The suitability of HSE’s risk assessment process and management standards for use in SMEs

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The suitability of HSE’s risk assessment process and management standards for use in SMEs

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HSE developed Management Standards, a 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and supporting information for tackling high levels of work-related stress in large organisations. This report details the measured acceptability of a trial-specific adaptation of this guidance for Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Distinct elements in HSE guidance were identified and then considered using specific criteria for SME suitability for inclusion into one of three printed volumes: 1) justification and process description, 2) analysis & recording tools, 3) supporting information.

Ten SMEs applied the guidance in a longitudinal study over at least seven months. This used interview administered questionnaires with one respondent from each SME. These measured initial buy-in, then acceptability midway and at the end for each element. Initial ratings of usefulness and acceptability for elements were favourable. These rose further still with familiarity and practical application.

Redundant information reduction and more emphasis on business benefits is recommended to enhance the initial buy-in. Structure and content amendments, the inclusion of personal self-assessment tools and case studies relevant to SMEs, are also recommended. It is concluded that SMEs can successfully apply the materials unaided to conduct a structured risk assessment process and identify improvements that reduce stress and benefit their business.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Business Link Cheshire and Warrington who provided the initial contacts with SMEs that made this study possible. In particular, Ron Coulter is acknowledged for assistance in interviewing SME respondents. Rosanna Cousins of the HSE Business Health Psychology Unit is thanked for supporting Vectra throughout the work by her enthusiasm and helpful suggestions. Finally, the biggest thanks are due to those ten participating SMEs and their representatives who must remain anonymous. They tried out the entire Risk Assessment Process and so openly and honestly provided feedback both on the materials provided to them and on their own company’s situation.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Vectra Group Ltd (Vectra) conducted a pilot trial of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)’s Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards for Work-related Stress in Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) over a period of 18 months, from November 2004 to March 2006. The original aim of the trial was to determine if the methodology used was suitable for larger scale evaluation studies that would help HSE evaluate the usability and acceptability of the Risk Assessment Process and the Management Standards within SMEs. However, as the work progressed and as initial indications were favourable, the trial objective became to obtain feedback from SMEs about the content and approaches of the Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards.

The impetus for the creation of the Management Standards for Work-related Stress and the supporting Risk Assessment Process was the Government’s target, set out in “Securing Health Together” (HSE, 2000), to reduce lost days due to illness (and in particular work-related stress) by 20% by 2010). As SMEs constitute a significant proportion of organisations in the UK, it is necessary to ensure that the Management Standards and supporting materials are suitable for unaided use by SMEs. Prior to this work, the Risk Assessment Process had only been trialled in large organisations.

METHOD

The Management Standards for Work-related Stress is an initiative that was launched on the HSE’s website in November 2004, aiming to provide businesses with a process, information, and a toolset to facilitate their management of work-related stress. For both practical and methodological reasons the information on the HSE website was presented to SMEs as paper copy.

Research by Stephens et al, (2004) identified that the SME manager typically acts as a “gatekeeper”, through which the implementation of policy and practices, such as those advocated and required in the Risk Assessment Process materials, must pass. Within SMEs, there are a considerable number of competing demands upon these managers. Therefore, getting them to “buy-in” to the Risk Assessment Process supporting the Management Standards was going to be crucial for testing it in SMEs. The SME manager must see that they can quickly understand and readily apply HSE’s Risk Assessment Process for the Management Standards to reduce any work-related stress in their organisation.

To improve the likelihood of achieving a “buy in” by the SME manager, a systematic review of the HSE website material was undertaken. This review revealed gaps in the HSE material, and with the agreement of HSE Project Officer, the material was reorganised and supplemented. This was necessary because the information was not organised in the optimal sequence from a user’s perspective and was unlikely to sell itself to the target audience for the trial, SMEs.

Questionnaires were designed and then applied during interviews at participant SMEs’ workplaces to elicit structured feedback from participants.

The trial was conducted in collaboration with Business Link Cheshire & Warrington. Business Link has close contacts with many SMEs, so they offered an improved opportunity to gain access to these companies. Business Link identified twenty SMEs who might benefit from participating in this study; the benefits would be through the application of the Risk Assessment Processes –no other inducements to participate were offered. The selection of SMEs was based upon a Business Link Advisor’s view that they were experiencing some degree of work-related stress in their organisation. Of the twenty SMEs identified and subsequently visited, ten fully participated in the trial with the intention of working completely through the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and the Risk
Assessment Process materials as they saw fit. These SMEs were visited on three separate occasions over the course of approximately one year. These visits were arranged to gather measurements of initial impressions of the material and opinions about the usefulness of the material in practice.

For the purpose of this study, the bias introduced by the pre-selection of the SMEs invited to participate was not an issue. This is because the interest was in testing the methodology and obtaining feedback on the content of the Risk Assessment Process materials. Thus, those with the greatest probability of participation were selected.

FINDINGS

Participant SME managers generally received the Risk Assessment Process for the Management Standards material well. They reported that they liked the structured approach provided to assess their organisation. In fact, the process provided in the 5-Step Risk Assessment was so well understood by some participants that, at the end of the trial they said this information had become redundant (i.e. they had absorbed the information and integrated it into their management processes). This comment provides a testament to the overall usability of the material. The elements of the Risk Assessment Process with the highest ‘buy-in’ were the Indicator and Analysis Tools. These offer the ‘time poor’ SME manager a quick and easy method for identifying problems.

The majority of SME managers reported that conducting the process of risk assessment provided business benefits that outweighed the costs of implementation. Some SMEs were able to pinpoint stress-related problems and identify a mechanism for discussing them. In other cases, where the participants had thought the company was free from problems, issues were identified that may have otherwise remained a source of work-related stress.

The SMEs who took part in this trial were able to implement the process provided in the Risk Assessment Process materials without support outside of the trial’s necessary interactions.

The small sample size of this trial precludes any statistical analysis, however, the results do provide insight into the usability of the material and identify potential improvements.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Methodology

The overall methodological approach used in this study was successful in gathering direct feedback from SMEs about the acceptability and usefulness of the Risk Assessment Process. Therefore, it is recommended that future HSE evaluations of the take up and efficacy of health and safety initiatives consider adopting such an approach. However, it is recognised that gathering data in this way is costly and takes a long time (ideally this study should continue to follow up the SMEs to see if the processes have become integrated into general management practice).

To Ensure Unaided Buy-in by SMEs

To ensure the Risk Assessment Process is able to sell itself without the use of an introductory agent, such as Business Link Cheshire and Warrington or Vectra, the following points are recommended to HSE:

• Seek to reduce the volume of information within the Management Standards and Risk Assessment Process materials (e.g. some reduction can be achieved through removal of repetitious text from the current material).
• Consider combining the information into one volume of guidance.
• Insert carefully considered and relevant case studies into the Introduction.
• Obtain case study material to provide examples of the benefits realised by the SMEs that took part in this trial and add these to the Introduction.

One general recommendation is made, to improve the initial attractiveness of the Risk Assessment Process. BLCW’s advisor and several of the SME managers visited also made this recommendation. The recommendation is that HSE consider renaming the Management Standards for Work-related Stress with a name that emphasises their potential to improve business performance, which in turn would lead to greater profitability.

This recommendation has come about because of the recognition that the Risk Assessment Process in fact offers a process that is essentially a good business management process. A number of the companies visited during this study were reluctant to raise “stress” as an issue for fear of people using it as an excuse for absenteeism or pursuing a compensation claim. However, when the benefits of the process were explained as a useful business management tool, many SME managers appeared to feel more comfortable about looking at the material.

Renaming the Risk Assessment Process could place more emphasis on its ability to increase the performance potential of a company or organisation through improvement management practices. Doing so would enable HSE to meet its obligations to the Government, by providing a process that will help companies and organisations to manage work-related stress, but negate the need to place emphasis on the subject so formally.

To Ensure the Greatest Usability

To ensure that the Risk Assessment Process is usable by as many SMEs as possible the following recommendations are made:

• Develop methods for Step 2 “Decide who might be harmed and how” that are independent of the Indicator Tool but are still attractive to the "time-poor" SME manager.
• Develop guidance on what to do, in practical terms, to take the results of surveys forward, that is, Step 3. For some SMEs this information may need to be spelt out in a more prescriptive way, in particular the benefits of employee involvement should be included.

To Ensure an Improvement in Validity

To ensure that the Risk Assessment Process captures all the root causes of stress in the workplace it is recommended that HSE:

• Develop and incorporate a manager’s self-assessment tool. One potential source of stress within an organisation is the manager. Therefore, if the managers can be persuaded to look at their own behaviour first and gain a better understanding of the impact their attitudes and behaviours can have on their workforce, then a greater improvement in a company’s business performance may be achieved.
• Develop a self-assessment and self help section targeted at any stress the managers may themselves be experiencing.
• Develop a section in the Introduction that draws more attention to the benefits and rationale of including employees in the overall processes.
• Include information about identifying and dealing with workplace bullies.
• Include tools and advice for geographically diverse SMEs (i.e. employees in remote locations).
• Establish whether the Indicator and Analysis Tools remain valid when used with British populations for whom English is a second language.

• Publish the Risk Assessment Process in a range of languages that would be encountered amongst UK-based workforces.
1 INTRODUCTION

For any Health and Safety Executive (HSE) initiative, feedback is necessary to determine the effectiveness of that initiative and to facilitate informed improvement. This report presents the results of a trial of the acceptability of HSE’s 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and the Management Standards for work-related stress in Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Vectra Group Limited (Vectra) undertook this research on behalf of the Better Health at Work Division of HSE, over a period of 18 months from November 2004 until March 2006.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Work-related stress is a high priority issue for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The 2004/05 survey of Self-reported Work-related Illness (SWI 04/05) provides estimates that 12.8 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2004/2005 with an average of 28.5 lost working days per case. The survey also estimates that 245,000 people became aware of ill-health symptoms between 2003 and 2004 (HSE, 2005). In this survey, stress related problems were the second most commonly reported problems after musculoskeletal work-related disorders. The overall trend for stress-related problems is not clear, with data showing an initial increase between 1995 and 2001/02 with a levelling out of incidents and possible fall since that time. However, the rates alone are sufficiently high that some form of intervention is necessary.

Against this backdrop, and the Government’s targets set out in “Securing Health Together” (HSE, 2000), to reduce the incidence of work-related ill-health by 20%, and the number of lost working days by 30%, HSE developed the Management Standards for Work-related Stress and a supporting 5-Step Risk Assessment Process. HSE have developed these Management Standards with the intention that they assist managers in dealing with work-related stress within their organisation.

The “Management Standards for Work-related Stress” is a HSE initiative that was launched on their website in November 2004, to provide businesses with a process, information, and a toolset to facilitate their management of work-related stress, (http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm 04/11/2004).

A 5-Step Risk Assessment Process assesses implementation of the Management Standards for Work-Related Stress. This risk assessment process has undergone trials in a number of large organisations to good effect (Tascho et al, 2004). However, it was thought that SMEs might offer more resistance to the use of the Risk Assessment Process material. Both HSE and Vectra postulated that such organisations would not necessarily have the resources to implement the guidance for the Risk Assessment Process supporting the Management Standards. Therefore, in smaller organisations there would be an increased need for the material issued by HSE to be readily usable and attractive to the time and resource pressured SME.

HSE wanted to assess how SMEs would receive and use the Risk Assessment Process materials for Work-Related Stress and if the guidance contained helped them to manage work-related stress within their workforce. To this end, HSE commissioned Vectra to develop a method to evaluate the effectiveness of the 5-Step Risk Assessment process and the Management Standards for Work-Related Stress within SMEs and to trial that method in a small number of SMEs. Based upon the findings of this trial, a wider study would potentially have followed to gather sufficient data to undertake meaningful statistical analysis.

Throughout the rest of this report, the HSE material including the Management Standards and Risk Assessment Process together with other information supporting them for Work-Related Stress is collectively referred to as the ‘Risk Assessment Process material’. However, because SMEs were given the reorganised material in a box-folder (rather than require them to extract the information from the HSE website), the material became known, to those involved in the trial, as ‘The Pack’.
Hence, where respondents’ verbatim answers are provided, ‘The Pack’ should be read as synonymous with the Risk Assessment Process material. The term ‘Risk Assessment Process’ is used to refer to the overall practical application by an SME of the processes described in the materials. Finally, it is also important to note that one major component of the Risk Assessment Process material is called the ‘5-Step Risk Assessment Process’. When this component of the material is being specifically referred to, it is always given its full title of the ‘5-Step Risk Assessment Process’.

1.2 SMES

There were an estimated 4.3 million SMEs in the UK excluding all not-for-profit organisations at the start of 2004 (DTI, 2005). Of the 4.3 million small to medium-sized enterprises, 99.3% had fewer than 50 employees (0 to 49), whereas, 0.6% organisations had between 50 to 249 employees. In the UK, only 6,000 organisations (0.1% of the total number of UK based organisations) had more than 250 employees; these organisations are classed as 'large'. Small and medium-sized enterprises accounted for more than half of the employment (58.5%) and turnover (51.3%) in the UK. These figures demonstrate the significant potential economic gain by reducing lost days due to illness, and in particular, illnesses caused by work-related stress, in small to medium-sized enterprises.

SMEs offer unique challenges to organisations like HSE, who want to initiate and facilitate change. SMEs are a wide range of diverse businesses, with very different objectives, management styles and business areas. Research by Stephens et al, (2004) identified that the SME manager typically acts as a “gatekeeper”, through whom the implementation of policy and practices, such as those advocated in the Risk Assessment Process for the Management Standards, must pass. Within the SME business world, there are a considerable number of competing demands upon these managers. Obtaining commitment of the specific targeted audience is essential when implementing any HSE policy or guidance, therefore, getting these managers to “buy-in” to the Risk Assessment Process was crucial to testing it in SMEs. The HSE Risk Assessment Process needed to be both easily understood by the SME manager and minimise disruption to existing business processes if it was to succeed in helping reduce the incidence of work-related stress.

Vectra worked with Business Link Cheshire & Warrington (BLCW) to improve the probability of getting SME participation in this study. Business Link is an organisation that already has close contact with many SMEs and so could provide access to SME managers. BLCW also provided opinions on the scope and content of the HSE materials prior to presenting these to the SMEs.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

HSE wished to evaluate the usability and acceptability of the Risk Assessment Process within SMEs. To undertake such an evaluation a representative sample of SMEs would need to be surveyed, with the collection of sufficient data to produce statistical results. As a precursor to this large-scale survey, HSE wished to develop and trial a methodology to determine if such a large-scale survey would be feasible and would produce meaningful results.

The aims of the study documented in this report were to:

• Develop and present a methodology for collecting data from SMEs about their perceptions and experience of using the Risk Assessment Process.
• Assess the effectiveness of this methodology using a pilot scheme.
• Identify methodological improvements where necessary.
• Identify enhancements to the presentation and content of the Risk Assessment Process and supporting materials.
It is emphasised that the pilot trial of the material and methodology was not intended to produce statistical data on the effectiveness and uptake of the Risk Assessment Process and associated Management Standards. The target sample size of ten SMEs restricts the level and rigour of any statistical tests that might be conducted. Nevertheless, the results can provide initial insight into the reactions of SMEs, thereby enabling some informed conclusions to be drawn about the material and methodology.

This report details the methods employed by Vectra to assess the usability and acceptance of the Risk Assessment Process within SMEs and the results. Figure 1 shows the structure of the methods used.
Figure 1: The structure of the methods and of this report
2 METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

There were a number of key stages of the methodological development for the study. Each of these is detailed in the subsections given below. These stages were:

- Identifying the scope of the Risk Assessment Process materials;
- Identifying the elements in the Risk Assessment Process materials;
- Review of the intended Risk Assessment Process Information for applicability and content;
- Reorganising the material for use by SMEs;
- Developing the Risk Assessment Process’ ‘selling’ process to SMEs;
- Developing the questionnaire for measurement of acceptability;
- Training Business Link advisors for the study;
- Developing the usability and acceptability measurements;
- Selecting SMEs for inclusion in the study.

2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS INFORMATION SCOPE

This section describes the process used to compile the information that was made available to SMEs during the acceptance trial.

The first definition, agreed between Vectra and HSE, of what constituted the Risk Assessment Process was the 'pdf' files on the HSE website (http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm) as available on 4th November 2004, from the 'downloads' link. The rationale for including just the downloads, as opposed to the website as a whole, was that the downloadable files were stand-alone documentation, which could be used offline by all SMEs, because not all SMEs would have ready Internet access.

However, a review of these documents indicated that the web pages were an essential part of the Risk Assessment Process. These linking pages contained much of the discourse required to make sense of the information and to put it into context. Therefore, a revised definition of the Risk Assessment Process included printouts of all the website pages and the downloadable links from these pages. Additionally, the booklet, 'Work-related stress – a short guide' (HSE, 2003) was included in the Risk Assessment Process. This booklet was accessed via a link from the HSE stress web area and was a free download. In addition, the booklet was targeted at managers, and so might have more appeal to SME gatekeepers than the other more general material on the HSE web site.

Hence, the scope of the Risk Assessment Process was finally defined as, “all the pages of the HSE Management Standards website as of 08 December 2004, plus all the linked pages from this site, including a copy of the booklet, 'Work-related stress – a short guide' (HSE, 2003).”

All pages and downloads from the website were printed and bound into a cohesive paper-based package. This package contained all the Risk Assessment Process material, intended for presentation to SMEs at that time.
2.2 IDENTIFICATION OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS MATERIAL ELEMENTS

The Risk Assessment Process elements were identified to enable a later record to be made of which elements were used by the SME. To be able to do this, the elements had to be easy to distinguish and coherent in their own right. To carry out the identification process, the information was carefully analysed for its underlying content and then the Risk Assessment Process materials were organised into their logical elements. The results provided seven folders. Each folder contained material supporting a stage in the Risk Assessment Process.

2.3 REVIEW OF RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS INFORMATION

The review undertaken of the Risk Assessment Process consisted of three stages:

Analyse the Risk Assessment Process to establish whether each of its Steps contained sufficient information for an SME manager to understand what was required and why they sought to follow the guidance given.

Test, by role-play, whether the Risk Assessment Process could be presented to a SME manager.

Revise the material based upon the findings of the first two stages above.

The following report sections describe these three stages.

2.3.1 Intended Risk Assessment Process informational content

Each of the Steps within the Risk Assessment Process should possess content that enables the following questions to be answered confidently. These constitute criteria for assessing sufficiency of information content:

- **Objective** – what does this step achieve?
- **Sell** – Why should the SME manager conduct this step? Is the argument convincing for doing so?
- **Process/Activity** – How does the SME manager carry out the Step?
- **Supporting Information** – To complete the step as intended, what instructions, or background material, does the SME manager require?
- **Completion Criteria** – When is the Step completed and how can this be shown so the next Step can begin?

The review of the HSE material identified that some of the Steps did not satisfy the information criteria. These omissions were noted and the role-play exercise used to determine how critical the absent information was to the overall success of the process.

2.3.2 Role-play review of process information

During the compilation of the Risk Assessment Process, it was clear that duplicate material existed that could confuse the target audience. For instance, some sections appeared to focus on employees raising the issue of stress with their managers, while other sections focussed on the managers. To test the content and predict potential responses from SME managers, several role-play exercises were undertaken, within which one person taking the role of researcher presented the Risk Assessment Process to another who acted as a SME manager.
The role-playing exercises reinforced the researchers’ view that there were information gaps in the Risk Assessment Process and that the flow of information did not always correspond to the expectations of the role-played SME manager. Particular issues arose with the following:

- Not all the Steps satisfied the criteria for information inclusion (Objective, Sell, Process/Activity, Supporting Information and, Completion Criteria).
- There was insufficient guidance given on choosing and using information gathering techniques (e.g. Indicator Tool, focus groups etc.).
- The development of specific actions to address stress was not well illustrated.
- The requirement to make a record of the process and results of an assessment (declared at a relatively later stage of the original material) seemed to repeat earlier steps where information would or should have already been written down.
- The material did not have a clear audience. There were sections clearly written for management alongside sections aimed at employees.

These, and other points, were demonstrated to the HSE Technical Officer at a review meeting held on 10 January 2005. The conclusion of this meeting was that the Risk Assessment Process required restructuring and the provision of some additional information.

2.3.3 Business Link comments on process information

The content and structure of the Process Information was further assessed with Business Link Cheshire Warrington (BLCW). BLCW have considerable experience of dealing with the business issues of SMEs, including personnel matters, and so were a potential advocate of the Management Standards and supporting Risk Assessment Process.

BLCW were provided with a copy of the HSE Risk Assessment Process and their feedback on its content sought. This material was provided to BLCW as printed downloads from the HSE website (04 November, 2004). The BLCW advisor most closely involved with the study made the following observations on the Risk Assessment Process:

“If the purpose of the...[Risk Assessment Process]...is to educate and advise company managers on how to put together up front policies and procedures to address potential ‘Stress’ issues that might arise among the workforce, then it succeeds quite well. However, if the purpose of the...[Risk Assessment Process]...is also to assist managers with dealing with an existing incidence of ‘Stress’, then it is not nearly so helpful.”

Other Business Link comments suggested that the content of the Risk Assessment Process needed to sell strongly the business benefits of adopting the approach presented. In addition, the material needed to be directed at the SMEs managers or gatekeepers, and not assume that the workforce in the target organisation would necessarily be empowered.

2.3.4 Risk Assessment Process material review conclusions

The three types of review of the Risk Assessment Process’s contents and structure confirmed the initial conclusion that it required both restructuring and additional material. A table was produced that showed how each element should be reorganised (Table 1).

HSE accepted that restructuring and additional material was necessary and the reorganisation process to achieve this is described in Section 2.4.
### Table 1: Proposed structure of the Risk Assessment Process materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sell</th>
<th>Process/activity</th>
<th>Supporting Information</th>
<th>Completion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Identify the Hazards</td>
<td>To understand the factors that can cause stress.</td>
<td>The validity and relevance of the Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards.</td>
<td>Understand information that describes the Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards.</td>
<td>Simple succinct descriptions of the factors and explanatory examples of their manifestation.</td>
<td>Be familiar with the six Management Standards and accept that these are indicators for stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Decide who Might be Harmed and How</td>
<td>To focus effort on people at risk.</td>
<td>Importance of surveying to obtain hidden or distorted information.</td>
<td>A survey – questionnaire, meetings, interviews, walk-round focus groups etc.</td>
<td>How to do chosen method mechanisms &amp; safeguards.</td>
<td>Stress risk accounted for all members of workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3a: Evaluate the Risk</td>
<td>To establish where the organisation is against where it ought to be.</td>
<td>Accepting the process and criteria as valid.</td>
<td>Comparing survey outcomes with Management Standards as targets and identify unacceptable outcomes and ones that meet or exceed the standards criterion.</td>
<td>A criterion in the Management Standards that can be interpreted whatever the format of the data.</td>
<td>Identification of all unacceptable outcomes for stress and proportion of the total that is unacceptable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1: Proposed structure of the Risk Assessment Process materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sell</th>
<th>Process/activity</th>
<th>Supporting Information</th>
<th>Completion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 3b: Decide plan and record what needs to be done</td>
<td>To identify interventions that will bring about the desired level of risk reduction.</td>
<td>Effort is required to attain the Management Standards’ criterion where there is a shortfall. Intervention can make a worthwhile difference.</td>
<td>Suggest actions obtain management &amp; workforce buy in record and assign actions.</td>
<td>Case studies illustrating implementations of solutions. For each Management Standard statement, sufficient illustrations of solution to identify a shortfall.</td>
<td>Agreed, published and assigned action plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Implement and monitor progress of plan</td>
<td>To ensure that required effort is sustained.</td>
<td>Alienation if expectations for change are not met. Squandered investment of earlier effort if actions not completed.</td>
<td>Many and varied according to identified needs</td>
<td>Example case studies</td>
<td>Action plan completed – if ever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Monitor effectiveness</td>
<td>To ensure that implemented changes actually reduce stress as part of a continuous improvement process.</td>
<td>The fact that interventions do not always work as expected.</td>
<td>Repeat measurement tool (see Step 3a above).</td>
<td>Case studies where later insights showed earlier interventions ineffective or backsliding.</td>
<td>Never –continuous improvement should be the goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4 FINAL REORGANISATION OF THE MATERIALS

It was agreed that reorganisation of the Risk Assessment Process materials plus some additional content was required to make the material more appealing and user-friendly to SME managers: the bases for the information within the Risk Assessment Process would be:

- The HSE web pages linked to www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm 08/12/04, that is, the Management Standards website, and
- Real Solutions, Real People: A managers’ guide to tackling work-related stress (HSE, 2003), published prior to the website being developed.

The scope of the process and its fundamental bases were not changed. However, an additional section that contained straightforward guidance on “Managing Effective Meetings” was introduced.

As to the structure and format of the revised materials, the information was divided into three volumes (as opposed to the seven steps on the original website). The structured content of these three volumes can be seen in Figure 2. Vectra developed this overview diagram to help obtain the “buy-in” at the initial meetings and to provide a quick and easy graphical aid to SME managers for the whole of the Risk Assessment Process. This shows the relationship of the six Management Standards to the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and how the elements within both the ‘Tools & Templates’ book and the ‘Support and Development’ book support that five step process.

The division of the material into three books was aimed at increasing the SME managers’ likely “buy-in” at the initial visits. In particular, the first of these books was developed to contain the key information about the Risk Assessment Process and the benefits of adopting the approach. By presenting just this book at the initial meeting with the SME manager, the risk of daunting them with a large volume of material was avoided.

The three books were entitled:

- 5-Step Risk Assessment Process
  This book contained the Introduction with information about why managers should tackle work-related stress, and described the benefits of doing so. The book also contained the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process together with the Management Standards.

- Tools and Templates
  This book contained the tools and templates supporting the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.

- Support and Development
  This book contained additional reference material that provided support for the development of solutions to problems found using the Risk Assessment Process. It also contained the section, “Are you doing enough?” as a checklist.

Each Management Standard was uniquely colour-coded, which was replicated throughout the material to provide consistency.
Figure 2 Overview sheet developed to aid buy-in of the Risk Assessment Process
2.5 SELLING PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

A potential obstacle to piloting the Risk Assessment Process was the unwillingness of a SME to participate in the study and use the Risk Assessment Process as HSE intended. Ideally, the Risk Assessment Process should sell itself to SME managers, but the material had to compete with many other business pressures and, as identified in a study on the treatment of occupational health issues in SMEs (Stephens et al, 2004), it would have had a low priority when compared to more pressing business demands. Therefore, the approach adopted in this study included a ‘selling in’ to the SME of the Risk Assessment Process.

The process and key reasons why the SME should use the Risk Assessment Process are listed in the following subsections. Once designed, the process and these arguments subsequently formed the framework for the dialogue with the SME manager.

2.5.1 Selling process – getting through the door

The first obstacle to selling the Risk Assessment Process was achieving an initial meeting with potential study participant SMEs. The study offered no financial inducement to SMEs invited to participate and based upon experience of trying to engage SMEs in matters of health and safety (Stephens et al, 2004), it was clear that generating initial interest would be difficult. To address this, collaboration with Business Link Cheshire & Warrington branch (BLCW) enabled initial contact with SMEs to gain their interest and arrange initial meetings with their managers.

Business Link is an official government service, providing advice and information for new and small businesses. They facilitate changes in business processes, accounting methods, personnel competence, and provide training and grants. Their primary objective is to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of client organisations. Business Link is organised by geographical area so their clients tend to be within their particular designated area.

Thus, by involving BLCW in this study, access to their existing clients was achieved. The Risk Assessment Process was, potentially, a useful tool for BLCW to show to their clients, as the application of the Risk Assessment Process could help improve the SMEs' business performance. Therefore, BLCW’s helping in this study did not conflict with their wider business service remit.

2.5.2 Risk assessment process selling points

The selling points for the Risk Assessment Process were derived with input from HSE. These points fall into three categories: the business case, the personal case and the moral case for tackling work-related stress. The selling points identified extend beyond those contained within the original HSE Risk Assessment Process materials. The following sections detail these points.

2.5.2.1 The business case

Business Case sales points relate to improvements that may arise through the reduction and management of work-related stress. The points fall into two broad categories:

• Incentives that improve business performance and,
• Incentives that reduce the SME’s business loss or overheads.
The main selling points relating to the business case are:

- **Reduce staff absenteeism:**
  Staff either may be absent directly because of prolonged exposure to stressful working conditions or may take frequent sick days as a coping mechanism. Either way, this is a business overhead and possible source of reduced productivity.

- **Reduce staff turnover:**
  Staff may choose to leave the company, or leave because of stress-related illness if there are unnecessarily high levels of stress. There are business costs associated with replacing staff, training new staff etc. If there is a high turnover, then potential employees will not view the SME as a favourable employer and recruitment costs and effort may increase.

- **Reduce the cost of early retirement:**
  Staff nearing retirement age may opt to retire as early as they are able if they are experiencing poor working conditions. Like staff turnover, there are costs associated with recruitment and training.

- **Reduce the potential for litigation claims:**
  “Reduction” also applies to the potential for success of actual claims. Employees who claim that work-related stress was a cause of illness have already brought a number of successful legal actions. If the SME manager can demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to minimise the exposure of their staff to stress, then the likelihood of a successful claim against the SME can be reduced.

- **Reduce insurance premiums:**
  Insurance companies are starting to take note of the cost of work-related stress claims because of the increasing number of legal cases of work-related stress, and the associated fines imposed on employers for failing to prevent ill health or manage the well being of their staff. By demonstrating their application of the Management Standards to the insurance company, the SME could potentially reduce its premiums. The HSE Management Standard could be a useful reference approach to justify reduced premiums.

- **Improve staff retention:**
  The converse effect of losing staff because of stress is that staff may like their place of work and therefore, be reluctant to leave. Retaining staff reduces overall business costs, and facilitates staff development, retention of company knowledge, skills and stability.

- **Increase performance and productivity:**
  Staff content in their work will generally be more committed to the company and work more diligently and productively. Staff may also be proactive in improving the overall business processes by making constructive suggestions to management.

- **Increase customer satisfaction:**
  A good place to work often promotes itself through showing a more enthusiastic and co-ordinated company when compared to its competitors.

- **Improve organisational image and reputation:**
  Good image and reputation are sales assets as well as attracting potential new staff that will be keen to work for that company. Managing the work place stress can contribute to the development of an organisation’s image and reputation.

- **Comply with Regulations:**
  Compliance with the Management of Health & Safety Regulations 1999, Regulation 3, which states that the employer must “…assess risks to health and safety from hazards at work. This includes the risk of employees developing stress-related illness because of their work.” (HSG218, 2001). This point could be put another way; reduce the risk of prosecution under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 arising from staff suffering from chronic stress-related illness.
2.5.2.2 The personal case

The following selling points are aimed directly at the SME manager. These points emphasise that their ‘life’ can be made easier by ensuring that their workforce are not subject to excessive stress.

- *Reduce the number of interruptions to business due to staff disquiet:*
  Members of staff who are experiencing work-related stress are potentially likely to seek legal support and, or, create an atmosphere of dissatisfaction amongst their work colleagues. Hence, staff that are content and stress-free are unlikely to have a negative effect on the rest of the workforce.

- *Staff will be more co-operative and accepting of change and challenge:*
  Staff feel that they are valued and respected when kept informed, and more importantly consulted, about changes and upcoming challenges. This creates a more positive outlook when dealing with difficult issues, which means that staff will be more co-operative generally.

- *Staff will be more pleasant to work with:*
  This is true of any group of people who are shown that they are valued. The Risk Assessment Process materials advocate including staff in management decisions for this reason. The concept behind this comes from well-researched organisational psychology and is linked directly to motivation.

- *Reduce symptoms of anxiety:*
  The symptoms of anxiety experienced by management level staff may be reduced with the disappearance of unrest among the staff. The involvement of legal representation, by staff who feel that they have been placed under unduly high levels of stress, brings to the organisation the possibility of financial harm, which in turn is likely create anxiety in the management. Keeping staff happy and tackling stress will eliminate this potential.

2.5.2.3 The moral case

There is also scope to appeal to the core values of individuals in management by targeting their ethical and moral behaviours:

- *Staff will be happier:*
  Staff, and all people, who are enabled with a degree of control and autonomy in their life are generally psychologically better off and are therefore, happier. Any employer who cares about their staff should wish that the psychological well-being of employees was being accounted for in their job design.

- *Avoid creating an unpleasant work environment:*
  Management will not be creating unnecessarily unpleasant working conditions. The reality of the working conditions of their staff is sometimes hidden from employers, they may not be aware that they are responsible for unnecessarily unpleasant working conditions. Through the assessment of work-related stress, hidden issues may be revealed and successfully addressed.
• Avoid being responsible for the ill-health of employees: Management will not be responsible for inducing illness in their employees; work-related stress has been shown to have links with the following illnesses:
  - Heart disease
  - Back pain
  - Headaches
  - Stomach disorders
  - Anxiety
  - Depression, and
  - Other minor illnesses.

2.5.3 Sales objections

It was predicted that SMEs would offer some resistance to adopting the Risk Assessment Process. Understanding the possible ‘sales objections’ helped to develop the selling messages and served as preparation to address any objections the SME manager may have. The following objections were anticipated as likely typical objections, given by the SME manager, to participating in the study:

• I don’t have the time for this.
• It will cost me too much.
• There is no stress in this company.
• If I raise the issue of stress, all my employees will go off with it.
• I am managing stress already.
• I cannot see what is in it for me.
• I would feel uncomfortable carrying out the steps that you suggest.

These issues would be addressed during the initial interview with the SME manager, depending on the content of the discussion. Each objection required a different response, so no prescriptive ‘script’ was prepared. However, some role-play exercises were conducted to identify sales objections and explore responses to these.

It was anticipated that the SME managers might also raise objections against specific steps of the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process itself. These objections were recorded as part of the initial buy-in measurements.

2.6 BUSINESS LINK ADVISOR TRAINING

A half-day training session was developed and delivered to Business Link’s advisor with the purpose of:

• Informing the nominated advisor about the nature and duration of the trial
• Presenting the reorganised Risk Assessment Process
• Training the advisor in adopting neutral behaviour during the trial.

The third point was considered particularly important because of the potential for the advisor to bias the views of the SME manager about the Risk Assessment Process. It was vital that both a consistent
and neutral attitude toward the Risk Assessment Process material was conveyed at the meetings with SME managers. The importance of neutrality during this trial was emphasised in the training material.

2.7 DEVELOPMENT OF USABILITY / ACCEPTABILITY MEASUREMENTS

Measurements of the perceptions of the SME manager of the usability and acceptability of the Risk Assessment Process were taken during the study for each participating SME. Measurements were identified that captured a range of issues relating to stress and the perception of the Risk Assessment Process. The parameters included:

- The SME manager’s perception of the need to address work-related stress
- Those aspects of the Risk Assessment Process they thought would be useful to them and why
- Those aspects of the Risk Assessment Process they thought would not be useful to them and why they would not

The following sections provide details of the measurements developed.

2.7.1 Measurement stages

Measurements about the acceptability and use of the Risk Assessment Process were taken at three stages of the study. This was done to see how the attitudes of the SME respondent varied from initial impression through early experience to a more mature view. It also allowed the possibility of tracking how the elements of the Risk Assessment Process were taken up and adopted for use as time went on.

- Initial Buy-in to the Risk Assessment Process: At this presentation, the SME manager’s initial response to the Risk Assessment Process materials and content was asked for and recorded. A fortnight after this initial presentation a follow-up questionnaire was administered to elicit their views of how the Risk Assessment Process material was received by the SMEs.

- Evolved Buy-in: Measurements of the use of the Risk Assessment Process and the SME manager’s perception of the progress they had made in tackling stress in their organisation were taken between 3-5 months into the study. The measurements recorded the perceptions of the SME manager on how important any stress was in their organisation, what, if any, elements of the Risk Assessment Process they had used to try and tackle stress and how effective and useful they believed those elements to be. BLCW took measurements using a structured questionnaire developed for this trial. The responses of the SME to the questionnaire were recorded at a face-to-face meeting involving the SME manager and the Business Link advisor.

- Implementation Effectiveness & Change Observation: The final study measurements were taken 8-10 months after the initial presentation of the Risk Assessment Process to the SME manager. The measurements were to include repeating some of those that would have been recorded during the Evolved Buy-in, supplemented with additional measurements of the SME manager and Business Link advisor’s perceived impact of the SME’s stress reduction approach. BLCW recorded the measurements in face-to-face interviews with the SME manager.

2.7.2 Measurements of initial Risk Assessment Process buy-in

Initial buy-in measurements were taken at the initial selling-in meeting and again after a period of about two weeks to obtain a more comprehensive initial opinion following greater assimilation of the Risk Assessment Process material. This first measurement of the acceptability of the Risk Assessment Process was to investigate the initial response of the SME manager to it and to the concept of the
Management Standards. The measurements that were taken for acceptability fell into the following categories:

Identifying if the SME manager perceived that their organisation had a potential work-related stress problem:

SMEs were selected based on Business Link’s knowledge of that SME and the potential presence of stress. Therefore, it was expected that SMEs visited would report that there was a stress-related problem within their organisation. However, the questions asked also sought to determine if the SME managers had realised this themselves. The questions further sought to identify if the manager had changed their views after the introduction of the Risk Assessment Process.

Identifying if the SME manager wished to try to tackle any work-related stress in their organisation:

The SME manager might have recognised that there was work-related stress within his/her employees, but might have chosen not to act upon it. Alternatively, the manager might already have been taking steps to address the stress problem and so would not need to consider an alternative approach. This point was examined to understand if the SME manager was motivated to address stress and therefore, a willing recipient of the Risk Assessment Process.

Identifying if the SME manager had previously tried to address work-related stress in their SME and the manager’s perception about the effort and outcome of any such stress management effort:

Previous efforts to address stress would allow some comparison of the effectiveness of the Risk Assessment Process with their previous process.

Determining if the SME manager perceived the Management Standards and the Risk Assessment Process, taken as a whole or in parts, to be an effective approach to managing work-related stress in that SME:

A measurement of the ‘face value’ of the Management Standards and Risk Assessment Process to the SME manager would indicate whether they perceived all the material or elements of the material as likely to be useful and, therefore, they would be more likely to use it.

Understanding the reasons why the Risk Assessment Process material was attractive to the SME manager:

The SME manager might view the Risk Assessment Process in several ways. It might seem to offer a useful means of addressing work-related stress or, it might be perceived as offering nothing that added to the current policy of the SME manager.

Understanding any reasons why the SME manager thought the Risk Assessment Process would be useful:
Identifying if the SME manager immediately believed that particular aspects of the Risk Assessment Process were helpful to him or her.

Determining if the SME manager believed they could use the Risk Assessment Process themselves, or would require help:

HSE had designed the Risk Assessment Process so that organisations could use it without external support. The study aimed to sustain this position, although allowance was to be made for the provision of limited support through BLCW. However, this support was primarily intended to be used for dealing with any revealed stress problems, rather than applying the Risk Assessment Process.

Identifying if the SME manager believed that the process would take extensive resources or not:

The aim of questioning the SME manager's perceived resource requirements was to determine if the Risk Assessment Process (or indeed the rudiments of managing stress) appeared to require external resource. Any perceived requirement might reduce the acceptability to them of the Risk Assessment Process.

### 2.7.3 Measurements of evolved buy-in

Following the introduction of the Risk Assessment Process to the SME and the follow up a fortnight later, a period of between 3-5 months was allowed to elapse before a second visit was made to determine how well the application of the Risk Assessment Process was proceeding. The evolved buy-in measurements sought to determine which, if any, steps of the Risk Assessment Process the SME manager had read, which steps they were applying, and the perceived progress of stress management within the organisation.

A number of specific aspects about the use of the Risk Assessment Process were of interest, these being:

- **To determine if the Risk Assessment Process was still being used:**
  At this stage of the trial, measurements were taken to determine if initial indications that the SME manager would use the overall Risk Assessment Process had been followed up by action. If the Process had not been used then reasons for this were determined.

- **To identify which elements of the Risk Assessment Process were being used:**
  The SME manager was asked which elements of the Risk Assessment Process they were using and to comment on how useful these elements had been.

- **To identify which elements in the Risk Assessment Process were not being used (either because they were no longer required or were never used):**
  The SME manager was asked to identify any element of the Risk Assessment Process materials that they had not used, or had used and no longer required. The reason for the SME manager no longer using particular elements was identified.

- **To determine if the SME manager wanted additional information (supplementing the Risk Assessment Process’s content or new to the Risk Assessment Process):**
  The Risk Assessment Process was intended to be stand-alone. However, the SME manager might identify additional material that they thought would be helpful to their stress management approach. The nature of any additional information the SME manager identified was recorded.
• To determine the SME manager’s perception of the Risk Assessment Process’s value to their business:
A measurement of the perceived impact of applying the Risk Assessment Process on the SME’s business was taken. The measurement included ‘bottom line’ performance (revenues, cost savings, reduced absenteeism etc.) and personal benefits realised by the SME manager (improved relationships with staff etc.).

• To determine if any negative effects were emerging within the SME that seemed to result directly from trying to manage stress:
It was anticipated that stress, and the causes of stress, would be an emotive issue within the SME. Through applying the Risk Assessment Process, there was a risk that confrontational issues might arise that could not have been resolved. There was also a risk that effort would be placed on applying the Risk Assessment Process with no benefits evolving. Therefore, the SME manager was asked if any undesirable changes had occurred during the use of the Risk Assessment Process.

• To determine the amount of assistance that the SME had used to implement the Risk Assessment Process, or the assistance that they feel they would need:
The Risk Assessment Process is, in theory, easy to apply by the SME managers. However, managers may have chosen to obtain external support. This trial included provision for BLCW to provide resource and knowledge of business processes to assist in developing and applying a stress management policy. The SME was asked what support they had used, or what support they would have chosen to use and whether the uptake of the Risk Assessment Process was reliant upon the provision of support to the SME.

2.7.4 Measurements of implementation effectiveness
The final measurements in this trial were taken between eight to ten months after the Risk Assessment Process was introduced to the SMEs. After this period, changes to any previously occurring stress in the SMEs were expected. The measurements were the same as those recorded for the Evolved Buy-In stage, but with a greater emphasis placed upon the impact of using the Risk Assessment Process.

2.8 THE SELECTION OF SME PARTICIPANTS
BLCW targeted SMEs that they believed had a stress problem and would, therefore, benefit from applying the Risk Assessment Process. The use of BLCW reduced the costs of approaching SMEs at random to find participants and increased the likelihood of obtaining informative information about the acceptability and content of the Risk Assessment process materials. However, this biased sampling regime might elicit more favourable results on the Risk Assessment Process than would otherwise be obtained. Therefore, it is recommended that a sample of SMEs should be approached by cold-calling and their initial reactions to the Risk Assessment Process materials polled to establish ‘first-face’ reactions to the materials used in this study.

The study sought to select SMEs with fewer than 50 employees. Such small organisations are less likely to have specialist human resource personnel and, therefore, may face a greater challenge in applying the processes contained within the Risk Assessment Process. In practice, this was achieved in all but one case; one SME employed 120 people.

For this study, the aim was to obtain measurements from ten SMEs so twenty were approached initially.
3 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Questionnaires were specifically developed for use in the study. These questionnaires are contained within the appendices:

- Initial Visit – Appendix A
- Follow-up – Appendix B
- Mid-term Visit – Appendix C
- Final Visit – Appendix D

The questionnaires were designed so the researcher (or BLCW adviser) could administer them verbally and record the responses during each SME visit. The questionnaires contained closed-format (yes/no) questions, open-ended questions requiring a free-response answer and questions requiring a choice from a fixed-scale of responses.
4 FIRST SME VISITS

The purpose of the first SME visits was to present the Risk Assessment Process to the manager of each candidate SME company and seek to recruit their co-operation for the remainder of the study. The meetings took place at the SMEs and lasted around 45 minutes; the actual duration was dependent on the SME’s level of interest in the subject area.

Initial meetings were jointly conducted by Vectra and Business Link’s assigned adviser, who provided the introductions and arranged the meetings.

Vectra’s representative conducted the talk-through and then asked about their previous experience of tackling stress and polled their initial opinions of the Risk Assessment Process.

The results of this first buy-in stage are given in detail below.

4.1 TYPES OF SME VISITED

The SMEs visited represented a diverse range of industries. Table 2 shows the different types and size of SMEs that participated in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of company</th>
<th>No. Employees</th>
<th>Took part in study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialist industrial painters</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training consultants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical engineering manufacture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training consultants</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering development consultancy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals manufacture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Salon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist instrument manufacture</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle suppliers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist equipment suppliers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist instrument manufacture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book shop and café</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR consultancy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive gifts suppliers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics manufacture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of company</td>
<td>No. Employees</td>
<td>Took part in study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing consultants</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass designer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building equipment manufacture</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Training Solutions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designers &amp; printers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 INITIAL BUY-IN

The meetings consisted of initial introductions by BLCW of the SME manager to Vectra’s representative. The Vectra representative then systematically talked through the purpose of the trial, its duration, conditions, and the content of the Risk Assessment Process.

The sales arguments from the prepared list (see Section 2.4) were selectively used, depending upon specific issues that arose and the perceived attitudes of the SME manager. An effective selling process cannot adhere to a strict ‘script’ as there is a requirement for listening to the intended recipient and adapting the selling process to meet their expectations and the points they raise.

The selling process focussed first on the advantages to the SME of addressing work-related stress and then suggested the Risk Assessment Process as a useful means of helping them address it. In line with HSE’s rationale, no attempt was made to sell the Risk Assessment Process as the only means of addressing work-related stress.

Discussion with each SME was, as far as practicable, confined only to selling the benefits of addressing work-related stress. The discussion was not intended to be a tutorial in techniques to manage work-related stress. Indeed, one criterion of the study assessment was to determine if the Risk Assessment Process’s information content was sufficient to instruct the user in methods and approaches to addressing stress.

The Vectra representative recorded any objections raised during the initial meeting. These objections provided feedback on how well the Risk Assessment Process materials sold themselves.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF INITIAL BUY-IN QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Following the initial presentation of the Risk Assessment Process, Vectra administered a questionnaire (see Appendix A) seeking information about the SME manager’s current level of motivation to tackle stress, their past experiences of doing so and what they thought about the helpfulness and information in the Risk Assessment Process materials. This was completed whether or not the SME respondent intended to take part in the subsequent trial. The results are presented later in this section.

All the data from the closed and rating scale questions was entered into the statistical software Package, SPSS V13.0. The content of open-ended responses was examined by the analyst to identify any consistent trends.
4.3.1 Level of motivation for tackling work-related stress

The question ‘How motivated do you feel to tackle stress at the moment?’ was assessed by means of a 5-point rating scale.

Table 3 shows that for the 20 small to medium-sized companies visited, 50% reported being fairly well-motivated while a further 35% reported being highly motivated (at the time of the initial meeting) to tackle work-related stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all motivated</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only slightly motivated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat motivated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well motivated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly motivated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The size of a company and the level of motivation was examined. Table 4 shows the cross-tabulation between motivation and company size. The data does not reveal any trend, probably because of the small sample size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>No. Of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 10 (n =6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only slightly</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The possibility that the reported level of motivation might be interacting with other variables assessed by the questionnaire was addressed where relevant in the analyses. However, it should be noted that all the results discussed in this report are speculative and that without further data it is not possible to draw any firm statistically based conclusions from the evidence obtained.

4.3.2 Concerns about stress

Respondents were asked if they had any particular concerns about stress at present, to which eight of the twenty respondents said they had. On further analysis, seven of those eight respondents had already indicated that they were strongly motivated to tackle stress at that moment. The other company suggested that while they may have had an issue with stress, at that moment, they had limited motivation for dealing with it. For this company, the reason(s) why they were reluctant to formally tackle stress could not be established.

One finding of note was that 50% of the sample indicated that while they had no current concerns about workplace stress they were positively motivated to deal with it.
The general question about particular concerns was followed up by a specific but open-ended question, which asked, ‘What concerns about stress do you have?’ The range of answers given reflected each of the key issues addressed by the Risk Assessment process materials.

Change

Three companies indicated that change alone was an issue. Two companies reported that the main concerns were equipment changes. In one case, the change was due to the installation of latest technology equipment and in the other, the commissioning of a new electronic software system.

The third company’s respondents stated “Change in the organisation structure means that one department may be at risk.”

Support

Three respondents expressed concerns about support. This produced a more diverse range of issues including:

- Return of employees from maternity leave,
- Ineffective training for a new piece of equipment,
- Long-term sickness, and
- Choice of the right person for the job (because little support was possible in such a hands-on, busy and small team).

Comments included:

“I’ve trained the person who was to use it (new equipment) but he was taking longer to adjust than expected and I’m worried about the psychological impact of this.”

“Choosing the right person for the job was very stressful to do and if I get it wrong it’s very stressful for them.”

Demand

Only one company reported concerns about demand with minimal comment: “...some areas have high work volume.”

Communication

Only one company explicitly reported communication as a specific concern.

The impression of the SME managers’ views on stress at the initial meetings was that they have a genuine desire to care for their employees. This concern was frequently for an individual employee rather than the business as a whole. Furthermore, it was felt that those SME managers who expressed concerns about stress tended to feel paternal about the well-being of their employees. One example was given, where a manager had gone to the lengths of going through a money management process with a member of staff. This had been done over a period of several evenings, and was to enable the member of staff to alleviate their personal stress created by poor cash flow. The member of staff had previously been significantly affected at work by their financial difficulties, which presented itself in a lack of concentration and poor productivity.

However, the ‘paternal’ approach is reported as having an impact upon the managers themselves; several reported that they were themselves overworked in dealing with their employees’ issues.
4.3.3 Interventions previously used to tackle work-related stress

Of the 20 organisations initially visited, eleven (55%) indicated that they had made previous attempts at addressing stress. Of these, nine remained ‘fairly well’, or ‘highly’, motivated to tackle stress in the workplace.

Responses to the open questions revealed six ways in which the companies have previously attempted to tackle stress. These responses included:

• Providing pastoral care (n=6)
• Running surveys using questionnaires (n=3)
• Holding weekly or monthly meetings [general] (n=6)
• Providing flexible working arrangements and other forms of support (n=4)
• Funding activities external to work hours (n=1)
• Enforcing EU time directives (n=1)

Pastoral care

Six of the eleven companies had used a general ‘pastoral care’ approach either solely or partly as a way of tackling stress. One comment was:

“I look for warning signs in behaviour, I think I know what they are now because I know the people well.”

This comment came from a company with only five members of staff, all of whom had worked for the company since leaving college. However, it did reflect a general acceptance amongst the SME managers of the value of pastoral care that was independent of company size.

“…informal pastoral care is part of normal business management.”

Two managers used the term ‘ethos’ to indicate a general observing and caring approach.

Surveys

Three companies said that they had used questionnaires previously to assess stress. It was not established which questionnaires were used.

Meetings

Six companies said that they held meetings, two of whom held weekly meetings with their employees, while three indicated that they held one-to-one monthly supervision meetings.

Flexible working and other support

Four respondents said they provided a variety of opportunities for reducing stress. These included offering flexibility in the way their employees chose to work; investment in training; or availability of space and equipment to practice stress-reducing techniques, for example yoga:

“We do this by sharing our tools and [knowledge about] techniques for reducing stress via training…Yoga and other techniques are encouraged when it's quiet and at lunchtime.”
Another company enabled employees to work in a number of ways that supported their family commitments. The working options included: flexi-hours, job-sharing and part-time working.

**Funding external interests and activities**

One company reported funding external interests and activities as a way to help manage stress in their workforce. This included company funded away-days/weekends and financial support for attending further education courses of an employee’s choice.

**Enforcing EU time directives**

One company mentioned adhering to the Working Time Directive as a means of reducing stress, thereby disallowing overtime working except on very rare occasions, e.g. to accept an important late delivery.

### 4.3.4 Expectations and cost effectiveness of interventions

The interventions that SMEs reported they had used suggest a wide range of strategies, not all of which might be specifically labelled as a ‘stress’ intervention. SME managers viewed many of the strategies as being the application of ‘best management practice’. Therefore, it was perhaps difficult for the SME managers to answer questions asking them to rate how the results of their stress interventions had met with their expectations and how cost effective these had been.

When asked, the eleven SMEs who reported using a stress intervention about whether the approach they had used to tackle stress had met with their expectations, five respondents reported that their approach had met, or exceeded expectations. One respondent reported that the intervention had fallen short of their expectation.

The remaining five SME managers, who had indicated having tackled stress before, did not feel able to answer this question. They said this was because they had not thought of their day-to-day management skills as anything of note and certainly not as an intervention.

When asked about the cost-effectiveness of the intervention they had used seven out of the eleven SMEs responded. The majority (4 of 7) reported their intervention had been ‘somewhat cost effective’, with two others reporting the intervention as being ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ cost effective. The remaining SME reported that the intervention had been ‘somewhat costly’ (this respondent also reported that the intervention had not met with their expectation).

### 4.3.5 Initial Views on the Risk Assessment Material

Respondents were asked if they thought the Risk Assessment Process material would be beneficial to their business; 15 (75%) said it would be, four (20%) said they didn’t know (at this stage) and one (5%) said it would not.

A non-parametric Spearman’s rho test was used to determine if there was any correlation between the level of reported motivation and whether or not the SME manager thought the Risk Assessment Process would be useful. A low correlation was found (rho=0.4, p<0.05, one-tailed). Considering the small sample size this provides an indication that there is a consistent relationship between reported motivation and the likelihood of taking up and using the Risk Assessment Process. The low correlation co-efficient also suggests that there may be other unidentified factors consistently affecting the uptake.

Further analyses were performed to assess the reasons why SME managers viewed the Risk Assessment Process as beneficial or not. While it is not possible to subject such a small data sample to
factor analysis, it was practicable to make a further subjective assessment about what were seen to be the key features. The data revealed that there are two other ways that SME managers perceived the Risk Assessment Process as being potentially beneficial. These were: “Having case studies as examples” and “Having a process to follow”.

The SME managers thought of “Having a process to follow” in three different ways:

- The process provided “an official process”, or, “a formalised mechanism” to follow.
- The process would “highlight something that we’re not aware of”, or, “tell me what I should know but think I already know”.
- The process could be used as a back-up mechanism to the Investors in People process: “it (the Risk Assessment Process) coincides with [the requirements of] Investors in People”, and that, “it can be used as an add-on to the Investors in People process”.

The SME manager who did not think the Risk Assessment Process would be beneficial indicated that his company was already undertaking all the steps advocated in the Risk Assessment Process; these steps were being carried out as part of Investors in People. Further discussions with this manager revealed that he was already using a stress questionnaire that he had obtained through a personal link with an NHS trust hospital department. It is inferred that this may mean that he perceives himself as already using something equivalent to the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.

### 4.3.6 Elements of the material with immediate usefulness

At the end of the initial visit to the SME, the SME manager was asked for their opinion as to which elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials might be immediately useful.

Table 5 shows that the elements of the material that the SME manager immediately judged useful are the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process, The Management Standards as risk indicators, the Indicator Tool, the Analysis tool questionnaire results and the Action Plan template.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Assessment Process Element</th>
<th>Percentage usefulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Step Risk Assessment Process</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards as risk indicators</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards as evaluation goals</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress policy template</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings guidance</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups guidance</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator tool—questionnaire</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis tool-questionnaire results</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action plan template</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions development</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you doing enough? Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was unsurprising to find that equal numbers of respondents thought that both the Indicator Tool and Analysis Tool would be useful, because the Indicator Tool without the Analysis Tool is of little benefit to a user.
4.4 INITIAL VISIT - SUMMARY

The HSE Risk Assessment Process for the management of work-related stress was presented to twenty separate SMEs. At each presentation, a questionnaire was administered seeking responses about the SME’s levels of motivation to tackle stress and what their initial impressions were of the Risk Assessment Process materials.

The majority of respondents (85%) said they were ‘fairly well’ or ‘highly’ motivated to tackle stress. Respondents had concerns about stress, which related to four of the six Management Standards.

Eleven respondents’ organisations had previously tried to tackle stress and had done so using a variety of methods.

When asked what interventions they had previously used to tackle stress, respondents were not able to identify with the concept of “interventions”. For this reason, they were not easily able to answer when questioned about the cost-benefit of previous attempts of tackling stress.

The majority of SME managers (75%) thought the Risk Assessment Process would be beneficial to their company, predominantly because it provided a process to follow and had case studies as examples. The individual elements of the presented information, thought to be most potentially useful were:

- The 5-Step Risk Assessment Process
- The Management Standards as risk indicators
- The Indicator Tool
- The Analysis Tool

These choices appear to reflect a pragmatic approach; SME managers identified those elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials that most closely related to practically undertaking the process of risk assessment.

4.5 INITIAL MEETING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

The study sought to determine if the initial opinions of the SMEs about the Risk Assessment Process changed after the managers had had more time to read the information in detail.

Follow-up questionnaires were left with the SME managers at the initial visits. These were to be completed two weeks after the first visit. Twelve out of twenty SME representatives completed and returned the questionnaire. All the initial interviewees received a phone call two weeks after their first visit as a reminder to complete the questionnaire. A few of the respondents took longer than two weeks to reply. These were prompted to do so by second reminder phone calls. The reason for delay was given as heavy workload in each case.

Appendix B contains the questionnaire following up the Initial Meeting.

The results from the follow-up questionnaire (Table 6) show that the judged usefulness of the majority of elements has improved, whereas respondents rated the Indicator and Analysis Tool elements lower than at the initial meeting. It is suspected that this may be because the SME managers had read and digested these sections, because of their initial perceived attractiveness. The ‘tools’ at this stage are perhaps a little abstract, as their value is only realised once applied. However, given the limited sample and the lack of longitudinal measurements, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn.
Table 6: Perceived usefulness by SMEs of Risk Assessment Process at initial and follow-up visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of the Risk Assessment Process</th>
<th>Initial Visit percentage usefulness (n = 20)</th>
<th>Follow-up percentage usefulness (n = 12)</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Step Risk Assessment Process</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards as risk indicators</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards as evaluation goals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Policy template</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings guidance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups guidance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator Tool</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan template</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions Development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Doing Enough? Continuous improvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 MID-TERM VISITS

The Business Link adviser revisited the participant SMEs approximately four months after the initial visit. For continuity, the Business Link adviser was the same as had been responsible for the introductions to the SME managers. Vectra were not present for the mid-term visit.

The purpose of the mid-term visits was to collect ‘evolved buy-in’ data. Each visit took place at the SMEs’ premises and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The number of participating SMEs at the mid-term visit stage was nine. From the original 20 SMEs approached, 11 had agreed to participate in this study. However, one of these 11 dropped out and one SME had not used the material provided. This latter SME’s manager reported that they still intended to use the process, but only when production quietened down.

A questionnaire was designed for use in the structured interview (see Appendix C). The questions sought information about the SME respondents’ current use of the Management Standards and Risk Assessment Process, how easy they were to use and how helpful they had found them so far. The interviewer administered the questions and the results recorded on a paper pro-forma.

5.1 ANALYSIS OF EVOLVED BUY-IN QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The open-ended responses were qualitatively analysed and all responses coded before entry into an SPSS database.

Due to the small sample size, only descriptive analyses of the data have been performed.

The following subsections are titled using the question asked, with the results and discussion given in that subsection. Where the raw comments from free-response answers add benefit to the findings, these have been included.

5.1.1 How many SMEs had started using the Risk Assessment Process?

The definition of ‘started using’ the Risk Assessment Process was, ‘having begun to read its content in detail with a view to using them’ or, ‘actively using them’.

As reported above, nine out of the 20 SMEs approached, had started using the Risk Assessment Process. Nine SMEs had not wished to participate in the study following the initial meeting. Of the remaining two SMEs, one had not started using the material at all but said they intended to when work was quieter. The other company said that although they had started using the Risk Assessment Process, this was only so far as to have read the materials but they had not actively started assessing the workplace for stress. The latter company intended to use the Risk Assessment Process with their planned launch of a personnel performance appraisal process.

5.1.2 How easy was the Risk Assessment Process to use?

SMEs were asked to rate how difficult or easy they had found the Risk Assessment Process to use. Responses were recorded on a seven-point rating scale.

All nine SMEs, who had started using or reading the Risk Assessment Process, had found them easy to use; five SMEs reported that they had found the material ‘very easy’ to use with the other four reporting the material being ‘somewhat easy’ to use.
SMEs were asked what made the Risk Assessment Process materials easy or difficult to use by use of free-response questions. The results showed it was the design of the Risk Assessment Process that made it easy to use. In particular, respondents reported the following features of the material as being good:

- The colour-coding,
- The plain, simple language,
- The visual process, and
- The easy-to-follow steps.

The main difficulty the respondents reported related to the sheer volume of information/documentation (n=5) and the three-volume structure (n=2).

Interpretation of the results about what made the Risk Assessment Process materials difficult to use should be made against the results of the initial rating scale question, which indicated that overall no one found them difficult to use. Therefore, it is concluded that the aspects of the Risk Assessment Process SME managers found difficult to use should be considered as candidates for improvement in later versions. However, improvements to the material relate to the volume and not necessarily to the content as respondents, generally, still wished to use the material. When the Risk Assessment Process, Management Standards and supporting material were compiled into three volumes, a reduction in information volume was achieved. Further reduction in information volume could be achieved through additional review. Therefore, it is recommended that HSE establish a focus group to consider the relative merits of a single booklet or the three volumes created for this study.

5.1.3 What elements had the SMEs used, were they helpful and why?

The SMEs were asked about each individual element of the Risk Assessment Process materials. The questions were designed as three sequential questions to be asked about each element. They were: (a) if the respondent had used each element or not, (b) to rate how helpful they thought that element was using a 5-point scale, and, (c) to say why they had that view.

In the initial visit questionnaire, the SME manager had already been asked how helpful the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process was as a whole. However, by the mid-term visit, the SME managers would have had time to apply the different steps within the 5-Step process. Therefore, measurements were taken to determine their developed opinions for each step.

Two conditions were set down for answering each of these three-part questions. The first was that they had read the information and formed an opinion about its helpfulness and the second that they had read the information and actively sought to apply the processes described or implied. Nevertheless, some SMEs, who had not actively used an element, provided a rated ‘helpfulness’ answer and a free-response answer about why they felt that way because they had read that element and felt they had formed a well-considered opinion. Their data were included for analysis purposes.

Table 7 shows the number of respondents who had used each element of the Risk Assessment Process material.
Table 7 Frequencies of use for different elements of the Risk Assessment Process at Evolved Buy-in (n = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Assessment Process Stage &amp; Elements</th>
<th>No. of SMEs using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-Step Risk Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Identify the Hazards</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Decide Who Might Be Harmed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Evaluate the Risk and Take Action</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Record Your Findings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Monitor and Review</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools &amp; Templates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Policy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator Tool</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support &amp; Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Doing Enough?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A general decrease in the frequency of use can be seen for the successive steps of the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process. This trend was expected because the SMEs had not had the material long enough at the mid-term visit to try the later stages of the process.

It was interesting that, at this early stage, more than half of the respondents had looked at the Indicator and Analysis tools. It appears that respondents perceived these tools as the core of the method. Presumably, this was because they were the tools that can be used to characterise stress in the workplace in a concrete fashion and therefore, initiate an improvement process. For SMEs who are “time-poor”, any tool that ‘automatically’ defines an efficient process is likely to be taken up enthusiastically. It is recommended that HSE investigate means of providing tools that are more formulaic to facilitate the SME managers.

The fact that five respondents had looked at the Solutions element of the Support and Development book may suggest that at least half the sample were thinking positively about how to implement solutions. As a minimum, this suggests that they were considering the implications (e.g. cost and organisational) of implementing change. This can be taken as a positive sign of their engagement with the overall process.

5.1.4 Helpfulness of each element of the Risk Assessment Process

The SMEs were asked to rate how helpful they found each element of the Risk Assessment Process. This information on helpfulness was obtained by using a 5-point rating unipolar scale. This is shown below.
Next, SME managers were asked why they had responded the way they had, using a question that allowed free-response. These two questions were asked in turn for each element of the Risk Assessment Process materials. The results for both questions on each element are presented in turn below.

### 5.1.4.1 Introduction (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

This element provided information about the rationale for tackling work-related stress and the possible disadvantages of not managing this risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of helpfulness</th>
<th>Five rated the Introduction ‘very helpful’, three found it ‘reasonably helpful’ and one respondent found the Introduction only ‘slightly helpful’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why</td>
<td>There were six positive reasons given for the level of helpfulness. These all concerned the justification of why it is important to use the Risk Assessment Process and the usefulness of the Risk Assessment Process overview diagram (see Figure 2 of this report). One respondent said, “everything is clearly broken down, eg the benefits…it’s a compelling argument for use of the process”. Another said, “the Risk Assessment Process template [overview diagram] is very comprehensive and captures everything on a single page”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>From this result, it is recommended that the Risk Assessment Process contain a clear overview of the entire process and supporting material. It is recommended that some editing of the text be undertaken to reduce superfluous information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.1.4.2 Step 1 (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

Step 1 is entitled ‘Identify the Hazards’ and contains the Management Standards themselves and an overview description of the 5-Step process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of helpfulness</th>
<th>Four respondents rated Step 1 ‘very helpful’, four ‘reasonably helpful’ and one ‘not at all helpful’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why</td>
<td>Respondents gave three reasons were why Step 1 was helpful. The numbers of responses for each type of reason are given in brackets. These reasons were: setting out the causes of risk (four), “…definitions of the six main reasons is really helpful”, the provision of a model process (one), and the concise and simple format (one).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two respondents thought the level of information provided was too much: “I found it easier to identify the hazards by reading through the booklet” and “Summary and introduction gave me all the information I needed...”

It seems likely that those who felt Step 1 was an unneeded section did so because they were able to remember the information provided at the initial visit. Alternatively, this could be because of the layout. In Step 1, there is a blank page between the presentation of the Management Standards and the text of the Risk Assessment Process. This may give the impression that the Management Standards are not an integral part of the Risk Assessment Process material. It is recommended that the layout of this Section be reconsidered.

5.1.4.3 Step 2 (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

Step 2 is entitled ‘Decide who might be harmed’ and contains information on the relative merits of different methods for establishing who might be harmed.

Level of helpfulness

One respondent rated Step 2 as ‘exceptionally helpful’, six as ‘very helpful’ and one as ‘reasonably helpful’.

Reasons why

All the responses to Step 2 were positive and concerned the practical nature of its content. Of the eight answers, seven concerned the practical nature of Step 2 including, “offers ideas about how to address it [stress]”, and, “provides good guidance on what to do – gives you the how” and “idiot proof”. The single respondent related helpfulness of the Step to the ‘method guide’ saying, “the listing of different methods made things easy”.

Discussion

Based on the above, the content of Step 2 should be retained without any further modifications.

5.1.4.4 Step 3 (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

Step 3 is entitled ‘Evaluate the Risk and Take Action’ and concerns the evaluation of risk comparing results with the Management Standards and creating an action plan.

Level of helpfulness

One respondent rated Step 3 as ‘exceptionally helpful’, whilst four judged it ‘reasonably helpful’ and one respondent ‘not at all helpful’. The other respondents had not used the step.

Reasons why

Three positive responses explained that Step 3 was helpful because of its practical nature. One SME made particular reference to the information on action plans, which Vectra had moved into this section, saying, “the idea to create an action plan was good”. The other positive comments were less specific and included, “good to have, interesting”.

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One respondent found Step 3 was not helpful, stating: “[It] didn’t help with how to deal with the results that come out of the questionnaire and indicator [analysis] tool”. Vectra has noted that there is an underlying emphasis in the Risk Assessment Process on collaborative approaches to developing solutions between staff and management. However, when first compiling the modified version for SMEs there was a marked gap in information in two respects.

The first was, (as also raised by one of the SMEs), the lack of what to ‘really’ do, once information about the levels of stress in one’s organization had been obtained. The second was how to carry out an assessment without using the questionnaire (Indicator Tool) and the Analysis Tool. If one was to conduct only meetings or focus groups, there is no alternative measurement tool available.

Discussion Therefore, it is suggested that further work is needed in this section of the Risk Assessment Process to meet users’ reasonable desires to employ different risk assessment and management processes.

5.1.4.5 Step 4 (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

Step 4 is entitled ‘Record your Findings’ and concerns record keeping of the risk assessment findings.

Level of helpfulness Two respondents rated Step 4 as ‘very helpful’ and two as ‘reasonably helpful’, whilst one said it was only ‘slightly helpful’.

Reasons why The four free-responses showed a dichotomy of opinion between the information being unneeded and practical. The responses that indicated it was superfluous were, “It just seemed common sense and something we would have done anyway…”, and “Just what you would do in any case”. On the other hand, one SME thought Step 4 was, “informative”, and another, that it was, “concise and simple”.

Discussion It is suggested that it was too early to draw definitive conclusions from the responses gained for Step 4. However, based on a very small sample, four SMEs thought it was ‘reasonably’ to ‘very’ helpful so the information should be retained. However, there are issues about whether the record keeping should be placed at the start of the documentation for the entire process and whether it constitutes a step in its own right.

5.1.4.6 Step 5 (in 5-Step Risk Assessment Process)

Step 5 is entitled’ Monitor and Review’ and concerns monitoring progress against action plans and the effectiveness of implemented solutions.

Level of helpfulness One respondent judged Step 5 ‘very helpful’, two ‘reasonably helpful’ and one only ‘slightly helpful’. 

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Reasons why

Four SMEs had used the step at the mid-term and had given comments. Their free-responses show that three thought it was a logical process and one thought it omitted to tell the reader how to Monitor and Review.

Discussion

Given the limited number of SMEs that had used this element at the mid-term visit, it was considered too early to draw definitive conclusions from the responses given.

5.1.4.7 Stress Policy (in Tools and Templates)

This section provides an example of a stress policy template.

Level of helpfulness

One respondent judged The Stress Policy template to be ‘exceptionally helpful’, three ‘very helpful’ and two ‘only slightly helpful’.

Reasons why

Six free-responses were provided. Of these, four indicated that they thought the Policy template was helpful and time saving. One thought it was not needed (by them) and another thought it had a one-sided emphasis towards the responsibilities of employers for their employees and did not address the personal needs of managers for stress reduction. This last respondent, who provides training on people management, said of the Stress Policy, “Employees should have more responsibility than is stated in the policy. There should be an entry at the end requiring the employee to sign to say that they received it [The policy]. Managers are also employees and this needs to be considered in the Stress Policy wording.”

This valuable proposal for a future modification is endorsed.

Discussion

Anecdotal evidence gained during the visits suggests that SME managers are frequently the most pressured and potentially stressed people in the company. There is nothing currently in the Stress Policy that addresses this. Therefore, it is suggested that the Stress Policy should be modified to acknowledge this.

5.1.4.8 Meetings guidance (in Tools and Templates)

This section provides guidance on running meetings.

Level of helpfulness

One respondent judged the Meetings guidance to be ‘exceptionally helpful’, and one ‘very helpful’, whilst two respondents thought it ‘only slightly helpful’ and one ‘not at all helpful’.
Reasons why

Two responses stated that they had not yet used this element, three said that the information was not needed, for example: “already doing a lot of the things explained” but one respondent said it was, “very helpful to have such guidance I didn’t expect assistance in this area”. Two other comments suggested the information in its current form was not suitable for SMEs stating that it “felt that this [information] is for larger companies and not really practical for small businesses”, and it, “doesn’t take account of good meeting practice”.

Discussion

The information seems to be useful for those who felt inexpert in running meetings. However, others would wish the material to be better polished and more detailed. This element of the material is further assessed in the analysis of the final visits to see if the opinion becomes clearer.

5.1.4.9 Focus Groups guidance (in Tools and Templates)

This material concerns the running of focus groups.

Level of helpfulness

One respondent judged the guidance on Focus Groups ‘exceptionally helpful’, one ‘very helpful’ and one ‘reasonably helpful’. Two judged it ‘slightly helpful’ and one ‘not at all helpful’.

Reasons why

Of the free-responses provided, two respondents did not think the information was suited to their size of company, “not really appropriate to SME sector”, two respondents felt the information was not needed, “this really is our business, but [I] could see how it would be helpful to others”. One respondent said, “The suggestion for numbers of participants was useful, the information was simple and clear”. Another respondent also thought the information was helpful, and unexpected, but in common with two other SMEs had not yet actively used it. These responses suggest that no clear conclusion can be drawn about the perceived helpfulness of this element. However, the breadth of results possibly explains something about the diversity of performance/people management knowledge in SMEs. Given this diversity, then it would be sensible to retain this information and allow SMEs either to use it, or not, as they see appropriate for their company.

Discussion

It is suspected, that for small SMEs of fewer than 50 employees, the extensive information provided for running Focus Groups may appear too specialised and require too much preparation. Furthermore, SMEs might feel intimidated by the title of this element. The term Focus Group, will either not have been encountered before by some SMEs or may sound like a technique only used by market researchers and, therefore, not relevant to them. It is recommended that this information be retained, but also, that the title might be changed, and the volume reduced to make it less burdensome to SMEs.
## 5.1.4.10 Indicator Tool (in Tools and Templates)

The indicator tool is the questionnaire that can be administered to measure personally experienced sources and levels of stress at work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of helpfulness</th>
<th>Five respondents found the indicator tool ‘exceptionally helpful’ and three ‘very helpful’ whilst one respondent found it ‘only slightly helpful’. Four respondents had not used the tool at the mid-term visit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why</td>
<td>The majority of the comments provided by the free-response answers indicated that the Indicator Tool was popular because it was easy to use, well designed and ready for immediate use. Some comments concerned the ‘time-saving’ quality of this tool. One recommendation was provided about the provision of more easily removable pages, the Risk Assessment Process’s presentation as bound books meant that the SME needed to photocopy the questionnaire to be able to use it. This has now been remedied by providing the questionnaire on the CD ROM containing the Analysis Tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>SMEs found the Indicator Tool very useful and so it should be retained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 5.1.4.11 Analysis Tool (in Tools and Templates)

The analysis tool is applied to the analysis of questionnaire results measuring sources and levels of stress in individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of helpfulness</th>
<th>Four respondents found the Analysis Tool ‘exceptionally helpful’, two ‘very helpful’ and two ‘reasonably helpful’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why</td>
<td>Five free-responses stated that the Analysis Tool was easy to use; two additional respondents said it, “looks very good”. However, one respondent expressed a drawback by that, “it still left us with the problem of who had the issues”. Two other respondents gave no reason for their rating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>It is likely that the one negative-response might be invalid, as it was possibly a spurious justification for doing nothing by this particular respondent. It is believed that the Risk Assessment Process does make it clear that a survey should only be used in conjunction with other methods to find out what the problems are and work out how to tackle them via consultation with the company’s staff members (SME managers do tend to have a more direct relationship with their people. Therefore, it may be appropriate that they know exactly with whom a problem lies so that they are able to make improvements).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No changes or modifications are proposed for the Analysis Tool.

5.1.4.12 **Action Plan (in Tools and Templates)**

This element provides an example of an action plan.

| Level of helpfulness | Three respondents found the Action plan ‘very helpful’, one ‘reasonably helpful’ and one ‘slightly helpful’. Four respondents had not used the Action Plan due to their early stage in the process. (At the time of the mid-term visits, some SMEs had had as little as three months to establish a process.) |
| Reasons why | Of the five who had read or actively used the Action Plan template, three thought it was practical and straightforward to use, saying it was: “*simple to follow*”, a “*good action plan*”, and was helpful because a “*method is set out ...*”. One slightly less favourable response was, “[I] feel that it would be of limited use, we will use a *less formal approach*”. A further comment was that the Action Plan does not incorporate a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed) approach to documenting actions. |
| Discussion | Examination of the Action Plan shows that it does incorporate the principles of SMART goals, but does not make them explicit. It is recommended that additional dialogue about using SMART goals would add value to this element. |

5.1.4.13 **Solutions Development (in Support and Development)**

This provides suggested solutions to identified causes of stress such as demands or support, etc.

| Level of helpfulness | One respondent judged the Solutions Development to be ‘exceptionally helpful’, two ‘very helpful’ and two ‘reasonably helpful’. One further respondent judged it to be ‘slightly helpful’. |
| Reasons why | The six free responses provided show that four respondents felt that the Solutions Development element contained useful ideas, whilst two felt they did not need this part. Stating that they, “*already do many of the things with regard to the overall running of [their] business*”, and had, “*a clear vision of what needs to be done*”. |
| Discussion | Given the above results, no changes were proposed for this element. |

5.1.4.14 **Case Studies (in Support and Development)**

The case studies describe other organisations’ stress problems and their approaches to solutions.
Level of helpfulness Four respondents found the case study material ‘reasonably helpful’. Six respondents had not used the material.

Reasons why Of these, three were general comments like: “…background information good” and “Good overviews”, while one felt it was, “Helpful but doesn’t mirror [their] type of business”.

Discussion This suggests that more diverse case study material covering more business types may be beneficial.

5.1.4.15 Are You Doing Enough? (in Support and Development)

This material provides guidance on issues that might need addressing in a longer-term continual improvement process.

Level of helpfulness Two respondents found the material ‘very helpful’ and one ‘only slightly helpful’. One respondent omitted to complete the rating scale but answered why they found the material helpful. Six respondents had not used it.

Reasons why One free-response commented on the helpfulness of this element stating that it was, “good common sense guidance”. The other three responses (including one where no rating scale was completed), reported that they were not actively at the stage where they would use this information.

Discussion The ‘Are You Doing Enough?’ element was presented as something that might be done at or after the Step 5, Monitor and Review stage of the Risk Assessment Process. Therefore, the lack of informative feedback for this mid-term collection of data was, unsurprising.

5.1.5 Was anything missing from the Risk Assessment Process?

The SMEs who had used the Risk Assessment Process materials were asked if they thought there was anything missing from the information provided. Six respondents stated that they did not believe anything new needed was necessary. Three respondents thought additional content could be provided about bullying. Two of these three respondents had found that the Indicator and Analysis Tools identified bullying issues of which they were previously unaware. Both respondents wanted further information about how to handle the bullying (e.g. the legal position and suggestions on how to tackle the issue).

The third respondent said a risk analysis template should be included but provided no further details on the expected content.

5.1.6 Would SMEs have used the Risk Assessment Process alone?

At the beginning of this project, HSE expressed a concern about small to medium-sized companies being able to apply the Risk Assessment Process without assistance. Therefore, the following question was included in the questionnaire:
“If help was not available to me when using the Management Standards material I would be unlikely to continue trying to use it”

![Figure 3 Scale used for rating the likelihood of using the Risk Assessment Process without help](image)

The SMEs were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with this statement using the rating scale in Figure 3 above. Four ‘strongly disagreed’ and two ‘disagreed’ whilst three ‘agreed’ with it.

However, the questionnaire also asked if the respondent had received any help with using the materials provided and the process described and all of the respondents stated they had not. It is concluded that this indicates the Risk Assessment Process is a comprehensive, usable process and set of information. The SMEs had not received any assistance in understanding or implementing the Risk Assessment Process up to the time of the mid-term data collection.

5.1.7 What were the outcomes?

It was interesting to establish if the SMEs had identified any areas of concern about stress in their company and if they had experienced any unexpected, particularly negative, outcomes since using the Management Standards or the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process. Three reported that they had. Of these three, two respondents referred to bullying again. One further respondent whose company had not identified any specific concerns by using the HSE Indicator and Analysis Tools had experienced other negative personal outcomes, which they declined to comment on further. While respondents saw these as negative outcomes, in all three cases their application had a positive outcome because they had identified a previously unknown stress problem.

Following a debriefing meeting with BLCW, the impression was that the SME manager who declined to comment might have had exceptionally high workload demands and was experiencing ever-increasing work responsibilities. In their role of assessor, this person or someone in a similar position may be unable to communicate their own stress because they would need to disclose this directly to their manager. This might be interpreted as a failure in their personal job competency, or at least they might fear this to be the case, and so make them unwilling to report. This can be a fundamental issue within SMEs, because those with managerial responsibilities are frequently under the most pressure and without means of support. The Risk Assessment Process does not attempt to tackle this problem, or the problem of managers who are themselves the source of stress in their workforce (e.g. the manager is the bully).

It is strongly recommend that these two issues are considered further and that information is provided to fill the gaps identified.

5.1.8 What did the SMEs plan to do?

The two respondents who had identified concerns related to bullying were both in the process of deciding what to do at the time of the second visit. Business Link’s advisor, who conducted the second visits, provided some initial guidance and reassurance to these respondents.

5.1.9 What were the costs to SMEs?

The respondents’ were asked what they thought the cost had been to their company of using the Management Standards and the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.
A free-response question was asked to find out what the perceived cost to SMEs had been. Five respondents reported that the ‘main costs’ in using the Risk Assessment Process had been, “the time to digest the information”, and two provided more quantified estimates of, “2-3 days”. Two SMEs stated that they did not yet know the costs.

5.1.10 Would the benefits outweigh the costs?

Respondents were asked if applying the Risk Assessment Process outweighed the costs involved in doing so. Six responded that the benefits would outweigh the costs, while three did not know yet. This suggests there is a perceived business benefit to managing work-related stress using the Risk Assessment Process.

5.2 SUMMARY FOR MID-TERM VISIT

Overall, conclusions for the SMEs’ use of the Management Standards and the Risk Assessment Process at the mid-term were favourable.

Of the nine SMEs that had started using the guidance, all had found it either somewhat or very easy to use. All nine respondents felt that they were able to do so without assistance.

The key aspects of the Risk Assessment Process that made the material easy to use were its plain and simple style of writing, clarity of process and user-aiding design. However, some SME managers thought that the volume of information was excessive and therefore time-consuming to read. Two SMEs felt that the information would have been better if presented in one book rather than three books. At this stage in the trial, it was too early to make a decision about the relative merits of combining the three booklets, or keeping them separate.
Respondents found the ready-made, ready-to-use elements of the Risk Assessment Process of most help, especially:

- The Stress Policy
- The Indicator, and
- The Analysis Tool

It was found that the rated level of helpfulness appeared greatest for those elements of the Risk Management Process materials with which the respondent was already familiar. Therefore, at the mid-term visit it was unsurprising that the material that had yet to be used was rated as less helpful because there was less practical opportunity to have become familiar with the content of that material.

The Indicator and Analysis Tools were both particularly well received by the SMEs. In general, the other materials were also well received, with the majority of comments on the material being positive. It is interesting that, as in the issue of whether to provide the material in one or three volumes, some expressed opinions take opposite stances. However, it is clear that where this has happened it is because some respondents found material unhelpful (e.g. focus group guidance) only because they already have the necessary skills to apply the content of that guidance. This result might be expected particularly in the case of the current sample because two of the ten participating SMEs were training organisations.

The potential value of case study material became clear in the two instances where previously unsuspected bullying was revealed. In both cases, the SME managers wanted further information about their legal position and how to handle the situation. Possibly, a case study on bullying might be helpful. However, it would not be reasonable to expect HSE to provide guidance on all of the many and diverse facets that contribute to work related stress and, of course, some issues might be more authoritatively addressed by materials available from other organisations like ACAS or the Law Society. For example, ACAS provide an excellent online leaflet on bullying (ACAS, 2005).

Overall, two-thirds of those who had used the material to any extent (six out of nine) thought that the benefits of using the Risk Assessment Process would outweigh the costs.
6 FINAL VISITS

Business Link’s advisor carried out the final visit to SMEs during February and March 2006. By this time, the SMEs had possessed the Risk Assessment Process materials for an average of just less than seven months. The longest was eight months (one company) and the shortest was six months (two companies).

The final visit data aimed to measure respondents’ overall opinions of the Risk Assessment Process materials, and to identify any particularly positive or negative experiences because of implementing them.

At the final visit, ten out of the original 20 SMEs approached remained involved in the study.

As with the initial and the mid-term visits, the BLCW advisor carried out a structured interview using a Vectra designed questionnaire (attached as Appendix D). Again, the visits took place at the SMEs’ premises and lasted around 20-30 minutes. Ten companies contributed to the final visit data. As with the mid-term visit, respondents were asked to provide their ratings of the judged level of helpfulness for the different sections of the material and the reasons why it was judged to be helpful or not. To make it easier to respond, they were provided with choices derived from answers given in the mid-term visit. In addition, they were also asked their opinions on which different elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials would be useful to them in the longer term. Finally, the SME manager was asked what stage they had reached in implementing the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.

6.1 ANALYSIS OF FINAL VISIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Data that required fixed answers were analysed using SPSS. This included a sub-set of questions about the reasoning for individual elements of the Risk assessment Process materials being found to be helpful, or not. All other free-response data was analysed for content manually.

6.1.1 Stages reached in the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process

SMEs were asked how far they had progressed the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.

All ten companies remaining in the study reported that they had started actively using the Risk Assessment Process, and all said that they were further along the process than at the mid-term visits.

The bar chart in Figure 4 shows the number of companies at each of the five stages of the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process at the time of the final visit.
Seven of the ten companies had made significant progress in applying the Risk Assessment Process, having reached Steps 4 or 5. This advanced level of progress, made in the six to eight months after receiving the material, can be taken as a reflection of the level of commitment of the participating SMEs. (It must be remembered, however, that this sample of SMEs was chosen because of the judged likelihood of their participating in this trial.)

The two SMEs who had only reached Step 2 remained enthusiastic about the process. They had remained at Step 2 deliberately and planned to progress the Steps to coincide with new internal management processes.

One SME had difficulty in the administration of the Indicator Tool because of the remote working locations of its staff.

### 6.1.2 Elements the SMEs had used

SMEs were asked what elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials they had used by the time of the final visit.

As at the mid-term interviews, the definition of ‘used’ was ‘has read or actively used’ because this allowed more flexibility of response by the SMEs.

An increase in the use of all elements of the material relative to the mid-term visit was expected. This was found to be the case. Table 8 shows that all ten SMEs had used most of the Risk Assessment Process materials, with the exception of the ‘Support and Development’ book and the ‘Action Plan template’ from the ‘Tools and Templates’ book. Nevertheless, in these cases over half of the sample had used all the material. The one area of potential concern may be that only seven respondents reported using the Action Plan template, although all ten had applied all steps of the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.
Assessment Process. On that basis, there should be action plans in all cases. The helpfulness of the Action Plan is discussed later in this section.

Table 8 Frequencies of use for different elements of the Risk Assessment Process at Evolved Final Visit (n = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Assessment Process Stage &amp; Elements</th>
<th>No. of SMEs using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-Step Risk Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Identify the Hazards</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Decide Who Might Be Harmed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Evaluate the Risk and Take Action</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Record Your Findings</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Monitor and Review</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools &amp; Templates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Policy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator Tool</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support &amp; Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Doing Enough?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.3 Helpfulness of the Risk Assessment Process materials

As in the mid-term visits, SMEs were asked how helpful they had found the different elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials. This information was obtained by using the same 5-point rating scale.

The reason why they found each element helpful, or not, was established. This time, to save respondent time and patience, closed questions were asked that had been derived from answers provided from the free-response answers given by the SMEs during the mid-term data collection. In addition, an option was given for a free-response answer if preferred. Twelve different responses were available, balanced for negative and positive replies. These were:

- Not sufficiently detailed
- An entirely suitable process
- Too bureaucratic and formal
- A logical process
- Not suitable for our company
- Time saving
- Informative about what is needed
- An unneeded process - we already have one
- A practical process we can apply
The perceived levels of helpfulness and the reasons for this perception are presented and discussed below for each element of the Risk Assessment Process materials. (Each given heading is one element of the materials).

6.1.3.1 Introduction

This element provided information about the rationale for tackling work-related stress and the possible disadvantages of not managing this risk.

Level of helpfulness: The rated level of helpfulness for the Introduction had increased at the final visit from the mid-term visit. At the final visit, the Introduction SMEs found to be 'exceptionally helpful' (1), 'very helpful' (5), and 'reasonably helpful' (4).

Reasons why: The Introduction was found to be helpful by five respondents because it is, 'clear, simple and easy to use' (5), 'a practical process we can apply' (3), 'a logical process to do' (1), and 'informative about what is needed'(1).

Discussion: Participant SMEs continued to judge the Introduction favourably as it provided them with a straightforward and usable introduction to managing stress in the workplace.

6.1.3.2 Step 1

Step 1 is entitled ‘Identify the Hazards’ and contains the Management Standards themselves and an overview description of the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process.

Level of helpfulness: The rated level of helpfulness for Step 1 indicate that there was an improvement in judged helpfulness between the mid-term visit and the final visit. Step 1 was ‘exceptionally helpful’ (1 versus 0 previously), ‘very helpful’ (five versus three previously), with consequent reduction in the ‘reasonable helpful’ rating (three versus four previously). One respondent maintained their view that Step 1 was 'not at all helpful'.

Reasons why: The aspects of Step 1 that made it helpful was that it is, ‘informative about what is needed’ (two), ‘a practical process we can apply’ (five), and ‘clear, simple and easy to use’ (two). However, one respondent felt it was, ‘common sense so the material was not needed’.

Discussion: The measured increase in perceived helpfulness of the Management Standards may be because their relevance becomes more apparent as the Risk Assessment Process progresses, and the user becomes more familiar with the materials.
6.1.3.3 Step 2

Step 2 is entitled ‘Decide who might be harmed’ and contains information on the relative merits of different methods for establishing who might be harmed.

Level of helpfulness: The rated levels of helpfulness show that there was a slight improvement for Step 2 from the mid-term visit to the final visit. The two previously ‘not applicable’ responses from the mid-term visit have disappeared with the pick-up in use of Step 2. One respondent found Step 2 ‘exceptionally’ helpful, as in the mid-term visit. Six considered it ‘very helpful’ as in the mid-term visit. However, the number finding it ‘reasonably helpful’ had risen from one to three.

Reasons why: Seven respondents stated Step 2 was helpful because it provided a ‘practical, logical process’, which was ‘informative about what is needed’. Two respondents, however, said it was either, ‘not suitable for our company’”, or, ‘common sense so the material was not needed’.

Discussion: The majority of respondents judged Step 2 helpful, even those who indicated that the information was either unsuitable for their company, or who indicated it was common sense and therefore, not needed.

6.1.3.4 Step 3

Step 3 is entitled ‘Evaluate the Risk and Take Action’ and concerns the evaluation of risk comparing results with the Management Standards and creating an action plan.

Level of helpfulness: All ten respondents provided answers at the final visit compared to the mid-term visit when one respondent did not respond and three had not yet used Step 3. At the final visit one respondent thought this step was ‘exceptionally helpful’, three ‘very helpful’ and five ‘reasonably helpful’ although one respondent thought Step 3 was ‘not at all’ helpful.

Reasons why: For the majority (seven in ten) Step 3 provides a ‘practical process’, which was ‘clear and simple to implement’.

However, two respondents considered Step 3 to be, ‘too bureaucratic or formal’ (1), or, ‘common sense so the material is not needed’ (1). The respondent who thought this step was ‘not at all’ helpful said that, “Small businesses would need more help with this area”. However, for two companies it was too formal or daunting for them. One thought that they did not need Step 3.

Discussion: Those who had encountered it at the mid-term visits considered this step helpful. The need for further guidance on alternative methods not involving the questionnaire remains. Notwithstanding, the majority do find the material logical, although it may need some simplification. As much of the entire substantive ‘doing’ part of the process is vested in Step 3, it is unsurprising that it is seen as formal or bureaucratic by some.
6.1.3.5 Step 4

Step 4 is entitled ‘Record your Findings’ and concerns record keeping of the risk assessment findings.

Level of helpfulness: All 10 respondents provided answers at the final visit, whereas at the mid-term visit, two did not respond and three had not yet used Step 4.

Respondents thought Step 4 was ‘exceptionally helpful’ (one respondent versus none previously), ‘very helpful’ (five versus two previously) and ‘reasonably helpful’ (four versus two previously).

Reasons why: Respondents stated that Step 4 was helpful because it is: ‘a logical process’ (3), ‘a practical process we can apply’ (3), ‘an entirely suitable process for our needs’ (1), ‘clear, simple and easy to use’ (1), ‘informative about what is needed’ (1).

One respondent thought this element was ‘common sense so the material is not needed’

Discussion: Respondents have an overall positive view of Step 4.

It is also interesting to note that the rated level of helpfulness appears to have improved as more respondents applied the material rather than simply reading it. This finding has significant implications because it underlines the importance of making material attractive and easily assimilated rather than relying on the applied usefulness of the material to ‘sell itself’.

6.1.3.6 Step 5

Step 5 is entitled ‘Monitor and Review’ and concerns monitoring progress against action plans and assessing the effectiveness of implemented solutions.

Level of helpfulness: The helpfulness rating for Step 5 increased between the mid and final visits: the ratings were ‘very helpful’ (5 versus 1 at the mid-term), ‘reasonably helpful’ (4 versus 2) and ‘slightly helpful’ (1, as previously).

Reasons why: Respondents stated that Step 5 was helpful because it was ‘a practical process we can apply’ (5), ‘a logical process to do’ (2). However, three respondents found that Step 5 was not helpful because: it is ‘not sufficiently detailed to use’ (2) and is ‘common sense so the material is not needed’ (1).

Discussion: Step 5, whilst judged helpful, does contain two adverse responses about there being insufficient detail. Therefore, it is recommended that the Step 5 material be augmented to provide more guidance on longer-term follow-up actions.

6.1.3.7 Stress Policy template

This element provides an example of the format and content for a corporate stress policy.
Level of helpfulness: Five respondents judged the Stress Policy template to be ‘very helpful’, two found it ‘reasonably helpful’, one ‘only slightly helpful,’ and one ‘not at all helpful’. (At the mid-term visit one found it extremely helpful, three very helpful and two slightly helpful).

Reasons why: Three respondents found that the Stress Policy template was helpful because it is ‘informative about what is needed’, two respondents found it ‘clear and simple to use’ and one stated it was a ‘practical process they could apply’. ‘In total, seven positive reasons were provided. One respondent suggested that the material was ‘too bureaucratic’ and another that it is ‘not aimed at a smaller company’. One other respondent suggested the material was ‘common sense and so not needed’.

Discussion: The judged helpfulness for the Stress Policy Template is generally good. The two adverse responses suggest that a small company may consider any policy document as ‘overkill’. However, it is recommended that the template be retained in its current format. In smaller companies, where ‘formal’ communications mechanisms might be viewed as excessive, it may be sufficient to suggest that a policy is practiced rather than there being a written document.

6.1.3.8 Meetings guidance

This element of the process provides guidance on running meetings.

Level of helpfulness: Meetings guidance was found to be ‘exceptionally helpful’ by two respondents (versus 1 at the mid-term visit), ‘very helpful’ by two (1 at mid-term), ‘reasonably’ by two (none previously) and ‘only slightly’ by three (two previously). There were no cases of ‘not at all’ helpful (1 at the mid-term visit).

Reasons why: The Meetings guidance material was found to be helpful by seven respondents for the following reasons: it is ‘an entirely suitable process for our needs’ (two), also, ‘informative about what is needed’ (two) ‘a logical process to do’ (one), ‘a practical process we can apply’ (one), and ‘describes a time saving process’ (one).

Three unfavourable responses were also provided, which were: it is, ‘not suitable for our company’ (one), ‘common sense so the material is not needed’ (one) and one free response of “not suitable for smaller companies”. No specific detail was recorded saying why this element was considered not suitable.

Discussion: The ranked levels of helpfulness of the Meetings guidance were broadly spread. There was a similar broad spread for the mid-term visits. However, six of the nine respondents reported that it was ‘reasonably’ helpful or better. This suggests that this section has value, and supports the Risk Assessment Process.
6.1.3.9 Focus Groups guidance

This material concerns the running of focus groups.

Level of helpfulness: At the final visit, all (10) respondents provided an answer (at the mid-term visit one respondent did not answer the question and three had not started using it). The respondents found that the Focus Groups guidance was ‘exceptionally helpful’ (2), ‘very helpful’ (4), ‘reasonably helpful’ (1), and ‘only slightly helpful’ (3). There were no cases of ‘not at all’ helpful.

Reasons why: The Focus Groups guidance was found to be helpful for the following reasons: it is ‘an entirely suitable’ or ‘practical process we can apply’ (2), ‘clear, simple and easy to use’ (2), ‘informative about what is needed’ (1) and ‘describes a time saving process’ (1). However, it was also thought to be ‘not suitable for our company’ (1), ‘an unneeded process because we already have one’ (1), ‘not suitable for our company’ (1), and one ‘other’, “It’s not appropriate for smaller companies”.

These answers provide six favourable reasons, and three unfavourable reasons about helpfulness.

Discussion: Six respondents rated the Focus Groups guidance very or exceptionally helpful. The results included an improved rating for the material from that given in the mid-term visits.

This result was in contrast to that predicted prior to the collection of the final visit data. It had been thought, based on mid-term feedback, that the SMEs would consider the use of focus groups as too time consuming or ‘specialised’.

Although one respondent said “It’s not suitable for smaller companies” (and had 20 employees), feedback from another smaller SME (with only 12 part-time employees) was that they had used Focus Groups to tackle the issues that became known to them, and fully intended to use the approach again in the future.

Therefore, it is concluded that the Focus Groups guidance is useful, even to smaller SMEs.

6.1.3.10 Indicator Tool

The indicator tool is the questionnaire that an organisation can administer to measure personally experienced sources and levels of stress at work.

Level of helpfulness: Five respondents found the indicator tool ‘exceptionally helpful’, three ‘very helpful’ and one each ‘reasonably’ or ‘slightly helpful’.
Reasons why: Six respondents said the indicator tool was “clear and simple to use”, one said it was “…a practical process we could apply” and one said it was “…a logical process”. Two free responses were given. One simply stated that the tool was useful and the other asked whether the tool had been tested with those having disability or English as a second language.

Discussion: The response to this element of the process remained identical to that at the mid-term. This element is clearly seen as a valuable and core component of the materials. It reflects the BLCW view of SMEs that they respond most favourably when they are given a prescription on what to do. The indicator tool fits this criterion very well indeed.

Given the one concern about the applicability of the tool to different populations, HSE should investigate if the indicator tool is suitable for a wide range of people from different backgrounds and different abilities.

6.1.3.11 Analysis Tool

The analysis tool is applied to the analysis of questionnaire results measuring sources and levels of stress in individuals.

Level of helpfulness: Five respondents found the analysis tool to be ‘exceptionally helpful’ two found it ‘very helpful’ and one ‘reasonably helpful’.

Reasons why: Six stated that the Analysis Tool is, ‘clear, simple and easy to use’ two stated that it is ‘a practical process we can apply’ and one that it is ‘a logical process to do’.

One respondent provided an alternative response, stating it was simple but questioning its validity for people with impaired abilities or who are not native English speakers.

Discussion: The Analysis Tool was found to be nearly as popular as the Indicator Tool with seven of the ten respondents finding it to be ‘exceptionally’ or ‘very’ helpful. This response remained as strong as at the mid-term. Given the obvious link between these two tools this result was unsurprising.

6.1.3.12 Action plan template

This element provides an example of an action plan.

Level of helpfulness: At the final visit, six of ten respondents had used the Action Plan template. Two found it ‘very helpful’ two ‘reasonably helpful’ and two ‘only slightly helpful’.

Reasons why: In contrast to other elements in the Risk Assessment Process materials, the Action Plan Template received 6 unfavourable
responses: five stating it was, ‘not suitable to our company’, and one saying, “The examples give no success criteria”.

The Action Plan template was found to be helpful by only 3 respondents, for the following reasons: it is ‘an entirely suitable process’ (1), ‘a practical process we can apply’ (1) and ‘clear, simple and easy to use’ (1).

Discussion: This is the only element of the Risk Assessment Process materials to have received more unfavourable responses than favourable ones. The five statements that this was not suitable to their company, leads to the conclusion that (with the exception of one who has only just started using the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process) that they have made a firm decision about its unsuitability for them. With only two reporting it to be very helpful, this element deserves to have more attention directed to redesigning it for use by smaller companies.

6.1.3.13 Solutions Development guidance

This provides suggested solutions to identified causes of stress such as demands or support, etc.

Level of helpfulness: At the final visit, two respondents had not used the Solutions Development material, compared to four at the mid-term visit.

Three respondents found this element to be ‘exceptionally helpful’ by two found it ‘very’ helpful, ‘only slightly’ and one ‘not at all’ helpful.

Reasons why: The Solutions Development material invoked seven positive and one negative response. It was found to be helpful because: three said it is ‘informative about what is needed, three said ‘a practical process we can apply’ and one said it is ‘a logical process to do’ The one unfavourable response stated it is ‘not suitable for our company’.

One had not read or used it, and one provided an alternative response, which was, “we are yet to identify a suitable way forward for our company”

Discussion: This material is highly rated with six saying it is ‘exceptionally’ or ‘very’ helpful. The one negative response was because they have a mobile workforce and no solutions offered seemed appropriate.

The solutions development guidance could be developed to include solutions that would help companies who have mobile or off-site workforces.

6.1.3.14 Case Studies

The case studies describe other organisations’ stress problems and their approaches to solutions.
At the final visit, six respondents had used the Case Studies material. This element was found to be ‘very helpful’ by three respondents and ‘reasonably helpful’ by three.

The Case Studies material was judged to be helpful by four respondents because it is ‘informative about what is needed’ However three respondents said it was, ‘not suited to our company’.

The results show that the perceived level of helpfulness has increased since the mid-term visit, when the three respondents who had read or used it judged it ‘reasonably helpful’. However, by the time of the final interviews at least three SMEs had not reached a stage in the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process for them to have used this element.

Note: One respondent, who decided this element was not suitable to their company, had reported the level of helpfulness as ‘not applicable’ rather than giving a low helpfulness rating. It is recommended that further information about the level of helpfulness of the Case Studies material be sought from those who had not yet been able to complete the process in the timescale of this work. Such additional work might also include a repeat visit to those who had used this element, to find out further information about its usefulness.

**6.1.3.15 Are You Doing Enough?**

This material provides guidance on issues that might need addressing in a longer-term continual improvement process.

At the final visit, four respondents had not used the ‘Are You Doing Enough?’ material, compared to five at the mid-term visit. It was judged to be ‘very helpful’ by three respondents ‘only slightly helpful’ by two and ‘not at all helpful’ by one.

The ‘Are You Doing Enough?’ material was found to be helpful by two respondents because: it was, ‘clear, simple and easy to use’, one said it is ‘a logical process to do’ and one other respondent said ‘informative about what is needed’. Three respondents found this element was not particularly helpful to them; two stating ‘an unneeded process because we already have a suitable one’ and one stating it is ‘not sufficiently detailed to use’. This question was ‘not applicable’ to three respondents because they had not use the material.

Half the respondents rated the material very helpful. However, the other three rated it markedly less so. It generally appears that the rated opinion on the helpfulness of material improves as it is used.

Therefore, like the Case Studies material, it is recommended that further information about the helpfulness of the ‘Are You Doing Enough?’ material be sought from those who had not yet been able to use the material in any detail during the timescale of this work.
6.1.4 Help SMEs needed

The SMEs who participated in this trial did not formally request any assistance in implementing the Risk Assessment Process. However, anecdotal evidence from Business Link’s advisor suggests that SME representatives did take the opportunity to discuss their business in general in respect of issues raised in applying the Risk Assessment Process. In one specific instance, an individual given responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Risk Assessment Process used the Advisor as a sympathetic ear, given that they were finding the role difficult. This finding is important and leads to the conclusion that SMEs would benefit from support in implementing the Risk Assessment Process, even if that process is well-prescribed and clearly laid out.

6.1.5 Changes SMEs think are needed

The final visit questionnaire was used to collect information about any changes the SMEs thought were needed to the Risk Assessment Process. The SMEs were asked if any additional information was needed, and whether any reduction or simplification was needed. The questions were provided with a free-response format.

6.1.5.1 Additional Information

When asked if any additional information was required, a small majority (6/10) of respondents said it was not. Some provided additional comments such as, “No, it’s a very thorough process from start to finish”, or, “No, it’s clear, easy to read - very comprehensive”.

Of the four SME managers, who said they would like some additional information, they wanted practical guidance in three areas. These areas were:

- Guidance on what to do with the information the questionnaire results provide
- Alternative ways of finding out who might be harmed, and
- Provision of a template for job descriptions.

It was interesting that two out of four respondents felt they would like to see, “more guidelines on what actions to take […] on what comes up from the questionnaire”. These responses agree with the first review of the Risk Assessment Process Step 3.

It is suspected that the main driver for a need for more information at this stage of the process was the discovery of problems hitherto unknown. At the initial visit, a number of SMEs had expressed a belief that they would know about any problems because of the close-knit nature of their business. Therefore, it is likely that some companies experienced a sense of shock when they discovered a hidden problem that could be a cause of work-related stress.

Step 2 provides a recommendation, albeit brief, to validate any results obtained from the use of the HSE Indicator and Analysis Tools with direct input from their employees. However, the content of Step 3 does not reflect this recommendation. Therefore, a link needs to be made that makes users aware of the important place of focused meetings to understand the problems and develop solutions.

Three recommendations are applicable to this element:

- A stronger emphasis should be introduced on the need to engage the workforce to understand fully the nature of problems identified using the ‘quick and easy’ tools in both Step 2 and Step 3.
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of a managers’ self-assessment tool, which would prompt them to consider whether they themselves might be the root cause of, or contributor
to, any identified stress-related problems. This recommendation comes about because one of the companies, who wished for more information, had identified a problem of bullying through the questionnaire returns. However, they were unable to discover what the underlying problem was from one-to-one appraisals. It is not surprising to find that SMEs were unsuccessful with this approach and it is suspected that the cause of the problem may have been with the manager himself.

- Further examples of alternative ways of gathering information from staff, other than the use of the questionnaire, be provided. Companies whose staff work in remote sites and for whom getting questionnaires back can be a problem particularly need this. Some examples might be the use of telephone conferences, or the use of Skype Internet video connections to conduct focused discussions.

The “...provision of a template for job descriptions”, which was requested by one company, was considered. It is concluded that the diversity of industries covered in the SME market would prohibit the creation of a useful descriptive template, however, HSE should consider if some high-level generic guidance could be included such as ‘How to produce a job description guide’.

6.1.5.2 Simplification and Reduction

The ten SMEs were asked if there was anything in the Risk Assessment Process they would want to simplify or reduce. These two questions were asked consecutively, but the answers provided are so closely related that they are presented together.

These two questions were asked because of the previous answers provided at the mid-term visit about whether SMEs had found any of the material difficult to use. In response to this question, five had said that there was too much information and two had said the information would be better presented in one book rather than three. At that time, two had said that they had found nothing in the material difficult to use. Therefore, the questions aimed to determine if opinions had changed following an extended period of usage.

At the final visit, the SMEs were asked if any simplification of the Risk Assessment Process was needed, and if anything in the Risk Assessment Process needed reducing. Their responses fall into three key points:

- Combine the information into one book,
- Slim it down, and
- Remove all of the repetition.

The suggestion of combining all the material into one book was surprising; at the outset of this study it was believed that one book would be too daunting for SME managers with other pressing demands upon their attention. However, the overarching issue for SME managers was the sheer volume of material (5 of the ten respondents said this was an issue). Typical responses included “it’s too lengthy and needs slimming down”, “…there is just too much paper!”

6.1.5.3 Repetition

The third requirement that the respondents had for the simplification or reduction of the material was to remove repetition. Four thought that there was a need to, “cut out all repetition” because “[it] keeps repeating itself”, “the whole pack repeats itself”.

It is recommended that the written content of the Risk Assessment Process materials (modified for use by the SMEs for this trial) be reviewed for repetitious phrases or chunks of content. For example, the
Introduction contains all the ‘sales’ information needed to convince SMEs that there is a purpose and benefit to managing stress in the workplace. Therefore, there is no need for such information to be repeated elsewhere.

Another source of repetition needing removal related to the frequent reference to the key causes of stress, as stated by the Management Standards themselves. SMEs generally work to tight time schedules so this sort of repetition could be seen as an annoyance at best, and a complete deterrent at worst. This is actually true for most organisations; therefore, it is recommended a thorough review of the Risk Assessment Process materials to ensure that, for the SME audience at least, it is as concise as it can be without losing any vital information.

6.1.5.4 **No, don’t change anything**

In spite of the comments reported above, there were some respondents who thought the content of the Risk Assessment Process acceptable as it was. One respondent said that no simplification or reduction was need. Three others (4 in total) also thought that no reduction was needed but one of these did feel that the information would be better presented as one rather than three volumes.

6.1.6 **Benefits of using the Risk Assessment Process**

The SMEs were asked to provide free-response answers about what the benefits had been for them in using the Risk Assessment Process. The responses were all of a positive nature. Eight said it had highlighted areas of concern to them, and a selection of the responses provided includes:

“It highlighted a need for change within the business, such as culture change. It was a very useful way of communicating that. One of the major benefits to come out of this study was to flag up ‘communication’ between Management and the shopfloor as a major issue.”

“It highlighted areas where we did not realise we had a problem.”

“We now have a focus group and we have identified communication problems…”

“We identified our critical areas, it has given us a tool to work with and helped us to communicate and resolve issues with our whole team.”

All eight of the comments of this type were very encouraging for the Risk Assessment Process because it clearly demonstrates the practical application and acceptability for SMEs of the process and tools offered.

Three respondents said that the process had been positive for their internal self-image saying:

“We’ve had very positive feedback from staff concerning the company’s approach to stress management”

“It has ensured that the staff recognise that we see stress as an important issue.” And that,

“It has helped staff understand how they could feel stressed. It’s given everyone a model and has evolved effective management.”

One further benefit was identified by one respondent, themselves in a HR role rather than a managing director, being that,

“It provided me with the evidence of what I suspected. This enabled me to make the MD aware of the actual information.”
This last statement provides more evidence of the Risk Assessment Process’s potential for usefulness within SMEs. It offers a process and toolset that supports junior managers and HR staff deliver a calculated assessment of the ‘health’ of their company to senior managers. It is hypothesised, based on previously gained knowledge of SMEs, that the ability to produce a well-calculated and presented case for the need to change is more likely to influence the ‘time-poor’ company manager to invest (either intellectually or financially) in the required changes. This will then have benefits for both the business and the employees.

When asked if they thought the benefits of using the Risk Assessment Process outweighed any costs eight (80%) said ‘Yes’. Of those who did not, one (10%) said ‘No’ and the other one (10%) said they didn’t know.

6.1.7 The difficulties of using the Risk Assessment Process

The SMEs were asked if they had had trouble in applying the Risk Assessment Process. The question required a free-response answer. The responses provided were analysed for content. Being free-response answers there were sometimes two (though there could have been more) categories of content identified per response.

It was found that five respondents thought the Risk Assessment Process did not pose any difficulty. However, four respondents reported that the time needed to implement it did.

Getting employee buy-in was found to be difficult for two respondents, as was getting the questionnaires returned (two found difficulty with this).

One respondent said that managing the actions that came out of the process was difficult, whereas the process itself was straightforward. The quotes taken from three different respondents provides good examples of this range of recorded responses:

“Process itself is straightforward. Managing the actions was more difficult but is anyway.”

“No real difficulty, I had to chase up the return of the questionnaires.”

“None, very useful, just a problem finding the time to introduce it.”

“Time constraints and getting employees buy-in to the process.”

The responses provided highlight the issue of time constraint faced by SMEs and the level of commitment to taking part in this trial. This also provides some additional, overall, support for the Risk Assessment Process.

6.1.8 Elements of the materials SMEs will continue to use

The ultimate test for how accepted and usable the Management Standards were by SMEs was to ask them if they thought they would continue to use the material, or not, following the end of the trial.

SMEs were first asked if they thought they would continue to use the Risk Assessment Process and then asked what elements of the material they thought they would be most likely to use.

Six out of ten respondents thought they would continue to use the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process, with the remaining four participants stating that they were considering doing so.

SMEs were asked which elements of the material they were most likely to use in the future. Table 9 provides a reminder of the three books and the elements they contain. To record the response options
were given for single books and for the groups of books that were provided in the Risk Assessment Process material used for the trial.

Table 9 A reminder of the titles and content of each book used as the trial material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-Step Risk Assessment Process:</th>
<th>Tools &amp; Templates</th>
<th>Support &amp; Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Stress policy template</td>
<td>Solutions Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 to Step 5</td>
<td>Meetings guidance</td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Groups guidance</td>
<td>Are You Doing Enough?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indicator Tool</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action Plan template</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the ten respondents:

- Five believe they would use both the ‘5-step Risk Assessment Process’ and the ‘Tools and Templates’.
- Two respondents suggested they would continue to use the ‘Tools and Templates’ books as well as the ‘Support and Development’ material.
- Three respondents said they would be most likely to use all of the material provided.

The responses indicate that the ‘Tools and Templates’ material was the only material that all respondents thought they would continue to use. This finding is not surprising as much of the other material could have been absorbed into management processes, or learned. One of these two respondents (in the additional comments space provided) said,

“I may continue using it but it’s fairly obvious stuff, might refer back to it on occasions.”

Another respondent, when answering the question about whether or not anything should be simplified said,

“Once the subject is grasped the first book becomes practically redundant.”

6.1.9 Involvement of the employees

The Risk Assessment Process encourages companies and organisations to use a collaborative approach to tackling stress by emphasising the value of getting employees' views. Step 2 of the process informs the reader that it is not advisable to rely solely on the results of a survey, but that it is also necessary to have discussions with their staff to identify who may be harmed.

Therefore, questions were asked to determine how many SMEs had noted this information and if any effects could be detected from having done so, or not?

The results in Figure 5 show that five SME managers had involved their staff in ‘nearly all stages and decisions’, two managers had done so in ‘most stages and decisions’, and one manager each in ‘some stages and decisions’ ‘very few stages and decisions’ and ‘no stages and decisions’.
It was hypothesised that a lower level of staff involvement may have created an increase in the difficulty experienced, especially on getting staff buy-in that had been reported (to determine if the level of staff involvement had any effect on the difficulties found by SMEs who took part in the trial). To test this, a cross tabulation table was produced using SPSS, with the ‘levels of staff involvement’ and ‘difficulties found’. The data was then prepared for a Fisher two-by-two exact test by grouping the ‘difficulty’ data for good or bad content and the ‘levels’ data for high or low involvement. The test was manually carried out and differences were not found to be significant. Therefore, it is concluded that the level of staff involvement does not relate to the difficulties found. It might be supposed that such difficulties might arise at much lower levels of staff involvement than those encountered in this trial. However, it is considered that some SMEs in the trial did have low involvement level, so tending to counter this hypothesis.

6.1.10 Time taken implementing the process

The SMEs were asked to provide information about how many days they had taken, up to the final visit, in applying the Risk Assessment Process. The average number of days taken was nearly four (3.9) with a maximum of seven and a minimum of one. This is a low figure given the amount of reading required, and evidenced above. However, the one company who only took one day was a company that provides leadership and other management skills training. Therefore, this company was likely to be well versed in the basic content of the Risk Assessment Process, which may explain the minimal time required implementing its process.

6.1.11 Final comments SMEs made

The SMEs were given the opportunity to make any final comments that they wished to provide with a free-response question.

Examining the free-responses supplied by the SMEs three topics predominated.
First, there was evidence that the Risk Management Process material had been found to be useful and easy to absorb, and had produced definite benefits. This was identified from the following comment:

“We now hold regular shopfloor meetings which are assisting to resolve this problem. The Standards are not a solution in themselves but they back up and support management’s argument for dealing with certain issues.”

This provides a manager’s perspective of the benefits and ease of use of the material. The next quote provides a perspective from a junior member of staff with HR responsibilities.

“I have already absorbed the information in the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process (Book 1 containing the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and the Management Standards). The Support and Development section [volume] may help with submitting the results to senior management.”

Second, respondents expressed concern about the absence of guidance on stressors that are external to the work environment. This was a concern raised by many SMEs at the initial visit stage of the trial and for some the concern is still apparent. This is identified in the following comments:

“I would like to know how the questionnaire (the Indicator Tool) takes account of problems outside the workplace?”

“People’s stress at work is not always about the working environment. Therefore, there needs to be a recognition that stress, as felt by the individual, is not compartmentalised into home or work.”

This second comment was made by a person whose company provides training to health care professionals. They are well versed in the mechanisms of stress and deliver training that tackles the subject matter from a holistic viewpoint. It may not be feasible to separate the effects upon the individual of stress-invoking conditions at home from those at work. Also, managing external stress sources might be difficult issue because it may not be possible for an SME manager to influence domestic circumstances. There was evidence from the initial visits data, that some SMEs are aware of the significance on work performance of home-based stressors and consider it worthwhile to support an individual employee in dealing with the issue. Obviously, the nature of the issue would have an impact on how much the individual can be supported.

A comment made by another respondent might provide a possible solution to this problem:

“The focus [In the Pack] should be on well being, creating a positive climate and effective management rather than stress.”

Detailed consideration was encouraged of the emphasis of the message the Management Standards and Risk Assessment Process deliver. The need to manage stress continues to be important, but the method for achieving this in the UK’s broad-ranging business cultures may need to be sensitively adjusted to maximise the effectiveness with which the Risk Assessment Process reaches its target audiences.

The same respondent who suggested emphasising the positives that stem from applying the Risk Assessment Process also suggested a way of assisting SMEs to target their own workforce. This was to, “Have a downloadable PowerPoint presentation on the HSE website to use to introduce the subject to employees.” This suggestion is strongly endorsed and, if developed, such a presentation could reach and engage a wider SME audience.

Third, there was repeated feedback requesting the simplification and reduction of the material. This feedback was already collected in the final visit data about ‘helpfulness’ but clearly, some respondents really wanted to make sure this message was understood. One respondent said simply,
“The overriding message is simplify and abbreviate if you wish to get SME buy-in.”

Another made a comment implying the need to simplify and reduce the Risk Assessment Process, saying,

“The booklet ‘Tackling Work Related Stress – A managers guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being’ is more helpful in terms of being small and easy to read. If the questionnaire was built into that format – this would be a better solution.”

The sentiment behind this suggestion is endorsed. It is recommended that the booklet be reviewed with a view to incorporating the tools and templates available in the current Risk Assessment Process. It would also require the most relevant case study information and the addition of the Management Standards themselves. Interestingly, the same respondent who made this suggestion also said that the available case studies did not represent his company. Therefore, it is also recommended that the SMEs who took part in the trial be approached with a view to writing case study information from their own experiences. By supplementing, or substituting, the current case study information, HSE can ensure that the material provided appears relevant to a diverse range of employers.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINAL VISIT RESULTS

The final visit was made to the participating SME companies on average seven months after the initial visits. All ten companies who participated throughout the whole study had reached a minimum of Step 2 in the 5-Step Risk Assessment Process. Seven companies had reached Step 4 or 5. This was beyond expectations for the participants in this sample, and demonstrated a significant level of commitment to the Risk Assessment Process. The average time the SMEs had spent applying the process was 4 days and none of the 10 participating companies had needed any additional support to apply the process described.
By the final visit, nearly all of the participating respondents had used all of the different elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials. Reasons given why the individual elements of the material were perceived helpful to the SMEs were:

- The process was seen as practical and one the SMEs felt they could apply.
- The material was clear, simple and found to be easy to use, and
- The material was informative about what was needed.

Reasons SMEs provided for certain elements not being helpful included:

- Some of the material was common sense and so was not needed.
- Some of the material was too bureaucratic or formal in style.
- Some of the material wasn’t suited to a particular respondent’s company.
- Some of the material was thought to be unsuitable for smaller companies.

It can be seen that a range of opinions exist as to why respondents found the specific elements helpful or not. This reflects the range of size and management experience and competence found during this study when visiting the participating SME companies.

The elements that were found to be very helpful were the:

- Introduction
- Steps 1 to 4
- Stress Policy
- Indicator Tool
- Analysis Tool

Step 5 was found to be helpful by most, but two respondents thought it required more detail on how to carry out the ‘monitor and review’ part of the process.

There was more disagreement about the helpfulness of the following sections:

- Effective Meetings
- Focus Groups
- Action Plan
- Case Studies
- Solutions Development
- Are You Doing Enough?

The majority of participants did not think any additional material was needed, although some participants would have liked to see information about:

- What to do with the information the questionnaire results provide, and
- Alternative ways of finding out who might be harmed by stress.
The expressed desire for more information on what to do with the questionnaire results suggests that the recommendations for improvement already in the material need greater emphasis. Specifically, more emphasis is required on the need to discuss the process with staff and seek their input when working out the root causes and formulating solutions to sources of work-related stress.

Evaluation of the final visit results leads to a recommendation that the material should include a managers’ self-assessment tool, as they could be a potential key source of stress as well as subject to high levels of stress themselves.

Difficulties in applying the process to remote working or mobile staff also need to be considered further in future versions of the material; the company that operated in this way managed to get just 40% of their questionnaires returned. Unsurprisingly, that company found communication to be the biggest reported problem (anecdotal evidence provided from discussions with the BLCW advisor).

The inclusion of case studies in the Introduction or Step 2 material of the first volume is recommended to encourage the involvement of staff through focus groups even if they are remote from a central office. At least one company that took part in the trial is apparently fully committed to continuing the process and has used focus groups information as part of their application of it. This company would provide good case study evidence to other SMEs, particularly as this one only had 12 employees. Results above show that half of the companies involved their staff in nearly all of the stages and decisions made in applying the Risk Assessment Process.

Half of the participants (five) thought that the material would be better if presented in one book, instead of three: separating the process from the tools and other supporting information. Four said that there was too much repetition. It is suspected that this is due to the repeated ‘sales’ message in the material about the need to tackle work-related stress. However, further work is needed to validate this opinion.

Three respondents said the material did not need changing in any way. In reality, given the small sample size of ten, it is not truly possible to make conclusions about whether material should be added, or removed, or even if the three books should be amalgamated into one. However, had the trial presented the books as one large volume at the initial visit, it is likely that it would have been more difficult to ‘sell’ the whole approach to the SMEs.

For all but one SME, the benefits of applying the Risk Assessment Process had outweighed the costs of the time required to digest the information and then implement the process. The benefits had been:

- Highlighting areas where they had not realised there was a problem.
- Ensuring that the staff recognised that the management saw stress as an important issue, so improving their internal self-image.
- Enabling the Managing Director to inform staff of the problems that exist.
- Enabling human resources staff to make the managing director aware of stress-related issues and visa-versa.

One participant commented on the usability of the process by populations with English as a second language. It is recommended that this should be addressed and the reliability of the tools tested in such populations.
7 DISCUSSION

The overall response of the SMEs who took part in this study was favourable towards the Risk Assessment Process materials and their implementation. This conclusion is supported by a number of responses from the participants. These responses include the ratings of helpfulness, favourable statements supporting those ratings, the stated intention at the end of the study to continue using the materials, and a view that the benefits outweigh the costs for most respondents.

Participants did raise criticisms of the material. These criticisms related to specific elements of the material and the volume or repetition of information.

The participant responses show that very little of the material is viewed as irrelevant or not useful. However, the Action Plan Template clearly requires improvement.

Whilst the participants viewed the material as logical and helpful, they did raise criticisms about repetition throughout the material. By reapplying the Vectra criteria (used to restructure the material prior to the trial with SMEs), repetition could be systematically addressed and reduced. It is important to note that the criteria developed were to identify missing information in the Risk Assessment Process and supporting information. Nevertheless, the structure devised would facilitate rationalisation of the material, whilst ensuring all relevant information is maintained.

At the start of the study, SMEs’ initial impressions of the material were very important for the acceptance and adoption of that material. It was decided that to facilitate the introduction of the material to SMEs, the internet-based material (i.e. from the HSE web-site) was not suitable. The web pages were reviewed with the conclusion that there was information missing and that improved formatting and structure could be achieved through a printed version. The printed version was also easier to present to the SMEs in their work environment.

The amount of information available from HSE web pages was considerable and, when printed, was daunting in volume. It was thought that the sheer volume would be off-putting to busy SME managers. Therefore, the materials were divided into a three volume presentation pack; with the second volume providing tools supporting the risk assessment process described in the first and the third providing supporting information for making changes.

A further reason for producing paper-based material is that people’s assimilation and recollection of hard copy material is better than hyperlinked computer-based structure. One might suppose that online presentation would be an effective means to disguise the volume of material being presented (thereby overcoming the issue with volume of information). This is probably true. However, findings from educational psychology indicate that human performance on Internet navigation and subsequent recollection of material remains poorer when compared to linear hardcopy text format.

Further criticism of the pack concerned the volume of material; participants considered the volume of information too large. The sheer volume of material has an important negative effect on their first impressions. This conclusion is systematically borne out by the ratings obtained as the study progressed. Participants did not fall out from this study for this reason, but two factors present in the study mitigated this possibility. First, participants were pre-selected, because of their likely enthusiasm for using the materials (participants had an existing problem with stress). Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that they would be more highly motivated to continue steady participation than other representatives of typical SMEs would. Second, because measurements were being taken, it can be hypothesised that participants felt ‘under the spotlight’. Therefore, they were more likely to be driven to continue participating in the study.

However, despite the issues with volume of information, it is clear that ratings of helpfulness improved when users went from reading the material to implementing it.
It is very noticeable that the most favourably received elements of the material were the most concrete and directly applicable tools (i.e. the indicator and analysis tools). This clearly supports the view that SMEs prefer a prescribed method for undertaking assessments of this nature. Providing a clear and straightforward method means the SME manager can readily implement the process and is not required to spend what they would regard as unnecessary time and attention to understand the requirements and develop their own approach. The prescribed tools also reduce ambiguity; the manager knows what the regulator is expecting. On this basis, it seems likely that if other material could be made more prescriptive it would be more readily received and taken up. However, it is recognised that issues such as stress cannot be fully appreciated by formulaic assessment tools alone; the implementation of both the tools to understand and the remedial actions to address risks, require an understanding of the issues related to causes of stress.

Finally, it is clear that some SMEs would prefer to have a wider range of tools for addressing work-related stress than those currently included in the Risk Assessment Process materials. For example, one respondent suggested that an alternative to the questionnaire (notwithstanding its high desirability) would be beneficial. The provision of alternatives would not only assist SMEs in adopting a process best suited to their own circumstances but would fulfil their desire to have clearly prescribed methods and approaches. Perhaps, unlike larger companies, SMEs would be less confident in adopting their own alternative approach because they have neither the time to justify such an approach should they be inspected, nor the experience in health and safety to be confident that their arguments would be accepted.

Thus far, this discussion has concentrated on the findings relevant to the Risk Assessment Process materials. However, it is believed that HSE do not routinely evaluate the usability and acceptability of materials as this study has attempted to do. Accordingly, it is appropriate to record and discuss some methodological insights that would be relevant for comparable future studies.

One of the underlying intentions of this study was to capture detailed measurements of the uptake and use of a process devised by HSE within SMEs. This intention goes beyond many other ‘studies’ that generally capture high-level information about whether an organisation has received information (i.e. no attempt is made to determine how the information is greeted, perceived or applied in practice) (Stephens et al 2004). This study has met the intention and has demonstrated that the methodology used can produce valuable results. Such results enable the developers and regulators of the material to be satisfied with the material or amend it according to the feedback. However, the approach is time and resource intensive. This cost is however, unavoidable if the level of feedback and assessment required is to have meaning. This issue will arise for any similar HSE initiatives – how much resource and budget should be allocated to gaining systematic feedback about the uptake and effectiveness of that initiative?

Further methodological issues arise when one considers that studies of this kind should measure the health and safety changes that an initiative achieves. In this case, have the levels of occupational stress changed within the SMEs who used the Risk Assessment Process? Furthermore, will any change be sustained? Feedback from the SMEs suggests that the risk assessment process was helping them, but a more extended longitudinal study would be necessary to address issues of sustainability. Again, this methodological issue is one of resource, rather than the actual method used.

There are some specific methodological issues related to this study that are discussed next.

The original intention of this study had been to present the materials to SMEs in a neutral fashion, so that measurements could be taken on the uptake of materials based upon ‘first face’ opinion. If the outcome of this study is considered to be representative, it would be predicted that approximately half of those encountering the Risk Assessment Process would adopt it. In practice, this proportion is probably optimistic (remember that the SME participants had been pre-selected for this study). However, because appropriate data on opinions and usage of materials such as these can only be gained if the substance of the material is applied in practice, it is necessary for an economic study to
have willing participants. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies of this kind should also be supplemented by an initial uptake study, which seeks to establish whether people approached would apparently be willing to use the materials. In this circumstance, it would also be necessary for them to believe that if they said they would use materials there was a good probability that they would in practice.

For this study, it was hoped that measurements could be taken that would differentiate between a respondent’s opinions of the different sections of the material before and after they used them (i.e. what their opinion was on reading the material and their opinion once they tried using the material). Capturing this opinion is important to determine if the material provided is ‘attractive’ to the potential user and then if the content itself is helpful in practical application. Trying to measure these opinions appeared to be straightforward initially, however in practice the transition between initial impressions and adoption of the material to the use was not a clear and unambiguous change. Most respondents displayed some degree of tentative exploration in the period between initially reading the material to apprise themselves of its content and the point where the implement the process suggested by, or adopted from, the materials provided.

To achieve a before and after measure it is suggested that future study should have more pronounced intervention than this one. In particular, it is recommended that participants should be asked not to use the material until they have read all of it and then report on its perceived helpfulness. If such a condition can be achieved then it will be possible to provide a measure of relative helpfulness of the material. In addition, the measure of helpfulness used in this study could be employed by respondents in a self-completion questionnaire to be filled in at the end of reading a modular section of material. It is suggested that subsequent measures of helpfulness should only be taken when the material is actually being implemented in practice and therefore, the rating of helpfulness is then clearly associated with the application of the process rather than its perceived helpfulness through reading alone or reading in conjunction with tentative exploration and application.

The rating of helpfulness was applied using a unipolar scale (ranging from ‘not at all helpful’ to ‘extremely helpful’). It would be interesting to pilot the application of a bipolar scale ranging from ‘extremely unhelpful’ through a neutral point to ‘extremely helpful’. No systematic cross-tabulated ratings of helpfulness with their corresponding positive or negative explanations for a rating has been used. However, it seems likely that the scale might be considered somewhat biased by some respondents, however, and interestingly, it is clear that some respondents favourably rated material on the helpfulness scale but still offered negative comments. Therefore, this methodological issue remains unclear.

Finally, at a later stage in the study, the usefulness of gauging the stage that respondents had reached was established by asking them to report on the material that had been applied and used in practice. It is believed that this should be repeated in future studies to establish what extent the material had been read as to what degree the respondent felt they had digestive that material as well as the stage reached in implementation of the processes described within the material.
8 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key recommendations are made to enhance the acceptability and usability of the Risk Assessment Process in the SME business sector.

8.1 TO ENSURE UNAIDED BUY-IN BY SMES

To ensure the Risk Assessment Process is able to sell itself without the use of an introductory agent, such as Business Link Cheshire and Warrington, or Vectra, the following is recommended:

• Seek to reduce the volume of information within the Risk Assessment Process materials (e.g. some reduction can be achieved through removal of repetitious text from the current material).
• Consider combining the information into one volume.
• Insert carefully considered and relevant case studies into the Introduction.
• Obtain case study material to provide examples of the benefits realised by the SMEs that took part in this trial and add these to the Introduction.

One general recommendation is made to improve the initial attractiveness of the Risk Assessment Process. BLCW’s advisor and several of the SME managers visited also made this recommendation.

The recommendation is that HSE consider renaming the Management Standards for Work-related Stress with a name that emphasises its potential to improve business performance, which in turn would lead to greater profitability.

This recommendation has come about because of the recognition that the Risk Assessment Process in fact offers a process that is essentially a good business management process. A number of the companies that visited during this study were reluctant to raise ‘stress’ as an issue for fear of people using it as an excuse for absenteeism or pursuing a compensation claim. However, when the benefits of the process were explained as a useful business management tool, many SME managers appeared to feel more comfortable about looking at the material.

Renaming the Risk Assessment Process could place more emphasis on its ability to increase the performance potential of a company or organisation through improvement management practices. Doing so would enable HSE to meet its obligations to the Government, by providing a process that will help companies and organisations to manage work-related stress, but negate the need to place emphasis on the subject so formally.

8.2 TO ENSURE THE GREATEST USABILITY

To ensure that the Risk Assessment Process is usable by as many SMEs as possible the following recommendations are made:

• Develop methods for Step 2 “Decide who might be harmed and how” that are independent of the Indicator Tool but are still attractive to the "time-poor" SME manager.
• Develop guidance on what to do, in practical terms, to take the results of surveys forward, that is, Step 3. For some SMEs this information may need to be spelt out in a more prescriptive way, in particular the benefits of employee involvement should be included.
8.3 TO ENSURE AN IMPROVEMENT IN VALIDITY

To ensure that the Risk Assessment Process captures all the root causes of stress in the workplace the following are recommended:

- Develop and incorporate a self-assessment tool for self-administration by a manager. One potential source of stress within an organisation is the manager. Therefore, if the managers can be persuaded to take a look at their own behaviour first, and gain a better understanding of the impact their attitudes and behaviours can have on their workforce, then a greater improvement in a company’s business performance may be achieved.
- Develop a self-assessment and self help section targeted at any stress the managers may themselves be experiencing.
- Develop a section in the Introduction that draws more attention to the benefits and rationale of including employees in overall processes.
- Include information about identifying and dealing with workplace bullies.
- Include tools and advice for geographically diverse SMEs (i.e. employees in remote locations).
- Check the validation process that was used for the Indicator and Analysis Tools to find out if it was validated with the inclusion of British populations for whom English is a second language.
- Publish the Risk Assessment Process in a range of languages that would be encountered amongst UK-based workforces.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH ELEMENT OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The following recommendations are made about the individual elements of the Risk Assessment Process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Enrich with information about the benefits of employee involvement, plus case study examples from this study of the costs and benefits of implementing the Risk Assessment Process. Seek to reduce the volume of information, but maintain a clear overview of the entire process and supporting information contained with the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Retain, but review the overall layout of the material and the flow into the Management Standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Enrich with alternative method(s) to the Indicator Tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Review, develop and supplement with material that offers a “What to do if” decision chart and linked information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Retain, but consider whether this Step could be integrated with the other Steps (in the study, Step 4 was not viewed as a ‘step’ in its own right).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Review, develop and supplement with practical methods for monitoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Policy</td>
<td>Include material relating to the potential stress that a manager may experience (the study respondents thought the Stress Policy template was biased toward employees). Consider introducing a policy template that is tailored to SMEs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Retain, but apply editorial ‘polishing’ and include further detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Retain, but consider a title change to make it sound less intimidating to SME managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator Tool</td>
<td>Retain and provide in additional languages. Consider amalgamating as one tool with the Analysis Tool; evidence shows this is not used independently of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Tool</td>
<td>Retain and provide in additional languages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Action Plan | Add specific dialogue about using SMART goals. Consider tailoring the information for SMEs (respondents thought that the Action Plan was not suitable for their (SME) business.
---|---
Solutions Development | Retain but modify to accommodate companies with remote working practices.
Case Studies | Review for relevance to the SME sector and update with case studies from the participants of the current study. The current material lacks detail of what was done and how stress was reduced.
Are You Doing Enough? | Obtain further detail from recent users of the Risk Assessment Process (respondents for this study had limited exposure to this section of the material, so only limited data was collected).

### 8.5 METHODOLOGY

The overall methodological approach used in this study was successful in gathering direct feedback from SMEs about the acceptability and usefulness of the Risk Assessment Process. Therefore, it is recommended that future HSE evaluations of the take up and efficacy of health and safety initiative consider adopting such an approach. However, it is recognised that gathering data in this way is costly and takes a long time (ideally this study should continue to follow up the SMEs to see if the processes have become integrated into general management practice).
9 CONCLUSIONS

The SME managers that participated in this study were well motivated to tackle stress. Generally, these managers viewed taking action against work-related stress as an important part of their routine business management duties.

The Risk Assessment Process was well received by these managers, who liked the structured approach provided to assess their organisation. Indeed, the process of assessing risk in five steps was so well understood by some of these managers that, at the end of the trial, they said this information had become redundant (i.e. they had absorbed the material and integrated it into their management practices). This comment provides a testament to the overall usability of the material.

The elements of the Risk Assessment Process materials with the highest ‘buy-in’ were the Indicator and Analysis Tools, both of which offer the ‘time poor’ SME manager quick and easy methods for identifying problems.

The majority of participating SME managers thought that the business benefits of implementing the Risk Assessment Process outweighed the costs of implementation. Some SMEs were able to identify suspected work-related stress through using the Risk Assessment Process and effectively used the suggested mechanisms for discussing the issues either with their employees (or with higher management, where this was applicable). In other cases, where the participants had thought the company was free from problems, hidden issues were identified that may have otherwise remained an unrevealed source of work-related stress.

The SMEs who took part in this trial were able to implement the process provided in the Risk Assessment Process materials without support beyond that required to sustain the special conditions of the trial. Although the small sample size precluded detailed statistical analysis and conclusions, it was possible to identify areas for improving the Risk Assessment Process material. These improvements focus on reducing the volume of material, generally through removing redundant material –especially that ‘selling’ the importance of tackling stress- and some additional material covering for self-assessment or SME specific case studies.

Taking all the results of this longitudinal study together, it is concluded that SMEs can successfully apply the materials unaided to conduct a structured risk assessment process for work-related stress and then to identify improvements for reducing that stress and benefiting their business.
10 REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INITIAL BUY-IN QUESTIONNAIRE
Initial Buy-in Questionnaire

Details
Name of company:

Contact name:

Contact telephone number (s):

Preliminary questions

a) Are you the manager of your organisation? Yes ☐ No ☐

b) Do you have the authority to implement management changes in your organisation? Yes ☐ No ☐

c) If you answered no to both questions above, could you provide me with an interview with a, or, the person who has such authority? Yes ☐ No ☐

Name of person:
Name of person:
Detail of arrangements:
Detail of arrangements:
Main questions

Questions A1 – A7 are about your previous experience of managing stress in the workplace (as the SME manager, or, person with authority for implementing health and safety management changes in the SME manager organisation).

Questions A8 – A11 are about the Pack.

Experience of managing stress in the workplace

A1. How motivated do you feel to tackle stress at the moment?

Show the person the scorecard now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly motivated</th>
<th>Fairly well motivated</th>
<th>Somewhat motivated</th>
<th>Only slightly motivated</th>
<th>Not at all motivated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A2. Do you have any particular concerns about stress at present? Yes ☐ No ☐

A3. If YES, what concerns about stress do you have?

A4. Have you tried previously, to tackle stress in your organisation? Yes ☐ No ☐

If NO, please go to question A8.
A5. What interventions (ways of tackling stress) have you tried in the past?

A6. To what extent did your interventions bring the expected benefits to your business?

Show the person the scorecard now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fell well short of expectations</th>
<th>Fell somewhat short of expectations</th>
<th>Met expectations</th>
<th>Somewhat exceeded expectations</th>
<th>Greatly exceeded expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A7. How cost effective would you say your interventions have been?

By cost I mean things like, the time and resource spent, compared with the reduction in sick time taken, or increase in productivity gained.

Show the person the scorecard now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely cost effective</th>
<th>Very cost effective</th>
<th>Somewhat cost effective</th>
<th>Somewhat costly</th>
<th>Very costly</th>
<th>Extremely costly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The next questions are about the Pack.

A8. Do you think the Pack will be beneficial to your business?

Yes [ ]  No [ ]  Don't Know [ ]

A9. In what ways do you think the Pack will be beneficial or not?
A10. Are there any parts of the Pack that you feel will be immediately useful to you?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know ☐

A11. If YES, what parts do you feel will be immediately useful to you?

Please put a tick against the appropriate parts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-Step Risk Assessment Process folder</th>
<th>Tools and Templates folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Stress Policy template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Step Risk Assessment Process (as a process)</td>
<td>How to Manage Effective Meetings guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards (as indicators of risk)</td>
<td>How to Organise &amp; Run Focus Groups guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Standards (as evaluation goals)</td>
<td>HSE Indicator Tool – questionnaire survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HSE Analysis Tool – questionnaire results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action Plan template</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support and Development folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions Development - guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Doing Enough – guidance for continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire with me.
APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BUY-IN OF THE PACK
Follow-up Questionnaire for Buy-in of the Pack

Date:

Dear

First of all, thank you for agreeing to take part in this trial. We at Vectra (who are overseeing the trial on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)) are aware that you are often short of time and resources. Therefore we greatly appreciate your time and effort in agreeing to help.

The trial is a test of HSE’s Management Standards Pack for assessing and managing work-related stress. This is the first trial of the Management Standards in small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, your early feedback by this questionnaire is important.

Your opinions of the Pack will inform its future development and, or, the way in which help is provided to organisations like yours. Please help us in this part of the study by completing the questionnaire attached. The questionnaire has just 12 questions and is expected to take you no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Please be reassured that no details about your organisation, or you in particular, will be made available to HSE. All personal information with which you provide us will be treated with complete confidentiality.

Thank you for your time and effort given in answering these questions, which we hope you will do two weeks from our first meeting. Please return this to Vectra Group Ltd in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Vectra’s Representative will contact you as a reminder, near this time. Once again, your help is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Gaskell

Vectra Group Ltd
Europa House
310 Europa Boulevard
Gemini Business Park
Westbrook
Warrington
WA5 7YQ
Please Enter Your Details

Name of company:

Your name:

Instructions

Please answer all the questions on this form as directed by it.

Questions B1 – B7 are about your experience of managing stress in your current organisation.

B1. How motivated do you feel to tackle stress at the moment?

Please tick one box only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly motivated</th>
<th>Fairly well motivated</th>
<th>Somewhat motivated</th>
<th>Only slightly motivated</th>
<th>Not at all motivated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

B2. Do you have any particular concerns about stress at present?  
Yes ☐ No ☐

B3. If YES, what concerns about stress do you have?

B4. Have you tried previously, to tackle stress in you organisation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If NO, please go to question B8.
B5. What interventions (ways of tackling stress) have you tried in the past?

B6. To what extent did your interventions bring the expected benefits to your business?

Please tick one box only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fell well short of expectations</th>
<th>Fell somewhat short of expectations</th>
<th>Met expectations</th>
<th>Somewhat exceeded expectations</th>
<th>Greatly exceeded expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

B7. How cost effective would you say your interventions have been?

By ‘cost’, I mean things like, the time and money spent, compared with the reduction in sick time taken, or increase in productivity gained.

Please tick one box only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely cost effective</th>
<th>Very cost effective</th>
<th>Somewhat cost effective</th>
<th>Somewhat costly</th>
<th>Very costly</th>
<th>Extremely costly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The next questions are about the Pack.

B8. Do you think that Pack will be beneficial to your business?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

B9. In what ways do you think the Pack will be beneficial or not?

B10. Are there any parts of the Pack that you feel will be immediately useful to you?

Yes ☐ No ☐

B11. If YES, what parts do you feel will be immediately useful to you?

Please put a tick against the appropriate parts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-Step Risk Assessment Process folder r</th>
<th>Tools and Templates folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Action Plan template</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support and Development folder

| Solutions Development - guidance | 11 |
| Case Studies                    | 12 |
| Are You Doing Enough – guidance for continuous improvement | 13 |

B12. How do you feel about this statement: “The Pack will be usable without external assistance.”

Please tick one box only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Thank you for your time and effort given in answering these questions. Your help is very much appreciated.

Please return this to Vectra Group Ltd in the prepaid envelope provided.
APPENDIX C: MID-TERM QUESTIONNAIRE
Mid-term Questionnaire

Instructions for use:

Please ensure that you have read through this questionnaire prior to conducting the interview with the SME manager paying particular attention to the instructions for question C8 to C22

This interview should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes and all the information is recorded using these recording sheets. We appreciate that you have a greater knowledge and understanding of the SMEs participating in this study, therefore, please make any additional notes that you feel are of interest following the meeting.
Questions:

C1. Have you started using the Pack since receiving it?  

Yes ☐ No ☐

If YES, please go to question C5.

C2. Please tell me what the reasons are.
C3. Are you planning to use the Pack in the future?  
Yes [ ]  No [ ]

C4. If YES, how do you plan to do so?

Instruction: Thank the SME manager for his (her) time and valuable information.
**Instruction:** Show the scales sheet to the SME manager

C5. Please tell me how difficult or easy you have found the Pack to use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely difficult 1</th>
<th>Very difficult 2</th>
<th>Somewhat difficult 3</th>
<th>Neither easy nor difficult 4</th>
<th>Somewhat easy 5</th>
<th>Very easy 6</th>
<th>Extremely easy 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C6. Can you describe what makes the Pack EASY to use, if anything?


C7. Can you describe what makes the Pack DIFFICULT to use, if anything?
Instruction:

The next questions are about the parts of the Pack the SME has used and what they think about those individual parts.

Please treat each part of the Pack, identified on the following sheets, as an individual question. For each part of the Pack you will need to ask the SME manager:

(a) Have you used…(which ever part of the Pack it applies to)…?

(b) How helpful have you found this? Please use the scale.

(c) Can you tell me why?

Please record the answers in the table provided below.

For example:

*Question C8a – In the 5-Step Risk Assessment Folder: Have you used the Introduction? Question C8b – How helpful have you found this? Question C8c – Can you tell me why?*

*Show the SME manager the scales sheet for questions C8b to C22b*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptionally</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Reasonably</th>
<th>Only Slightly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Record table for questions C8 to C22.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-Step Risk Assessment Process</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
<th>Reason Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C8**

Introduction

**C9**

Step 1: Identify the hazards.

**C10**

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-Step Risk Assessment Process</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
<th>Reason Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C11</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Evaluate the risk and take action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C12</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Record your findings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C13</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Monitor and review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools and Templates</td>
<td>Used</td>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>Reason Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C14</strong></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Policy template</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C15</strong></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Manage Effective Meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C16</strong></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Organise &amp; Run Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools and Templates</td>
<td>Used</td>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>Reason Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C17  HSE Indicator Tool – questionnaire survey</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C18  HSE Analysis Tool – questionnaire results</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C19  Action Plan template</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and Development</td>
<td>Used</td>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>Reason Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C20 Solutions Development - guidance</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C21 Case Studies</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C22 Are You Doing Enough – guidance for continuous improvement</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Instruction:** Show the SME manager the scales sheet

C23. How do you feel about this statement?

> "If help was not available to me when using the Pack I would be unlikely to continue trying to use it"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C24. Have you received help in using the Pack? Yes [ ] No [ ]

C25. What help have you had? Please answer this even though it may be me (Ron) who has asked this question and provided you with help.
C26. What, if anything, do you think is missing from the current Pack?

C27. Have you identified any problem areas, so far, during your use of the Pack? Yes □ No □

C28. What are you planning to do about any problem areas that you have identified?
C29. What do you think the main costs will be, or have been, for using the Pack? This does not necessarily mean the costs in terms of financial outlay (e.g. how much time has it taken?).

C30. Do you think the benefits of using the Pack will outweigh the costs?  

Yes ☐ No ☐
C31. In using the Pack have you experienced any outcomes that you consider are particularly negative? Yes ☐  No ☐

C32. What have these been?

(a)

On behalf of Vectra:

Thank you very much for giving up your time, it is appreciated.
APPENDIX D: FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE – MANAGEMENT STANDARDS IN SMES
Final Questionnaire –
Management Standards in SMEs

Vectra has been carrying out a trial of the Health and Safety Executive’s Management Standards in SMEs. This is your third and final interview as part of this trial. We would like to reassure you that, all information you provide in this questionnaire will be treated as confidential and your anonymity will be protected when reporting our findings.

This questionnaire should take 20 – 30 minutes to complete and all the information is recorded using these sheets.
D1. Please tick the box for the **one** row that best describes which stage you are at in the Management Standards process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not looked at the Management Standards yet.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the Introduction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read Step 1: Understood the Management Standards targets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
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<td>As above</td>
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<td>As above</td>
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<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented Step 2: Identified the risks of stress in my company.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented Step 3: Analyzed the risks, and planned what to do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented Step 4: Completed records.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented Step 5 Reviewed my company’s progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D2. Are you any further along the Management Standards process than the last time you were visited?   Yes ☐ No ☐
Instructions for the next section of the Survey

For D3 – D17 please consider each part of the Management Standards individually and provide your rating of helpfulness for each.

To help you decide if your opinion has changed since last time, your last ratings of helpfulness have been entered.

Where you hadn’t used the part and formed an opinion on its helpfulness, we have indicated this by ‘0’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceptionally helpful</td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>Reasonably helpful</td>
<td>Only slightly helpful</td>
<td>Not at all helpful</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, for D3-D17 please give us the main reason why you have given that rating. Use one of the numbered reasons below or give your own answer.

The material ……

1. Is clear simple & easy to use
2. Is common sense so the material is not needed
3. Is a practical process we can apply
4. Is an unneeded process because we already have a suitable one
5. Is informative about what is needed
6. Describes a time saving process
7. Is not suitable for our company
8. Is a logical process to do
9. Is too bureaucratic and formal in its expression
10. Is an entirely suitable process for our needs
11. Is not sufficiently detailed to use

The helpfulness ratings and reasons why are available separately on a laminated sheet for ease of reference.
Please enter the number from the list above that most applies, or provide your own answer to each part below.

| Part of Management Standards | Used Y/N | Previous rating, 0, or missing | Current rating | Please tell us why:  
Please enter the number of the one response you agree with most or provide your own answer. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D3. Introduction</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4. Step 1: Identify the hazards.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5. Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6. Step 3: Evaluate the risk and take action.</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7. Step 4: Record your findings</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of Management Standards</td>
<td>Used Y/N</td>
<td>Previous rating, 0, or missing</td>
<td>Current rating</td>
<td>Please tell us why: Please enter the number of the one response you agree with most or provide your own answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D8. Step 5: Monitor and review</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no. Your own answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D9. Stress Policy template</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no. Your own answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D10. How to Manage Effective Meetings guidance</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no. Your own answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D11. How to Organise &amp; Run Focus Groups guidance</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no. Your own answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D12. HSE Indicator Tool – questionnaire survey</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no. Your own answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of Management Standards</td>
<td>Used Y/N</td>
<td>Previous rating, 0, or missing</td>
<td>Current rating</td>
<td>Please tell us why: Please enter the number of the one response you agree with most or provide your own answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE Analysis Tool – questionnaire results</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan template</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions Development - guidance</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Doing Enough – guidance for continuous improvement</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Response no.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D18. Since the last visit, have you felt you needed any help in using the Management Standards pack or finding solutions for problems identified as a result of using it?  

Yes ☐  No ☐  

If no, go to D20

D19. Did you seek help? If, yes, what help did you receive?

D20. Is there any additional information you would like to see in future versions of the Management Standards? If so, what?
D21. Is there anything you’d simplify? If so, what?

D22. Is there any information you’d reduce? If so, how?
D23. How much time, as an estimate, have you and your company taken to apply the Management Standards process (days or hours)?

D24. What have the benefits of using the Management Standards been?

D25. Do you think the benefits of using the Management Standards have outweighed the costs? Yes ☐ No ☐
D26. What difficulties, if any, have you found when applying the Management Standards process?

D27. In how many stages and decisions to date have you involved staff in implementing the Management Standards process?

*Tick the most appropriate box on the scale.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No stages or decisions</td>
<td>Very few stages or decisions</td>
<td>Some stages or decisions</td>
<td>Most stages or decisions</td>
<td>Nearly all stages and decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D28. Will you continue to use the Management Standards process after this trial or not?

Yes ☐  Maybe ☐  No ☐  Don’t know ☐
D29. Please indicate which parts, if any, you are most likely to continue using?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likely to use (√ yes)</th>
<th>Optional comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 5-Step Risk Assessment Process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tools and Templates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Support and Development section</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D30 Do you have any other comments?

(b)

We are very grateful for the time and effort you and your company have put into helping us assess the suitability of the Management Standards for use by SMEs. You can be assured that the information provided will be acted upon to help other organisations such as yours manage the risk of stress effectively. If you have any further comments or queries on this trial please telephone:

Liz Gaskell at Vectra on 01925 444xxx.
## Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLCW</td>
<td>Business Link Cheshire and Warrington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department for Trade and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health and Safety Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small to Medium-sized Enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>Survey Self-reported Work-related Illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRS</td>
<td>Work Related Stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The suitability of HSE’s risk assessment process and management standards for use in SMEs

HSE developed Management Standards, a 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and supporting information for tackling high levels of work-related stress in large organisations. This report details the measured acceptability of a trial-specific adaptation of this guidance for Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Distinct elements in HSE guidance were identified and then considered using specific criteria for SME suitability for inclusion into one of three printed volumes: 1) justification and process description, 2) analysis & recording tools, 3) supporting information.

Ten SMEs applied the guidance in a longitudinal study over at least seven months. This used interview administered questionnaires with one respondent from each SME. These measured initial buy-in, then acceptability midway and at the end for each element. Initial ratings of usefulness and acceptability for elements were favourable. These rose further still with familiarity and practical application.

Redundant information reduction and more emphasis on business benefits is recommended to enhance the initial buy-in. Structure and content amendments, the inclusion of personal self-assessment tools and case studies relevant to SMEs, are also recommended. It is concluded that SMEs can successfully apply the materials unaided to conduct a structured risk assessment process and identify improvements that reduce stress and benefit their business.

This report and the work it describes were funded by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Its contents, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect HSE policy.