WORK-RELATED STRESS:
A GUIDE

Implementing a European Social Partner agreement

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The workplace of the 21st century is a fast-paced, dynamic, highly stimulating environment which brings a large number of benefits and opportunities to those who work within it. The ever-changing demands of the working world can increase levels of stress, especially for those who are consistently working under pressure. Whilst pressure has its positive side in raising performance, if such pressure becomes excessive it can lead to stress which has negative consequences.

These guidelines provide a valuable tool for employees and employers who wish to understand in more depth the complex issue of work-related stress. In addition to a detailed explanation of the legislative framework surrounding work-related stress at both national and European level, a list is provided of the practical resources available to manage stress in the workplace effectively. The leaflet will be kept under review.

This leaflet has been jointly drawn up by the CBI, TUC, CEEP UK and the FPB working together in partnership with the HSE and the DTI. We have created guidance which we believe to be constructive, comprehensive and clear for all those who need this resource. We are committed to helping those in the workplace to put into practice the recommendations made by this guidance as we believe it is important to manage stress well to avoid its negative impacts on an individual, on employers and on the British economy as a whole.

CBI	CEEP UK	DTI	FPB	HSE	TUC

Introduction

Work-related stress is a complex issue with as many subtle variations as there are people affected by it. Each year in this country there are over half a million instances where work-related stress results in people being absent from work, costing UK employers an estimated £3.7 billion. On average, each stress related absence involves 29 working days lost, a total of 13 million days. This means that work-related stress is now the biggest cause of working days lost through occupational injury and ill health. (Source – HSE guide 'Tackling work-related stress')

There is evidence to suggest that there are ways in which a business can help to reduce instances of work-related stress, or better manage the issue when it arises. Effective people management, good two-way communication between employers and employees, suitable working environments and effective work organisation are just some of the factors which can have an impact.

A non-binding agreement on work-related stress has been reached at European level by employer and employee organisations as part of the Social Dialogue process. This note has been drawn up by the UK organisations that are represented in the Social Dialogue and is supported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The intention is to provide a guide to the basics of the European agreement and link this to the large amount of existing guidance and support already available in the UK.

The agreement

In summary, the aims of the voluntary agreement are to:

• Increase the awareness and understanding of employers, workers and their representatives of work-related stress

• Draw their attention to signs that could indicate problems of work-related stress.

The objective is to provide employers and employees with a framework of measures which will identify and prevent problems of work-related stress and help to manage them when they do arise. Under the agreement, the responsibility for determining the appropriate measures rests with the employer. These measures are carried out with the participation and collaboration of workers and/or their representatives. These measures can be collective, individual or both. They can be introduced in the form of specific measures targeted at identified stress factors or as part of an integrated stress policy encompassing both preventive and responsive measures.

Definition of stress and work-related stress

The European agreement defined stress as a state which is accompanied by physical, psychological or social complaints or dysfunction and which results from individuals feeling unable to bridge a gap with the requirements or expectations placed on them. In line with the approach taken in the European agreement, in the UK the HSE defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them".

Individuals are well adapted to cope with short-term exposure to pressure - in fact this can often be positive - but there will be greater difficulty in coping with prolonged intensive pressure. A key point to recognise is that individuals will react differently to pressure in different situations and at different stages in their working lives.

Stress is not a disease, but it can lead to a reduced ability to perform at work and have an impact on a person's health and wellbeing.

Existing legislative framework

The European agreement and this guidance are intended to complement existing legislation and guidance available in the UK. Current legislation under the European framework directive 89/391 requires that all employers have a "duty to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to work" in so far as they entail a risk to health and safety. This duty covers work-related stress and its causes.

In the UK, the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to secure the health (including mental health), safety and welfare of employees whilst at work and, amongst other things, provide a safe place of work; ensure safe systems of work and provide information and training. The Act also requires employees to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others and to co-operate with the employer in discharging their duties under the Act.

In addition, under The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, UK employers are required to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed whilst they are at work. This includes the requirement to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and to take measures to control the identified risk.

Copies of the act and regulations are available from: http://www.hmso.gov.uk

Summary of UK approach

In the UK, both employer and employee organisations as well as the Government recognise tackling work-related stress as a key challenge.

The Health and Safety Commission/Executive, in consultation with key stakeholders, has taken a partnership approach to tackling the issue of work-related stress. This has involved the development of tools and guidance aimed at helping organisations to prevent and manage work-related stress. HSE's approach focuses on prevention rather than cure, although work is ongoing into rehabilitation and recovery through back to work programmes. This builds on a risk assessment led approach and is predicated upon the notion of promoting good management practice.

To support this approach, HSE has developed Management Standards. Launched in November 2004, these aim to provide a yardstick against which organisations can measure their performance in tackling particular causes of stress and set out some indicators of good management practice. The Management Standards have the status of guidance and support the existing legislative framework.

The Management Standards approach places a strong emphasis on employers, employees and their representatives working in partnership to develop effective and practicable solutions relevant to their particular organisation. They also encourage organisations to pursue continuous improvement in recognition of the business and health benefits of tackling stress effectively.

Preventing and dealing with work-related stress

Practical information on addressing stress at work is available from the following:

Health and Safety Executive
Information, research, case studies and access to the HSE management standards for assessing work related stress:
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm

Acas (Arbitration Conciliation and Advisory Service)
http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/b18.html
http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/Stress-standards.pdf

TUC (Trade Union Congress)
Access to information and research as well as the TUC stress MOT and a step-by-step stress risk assessment tool:
http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=37

CBI (Confederation of British Industry)

http://www.cbi.org.uk/

Members of CEEP UK

NHS Employers

NHS Employers' Guidance: "The Management of Health Safety and Welfare Issues of NHS Staff" devotes a chapter to stress management:
http://www.nhsemployers.org/docs/blue_book_chapter_15.pdf

Cabinet Office

The Whitehall Studies of British Civil Servants have been in the lead in showing that the circumstances in which people live and work are not just crucial for perceived wellbeing but they are major influences on health. The Whitehall Studies are long-term studies of men and women examining the influences on health of circumstances at work, at home and in the wider community.

To help policy discussions, the Cabinet Office and the Council of Civil Service Unions asked Professor Sir Michael Marmot and his team at the University of London to produce a summary of the key findings that came out of the Whitehall Studies.

Work, Stress and Stress, the plain English guide to the Whitehall II study was produced by University College London in July 2004 with key findings from the original research spread over ten chapters. (Source: Stansfield, S., Head,J.,& Marmot, M (2000). Work-related Factors and Ill-health; The Whitehall II Study. HSE Contract Research Report 266/2000. Sudbury: HSE Books.)

A copy of the report can be found at:
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/whitehallII/Whitehallbooklet.pdf

The Employers' Organisation for Local Government.

Information on the range of stress-related information, guidance and publications is available from:

http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/health/stress/index.html
http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/publications/fullpublications/stress.html
http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/publications/fullpublications/ill_health.html

Forum of Private Business

http://www.fpb.org/

The Way Forward

Addressing the issue of work-related stress is an important objective and one that all the organisations involved in the production of this note wish to support. The publication of the HSE Management Standards in November 2004 was a key step in enabling organisations to move forward in conjunction with employees and their representatives. The Management Standards are complemented by supporting guidance on the risk assessment process and interventions.

The partnership approach taken in the development of the Management Standards has ensured an increased general awareness and knowledge of the issue of work-related stress in the UK. It is believed that this partnership approach and the continuing provision of support to employers, employees and their representatives by the regulatory authorities will have a significant impact in reducing the incidence of work-related stress.

The UK social partners will keep this issue under review with the HSE and the DTI.

Government

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
HSE Infoline
08701 545 500
http://www.hse.gov.uk/

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)
Enquiry Unit (for enquiries related to social partner agreements)
dti.enquiries@dti.gsi.gov.uk
020 7215 5000

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas)
http://www.acas.org.uk/contact/contact_us.html

Partner Organisations

CEEP UK
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