



Workforce

**Work-related Stress Policy: guide
for managers**

This guide explains how you, as a manager, can apply the Work-related Stress Policy to support your team's wellbeing.

The following guide forms part of the standard for workforce policies. These policies apply to all eligible staff within NHS Scotland, regardless of the board they are employed by. The guide covers:

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What is work-related stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.”

HSE Management Standards outline 6 main areas of work design which can affect stress levels. They are:

- Demands—This includes issues such as workload, work pattern and the work environment.
- Control—How much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support—This includes encouragement, sponsorship, and resources provided by the organisation, as well as line management and colleagues.
- Relationships—This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role—Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- Change—How organisational change, large or small, is managed and communicated in the organisation.

[Find out more about HSE Management Standards.](#)

As a manager, consider these areas when supporting employees in managing stress in the workplace.

Manager responsibilities

As a manager, you should:

- Assess and manage the risks of work-related stress in your team.
- Facilitate an appropriate induction and work-related training for new employees. This should include information on support services like occupational health, human resources, organisational development, and employee counselling.
- Take action to identify and support individuals who may be experiencing stress, for example, by carrying out an individual risk assessment.
- Monitor workloads by reviewing excess hours, absence, and staff turnover.

- **Promote a healthy work-life balance** and encourage your team to take regular breaks.

Impacts of work-related stress

Recognising the signs of stress is the first step to helping your team. Everyone's experience is different, but common signs can be grouped into the following areas.

Performance

- An unexplained drop in the quality of work.
- Turning down professional development or training opportunities.
- Reduced participation or contribution in team meetings or discussions.
- Lack of engagement in online chats or being constantly offline.
- Visibly uneasy or tense during meetings.

Attendance

- Being persistently late or leaving early.
- Working excessive hours for no obvious reason.
- More frequent or unscheduled absences.

Behaviour

- Avoiding social spaces or events.
- Withdrawing from previous sources of support, including team chats or catch-ups.
- A noticeable loss of confidence or increased anxiety.
- Problems with concentration or being easily overwhelmed.

Physical

- A significant change in appearance.
- Constant fatigue or exhaustion.
- Physical tension, panic attacks, or changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Substance misuse or dependence, or both.
- Self-harm or suicide attempts, or both.

Identifying and managing work-related stress

To reduce stress, you first need to identify the causes. You can do this by looking at team-level factors such as:

- Organisational culture
- Change management
- Communication systems
- Work environment
- Workforce data

You may then use these findings to develop interventions to address the identified areas of risk. These areas and risks should be regularly monitored and reviewed.

The HSE has devised a guide on how to tackle work-related stress using the management standards approach. The organisation has also provided a toolkit and stress management competency tool. Once you've identified potential stressors, you can use HSE toolkits to help you create an action plan with your team.

Where the risk assessment is for a larger group within the workplace, it may be helpful to use the [HSE – Talking Toolkit: Preventing work-related stress](#).

If the risk assessment is for an individual, you should [download the Individual risk assessment form](#).

Monitoring and reviewing

Creating an action plan is just the start. You must monitor the situation and regularly review your risk assessments. This will help you to monitor whether your actions are effective and to adapt to any new changes.

Support and wellbeing

As a manager, you should inform employees about the support available within your board. This will include occupational health and wellbeing services.

Useful links

- [National Wellbeing Hub](#)
- [NHS Inform – Stress Busters](#)
- [HSE – How to tackle work-related stress guidance \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE – Talking Toolkit: Preventing work-related stress \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE – Management standards for tackling work-related stress: Action plan template \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE: Information about health and safety at work](#)
- [Scottish Action for Mental Health \(SAMH\)](#)