STRESS MANAGEMENT (WORK WELL ASSESSMENTS) PROCEDURE

Policy Name – Stress Management (Work Well Assessments) Procedure	
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	HEALTH AND SAFETY **Stress Management (Work Well Assessments) Procedure**

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Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures - Ulster University

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1. Purpose

This Stress Management (Work Well Assessments) procedure sets out the University's aims and objectives for the management of health and safety in relation to potential stress at work.

2. Scope

This procedure is applicable from April 2025 and covers all University employees and campuses.

3. Definitions

Stress	Stress is defined by the Health & Safety Executive, 2005, as "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them."

4. Position Statement

Ulster University is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

The University believes that staff are its most important asset and that their wellbeing is essential to the achievement of a high-performance culture and the provision of quality services.

Ulster University is committed to identifying sources of stress in the workplace and to take action to address those causes of stress within its control while recognising that it may have limited control over external factors.

Stress can affect the body in three different ways, physically, behaviourally and emotionally and individuals can suffer from one, or a combination of these symptoms and stress can also reduce performance, creativity and productivity. Ulster University is committed to developing procedures, training measures and support systems to help all staff understand and recognise the nature and causes of stress and to take positive steps to manage stress effectively.

5. Key Aims and Objectives

Under the terms of the relevant legislation and regulations, Ulster University has a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the physical and mental health, safety and welfare at work of its entire staff. Ulster University also has a duty by law to assess the nature and scale of health and safety risks to which its staff are exposed.

The key aims and objectives of this procedure are:

- To increase awareness of stress and the methods available to combat it;

- To initiate appropriate action to manage and reduce stress at work;

- To support all staff in managing stress in themselves and others;

- To manage problems which occur and to provide confidential support;

- To provide support during the return-to-work period of those who have been absent due to stress.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Vice Chancellor and the Senior Leadership Team

The Vice-Chancellor has executive responsibility, alongside the Senior Leadership Team, to ensure that the requirements of health and safety legislation and the University Health and Safety and Wellbeing Policy are complied with.

The Vice Chancellor will ensure that:
- responsibility for health and safety is properly assigned and accepted at all levels within the University;
- adequate resources are made available for the effective implementation of this health and safety procedure;
- a culture of health, safety and wellbeing is embedded as an integral part of University life and will lead by example in this.

All members of the Senior Leadership Team have the responsibility to:
- adopt and champion a culture and style that embraces good communication and close employee involvement;
- understand the HSE Management Standards and ensure that they are taken into consideration in all decisions;

- seek to secure appropriate resources, needed to meet demands placed upon staff, are available and that relevant training is provided for the tasks expected of them;
- encourage an open attitude towards expressions by employees regarding stress at work and treat stress and other health issues seriously;
- ensure that potential causes of stress are identified when planning for and undertaking any significant changes in working practice or organisation;
- ensure that during project planning, the HSE Management Standards impact is assessed at each stage.

Managers

Heads of School and department managers are responsible for the provision of a healthy and safe working environment and will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the procedure and have responsibility for:

- engaging with those who require support, providing guidance to employees who require wellbeing support and carrying out a full wellbeing survey every two years and an ongoing review of the action plan or work situation carried out in the interim by:
    - identifying hazardous situations within their areas of responsibility that pose a risk of causing work-related stress in employees, and carrying out a stress assessment through the use of the wellbeing survey that will consider in turn each of the six stressors identified in the Management Standards, i.e. Demands, Control, Role, Support, Relationships and Change, as well as any other relevant factors they are aware of that could contribute to workplace stress. (Managers can

request assessments to be carried out at any time outside of their schedule);

- conducting and implementing recommendations of risk assessments within areas and activities under their control. This will be undertaken in conjunction with their staff and with the assistance of the Employee Wellbeing team in Health, Safety and Wellbeing;
- ensuring good communication between management and staff, particularly when there are organisational and/or procedural changes;
- ensuring staff are fully trained to discharge their duties and are trained and developed to handle job responsibilities and transitions to new roles;
- being approachable to their staff, encouraging them in their day-to-day work, and supporting those experiencing problems or working in emotionally demanding situations;
- planning work for staff that is commensurate with skills, abilities and the working time available;
- attending management training as required including Health and Safety and relevant Wellbeing training;
- being vigilant and where practicable offer additional support to any member of staff who is experiencing stress outside of work e.g., times of bereavement;
- regularly reviewing objectives and priorities giving support and direction through regular appraisal and supervision;
- maintaining good lines of communication with staff;
- ensuring that potential causes of stress are identified when planning for and undertaking any significant changes in working

practice or organisation and that these stressors are managed proactively;

- familiarising themselves with the [HSE Management Standards Guidance](#) and avail of training courses run by Employee Wellbeing.

Occupational Health and Safety Staff

Occupational Health and Safety staff will:

- be a source of specialist advice and assistance to managers and staff by providing awareness and training;
- respond to specific management and self-referrals on a confidential basis in relation to wellbeing issues causing difficulties at work;
- provide a confidential advisory and support service to individuals through counselling, information and training in personal coping strategies and stress management techniques and/or referral to specialist agencies as appropriate;
- provide advice and support to staff who are on sick leave with stress-related illness and advise individuals and managers in relation to rehabilitation and/or modifying duties;
- train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments;
- advise the University of any changes or developments in the field of wellbeing at work.

Employee Wellbeing

Employee Wellbeing staff will:

- be a source of specialist advice and assistance to managers and staff by providing awareness and training;
- respond to specific management and self-referrals on a confidential basis in relation to wellbeing issues causing difficulties at work;

- provide a confidential advisory and support service to individuals through information and training in personal coping strategies and stress management techniques and/or referral to specialist agencies as appropriate;
- provide advice and support to staff who are on sick leave with stress-related illness and advise individuals and managers in relation to rehabilitation and/or modifying duties in conjunction with Occupational Health;
- train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments;
- advise the University of any changes or developments in the field of wellbeing at work.

Employees

Employees at every level within Ulster University also have a duty of care to themselves and others to ensure that they take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals understand how they are feeling and feel confident and safe in bringing any concerns to the manager.

Employees should:
- be vigilant for signs of physical and mental ill health in themselves and their colleagues and seek support;
- raise issues of concern with their line manager if they believe they are experiencing work-related stress or if they believe one of their colleagues is experiencing work-related stress;
- work with their line manager to identify causes of work-related stress and possible control measures that may mitigate the risks;

- engage with the Wellbeing assessment process, including completing the questionnaire openly and honestly and volunteering for any focus groups;
- support the creation and implementation of Action Plans and recommendations made as a result of the Wellbeing assessment process;
- avail of the support and resources provided by the University e.g., Stress Management training, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provided by Inspire Workplaces.

For those employees who do not feel able to speak to their line manager, or feel their manager is not adequately addressing their concerns or may be the cause of the issue, they can speak directly to their relevant People Partner or Employee Wellbeing Advisor. They may also seek advice from the Employee Assistance Programme. They can also consult with their Trade Union Health and Safety or other Trade Union representative.

7. Wellbeing Assessment Procedure

Wellbeing Survey for all Staff

Wellbeing surveys of all staff in an area, e.g. a School or Department, should happen every two years and an ongoing review of the action plan and work situation carried out in the interim.

The process for the delivery of a Wellbeing Assessment will follow the steps laid out by the Health & Safety Executive. These steps are robust, and evidence based and ensure a consistency of approach that will allow

for comparisons to be drawn across distinct areas in the University. The following steps will be undertaken in partnership with Employee Wellbeing.

- Employee Wellbeing will use the Health & Safety Executive Management Standards Indicator Tool as the most appropriate, evidence-based framework to identify factors for work-related stress. This indicator tool consists of 35 items that ask about 'working conditions' known to be potential causes of work-related stress. These working conditions correspond to the six stressors of the Management Standards. The employee answers according to how they feel about these aspects of their work. Employee Wellbeing will ensure full accessibility of the survey, by facilitating the provision of an online survey, and in hard copy and any other methods as required by staff.

- Employee Wellbeing can add some demographic questions to the survey, to enable more use to be made of the data collected as appropriate. For example, comparisons can be by campus or job role responses, and this could enable good practice to be identified and adopted. However, the demographics must be such that it will not allow for the identification of the individual completing the survey. No other potentially identifying information will be requested.

- To enable more qualitative information to be included in the assessment, focus groups will be organised by Employee Wellbeing. These will follow a set format and take time to discuss each of the management standards, exploring problems raised and

looking for possible solutions.

- Employee Wellbeing will analyse the data collected from the wellbeing survey and the information gained through the focus group stage. A report will be produced, identifying the main issues raised including some narrative information on these, and the potential solutions offered by the team. This report will be presented to the area manager and shared with staff including the Trade Union Health and Safety or other Trade Union representative of each area.

- Upon receipt of the report and its recommendations the Senior Management Team will create an action plan and will communicate this with all staff in the area. This will be shared with appropriate Trade Union Health and Safety or other Trade Union representatives.

- Employees and Health and Safety representatives should be fully consulted and informed throughout the survey process.

8. Individual Stress Assessment

Where it is brought to an area manager's attention, or they have reason to believe that a member of staff may be suffering from stress, then a manager should offer to have a conversation with the individual to explore the causes of the stress; managers can make use of [HSE's Talking Toolkit](#). The toolkit has six templates for six different conversations. Each of these has a different theme designed to get line

managers and employees talking about issues which may be causing work-related stress or issues which could have the potential to become future causes if not managed properly. For each conversation, the first sheet gives the line manager a series of questions to start discussions with an employee about the causes of stress. The second sheet helps the line manager to develop ideas for how to begin tackling causes.

Adequate time should be found for these conversations. The toolkit also relies on both managers and employees having an open and honest conversation. Line managers should take sufficient time to listen to the points made by the employee and be understanding of any concerns raised. It is important to be empathetic and not to rush to offer simple explanations or excuses. Action points and solutions should be agreed together. The important thing is to start talking and to start planning.

Appropriate additional information and support for managers in undertaking these conversations will be provided by Employee Wellbeing. Employee Wellbeing are also available for employees to find out more about the process.

For those employees who do not feel able to speak to their line Manager, or feel their manager is not adequately addressing their concerns or may be the cause of the issue, they can speak directly to their relevant Employee Wellbeing Advisor. Their Trade Union Health and Safety or other Trade Union representative can also be contacted.

9. Related Policies and Procedures

[Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures](#)

- Bullying and Harassment (Dignity at Work) Policy and Procedures
- Reasonable Adjustment Policy
- Risk Assessment procedure
- Sickness Absence Policy