

The Well-Being Programme

The HSE Management Standards for Work-Related Stress: Frequently asked questions

What are the HSE's Management Standards for Work-Related Stress?

Following research highlighting stress as the second greatest cause of occupational ill health in Great Britain, the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) asked the HSE to formulate a pragmatic approach to tackling stress at work. The aim was to bring about a reduction in the number of employees taking sick leave or underperforming at work because of stress.

The HSE launched their "Management Standards" in November 2004. The Standards represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, wellbeing and organisational performance.

Following the Management Standards process enables employers to identify the gap between their current performance and these conditions and helps them to develop their own solutions to close this gap. The Standards cover six main areas (Demands, Control, Relationships, Change, Role and Support) and are relevant to all organisations, including schools.

What are the legal obligations in relation to assessing the risk of work-related stress?

All employers have a legal duty:

- under the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999*, to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities
- under the *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974*, to take measures to control that risk

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) expects all organisations to carry out a "suitable and sufficient" risk assessment for stress, and to take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment.

HSE figures show that stress is the predominant cause of work-related illness in the education sector, with 45% of all absence in education being stress-related. Tackling work-related stress in education has therefore become a priority for the HSE. They recently announced that they will be carrying out targeted inspections of local authorities, seeking evidence that schools are taking action to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for work-related stress.

What do we need to do to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for stress?

The HSE recommends a five-step approach to risk assessment:

Step 1: Identify the hazards

The HSE has identified 6 areas that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing. These form the backbone of the HSE Management Standards and the Well-Being Programme from Worklife Support. The first step is therefore to be aware of these areas.

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Gather data, such as staff perceptions through a survey, to identify potential areas for development.

Step 3: Evaluate the risk and take action

Involve employees in deciding on priority areas for action as well as in developing solutions to address these.

Step 4: Record your findings

Develop an action plan.

Step 5: Monitor and Review

Evaluate progress and make continuous improvements.

The HSE propose that organisations use the Managements Standards, or an equivalent approach such as the Well-Being Programme from Worklife Support, as a framework to undertake their statutory risk-assessment process working with their employees and representatives.

Do we have to do a staff survey?

Not necessarily, but you must be able to demonstrate that you have gathered data in a systematic and robust way that enables you to identify whether stress is a problem for your school. Using a confidential survey ensures that all staff are given the opportunity to express their honest opinions freely and objectively.

Is the Well-Being Programme from Worklife Support a suitable and sufficient risk assessment?

Yes. That is assuming, of course, that it is properly implemented. *(See the separate Worklife Support guidance entitled 'Fulfilling your duty of care', which sets out how to ensure your Well-Being Programme meets your statutory risk-assessment obligations.)*

The HSE recognises the Well-Being Programme as a suitable risk-assessment approach that has been specifically tailored for schools:

"The Well-Being Programme from Worklife Support has been developed specifically for schools and is broadly equivalent to the HSE Management Standards approach. Participation in the Well-Being Programme will enable schools to demonstrate they have met their duty of care under Health and Safety legislation."
Health and Safety Executive, March 2006

Why use Well-Being to implement the Management Standards?

- The Well-Being Programme was originally developed for schools. It is a sophisticated, tailor-made tool with which to carry out a risk assessment on work-related stress
- The programme's survey of staff perception is completely automated and paper-free. There is no need for staff responses to be collated and input manually and the results of the survey are automatically generated, saving you valuable time
- The wide-ranging survey comprises 79 questions across 8 different areas of work (the 6 areas of the Management Standards, plus 2 additional areas including a stress-audit-style section on 'personal wellbeing') and a unique prioritisation exercise
- The emphasis placed on wellbeing - rather than on the prevalence of stress - is viewed particularly positively by school staff
- The results of the survey can be collated into common themes such as 'communication' and 'team working' to provide a more detailed analysis

- Each school receives a powerful, detailed data profile and each local authority receives an aggregated report - allowing interventions to be implemented at the most appropriate level
- The data profile breaks down staff data by up to six sector-specific demographic categories and provides benchmarking against schools or organisations of the same type
- The Well-Being Programme encourages a very high participation rate: on average three-quarters of an organisation's staff voluntarily take part in the survey
- Confidentiality is inbuilt and guaranteed
- Worklife Support provide support for ongoing work, helping to ensure that all changes generated are properly embedded and sustained
- Worklife Support have extensive knowledge of and experience in the educational field, having to date worked with more than 3,000 schools and 170,000 staff across the UK.

We participated in the Well-Being Programme 3 years ago. Haven't we done it now?

It is important to remember that the Well-Being Programme, as with any risk-assessment approach, is about making steady, continuous improvements in the way you manage stress and promote wellbeing in your school. It cannot be seen as a one-off. It is critical that you are committed to working continuously and systematically with the staff team to evaluate progress and find creative ways of promoting staff wellbeing and managing stress. Repeating the process on a regular basis is an important way of evaluating progress, maintaining momentum and identifying new, emerging areas of focus.

Our staff have access to a counselling service / Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Isn't that enough?

An important aspect of meeting your obligations in relation to work-related stress is ensuring that you are able to address the individual concerns of individuals, as well as develop solutions for more universal issues. Therefore, it is essential that you develop ways, such as a confidential support service, through which employees can raise concerns and get support for their individual issues.

However, providing a 'primary intervention' such as an EAP or counselling service does not do enough to help you to identify the underlying organisational issues that promote wellbeing or, if not properly managed, can cause stress. This organisational approach is an essential element of the Well-Being Programme and the HSE Management Standards.

For more information on the Management Standards, see www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

For more information on the Well-Being Programme, see www.worklifesupport.com