
Policy: Management of stress at work

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. This policy defines WINNS Services Management of stress at work to ensure it meets requirements.
- 1.2. The Operations Director is responsible for implementation and management of the Management of stress at work

Rev.	Date	Nature of Changes	Approved By
1	27 February 2018	Original issue.	C Stebbing
2	7th September 2021	General Updates	C Stebbing

2. POLICY: Management of stress at work

WINNS is committed to promoting a healthy and supportive working environment. WINNS believes that its people are its most important asset and that their well-being is essential to effective work performance and the provision of high quality services.

3. Aims of the Policy

- 3.1. To recognise that action to prevent stress is far more effective than dealing with it once it has arisen.
- 3.2. To establish guidelines for managers on the prevention and identification of work-related stress, and to encourage members of staff that are experiencing unacceptable levels of stress to seek assistance and receive the advice and support they need.
- 3.3. To maximise the physical and psychological well-being of all members of staff.
- 3.4. To encourage the creation of a working environment in which employees and managers actively identify opportunities to enhance employee well-being.
- 3.5. To promote a healthy and safe environment which fosters a culture of trust, co-operation and mutual respect, and within which all members of staff treat each other with dignity.
- 3.6. To develop a culture that is supportive and non-judgemental of people with mental health problems.
- 3.7. To reduce as far as reasonably practicable and, where possible, prevent risks to mental health in relation to work.

4. What is stress?

Stress is what we experience when we feel we cannot cope with the pressures and demands placed on us. We all vary in our capacity to cope with different levels or types of pressure. Working life inevitably involves periods of high demand, deadlines and pressures. Some pressure, even when high, can be positive and is frequently challenging and motivating. Responding effectively to this kind of pressure can lead to job satisfaction. However, when pressure reaches a level we cannot cope with, we may experience negative stress. This may

also occur when there is too little pressure or challenge to motivate us. It is important to remember that some level of stress is a normal aspect of everyday life. However, the harmful effects of stress, particularly when chronic, are now regarded as having a significant negative impact on the overall physical and psychological well-being of individuals. This policy document is concerned with those negative and harmful aspects of stress.

5. How does WINNS aim to reduce work-related stress levels?

By following good principles of job design, allowing individuals some control over their work and the ability to call upon support and advice when necessary.

- 5.1. By providing a safe and healthy environment in which to work.
- 5.2. By providing a workplace free from harassment, bullying and victimisation.
- 5.3. By sound management practice based on equality of treatment and respect for diversity.
- 5.4. By effective planning, workload allocation and feedback on performance.
- 5.5. By encouraging staff to maintain and improve their physical and psychological health.
- 5.6. By offering support to staff through the line manager, and through other relevant services, including those run by external agencies, where appropriate.
- 5.7. By ensuring good communication throughout WINNS.
- 5.8. By providing information and training to enable staff to develop their skills and confidence and hence maximise their contribution to the success of WINNS.

6. The Legal Position

- 6.1. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.
- 6.2. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employers have a duty to assess the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed at work.
- 6.3. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on account of their disability as defined under the Act. This involves making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or to the way the work is done, if the existing working arrangements or physical features place the disabled person concerned at a substantial disadvantage. Long-term ill health arising from, or exacerbated by, stress at work may constitute a disability under the Act.
- 6.4. Ill health resulting from stress caused at work has to be treated in the same way as ill health due to physical causes in the workplace. This means that employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that health is not put at risk through excessive and/or sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, or from the day-to-day demands placed on their workforce.

7. Risk Assessment

It is legally incumbent upon WINNS to assess the nature and scale of risk to the health of its staff in order to take appropriate preventative and protective steps. This assessment should include the mental pressures of each job in an effort to minimise the risks to health in the workplace. Such assessments will take into account as far as reasonably possible and to the extent to which managers are aware, non-work pressures that may make employees more vulnerable to developing stress from pressures at work. They should also be taken into account when deciding on the criteria for selection to jobs known to be characterised by periods of high demand.

Changes in capacity to cope with stress may be affected by a variety of non-work factors: e.g. general physical and psychological health, home circumstances, and unexpected or traumatic life events. An individual's ability to cope will depend on health, stability in work, domestic and social life. Normally, an individual will cope if problems arise in one area but can be overwhelmed by more than this. It is likely that only in the event of an acute life-threatening event (real or perceived) will a single cause result in significant stress.

Assessment of the risks associated with work stress should aim to identify:

- 7.1. Factors that are likely to lead to stress;
- 7.2. Whether these factors are currently causing stress;
- 7.3. Employees/occupational groups at particular risk of experiencing stress;
- 7.4. Steps that are required to eliminate or reduce risk;
- 7.5. The nature of existing preventative measures.

The principles of risk assessment associated with work-related stress are the same as for other forms risk assessment. However, the approach differs in that there is a need to take due account of an individual's perceptions of, and vulnerability to, stress as well as to assess the work conditions that are likely to cause stress.

8. Factors likely to lead to work-related stress

WINNS recognises particular factors that are likely to lead to harmful stress such as competing and conflicting demands for attention, lack of control over workload, bullying, harassment, poor working conditions, and overbearing management styles. WINNS's risk assessment in this area will aim to take account of employee perceptions of stress as well as to examine the work conditions likely to lead to stress. It is important to be aware that a Management Standards approach has been developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to reduce the levels of work-related stress reported by British employees. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

Demands such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

- 8.1. Control such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work or the ability to renegotiate priorities and deadlines.
- 8.2. Support such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- 8.3. Relationships such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

- 8.4. Role such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- 8.5. Change such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

9. Methods of assessment and evaluating the effectiveness of the Policy

The measurement of levels of stress is complex. There are no simple measures, which can be used as direct indicators of levels of stress. However, it is important that managers are alert to potential indicators of stress so that both potential problems and variability in stress between different departments and occupations can be identified. In view of this, WINNS will attempt to assess and quantify existing levels of risk of stress by examining available information and seeking to obtain other data, which may indicate a higher than average risk of stress. This includes both objective and subjective elements such as the following:

- 9.1. Objective indicators, which may be linked to stress. However, these could also have a variety of other causes.

- 9.1.1. Sick absence statistics including patterns and reasons for absence.

- 9.1.2. Ill health early retirements including reasons and clusters.

- 9.1.3. High staff turnover rates.

- 9.1.4. Grievance and harassment cases: numbers and patterns.

- 9.1.5. Accident statistics.

- 9.1.6. Annual leave not taken.

- 9.1.7. Information on excessive hours of work.

- 9.2. Subjective indicators

- 9.2.1. Stress audits, i.e. self-assessment.

- 9.2.2. Questionnaires.

- 9.2.3. Staff opinion surveys.

WINNS will routinely monitor statistics as available in order to alert line managers to potential problems in their areas. Information used will be treated confidentially in order to ensure individual privacy.

WINNS will aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the Policy on an annual basis through the process of risk assessment and an examination of the methods of assessment set out in section

10. Effects of stress on the individual and WINNS

Stress is not an illness in itself but, if experienced for a prolonged period, can result in psychological illness such as anxiety, depression or physical symptoms such as headaches and, if particularly severe, it is thought to be able to contribute to physical illnesses such as high blood pressure or heart disease and susceptibility to other illnesses.

At an organisational level stress can result in deterioration of morale, poor performance and increased staff turnover. Sickness absence due to stress can cause a domino effect where increased workload due to sickness absence of a colleague can in turn lead to increased workload pressures and stress on other members of the team.

11. Prevention of stress

WINNS recognises that the most effective way of tackling harmful, excessive workplace stress is to prevent it at source. WINNS efforts will be concentrated on the prevention of harmful stress.

It is recognised that some legitimate, unavoidable and reasonable management interventions can be stressful for the employees concerned. In such situations WINNS will continue its current practice of acting in a way to minimise the stress involved.

WINNS recognises that employees' reaction to pressure varies considerably and it will aim to put in place support measures to help their ability to identify and cope with stress.

WINNS believes that the responsibility for managing stress is a joint one. It will aim to put in place measures to identify, prevent and address the issue of harmful stress on the basis that individual employees take a similarly responsible approach to the management of work-related stress.

WINNS aims to train managers in such a way that they are aware of the need to be sensitive to the issue of stress, without compromising unduly their own or others' ability to manage effectively. Managers/heads of department will be encouraged to raise awareness amongst staff and to contribute to creating a culture where WINNS's objectives in this area can be realised.

Specifically, WINNS through its managers/heads of departments can contribute to preventing stress through such measures as:

- 11.1. Ensuring that appropriate selections are made for jobs at the recruitment stage.
- 11.2. Effective job and process design to allow employees some control over the work process.
- 11.3. Ensuring clarity of expectations in terms of role, accountabilities and performance standards, e.g. through clear job descriptions, reporting lines, and published service level specifications.
- 11.4. Effective local supervision and communications to allow employees easy access to advice and support in dealing with excessive or conflicting work demands.
- 11.5. Guidance on effective techniques of time management.
- 11.6. Appropriate and effective staff development activities such as appraisal and training.
- 11.7. Effective communications and consultation about change; HR will work in partnership with Union representatives who have a key role to play in the welfare of staff. They contribute to discussions and subsequent actions on matters concerning all aspects of staff welfare.
- 11.8. Commitment to effective Equality and Diversity and Harassment policies, which includes the promotion of a culture, which has a zero-tolerance approach towards bullying and harassment and other unacceptable behaviours.

12. Management of harmful stress

WINNS will provide mechanisms for support:

In cases where problems of stress are reported they will be managed in an appropriate and sensitive way. Referrals to the Operations Director. Alternatively, staff can refer themselves to the Operations Director or Counselling for support and advice. Staff can be assured that these are both strictly confidential support services.

- 12.1. WINNS will run stress management workshops with the aim of increasing awareness of managers and staff of techniques for avoiding or reducing stress at work, and to monitor and manage stress levels in themselves, their staff and their colleagues.
- 12.2. Facilitating a managed return to work when employees are absent from work as a result of stress, the return to work itself may be a 'stressful' experience. Employees are encouraged to discuss their return to work with their manager or the HR Department. A manageable programme of work has to be worked out with the individual and the supervisor or Head of Department. If a referral to the HR Department and MHL has not already been made, this would be an appropriate time so that fitness to return to work may be assessed and advice given on reasonable measures to be taken to avoid a recurrence of stress.
- 12.3. HR and line managers will work in partnership to facilitate and rehabilitate staff to return to work. In some cases, consideration may have to be given to a phased return, job redesign/adjustment or the possibility of redeployment. It is important to note that managers should not wait until individuals want to return to work before considering a referral to the HR Department and MHL. Planning rehabilitation at an early stage is often productive and helps with improving the general understanding of the issues and the timescales.

10. Managing Change

Change is happening all the time. However, it has to be recognised that dealing with the effects of organisational change can be difficult. The uncertainty of prospective change and changes in role as a result of reorganisation can pose particular difficulties. Managers in this situation should take detailed advice from the Operations Director. It is important to keep staff informed, consulted and involved in impending changes in the workload and/or work environment. This way the effect that these changes have in the workload or working environment need not be negative. Staff should feel able to approach managers with questions relating to changes that are being considered and feel able to voice concerns or offer suggestions to minimise these.

13. WINNS Policies

To ensure a fair and consistent approach to management a range of employment policies have been devised including those listed below. Managers should ensure that copies are available for reference as required.

H & S Policy

Equal Ops Policy

Dignity at Work Policy

Whistle Blowing Policy

Prevention of Occupational Violence Policy

Ethical Business Practices

Enlivenment Policy