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Stress Risk Assessment Guide 2024

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With support from



Introduction

Stress in the workplace

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) define work-related stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other demands placed on them (2022). Reasonable pressures can be motivating and prompt action. However, excessive pressure can physically and psychologically harm individuals and negatively impact the employee workforce, making them more prone to errors, poor work performance, conflict and mental health concerns. If the stress in the workplace is unaddressed, organisations will pay the price of high turnover, disengagement, absenteeism, and presenteeism.

In the UK, 17 million working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2021/22 (HSE, 2022)



In the UK, under the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**, employers have a legal responsibility for their employees' general safety and wellbeing while at work. This includes identifying hazards and minimising the risk of stress-related illness to all employees. If you have more than 5 employees, you are required by law to write a risk assessment.

Stress risk assessments

Employers are legally responsible for protecting employees from stress in the workplace by doing a stress risk assessment and acting on it. A stress risk assessment is a way of looking at work activities that can potentially cause work-related stress and identifying sensible precautions (control measures) to control the risks created by these activities.

Stress can be difficult to identify in an organisation. An individual's experience and vulnerability to stress can vary, making it difficult to measure. Additionally, evidence shows that employees are often unwilling to report experiences of stress due to fear of negative outcomes and stigma.

The rate of self-reported stress is increasing and is at a record high post-pandemic (HSE, 2022)



This risk assessment follows the 6 core risk areas from the HSE Management Standards (recognised as applicable in Ireland) and uses evidence from your organisation's HR analytics. However, due to the complexities around measuring stress, it is encouraged to regularly review and update the outcomes of this risk assessment to consider any additional factors that are not currently presented.

Useful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, some useful definitions are below:

Mental health

A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with life's stressors, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (World Health Organisation, 2022)

Poor mental health

When we experience emotional distress, low mood, stress or anxiety. We might feel restless, confused, short-tempered, upset, distracted or lose interest in work or other activities (CIPD, 2018)

Work-related stress

The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other demands placed on them (HSE, 2022)

Absenteeism

Days absent from work. This absence can be both positive and negative due to several factors (Deloitte, 2020)

Presenteeism

Attending work whilst unwell and therefore not performing at your full ability. Presenteeism can be both positive and negative (Deloitte, 2020)

The HSE's 6 key areas of risk

Identifying stress at work

The HSE's Management Standards help simplify risk assessment for work-related stress by:

- ④ Identifying the main risk factors
- ④ Focusing on the underlying causes and their prevention
- ④ Guiding tackling the key causes of stress

We have outlined the key factors and desired outcomes of the 6 key areas of risk, however, if you would like to learn more the HSE has a step-by-step workbook [accessible here.](#)



Scan the QR code to access the Management Standards Approach Workbook.

1. Demands

Issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that they can cope with the demands of their jobs
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work
- ④ People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands
- ④ Jobs are designed to be within employees' capabilities, and employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed

2. Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work
- ④ Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work
- ④ Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work

The HSE's 6 key areas of risk

- ④ The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills
- ④ Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken
- ④ Employees are consulted over their work patterns

3. Support

Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and supervisors
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ The organisation has policies and procedures to support employees adequately
- ④ Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff
- ④ Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues
- ④ Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it
- ④ Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job
- ④ Employees receive regular and constructive feedback

4. Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with

unacceptable behaviour. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, eg bullying at work
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ The organisation promotes behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness
- ④ Employees share information relevant to their work
- ④ The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour
- ④ Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour

The HSE's 6 key areas of risk

5. Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible
- ④ The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their roles and responsibilities

- ④ The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear
- ④ Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities

6. Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation. The standard is that:

- ④ Employees indicate that the organisation engages with them frequently when undergoing an organisational change
- ④ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns

What should be happening:

- ④ The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes
- ④ The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals
- ④ Employers are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs
- ④ Employees are aware of timetables for changes
- ④ Employees have access to relevant support during changes

Guidance for completing a stress risk assessment

Employees

You are invited to use this form to help you identify and support work-related stress. You do not have to answer every question, only those you may find helpful. If you choose to use this form, you are not obliged to share its contents with anyone. However, it is recommended that you share this with your manager. If you feel you cannot talk directly to your manager about a work-related concern, speak to HR.

Managers

You should offer your staff the opportunity to complete a stress risk assessment:

- Ⓞ When a staff member has been off sick with stress or poor mental health
- Ⓞ When you believe that an individual or team is likely to experience work-related stress
- Ⓞ Annually, for example, during an appraisal
- Ⓞ When planning for major change

You can give this form out and allow an individual to fill it out at their own pace before a follow-up discussion or use it to guide a meeting with an individual or team. You can ask for their preference or use your judgement.

When you and your staff have completed the stress risk assessment, develop a plan to control the risks and review them regularly, making changes or amendments where needed. Seek advice from your HR department where necessary and keep this report confidential.

Guidance: Role

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<p>Do you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have clear expectations at work? • Know how to get the job done? • Have clear duties and responsibilities? • Have clear goals and objectives? • Know how your work fits in with the overall aim of the organisation? • Feel like there is any ambiguity or confusion (role conflict) in your job? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty or change of role • Lack of understanding of others contribution • Lack of training • Too much or too little responsibility • Poor working environment • Excessive noise • Unreasonable time pressures or demands • Poor performance* in the role leading to performance management (informal/formal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies and plans to be discussed at team meetings, away days, briefings etc • Meet with all the staff to clarify roles and expectations • Review the induction process and ensure the job description is accurate • Ensure they know how to fulfill their duties and goals and understand how they fit in with the organisation • Establish clear targets • Training or development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff understand roles and responsibilities • Systems are in place, such as team meetings and appraisals • The different requirements placed on staff are compatible and clear • Information is provided to enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities • Staff can raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts about their role

*While performance management stresses may cause stress for an employee, it is essential to continue through to a conclusion with the process in a reasonable timeframe in order to reduce stress

Guidance: Demands

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you able to cope with the demands of your job?• Do you take the breaks that you are entitled to at work?• Do you require any particular training to acquire the skills to help you do at your job?• Are there any problems with your work environment?• Are you taking work home to complete your tasks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Too much to do• Too little to do• Boring or repetitive tasks• Poor working environment• Unachievable deadlines/time pressures• Intensive work• Mismatch between tasks and resources• Irregular or long hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demands to be discussed on a regular basis at team meetings• Time allocated for training and learning• Monitoring of early and late work within team• Working environment to be on the agenda of staff meetings• Help employees prioritise tasks• Increase variety of tasks• Consider changing how tasks are allocated• Provide staff with achievable targets• Share responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achievable objectives are agreed upon with Line Managers• Workloads effectively monitored• Staff have no issues about their work environment• Where possible, staff have control over their pace of work• Peoples skills and abilities are matched to their demands• Staff concerns about their work environments are addressed

Guidance: Control

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could you have more say about how your job is done? (i.e. break times, work speed, how the work is completed, flexible working time, working from home)• How could you be more included in decision-making in the team?• How could your skills be better utilised at work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of opportunity to provide input into planned change• No control over pace or content of work• Lack of job security• Irregular or long hours• Unreasonable time pressures or demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage the involvement of staff in the planning of work, how to address problems and decision-making• Seek alternative views (i.e. at times of change)• Hold proactive discussions with staff to identify issues• Discuss training and development needs• Consider role rotation• Consider flexible working requests and clearly communicate if this is not possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved awareness of outlets for concerns• Staff have opportunities for training and development• Implementation of existing flexible working policy• Staff are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work• Staff are encouraged to develop new skills• Staff have control over the pace of work and when breaks are taken• Staff are consulted on work patterns

Guidance: Relationships

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could communication in the team be improved? • Have you experienced or witnessed any bullying or harassment* at work? • Do you feel you have someone to talk to about your concerns at work? • Do you feel supported by your colleagues/manager? • Do you receive enough constructive feedback? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor working relationships • Strained relationships at work and friction and anger between colleagues • Bullying or harassment in the workplace, whether directly experienced or witnessed • Reduced social contact • Poor communications and consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify early signs of conflict and address them promptly and firmly • Ensure awareness of organisations policies for handling grievances, unsatisfactory performance, misconduct, bullying and harassment • Provide access to training in interpersonal skills • Regular meetings with team • Team building/charity/social events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good interpersonal relationships between colleagues • Staff feel supported at work and receive constructive feedback • Staff know what support is available and how to address it

*If yes, please follow our Bullying and Harassment Policy and speak to HR for support

Guidance: Change

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could your manager better support you during change at work?• How could the organisation better support you during change at work?• How do you feel about the upcoming changes?• Do you feel you have had enough information about the changes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncertainty of future role• Fears about job security• Uncertainty of skills for new tasks• Failed organisational or technological change• Inexperience/fear of new technology• Poor communication and uncertainty about what is happening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure good communication with staff• Provide support throughout the change• Maintain a timely cascade of information through staff• Ensure appropriate management of staff affected by the change• Change management training• Plan ahead• Work together with staff to solve problems• Technology support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes• Provide adequate opportunity for consultation on proposed changes• Staff are aware of any impact of any changes, even if none expected• Staff have access to relevant support during changes• If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes

Guidance: Support

Possible questions	Potential problems	Possible action	Desired state
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How could your line manager better support you at work?• How could your colleagues better support you at work?• Do you have a healthy work-life balance? If not, how could we help you improve this?• Do you feel you can speak up about any mistakes or concerns at work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of support from managers and co-workers• Inability to balance the demands of work and home• Lack of feedback or acknowledgement• Poor or inconsistent management• Poor working relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management training on policies• Team building events• Mentoring• Regular meetings• Praise, gratitude and encouragement given regularly• Support staff, even when things go wrong• Provide supportive feedback and appraisals regularly• Explore possibilities of flexible working and arrangements for work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff feel supported at work by their manager and colleagues• Extra support is provided where needed• They feel safe raising any concerns they have• They feel comfortable highlighting any mistakes that are made without fear• They are able to balance the demands of work and their home life• They receive regular and constructive feedback

Start small and grow

Effective change will not likely occur instantly. It might be useful to prioritise specific changes or pilot an approach before rolling changes out more widely.

Don't use change as an excuse

Change is almost constant in some sectors, but it should not be used as an excuse to do nothing.

Get the timing right

Ensure key activities are not scheduled during peak busy periods or holidays where employees are not able to participate.

Collaborate

Do not make assumptions; always ask for a person's own needs and ideas.

Assign resources

Failing to adequately resource the outcomes result in unnecessary delays, lost momentum and lowers morale. Ensure there is adequate management and resources allocated.

Be realistic

Make sure the plan is achievable and realistic. Consider using SMART goals:

- Ⓢ Specific
- Ⓜ Measurable
- ⓐ Attainable
- Ⓡ Relevant
- Ⓣ Timely

Don't blame

Identify sources of stress and stay solution-focused instead of blaming.

Utilise what you already have

You will already be doing some of the things the Management Standards approach uses (i.e. using sickness absence data, Employee Assistance Programmes, etc).

Be open






Communication is vital. Talk to your employees and listen to their feedback and support their involvement.

Forward planning

It is essential to consider what is involved in each process step and plan to prevent future delays.

Respect people's differences

Remember: we all experience things differently and have different opinions.

-  **Identify causes of concern regarding stress in the workplace**
Look out for signs of poor mental health, understand employee experiences in regular meetings and appraisals, recognise upcoming changes that pose a risk of stress at work, explore sickness absence
-  **Approach the topic and schedule a meeting to discuss experiences of stress**
Use the guidance to discuss with your team/colleague and have an honest discussion about their stress
-  **Complete the stress risk assessment form**
You can give this form out and allow an individual to fill it out at their own pace before a follow-up discussion or use it to guide a meeting with an individual or team. You can ask for their preference or use your judgement. Develop a plan to control the risks and plan your follow-up meeting
-  **Add the follow-up meeting to your calendars**
It is recommended to have a follow-up meeting to discuss and amend the outcomes of this stress risk assessment. Please add this date in your calendars and set a reminder
-  **Signpost to appropriate support**
While stress is common, no one should feel they have to go through it without help or support. Signpost to HR, your Mental Health First Aiders, the Employee Assistance Programme, or their GP

Helpful resources

Helpful resources are provided below and can be accessed by clicking the reference:

[Stress and mental health at work, The Health and Safety Executive \(2023\)](#)

[Managing the causes of work-related stress, The Health and Safety Executive \(2007\)](#)

[Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards Approach, The Health and Safety Executive \(2017\)](#)

[Talking toolkit: Preventing work-related stress, The Health and Safety Executive \(2021\)](#)

[A guide to preventing and reducing stress at work, CIPD \(2021\)](#)

[Mental health at work - Policy brief, The World Health Organisation \(2022\)](#)

[Mental health at work: Refreshing the case for investment, Deloitte \(2020\)](#)

[Tools and templates for managing stress at work, The Health and Safety Executive \(2023\)](#)