisation level. In the absence of clear standards of good management practice. The aim of proactive inspection has been to raise awareness and get employers to identify the hazards and implement current HSE guidance (HSG218 "Tackling Work-Related Stress"). There has also been investigation of selected work-related stress issues which have been brought to HSE's attention by staff representatives, complaints from employees etc.
16. According to FOCUS data, from the beginning of April 2002 to the end of January 2003, 748 days have been spent on stress (both proactive and reactive work) and stress was selected as a topic for discussion at 1700 inspections.

Knowledge

17. Work to support development of the management standards has formed a significant part of the research programme so far. This includes:

- Carrying out a critical review of the evidence base for standards on control, demand and support. This was completed and published in September 2002 (RR 024);
- Re-analysis of the Whitehall II dataset to reinforce the population model (underway)
- Establishing a call-off contract with HSL to support pilot organisations.
- Filling gaps identified in the review of the evidence base (underway)

18. Another significant strand is research to identify models of best practice in:

- Stress prevention by effective management interventions; and
- rehabilitation in stress cases.

19. In addition, work is ongoing to support target setting, in particular:

- Defining a 'case' of work-related stress; and
- looking at perceptual factors that influence people reporting being stressed by work.

Continuous improvement

20. In working towards our targets, we need to encourage a fresh, all-encompassing approach that complements the traditional compliance methodology. This is most likely to be achieved by working with partners with shared interests in these fields. So far a cross government 'Stress club' has been established to facilitate sharing of best practice between government departments in response to the high incidence of reported stress in the public sector. We are actively encouraging sharing of outcomes from this 'Stress Club' with other Stress PP stakeholders and encouraging the establishment of similar networks in other sectors.

21. Part of the stress club activity involves HSE sharing its experiences as an employer and this ties in with what HSE is doing to work towards becoming an exemplary employer. The Board discussed its plans to address work-related stress in HSE in June 2002 and has subsequently agreed to set a good example by implementing the risk assessment process outlined in HSE's own guidance; improve sickness/absence data as part of its 'managing attendance' programme; and consider how to minimise the stressful effects of IT. Action to do this is in hand and we are learning from these experiences. The learning points are useful both for HSE's own management and in implementing the policy.

22. Research carried out by HSL for HSE showed that there is activity going on to manage stress that goes unrecognised as such. Sharing information about such latent activity could help encourage employers to manage stress on a broad front and we are exploring ways of doing this.

Skills

23. FOD has established a network of nominated persons for stress, provided briefing for all Field Inspectors and developed a comprehensive 2 day training course (which was piloted in February 2003) to help inspectors deal with the issue of organisational stress. Feedback from the course showed that inspectors felt more confident dealing with work-related stress after attending the course.
24. Briefing material has also been made available to local authority and HSE inspectors on a special website.
25. We are also engaging with Department of Work and Pensions to look at ways of improving handling of cases of work-related stress by providing GPs with additional training and guidance.

Support mechanisms

26. In 2001 HSE published guidance for managers and employees aimed at tackling stress in the workplace. This guidance provides practical advice on recognising organisational issues which might affect the prevalence of workplace stressors and suggested some potential interventions. HSE's Infoline service is briefed to provide information to support the guidance.
27. During summer 2002 HSE ran a publicity campaign to raise awareness of stress and encourage managers to get hold of HSE's guidance and begin to implement it in readiness for the launch of the management standards. The campaign was timed to lead into wider scale media coverage of stress issues in the run up to European Week for Safety and Health (14-18 October 2002). Subsequent evaluation of the campaign has concluded:
 - Managers now know what symptoms to look for in the individual, but don't know how to manage stress or don't believe there is anything they can do to manage it;
 - a significant portion still believe it is an individual's problem, not the organisation's;
 - there is a shift towards using internal OH support (eg Employee Assistance Programmes) but not external bodies like HSE; and
 - the campaign did *not* raise HSE's profile as a source of advice in tackling stress.
28. Advice and updated information are also available via the HSE website which provides case studies and training resource materials. The web pages were relaunched during European Week for Safety and Health. Examples of best practice are also being made available online and we are continually considering how to further develop the site, for example, by making draft management standards or supporting tools available as they are being developed.

Summary

29. We are therefore meeting the milestones of the programme. However, in the light of recent statistical updates we need to consider what further action and support is necessary to ensure we maximise our contribution to the PAS targets and this issue is for consideration by the Commission on 29 April 2003.

Consultation

30. In taking the work forward under the five headings we have paid particular attention to:

- Consulting a range of partners over the development of standards (see paragraphs 13 and 14 for further explanation and next steps).
- Providing regular updates to OHAC and HELA, with opportunities to comment. (We are currently exploring ways of involving the OHAC working group on stress to gauge their expert opinion on our approach to developing the standards.)
- regularly attending meetings and giving presentations on HSE's work in this area. The feedback received is used to gauge support for these activities, for example, HSE officials are attending the UHSS meeting on 27 March (we can provide verbal feedback on this at the Commission meeting).

31. Commissioners have also been involved in promoting our work, for example Bill Callaghan has recently given an interview to People Management about the management standards and as a result, we have been in contact with the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development to explore further ways in which we can work together.

Presentation

32. HSE has set up an internal working group to develop a communications strategy. The group will consider criteria for engaging with and contributing to national and local media, journals and trade press; how to manage future publicity drives so they complement development of management standards and other key HSE initiatives; and how to improve our intelligence gathering on external stress initiatives.

33. For the standards work in particular, there are sensitivities around negotiations with partners who are interested in piloting the standards. Some still have work to do securing senior management support and we need to establish their trust before they will sign up or allow us to publicise their involvement – there are many issues around raising expectations that need sympathetic handling.

34. There are also sensitivities around widening the debate and we are coming under increased pressure from Trade Unions, academics and

management consultants to open up the debate by publicising the draft standards and supporting tools on the main HSE web site.

Costs and Benefits

35. Work-related stress is now the leading cause of work-related ill-health absence in the UK (SWI2001/02). In 2001/02 there were about 563,000 cases of stress, depression or anxiety (including old and new cases), compared with 2.3 million cases of work-related ill health. Stress-related illness now accounts for an estimated 25 % of all reported cases of occupational ill health.
36. In 2001/02 an estimated 265,000 people reported that they had first become aware of work-related stress, depression or anxiety during the previous 12 months. This is a significant increase when compared to 92,000 in 1995. Stress, depression and anxiety now account for 13.4 million working days lost (more than a third of the total) compared with 6.5 million working days lost in 1995. These data suggest that work-related stress and related disorders are increasing in the British population, however, these data are difficult to interpret and the exact extent of this increase cannot be determined.
37. We have yet to gather updated information on costs to society, which were estimated to be £3.7 to £3.8 billion (1995/96 prices).

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

38. HSE has a dedicated priority programme management team of approximately 7 staff years for stress, supported by human factors experts. In addition, approximately 2-3 staff years are dedicated operationally.
39. In becoming an exemplar there are potential savings to be made by HSE as an employer. A recent Board paper concluded that 20% of all days lost in HSE were on grounds of stress, anxiety or depression and that the yearly costs could be estimated at almost £2 million, although this was probably an underestimate because of difficulties with data capture. The total cost for implementing the risk assessment process for work-related stress was estimated to be £120,000, however this did not include the cost of implementing interventions.

Environmental Implications

40. None.

Other Implications

41. None.

Action

42. The Commission is asked to:

- a) note the progress made to date (paragraphs 8 to 31);
- b) offer views on and support to the approach HSE has adopted in developing management standards to tackle work-related stress (Appendix 1);
- c) agree to the proposed next steps in the development of the standards, in particular to widen the debate that is key to the development of the standards by:
 - (i) agreeing that HSE can put drafts of the standards and supporting tools on the main web site; and
 - (ii) offering views on the next stage in a wider consultation.

Appendix 1

Point arising during HSC discussion in January 2002	Subsequent action
<p>There was evidence that the number of cases of work related stress had risen in proportion to other illnesses. However, the diagnosis of work related stress was based on what the patient told their GP, and awareness and training was needed to develop skills in assessment of individual cases</p>	<p>HSE is engaging with Department of Work and Pensions to look at ways of improving handling of cases of work-related stress by providing GPs with additional training and guidance. A pilot e-learning module on stress is due to run during summer 2003.</p>
<p>Proactive inspections were included for the first time, based on guidance and training for inspectors. Training materials for managers and safety representatives has also been produced. Nine key factors had been identified that would be used as the basis for developing management standards</p>	<p>No action.</p>
<p>A key priority for HSC is early rehabilitation. HSE is commissioning research into rehabilitation which will inform guidance on management interventions and emphasising that work related stress is preventable;</p>	<p>Research underway – draft report expected Spring 2003.</p>
<p>There were some concerns that targets could be difficult to achieve against the background of an upsurge of interest in the subject;</p>	<p>No action.</p>
<p>European Health and Safety Week was being targeted as an opportunity for publicity, but the first proactive inspections on stress would also be newsworthy. Larger firms were the main target audience and safety representatives supported the view that stress was exacerbated by long chains of command. There</p>	<p>No action.</p>

<p>was also evidence that the issues affected public sector employers more than their private sector counterparts.</p>	
<p>It was agreed that further thought needed to be given to the desired outcomes of the communications and publicity campaign in terms of what was achievable and value for money as this remained a contentious area.</p>	<p>HSE has set up a working group to revise the existing communications strategy. The evaluation of the awareness raising campaign will feed into this work.</p>

SUITE OF DRAFT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS (II) ON WORK RELATED STRESS (January 2003)

Introduction:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been working with partners to develop standards of good management practice which will provide a yardstick against which employers can gauge their performance in tackling a range of key stressors. Following publication of an evaluation of scientific evidence to support standards for control, demand and support last summer, a first draft of a possible standard was prepared for discussion with partners. The outcome of this discussion was agreement that a standard was needed which is much simpler to understand and apply.

A radically revised approach has been taken by HSE in developing a second draft for the Management Standards. For each of the stressors identified in HSE's guidance publication "Tackling work-related stress" (HSG 218) we have sought to establish as a standard the percentage of workers exposed to conditions which reflect those stressors at the workplace. This is the current condition of stress management. Given the prevalence of occupational stress and resulting time off from work, the Health and Safety Commission's Priority Programme to reduce prevalence and incidence require this current condition to be improved. An increase in the percentile for the standard would set the target to bring about widespread organisational change to meet the standard and improve stress management at work.

Research commissioned by HSE (The scale of occupational stress – Bristol Stress and Health at Work Study CRR 265/2000) showed that as many as one in five employees reported that they were either 'very' or 'extremely' stressed by their work; the Whitehall II studies provided powerful evidence that the Demands placed upon employees, the Control employees have over their work; and the amount of Support employees receive are associated with health outcomes.

For the purposes of the pilot exercise we have made an assumption (based on the Bristol study) that 20% of employees within your organisation may be either very or extremely stressed by their work.

To impact upon this, we have set the cut-off points for the stressors on Demands, Control, and Support at 85%. That is to say that the organisation will only achieve the standard if at least 85% of employees indicate they are satisfied with the way these elements of work activity are managed.

At the time of writing, the evidence linking the stressors 'Relationships', 'Role' and 'Change' to health outcomes is not as robust. We have therefore set the cut-off points for these stressors at 65%. That is to say that the organisation will only achieve the standard if at least 65% of employees indicate that they are satisfied with the way these elements of work activity are managed.

Further work can be done to refine the estimates of numbers and proportions exposed to risk from low job control, high job demands and social support.



Draft Standard – Demands

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 85% of staff 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

State to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees (including managers) with adequate and achievable demands at work
- Job demands are assessed in terms of quantity, complexity, and intensity and are matched to people's skills and abilities
- Staff who are given high demands are able to have a say over the way the work is undertaken (see standard on Control) and receive adequate support from their managers and colleagues (see standard on support)
- Staff in safety-critical roles are competent and able to cope with the pressures of their jobs
- Repetitive and boring jobs are limited, so far as is reasonably practicable
- Staff are provided with mechanisms which enable them to raise concerns about health and safety issues (e.g. dangers – real or perceived, working conditions) and working patterns (e.g shift work systems, uncertain hours, etc.).



Draft Standard – Control

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 85% of staff 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

State to be achieved

- The organisation provides employees with the opportunity to have a say about the way their work is undertaken
- The organisation designs work activity so that the pace of the work is rarely driven by an external source (e.g. a machine)
- Employees are able to exert a degree of control over when breaks can be taken
- Employees are able to make suggestions to improve their work environment and these suggestions are given due consideration



Draft Standard – Support

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 85% of staff 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

State to be achieved

- The organisation provides employees (including managers) with adequate support at work
- Employees (including managers) know how to provide adequate support to their staff or colleagues
- Staff know how to call upon support from their managers and colleagues
- Staff are encouraged to seek support at an early stage if they feel as though they are unable to cope
- Staff are aware of any organisational systems that have been set up to help them with work-related or home-related issues (e.g. EAPs)



Draft Standard – Relationships

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 65% of staff 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

State to be achieved

- **The organisation has in place agreed procedures to effectively prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work. These procedures enable employees to confidentially report any concerns they might have**
- **Consideration is given to the way teams are organised to ensure that they are cohesive, have a sound structure, clear leadership and objectives**
- **Employees are encouraged to talk to their line manager, employee representative, or external provider about any behaviours that are causing them concern at work**
- **Individuals in teams are encouraged to be open and honest with each other and are aware of the penalties associated with unacceptable behaviour**



Draft Standard – Role

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 65% of staff indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and

systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

State to be achieved

- The organisation ensures that, so far as possible, that the demands it places upon employees (including managers) do not conflict
- The organisation ensures that employees (including managers) have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities (this can be achieved through a plan of work)
- Employees understand how their job fits into the overall aims and objectives of the organisation
- Employees are encouraged to talk to their manager, or employee representative, about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role

Footnote

Role conflict exists when – an individual is confronted by conflicting job demands or by doing things he or she does not really want to do, or by tasks which the individual does not believe are part of their job. Workers may often feel themselves torn between two groups of people who demand different types of behaviour, or who believe the job entails different functions

Role ambiguity arises when – individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, their co-workers' expectations of them, and the scope and responsibilities of their job. Often this ambiguity results simply because a manager or supervisor has never adequately explained what is required of them or because the job has changed without this being acknowledged in the job description.



Draft Standard – Change

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

at least 65% of staff indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and

systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

State to be achieved

- The organisation ensures that employees (including managers) understand the reason for proposed changes and receive adequate communication during the change process
- The organisation builds adequate employee consultation into its change programme and provides opportunities for employees to comment on the proposals
- Employees are made aware of the impact of the change on their jobs
- Employees are made aware of the timetable for action, and the proposed first steps of the change process
- Employees are encouraged to comment on planned organisational changes