

Example risk assessment on work-related stress in a medium-sized business on several sites

Setting the scene

This business runs a residential school for adults with learning difficulties spread over several sites. There is a main college building where 20 students live with care workers and 10 smaller houses where 3 students live with care workers.

A few employees in the smaller houses have said they feel stressed, as they have too much responsibility and not enough support from managers. Some students have complex problems which create additional stress. The manager responsible for health and safety agreed with the management board of the college that they should assess the risk and consider taking action.

How the risk assessment was done

The manager followed the guidance at www.hse.gov.uk/risk.

- To identify whether there was a problem, the manager:
 - looked at HSE's stress web pages at www.hse.gov.uk/stress, to learn about stress risk factors;
 - talked to members of staff to listen to their concerns and opinions about stress in the workplace;

- spoke to the trade union;
- checked sickness absence records and other records relating to staff turnover, exit interviews or complaint/incident reports etc.
- She then wrote down who was at risk of being harmed and how.
- The manager wrote down what controls, if any, were in place to manage these risks. Where she didn't consider existing controls good enough, she wrote down what else needed to be done to control the risk.
- She discussed the findings with senior staff, staff/trade unions and emailed the risk assessment to all employees to seek agreement, making staff aware of the changes and purpose, getting buy-in from them. She put it into practice, making sure that each identified action was done and ticking each one off as it was completed. She also updated the induction process for new staff and internal policies affected by the changes.
- She decided to review the new provisions regularly and update the risk assessment every year or straightaway if any major changes in the workplace happened.

Important reminder

This example risk assessment is not a generic risk assessment that you can just put your company name on and adopt wholesale without any thought. This would not satisfy the law – and would not be effective in protecting people. Every business is different – you need to think through the hazards and controls required in your business for yourself.

Date of risk assessment: 17/03/17

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Demands	All staff but particular attention to care workers and others directly supporting students with complex problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Understanding what work-related stress is and what can cause it ■ Making sure that staff don't have to support too many students and reducing the number where these students have complex problems ■ Looking for signs of stress in employees ■ Talking to employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitoring case loads ■ Planning work to manage demands ■ Taking on extra resource at busier times of year (eg term time) ■ Talking to employees regularly to gather information, directly or via managers ■ People may not identify time off sick as stress, so thinking about whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is an area/job that has high amounts of absence - employees complain about working in a particular area or doing a particular job 			
Control	Staff working away from the main site All staff, if they are not involved in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Talking to all staff about how they feel about their work ■ Having regular team meetings at the main site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review sickness absence data and your risk assessment with employees – asking what they think can be done and feeding back on these issues and ideas 			
Support	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training managers in spotting early signs of stress and how to manage it ■ Providing details of employee assistance services for staff ■ Staff can talk to managers if they are feeling stressed at work ■ Staff are supported on return to work after a period off with work-related stress ■ Training staff to manage issues around lone working and how to get support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training managers in supporting staff suffering from work-related stress ■ Having a clear commitment to employee wellbeing and a culture of openness ■ Reminding staff they can speak confidentially to managers or supervisors if they are feeling stressed at work ■ Putting a structured support policy in place, eg after an incident of violence 			
Relationships	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training managers in promoting a positive working culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sometimes managers may be part of the problem so having a range of routes for feedback can be really helpful ■ Setting up an online community for staff ■ Build up teams, perhaps have identified buddies 			

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Role	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Defining all team roles ■ Staff understanding what their duties and responsibilities are ■ Discussions on performance, expectations and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Thinking about whether any staff are particularly vulnerable, eg those working alone, young workers ■ Investigating whether there are roles where it is difficult to recruit or retain staff 			
Change	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Making sure changes are communicated openly, before they are made if possible, so everyone understands the effects they will have ■ Monitoring effects of changes on stress levels so staff have the chance to provide feedback ■ Establishing training needs following the change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clearly communicating results of inspections and the resulting changes to all sites ■ Acting on staff feedback so any new pressures linked to changes are discussed ■ Develop a feedback route for people who feel they need retraining ■ Recognise that even minor changes can have knock-on effects – consulting beforehand may reduce the negatives 			

Assessment review date: 17/03/18

You should review your risk assessment if anything changes (eg following a case of stress-related ill health in the workplace or if there are any significant changes, such as new work activities).

For more information see www.hse.gov.uk/stress.