

Health and Wellbeing at Work Policy and Guidance

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HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT WORK POLICY AND GUIDANCE (INCORPORATING MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESSES)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Policy sets out the Trust's commitment to managing and maintaining staff health and wellbeing at work, in particular in relation to mental health and occupational stress. The core aim of this Policy is to promote mental well-being, reduce the stigma associated with mental ill health and provide assistance to staff suffering from the symptoms of stress or more serious mental health conditions.
- 1.2 This Policy forms an integral part of the Trust's Health and Wellbeing Framework. The Framework outlines the Trust's strategy for improving staff wellbeing through introducing various systems and initiatives.
- 1.3 The Trust recognises its duty of care and legal obligations to reduce and manage risks to the health and safety of staff, which extend to mental health as well as physical health at work.
- 1.4 The Trust will put in place measures to prevent and manage risks to staff wellbeing and improve the ways in which the Trust can support staff mental health. These measures will include carrying out workload reviews, offering appropriate support for individuals experiencing mental ill health at work, running initiatives to raise awareness of mental health at work and ensuring managers feel confident and are sufficiently trained in their ability to deal with any staff suffering from stress or other mental health related condition/illness.
- 1.5 By implementing the appropriate interventions and support, the Trust aims to provide a positive working culture which should aid the staffs psychological wellbeing and their effectiveness at work.
- 1.6 The Trust is also committed to raising awareness of stress issues, reducing stress in the workplace, identifying sources of stress in the workplace and taking appropriate action for its effective management. It is acknowledged that effective management of occupational stress requires partnership working between management and staff and a clear understanding of the nature of the employment environment and school cohort.
- 1.7 This Policy has been prepared taking account of prevailing legislation and legislation requirements and follows best practice by enabling the Trust to demonstrate a fair, equitable and transparent environment particularly when supporting health and wellbeing at work. Accordingly, this Policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and is suitable for publication under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

2 WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

- 2.1 According to the definition provided by ACAS, mental health is the mental and emotional state in which we feel able to cope with the normal stresses of everyday life. If we are feeling good about ourselves we often work productively, interact well with colleagues and make a valuable contribution to our team or workplace.
- 2.2 Positive mental health is rarely an absolute state. Most of us may feel in good mental health generally but may also suffer with stress or anxiety (either work- related or due to personal circumstances) from time to time.
- 2.3 Mental ill health can range from feeling 'a bit down' to common disorders such as anxiety or low level depression and to more serious mental illnesses supported and/or controlled through medication or support provided through an identified case worker. Mental health conditions may emerge suddenly, as a result of a specific event, or gradually, over a period of time. Some illnesses are persistent and may be classed as a disability, while others come and go, giving an individual 'good days' and 'bad days'.

3 WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL STRESS?

- 3.1 There is no single agreed definition of the term stress. The most accurate definitions of stress are:
 - *'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.'* (**Health and Safety Executive**)
 - *'Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure'.*(**NHS**)
 - *'The result of a conflict between the role and the needs of an individual staff and organisational, personal or ergonomic factors in their workplace. There can also be an unacceptable tension between the demands of work and the individual's life outside work. Stress is also often typified by a lack of control over conditions at work.'* (**UK National Work-Stress Network**)
 - *'work related stress can be caused where there is a mismatch between job requirements and the individual's abilities, resources and needs.'* (**ACAS**)
- 3.2 It is important to remember that occupational stress on its own is not recognised as an illness or medical condition. Most jobs create some stress and it is generally accepted that a moderate level of stress is beneficial and helps people to cope with challenging situations at work. However, if stress becomes too excessive, intense or prolonged, this may lead to a physical or mental illness e.g. heart disease, back pain, anxiety or depression, gastrointestinal illnesses.
- 3.3 Stress is therefore the body's reaction (mental or physical) to the demands placed on an individual (either actual or perceived) and relates to an individual's own coping ability.

4 MAIN CAUSES OF STRESS AND THE TRUST'S PROCEDURES

4.1 ASSESSING THE RISKS

- 4.1.1 All staff who report stress (either occupational or personal) and where stress has been identified as a possible factor which contributed to the individual's ill health, will be offered a Wellbeing / Stress Risk Assessment carried out by the H&S Manager alongside the Head of School to ensure that all risk assessments are contextualized appropriately.
- 4.1.2 The purpose of an individual Workplace Wellbeing Risk Assessment is to identify appropriate measures which may support individuals to reduce work related stress.
- 4.1.3 The Trust may also periodically undertake staff surveys or use other confidential methods of assessing the reasons and effects of stress on staff.

4.2 COMMON CAUSES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS:

- 4.2.1 **Demands** i.e. workload, work patterns, work environment, pace of work, physical environment.
- 4.2.2 **Control** i.e. decision making and autonomy, overtime and excessive work pressures.
- 4.2.3 **Support** i.e. encouragement, resources provided by the Trust and colleagues, team support, perceived lack of job security.
- 4.2.4 **Relationships** i.e. positive working culture, interpersonal conflict.
- 4.2.5 **Role** i.e. well defined role within the organisation regarding the purpose/own and departmental goals.
- 4.2.6 **Change** i.e. management of the organisational change and communications with staff, pace of change, coping with change.

4.3 TRUST'S PROCEDURES TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

- 4.3.1 The Trust's approach to addressing issues around occupational stress includes a number of pro-active measures which are designed to protect staff health and wellbeing.
- 4.3.2 The Trust is committed to addressing individual staff stressors as identified through the Wellbeing Risk Assessment process. These stressors normally

relate to the reasons outlined in Section 4.2 above. The examples of the actions undertaken by the Trust in this area include:

The Organisation

- Ensure staff have the best working conditions that they can, including salary and other benefits;
- Promote positive staff behaviours at work to avoid conflict;
- Provide staff with sufficient resources to do their jobs;
- Provide systems which enable staff to report unacceptable behaviour in the workplace;
- Provide information to enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities i.e. via the annual appraisal system;
- Engage staff when undergoing organisational change i.e. by providing timely information and staff consultation opportunities on the proposed changes;
- Keep staff skills up to date and empower staff to respond to change effectively;
- Work in partnership with the Trust's recognised trade unions to discuss new policies and procedures and planned changes;
- Put measures in place to prevent occupational stress, so far as is reasonably practicable, e.g. carry out an organisation wide Stress Risk Assessment
- Provide staff and their representatives with comprehensive and relevant information about occupational stress;

Heads of School / Service:

- Review workloads to ensure that the demand placed upon an individual is not excessive or unreasonable. In some cases the workload may be temporarily reduced to support an individual's recovery;
- Encourage staff teams to support each other to take regular breaks from work;
- Where possible, encourage staff to develop new skills to help them take on new challenges e.g. time management, planning skills;
- Identify, where possible, and respond to issues of work related stress;
- Where necessary, ensure that formal Wellbeing Risk Assessments are carried out in accordance with the Trust's Health and Safety procedures;
- Follow recruitment procedures which ensure an appropriate fit between an individual's abilities and the requirements of the post;
- Consider stress issues which may arise during promotion, job changes, organisational change or changes in work location, work allocation and/or skill requirements and provide an opportunity for staff to discuss matters impacting upon them personally which may lead to stress;
- Listen to solutions identified by staff and where possible, implement these on either a short or long term basis;
- Take immediate action when you suspect that an individual is suffering from the effects of stress;
- Ensure effective communication within the department/team;
- Involve staff in setting department/team targets and objectives and ensure that personal objectives are agreed between the line manager and member of staff, rather than being imposed;
- Provide opportunities for regular, one to one meetings and provide constructive feedback.

Human Resources

- Facilitate regular staff surveys to gauge mental well-being and staff satisfaction;
- Promptly respond to staff grievances or concerns;
- Offer suitable support e.g. mediation, counselling, Occupational Health referrals;
- Promptly seek to resolve any interpersonal conflict;
- Develop and maintain policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour i.e. Dignity at Work Policy; Disciplinary Policy and Procedure; Capability Policy and Procedure;
- Keep under review sickness absence and staff turnover to identify any particular areas of concern;
- Seek to support staff concerns about their work environment e.g. lack of natural light;
- Inform the staff what support is available and how they can access it;
- Inform the staff of the likely impact of proposed changes upon their jobs, the proposed timetables for change and the availability of the relevant support;
- Ensure all new staff receive appropriate induction and training in their new role.
- Ensure newly promoted employees receive support and/or training as appropriate.

5 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND STRESS

5.1. Line managers and individual members of staff should be mindful of the common symptoms of mental ill health, which might include:

- A gradual deterioration in job performance, attitude to work or conduct;
- Unexplained change in behaviour i.e. lack of patience, outbreaks of anger, over reacting;
- Lack of energy – uncommunicative or moody behaviour;
- Increased absenteeism or lateness;
- Difficulty in concentration or memory;
- Lack of attention to detail;
- Unexplained physical aches and pains;
- Lack of attention to appearance and/or hygiene.

5.2 Mental health conditions can last for many years, therefore line managers should be aware of the issues listed below, however they should be clear that their role is not to 'cure' staff but to help and/or support them to manage their own conditions.

- Any changes e.g. in patterns of behaviour;
- General mental resilience to pressure at work;
- The effect of the individual's mental condition on the team.

6 MENTAL ILL HEALTH ABSENCE FROM WORK

6.1 PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR THE RETURN TO WORK

- 6.1.1 A return to work after a period of absence, which was attributed to stress or other mental health problems will require careful thought and planning by all parties. The Trust will adapt a case-management approach where the staff may be supported at every stage of the process by a third party e.g. work colleague or union representative. A 'Return to Work' plan should be put in place which outlines the support
- 6.1.2 Liaison between the staff, the Trust and the Occupational Health service should ideally continue during the period of absence from work to enable the Trust to put in place appropriate support for the staff member to enable a swift and sustained return to work. Referral to the Occupational Health service should be initiated as early as possible to ensure that the right strategies are put in place at an early stage of absence.
- 6.1.3 Support from the Trust will depend on each individual case and will be agreed during the consultative process with the staff, taking advice, where applicable, from the Occupational Health service into consideration.
- 6.1.4 It is important to identify any work related factors which may have contributed to the member of staff's ill health. It may be appropriate to suggest carrying out a Wellbeing Risk Assessment with the member of the staff at this stage, if one has not been prepared before.

6.2 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

- 6.2.1 Reasonable adjustments may be agreed to apply all the time or when they are needed, depending on the type of mental health condition for example if the mental condition is episodic.
- 6.2.2 Reasonable adjustments may include modifications as per [Appendix 2](#).
- 6.2.4 Reasonable adjustments, including changes to the way the member of staff works or ways of mitigating the factors which may have caused or potentially contributed to their mental ill health, will be discussed with the member of staff by the line manager and, if required, the designated HR Business Partner.
- 6.2.5 The Trust will seek professional advice in this regard from the Occupational Health service or the staff's own General Practitioner (with the express consent from the individual). The member of staff will be consulted about any reasonable adjustments and the situation will be monitored by their line manager and the designated HR Business Partner.

7 CONFIDENTIALITY

7.1 All records referring to the health or medical condition(s) of staff are processed by the Trust in accordance to the Trust's Data Protection Act Policy and Procedure. This means that any health related information disclosed by a member of staff during discussions with managers, the HR Department or the Occupational Health Service, is considered to be 'sensitive' data and therefore will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

8 STAFF SELF MANAGEMENT

9.1 Staff should take responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing, by adopting good health behaviours (i.e. in relation to diet, alcohol consumption or smoking) and inform the Trust if they believe their work or the working environment poses a risk to their health or if they require support.

9.2 It is the individual's responsibility to:

- Co-operate with the Trust in minimising, as far as is reasonably practicable, the effects of occupational stress;
- Inform the Trust (e.g. line manager, HR Business Partner or union representative) that they are suffering from stress;
- Identify what aspects of their role in particular may be contributing towards their stress;
- Access the free counselling service provided by the Trust if deemed beneficial (24/7 confidential telephone line);
- Co-operate with their work colleagues to achieve good working relations;
- Support colleagues showing any signs of stress and seek assistance from the line manager or HR Department.

APPENDIX 1

EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS WHICH MAY BE AGREED AS PART OF SUPPORT FOR STAFF WITH MENTAL ILL HEALTH

In considering appropriate support for any staff experiencing mental ill health, including stress, the Trust will take account of the examples listed in the **ACAS** guide '*Promoting positive mental health at work*':

However, decisions will be based on the operational demands of the Academy / Department and the wider Trust.

➤ **SCHEDULE MODIFICATION**

- phased return to work;
- temporary reduction in working hours (part-time working);
- temporary working from home (for staff not working directly in the classroom).

➤ **JOB MODIFICATION**

- job sharing;
- re-assignment to a vacant position;

➤ **PROVIDING TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE**

- providing a personal computer to enable staff to work at home or at unusual hours;

➤ **SPECIAL SUPERVISORY CONSIDERATIONS**

- offering additional supervisory sessions i.e. 1-1 support;
- offering additional training or instruction on new procedures or information;
- offering information and training in the staff's preferred mode (verbally, visually, written or experiential);
- ensuring the line manager is available throughout the work day;
- re-assignment to another line manager;
 - training line managers to temper negative feedback by providing positive feedback simultaneously;
- assigning a colleague to work as a 'buddy' or 'mentor'.