Stress Management Policy Statement

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Stress Management Policy Statement

Introduction

Robert Gordon University is committed to ensuring the health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of all employees. This 'wellbeing' commitment is embedded into our more general aim to provide a healthy and safe environment which enables interesting and challenging work and study.

As part of this wellbeing commitment the university recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing inappropriate causes of stress within the workplace. The university also recognises the importance of promoting and maintaining an organisational culture and environment which encourages wellbeing and the general 'wellness' of our employees. The university recognises that while harmful levels of stress can result from external factors as well as from work related issues, the impact on individual(s) often occurs within the workplace and so must be addressed by the university as part of its wider duty of care.

Policy Statement

It is the aspiration of the Robert Gordon University to provide a work environment where the understanding of 'stress'* is clear within our context, and the potential sources of such stress are identified and mitigated against to the lowest possible level.

*For the purposes of this policy statement, the university has adopted the commonly accepted definition of stress provided by the Health and Safety Executive.

The university aspires to achieve this through:

- Raising the awareness and understanding of stress;
- The promotion of a culture and an environment which encourages the wellbeing and general wellness of employees;
- The early identification of potential sources of stress;
- Providing the tools, guidance and training to its staff to enable them to effectively identify, support and manage the causes and effects of stress;
- The provision of confidential counselling for employees affected by stress caused by either work or external factors;
- The regular review of relevant, anonymised tracking information to inform the effectiveness of our arrangements

The university recognises that this policy does not sit in isolation.

The achievement of these objectives will be dependent on the effectiveness of other policies, procedures, benefits packages and support mechanisms available both within the university and accessible through our partner agencies.

The following links give information on accessing these university and external support services:

http://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/health-and-safety/wellbeing
https://you.rgu.ac.uk/org/hr/SitePages/Home.aspx

Definition of Stress

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

This definition makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. If an individual experiences stress at an excessive level or for a prolonged period, it will affect their efficiency and effectiveness at work. If this situation is not addressed it can impact upon their general wellbeing and lead to the development of mental and/or physical illness. It is recognised that negative stress can result from excessive pressure deriving from a variety of sources. These may be work related, non-work related or a combination of both.

Symptoms of Stress – Appendix 1

Management Standards – Appendix 2

Responsibilities

Line Managers

In common with other health and safety matters, line managers are expected to ensure that the required standards are met within their area of responsibility. The general expectations are set out in the "Management Structure - Responsibilities" document available at http://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/health-and-safety/management-guidance/management-structure

With particular reference to stress management, line managers must implement the procedures developed by the university to identify, assess and control stress at work. Line managers should also ensure that the working environment within their area of responsibility enables stress issues to be identified, discussed and addressed.

In the context of the workplace, the impact of stress on an employee can be mitigated if for example there is:

- clarity regarding line management, roles and responsibilities and job expectations
- active workload management so that work is appropriately distributed and planned

- sufficient influence over how, where and when work is done such that the employee feels they have sufficient control of their work
- regular information, communication and consultation so that the employee feels well informed and involved
- appropriate involvement in decision making
- an empathic line management, providing the time for listening and responding to concerns, whether work based or out-with work
- constructive feedback on performance, recognition and support for personal development and continuous improvement, whilst being open and honest about performance concerns

Senior managers must:

- Ensure that staff with line management responsibilities are provided with sufficient training, resource and support to meet the expectations placed upon them by this policy;

- Ensure that application of this policy is reviewed and discussed with key staff at regular intervals and reported to the local level H&S committee.

In addition, <u>within their area of responsibility and control</u> all line managers must, as part of normal and accepted management practice:

- Arrange and implement the recommendations of stress management risk assessments.
- Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure that the behavioural elements within the EPR system are discussed in a meaningful manner during formal reviews and that any actions arising are completed and recorded.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful personal and professional development opportunities.
- Proactively monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded. In particular, the impact of cyclic variations in work load and staff absences should be recognised and addressed through the active management of resources.
- Proactively monitor working time to ensure that staff are not routinely overworking and have adequate "downtime", watching for physical and behavioural indications of potential stress situations
- Proactively monitor and manage annual leave to ensure that staff do not have excessive periods without leave.
- Demonstrate personally zero tolerance of bullying and harassment, in whatever form, and ensure it is not tolerated by others.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress that arises from outside work, e.g. bereavement, divorce or separation, serious illness of family members, financial difficulties, caring responsibilities, etc.
- Routinely report on activity that assures compliance with the university's expectations to senior line management.

Employees

All employees should:

- Be aware of the causes and symptoms of unhealthy levels of stress and be prepared to take proactive action to reduce harm.
- Be prepared to communicate and raise issues of concern with their safety representative (work related) or line manager (<u>both</u> work and non-work related).
- Accept and cooperate with any referrals to the occupational health service.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.
- Be aware of the positive contribution of active self-care in the management of stress related problems.
- Ensure that they are aware of and use the existing benefits and support systems available to them.
- Recognise the importance of using their full annual leave entitlement.
- If unwilling to approach their safety representative or line manager use the confidential services provided through the human resources department, the ICAS helpline or approach their own GP.

Health & Safety Representatives

The recognised trade union health & safety representatives should be given sufficient training regarding stress management and an adequate time resource to enable them to discharge their function. The representatives should also have access to the local stress management risk assessments and, through the health and safety committee, to anonymised tracking data to enable them to monitor the effectiveness of the university's stress management arrangements.

Health & Safety Committee

The health & safety committee will monitor the effectiveness of the stress management policy and any other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety. In order to perform this function, the committee will have access to the risk assessments, action plans and anonymised tracking data.

Human Resources

The Human Resources department should:

- Give guidance to managers on the stress management policy and good management practice.
- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements and the opportunities for capability and competency development activities.
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment, including access to support mechanisms.

- Advise referral to occupational workplace counsellors where necessary to ensure that an individual receives an appropriate level of care and to facilitate their early return to work.

Occupational Health & Environmental Safety

The Occupational Health & Environmental Safety team should:

- Provide specialist advice and facilitate stress awareness training supporting cultural and behavioural change and development.
- Train and support managers in conducting risk assessments on stress management and in conjunction with the HR colleagues advise on the implementation of any resulting control measures.
- Provide training for managers and staff with regard to personal 'resilience' and 'coping' strategies.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the university and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

Occupational Health Service

The occupational health service provider should:

- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required:

OH&ES Audit

The effectiveness of the arrangements will be monitored by inclusion in the audit protocols for each School/Department.

Document History and Version Control

Version	Date Approved	Approved By	Description
1	April 2014	Harris Cooper	Creation
2	November 2015	Clinton Grant	Review
3	February 2019	Clinton Grant	Review