

Safety Manual Section No.	<b>NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL</b> <b>Managing Stress Risk in the Workplace</b> <b>Policy and Guidance for Schools</b>	
<b>B32</b>		

# Managing Stress Risk in the Workplace

## Policy & Guidance for Schools

September 2007



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## INTRODUCTION (Managing Stress Risk In Schools)

### Working together to reduce stress

The aim of this document is to describe Nottinghamshire County Council's (Local Authority) policy and procedures for managing stress risk in schools. The HSE define stress as the **"adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them"**.

Head teachers and governors who address the issue of stress at an early stage (ignoring whether it's caused by work, or just made worse by work) are generally the most successful in managing problems associated with stress.

Pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated, but excessive pressure can lead to stress, this undermines performance, is costly to the organisation and can make people ill.

Staff in schools have had to adapt to major changes over a number of years and there is no doubt that radical change in itself is a source of pressure. Clearly, the possible effects of such pressure need to be positively and sensitively managed.

### The management standards approach

Nottinghamshire County Council (LA) is committed to reducing and managing stress as well as providing support for employees experiencing stress resulting from external non-work related issues. To assist with the management of occupational stress Nottinghamshire County Council (LA) is implementing the HSE's Management Standards approach.

These identify the following six key areas that could cause work related stress:

- The demands of the job
- The amount of control the employee has over their work
- The relationship between people at work
- Management of change in the workplace
- Uncertainty about the employees role and what their objectives involve
- Level of support in terms of management and resources.

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### How the Management Standards work

Head teachers / managers need to gain an understanding of what the six areas (listed previously) look like where they work, and identify which areas may be presenting problems.

This information can be gained from:

- One-to-one discussions
- Supervision
- Team meetings
- Reviewing absence data
- Sickness absence and return to work discussions
- Reviewing employee turnover
- Undertaking surveys using the '[Wellworker - Stress Risk Management Indicator Tool](#)' in an attempt to identify, reduce and manage work related stress.

### Why is it important to tackle work related stress?

There are three main reasons;

1. Reducing sickness absence is a benefit, both for the individual and the school.
2. Benefits to the school.

As well as reducing sickness absence costs, tackling stress can have a positive effect on:

- Staff turnover or intention to leave
  - Staff recruitment and retention
  - Employee commitment to work
  - Staff performance
  - Organisational image and reputation.
3. To comply with the law Employers have duties:
    - Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities; and
    - Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to take measures to control that risk.

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## Preventing, identifying and managing stress risk in schools

Stress is an issue that **must** be addressed by schools. Much of what constitutes identification and prevention relates to good management practice. A framework now needs to be established by **all** schools to ensure that:

- Head teachers / managers / governors accept responsibility for the management of stress risk and the implementation of this policy.
- Development of an individual (school) action plan in order to implement this policy.
- Head teachers / managers (and where appropriate school governors) attend stress management training provided by the LA.
- Specific stress audits are carried out in accordance with this policy.
- Findings of stress audits are acted upon promptly.
- Appropriate support mechanisms are in place for all staff.

## Help & Support with this policy and its implementation

Key contacts for schools;

### **NCC (LA) Occupational Health Service (Nottingham) Tel: 0115 – 9772403**

*Via a Management Choices 'buy back' option the NCC's Occupational Health Service are able to assist schools with the provision of a stress risk assessment. The Wellworker – Stress Risk Management Indicator Tool will be used to survey employee groups and collect stress management information / data. A report will be provided which identifies problem areas and practical solutions. (See also section 1.10 of this document)*

### **NCC (LA) Human Resources (Schools) County Hall Tel: 0115 – 9773473**

*Comprehensive advice, guidance and support from a team of dedicated HR / Personnel professionals. (See also section 1.11 of this document)*

### **NCC (LA) Health & Safety (Schools) County Hall Tel: 0115 – 9773603**

*Comprehensive advice, guidance and support from a team of dedicated Health & Safety professionals. (See also section 1.12 of this document)*

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## 1. POLICY

- 1.1 Effective management of stress is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of our organisation by improving well-being, reducing absenteeism, greater retention of employees and reduced costs.
- 1.2 We can all feel stressed at times when we feel as though everything becomes too much, when things get on top of us, or when we feel as though we are unable to cope. It affects us in different ways at different times and is often the result of a combination of factors in our personal and working lives.
- 1.3 Nottinghamshire County Council (the LA) recognises that employees may be exposed to different degrees of stress resulting from their work activities. We are committed to promoting a holistic approach to the mental and physical well-being of employees. This includes reducing and managing occupational stress as well as providing support for employees experiencing stress resulting from external non work related issues. This document is based upon the Stress Management Standards produced by the HSE. The focus is to explain how the HSE's stress assessment tool should be used by head teachers / managers to identify stressors arising in the workplace.
- 1.4 The workplace involves pressures and demands that often have a positive effect on employees' performance at work. However, where pressures are excessive stress can result in a negative impact on a person's health and work performance. This guidance reflects Nottinghamshire County Councils (LA) commitment to managing workplace stressors where reasonably practicable.
- 1.5 There are three elements to the management of stress.
- 1.5.1 A fundamental requirement to identify and prevent stress. Risk assessment is an important tool to enable us to do this but there are many other management systems that should already be in place to enable head teachers / managers to identify and respond to signs of stress amongst the team/s they are responsible for.
  - 1.5.2 A need to provide training to increase awareness and provide coping skills.
  - 1.5.3 The provision of support and rehabilitation.
- 1.6 This policy and guidance is supplemented by other policy and guidance and should not be read in isolation. The 'manual of personnel guidance' is available via the intranet service 'wired', or by contacting your personnel service provider. You are advised to seek alternative guidance if your provider is not NCC (the LA).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as:

*'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other type of demand placed on them.'*

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- 1.6 This policy should be underpinned by the good management practices contained in the 'manual of personnel guidance' and its associated policies, procedures and guidance.
- 1.7 The LA is constantly reviewing and improving the way that stress is managed and producing information both for head teachers, managers and all employees. It is planned that head teachers / managers will be provided with a toolkit of further policy and guidance to supplement this document. Head Teachers / Managers will be informed as these are issued and training provided, where necessary.
- 1.8 The LA accepts that the management of stress involves much more than development of policies and guidance. Equally important is what is happening on the ground – especially the interaction between the individual and their immediate line manager and work group. Our policy therefore requires the use of a risk assessment approach by head teachers / managers. The approach will require use of the 'wellworker' stress risk management indicator tool. This approach is based upon the use of a questionnaire designed by the HSE. Where access to the internet is problematic then your health and safety adviser can provide hard copies of the indicator questionnaire. The aim of this policy is to ensure:
- Head teachers / managers identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
  - Schools provide / access training for all supervisory staff in good management practices.
  - Provision of confidential counseling for employees affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
  - That at LA level, we provide adequate information / support to enable governors / head teachers / managers to implement the agreed stress management strategy.
- 1.9 Head teachers and managers will need to ensure that they:
- Conduct risks assessments (using the 'Wellworker' stress risk management indicator tool), and implement controls (see also paragraph 2.5.2);
  - Identify risks and implement control measures
  - Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
  - Ensure good communication between management and employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
  - Provide good supervision and development opportunities
  - Ensure employees are fully trained to discharge their duties.
  - Ensure employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
  - Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.
  - Monitor working hours and any additional working time to ensure that employees are not overworking.
  - Monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their full entitlement.

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- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to an employee who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.

**Through the LA's Management Choices buy-back arrangements the following services are available (sections 1.10, 1.11, 1.12):**

1.10 NCC Occupational Health Service can ;

- Support individuals who are or have been off sick with stress/mental health issues and advise them and their direct Line Managers to agree a return to work plan.
- Provide specialist advice, support and awareness training on stress and mental health issues.
- Provide personalised practical and emotional support via one to one counselling or refer on to specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Support head teachers / managers and support training to raise awareness of mental health issues and to enable head teachers / managers to implement stress risk assessments
- Inform the employer of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.
- Make available fact sheets and guides on a diverse range of issues including stress management, panic attacks, work life balance etc.

1.11 NCC Human Resources can;

- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Provide continuing support to head teachers / managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage early referral to occupational health where appropriate.
- Contribute to return to work plans supporting head teachers / managers / individuals and facilitating OHS advice and support.

1.12 NCC Health & Safety Staff can;

- Provide guidance to head teachers / managers on the stress policy.
- Provide support and advice to head teachers / managers / individuals on training requirements.
- Provide support and guidance with the risk assessment process.

1.13 Employees need to be aware that pressure at work can be good for you, but if the experience of pressure gets too much, they may begin to feel stressed. Employees may also experience non work related pressure which results in stress, which also

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has an impact on their work life. It is often difficult for individuals to know what to do when this occurs. The following bullet points are intended to provide guidance on the responsibilities and actions that individuals should take to manage their stress;

- ☑ Employees should speak to their direct line manager or someone else they feel comfortable talking to in the school / organisation
- ☑ Employees should consider accessing the confidential counselling provided by the Occupational Health Service.
- ☑ Employees should consider whether they would benefit from a discussion with their GP
- ☑ Employees should take action at a personal level to review their lifestyle/work life balance to see if it is possible to identify any contributing factors. A simple checklist might include:

- eating on the run, or in a disorganised manner
- smoking, or drinking excessively
- rushing, hurrying, being available to everyone
- doing several jobs at once
- not taking breaks, taking excessive work home with you
- having no time for exercise and relaxation


## 2. GUIDANCE

### 2.1 Managing Stress in the Workplace.

2.1.1 Simply stated, the most effective way to tackle workplace stress is through good management practices. This includes, having in place clearly stated business objectives, effective communication, well-defined roles and responsibilities and a focus on personal development through supervision and appraisal. The manual of personnel guidance provides more detailed guidance on employment procedures provided to support good management practices at LA schools. You are advised to seek alternative guidance if your provider is not NCC.

The HSE Stress Management Standards look at the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress:

- **Demands** – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – How much say the person has in the way they do their work?
- **Support** – Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – 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.

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- 2.1.2 All head teachers / managers have a responsibility for the health safety and welfare of employees that report to them. They need to respond appropriately where it becomes evident that a member of their team may be suffering from stress. It is important to discuss this with the individual concerned. This may take place as part of the normal supervision process or separately but should be recorded.
- 2.1.3 Someone suffering from stress is likely to feel anxious and distressed. Head teachers / managers should be supportive and empathic so that problems can be solved in a positive way. Head teachers / managers should ask about possible causes and explore, together with the employee, some options for addressing the issues.
- 2.1.4 If part of the job or the working environment is identified as a source of the stress, the head teacher / manager will need to clarify the specific area(s) of concern and discuss with the employee ways of tackling the problem.
- 2.1.5 At particular times, employees may be more vulnerable to work-related stress. For example, those returning to work after a stress-related illness, or those who have experienced a personal or family problem, such as bereavement.
- 2.1.6 If a head teacher / manager has concerns regarding an employee's performance, capability or attendance procedures and guidance contained in the 'manual of personnel guidance' should be referred to. In addition, advice and support may be obtained from the schools personnel service provider.
- 2.1.7 Where individuals feel unable to share how they are feeling, then the head teacher / manager should suggest other people who may be able to help. These may include a sympathetic family member, friends, their doctor, trade unions, the LA's counselling service, Teacherline or other specialist counselling services external to the authority such as CRUSE (Bereavement Support). Further details of the support available may be found in the NCC booklet, entitled 'Alternative Pathways to Help and Support' (available from the *Health & Safety Community* on 'wired' (stress management folder).
- 2.1.8 When an employee is absent due to stress, head teachers / managers must ensure that supportive contact is maintained. The attendance management procedures can be found in the 'manual of personnel guidance'.

## **2.2 Guidance for employees who may be suffering from stress**

- 2.2.1 Employees who are experiencing problems at work, including feeling under excessive pressure, should discuss their concerns with their direct line manager or other appropriate person. The purpose of raising concerns and meeting with the line manager is to look for ways to resolve issues. A head teacher / manager may

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also approach employees, either as part of management supervision or attendance management procedures.

2.2.2 Even where employee's problems are not related to work it may be that help is still available, either from their line manager or from the counselling service.

2.2.3 There are many techniques and strategies, described in numerous publications that can be used to help prevent pressures building up to unhealthy stress. The County Council's (LA) booklet 'Working Together to Reduce Stress at Work – a guide for staff' may also help (available from the *Health & Safety Community* on 'wired' (stress management folder).

2.2.4 Stress awareness and stress management training courses are also available to school based employees. Your HR (Personnel) or HR (Health & Safety) provider should be contacted for further details.

## 2.3 Counselling Services

2.3.1 The counselling service is provided to school employees via the LA's 'buy back' arrangements. The types of referral are as follows: -

- Self referral** – absolutely confidential with no one outside of the OH Service knowing that you have been seen and your discussions with the counsellor being in absolute confidence. Section 2.1.7 also outlines a range of specialist services available to all employees. These services are outlined in the NCC booklet 'Alternative Pathways to Help and Support', available via the 'health & safety community' on 'wired' (stress management folder).
- Informal referral** - your head teacher / manager may informally refer you to the service but their involvement ends at that point.
- Formal referral** - A formal referral would involve the referring head teacher / manager providing background information in a similar way to the standard OH referral. A formal referral will only take place with the agreement of the individual involved. Any information provided in a formal referral will be agreed with the individual. Confidentiality will not be breached at any stage and the counsellor will be unable to provide feedback to anyone for this reason.

## 2.4 Early indications that Stress could be a problem

2.4.1 As an organisation NCC already collects information that can be used to obtain an initial broad indication of whether stress is a problem. For example:

- High levels of sickness absence may indicate a potential problem area. Checking the reasons given for absence, in a sympathetic manner, may help identify the cause.

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- Low productivity can be an indicator of problems. Talking to employees informally and formally through supervision should help head teachers / Managers explore the reasons behind this.
- High employee turnover could be an indication of high stress levels. head teachers / managers should investigate why people are leaving using exit interview data.
- Meetings with the employees line manager may offer the opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion.
- Team meetings can help head teachers / managers assess current performance.

## 2.5 Stress Risk Assessment

2.5.1 The HSE management standards are designed to enable head teachers / managers to identify what's causing stress in the workplace and take action to remove or reduce the risk. **They should not be considered in isolation from the standard supervision and management processes that should identify where stress from outside of the workplace is becoming an issue.** An overview of the standards and the way that our processes need to reflect them may be seen in Appendix 1.

2.5.2 Head teachers / managers should note that it might be necessary to adapt the process, to add questions that may add clarification to school specific issues. This may be necessary in order to reflect the different circumstances, roles and management structure at an individual school / establishment. Any additional questions should only be made after consultation with your health & safety service provider/wellworker administrator. (Refer also paragraph 1.10)

**Please note that in order for wellworker to measure stress accurately throughout NCC the 'core questions' within the wellworker stress management tool may not be changed or deleted from the measurement process. However, questions may be added to reflect local concerns.**

2.5.3 Finding out how the factors are affecting employees requires a partnership approach, based on openness, honesty and trust. head teachers / managers will need to ensure that employees;

- are consulted at all stages;
- fully involved in the process from the start;
- understand why the assessment is taking place;
- know how the information will be used;
- are informed of the outcome; and
- are involved in identifying the action required to address any problems.

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## 2.6 Risk Assessment Step 1 - Identifying the hazards involved



2.6.1 This step involves requiring the identified group of employees to complete the anonymous Indicator tool online using the Wellworker IT Solution. Alternatively, distributing paper copies of the questionnaire to all employees in the group. The 'Wellworker' system (and paper copies of questionnaires) can be accessed via the Health & Safety Community on 'wired' (stress management folder).

## 2.7 Risk Assessment Step 2 - Identifying who may be harmed



2.7.1 Step 1 will require identifying a team or groups of employees within a team. The breakdown will depend on the structure of the school or team. The employees should share common interests and encounter similar kinds of sources of work related pressure. The assessment works best where it is limited to a group with similar objectives.

2.7.2 Head teachers / managers will need to ensure arrangements are in place to secure commitment to the process from the employees involved. This may include a staff meeting, a range of smaller meetings or a memorandum that explains what is happening and why and then explains what will happen with the information provided. Emphasis needs to be placed on the anonymity of the individual completing the questionnaire and that future action to avoid or manage stress will be based upon this process.

2.7.3 Focus groups can form an important part of the process of using the Management Standards to assess and control risks. They usually consist of a number of representatives from the work group and are led by a facilitator independent of the work group. Managers are not required to use focus groups but to consider whether they will add value to the process of gathering data to evaluate the risk. However, because of the resource implications the use of focus groups should be limited to those areas where it has already been identified that there are significant levels of stress or where the risk assessment process has already identified a complex range of factors that need to be addressed. Head Teachers / Managers should consult their personnel service adviser to consider whether this approach is appropriate and for advice on how this process may be supported. Support will generally be provided by the OH Nurse (Mental Health).

## 2.8 Risk Assessment Step 3 - Evaluate the risk and take action



2.8.1 Where hard copies of the questionnaire are being used it will be necessary to enter the data from the returned questionnaires into the 'wellworker' stress tool. The 'wellworker' system (and paper copies of questionnaires) can be accessed via the 'health & safety community' on 'wired' (stress management folder).

2.8.2 Guidance on how to use the 'wellworker' stress tool can be accessed via the 'health & safety community' on 'wired' (stress management folder). or contacting your Health and Safety service provider.

2.8.3 Where the IT solution is being used the data can be analysed online.

2.8.4 Head teachers / managers should now be at a point where:

- They have identified what the biggest problems appear to be; and
- They have identified where they appear to be having the most impact.

2.8.5 Head teachers / managers need to take action using the information obtained. This will involve talking to employees and their representatives to confirm the nature of the problems and develop ideas for solutions.

2.8.6 It should be noted that NCC already collects information that can be used to supplement information obtained by the risk assessment process, which can help indicate potential problem areas. For example:

- High levels of sickness absence may indicate a potential problem area. Checking the reasons given for absence may help identify the cause.
- Low productivity can be an indicator of problems. Talking to employees should help explore the reasons behind this.
- High employee turnover could be an indication of high stress levels. Investigate why people are leaving – conducting exit interviews is one way of doing this.
- Supervision and performance appraisal could offer an opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion about work and to explore whether people in your team are experiencing excessive pressure.
- Team meetings can help assess current performance. They allow exploration of issues in considerable depth and are particularly useful if you want to find out what specific groups of people think about their work.

2.8.7 Further guidance relating to effective management of each of the HSE's identified key areas of work may be found as an action plan pro-forma, available from the 'Health & Safety Community' on 'Wired' (stress management folder).

## 2.9 Risk Assessment Step 4 - Recording your findings

2.9.1 It is important that head teachers / managers record both the results of the risk assessment and the action they intend to take in the action plan section of the 'wellworker' tool.





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2.9.2 Where the risk assessment has identified areas of concern and head teachers / managers have taken steps to develop some solutions, it is important that the action plan;

- identifies realistic timescales agreed with employees and their representatives;
- is communicated to all employees;
- shared with senior management;
- includes a review process.

2.9.3 Head teachers / managers should ensure that records relating to stress risk assessments are kept and are easily accessible for a minimum period of 25 years.

## 2.10 Risk Assessment Step 5 – Monitor and review

5

2.10.1 Head teachers / managers should;

- periodically check that agreed actions are being undertaken, that meetings are being held, or that there is evidence that agreed activities have been carried out.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of solutions by asking those involved whether they feel the solutions are having the desired effect.
- Consider data on employee turnover, sickness absence and productivity, and measure progress against emerging trends or changes in this data.
- Use the risk assessment indicator tool approach again after a period of time. Depending on the outcome of the initial risk assessment and any significant changes to work activities/structures/procedures the **head teacher / manager should consider whether a further risk assessment is required. The Local Authority (based on HSE guidance) advises that this should be reviewed annually and a record made to confirm what action should be taken, if any.**

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### 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Employers already have duties:

3.1.1 Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities; and

3.1.2 Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to take measures to control that risk.

3.1.3 The Management Standards are intended to help and encourage employers to meet these existing legal obligations.

3.1.4 The Stress Management Standards and supporting processes are designed to:

- Help simplify risk assessment for stress;
- Encourage employers, employees and their representatives to work in partnership to address work-related stress throughout the organisation
- Provide the yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

### 4. REFERENCES

4.1 HSE, HS (G) 218 : Tackling work related stress for managers

4.2 Croner, Workplace Stress :A management guide

4.3 Occupational Stress A Practical Guide to Preventing and managing Stress at Work.

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## 5. DOCUMENT HISTORY

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Education / Schools TU's (Working Party)	Date: 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2007 3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2007 5 <sup>th</sup> June 2007
Education (Schools) JCNP	Date: 28 <sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Final)
Human Resources Leadership Group	Date: October 2005 & July, 2006
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Document History	This Policy replaces the Corporate Policy document on the Management of Stress January 2002 (Section B32 of the County Safety Manual) and the Schools Stress Policy 2001.  Feedback from OSHLG has been incorporated 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2005
Location of Current Version:	Safety Manual: Policy and Guidance Health and Safety, Schools intranet service 'wired'
Copies of this guidance can be made available in various formats e.g. Tape, Large print and Braille.	

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**Appendix 1 Overview of Management Standards**

