



Washwood Heath
Multi Academy Trust

Stress at Work Policy

Prepared by:	Director of HR WHMAT
Applies to:	All WHMAT Employees
Approved by:	Board of Trustees following consultation with staff and unions – 27.06.2018
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Links to:	ACAS Guidance “Stress at Work” WHMAT’s Managing Sickness Policy Health & Safety Executive’s Management Standards for Stress Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 WHMAT Stress at Work Toolkit
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1.0 Introduction & Policy Aims

- 1.1 Washwood Heath Multi Academy Trust (WHMAT) is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees and to promoting a healthy and supportive working environment. It recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and alleviating workplace stressors.
- 1.2 WHMAT will take all reasonable steps to reduce health and safety risks due to stress in the workplace as set out in this Policy.
- 1.3 This Policy, through the proactive management of workplace stress by managers and other stakeholders, aims to:
- 1.3.1 provide a safer working environment for WHMAT employees where their wellbeing is prioritised;
 - 1.3.2 reduce the levels of sickness absence due to work related stress in individual academies and across WHMAT as a whole, so that the overall education provision for children is enhanced.

2.0 Application

- 2.1 This Policy will apply to all WHMAT employees, regardless of role, or whether they are employed on a permanent or fixed-term basis. It is designed to help WHMAT managers and Trustees do all that they reasonably can to discharge their duty of care in relation to stress, with a particular emphasis on workplace stress.
- 2.2 This Policy has been developed in accordance with the *Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Management Standards for Stress*, and the *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974*. It should be read in conjunction with WHMAT's Managing Sickness Policy where stress (whether personal or work related) leads to absence from work.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Board of Trustees will:

- 3.1.1 Approve this Policy in consultation with the Director of HR;
- 3.1.2 Have a nominated Trustee who leads on health and safety (including employee well-being) and carries out stress risk assessments of the CEO, if required, with support from HR as necessary;
- 3.1.3 Have an over-arching accountability for the implementation of this Policy as part of their wider health and safety responsibilities.

3.2 The CEO/Heads of Academy and other Line Managers are responsible for:

- 3.2.1 Familiarising themselves with this Policy and for following it where appropriate as part of their duty of care towards the employees that they line manage. This means using a risk assessment process, once suitable training has been given, to identify the causes of stress and trying to reduce them as far as is reasonably practicable (see further at 5.0 below);
- 3.2.2 Ensuring that there is good communication between management and staff, particularly where changes to working practices or organisational change are proposed (e.g. changes to staffing structures or mergers);
- 3.2.3 Ensuring line managers are trained by HR to discharge their responsibilities under this Policy;
- 3.2.4 Monitoring workloads through good forward planning and 1-2-1s to ensure that employees are not overloaded;
- 3.2.5 Monitoring working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking;
- 3.2.6 Being vigilant and offering additional support to any member of staff who is displaying signs of stress in the workplace and offering support as required e.g. signposting them to counselling, offering to carry out a risk assessment, or simply taking time out to talk to them as part of their duty of care.

3.3 HR is responsible for:

- 3.3.1 Training managers on the implementation of this Policy, specifically the risk assessment process and for supporting with the risk assessment of employees as appropriate;
- 3.3.2 Giving guidance to CEO/Heads and other line managers on this Policy;
- 3.3.3 Working with the CEO/Heads and other line managers to support with stress risk assessments as necessary (in particular, supporting the CEO to conduct risk assessments for Heads as appropriate);
- 3.3.4 Working with Cover Managers across WHMAT to ensure that regular sickness absence reports are produced and analysed, so that levels of absence due to work-place-stress across WHMAT can be monitored and interventions recommended.

3.4 WHMAT Employees are responsible for:

- 3.4.1 Raising any issues of concern regarding the workplace with their line manager, or another appropriate manager, so that issues can be discussed and strategies and/or support offered or agreed;
- 3.4.2 Taking care of their own health and wellbeing in the workplace by considering and accepting, if appropriate, opportunities for counselling, mentoring, or other agreed interventions;

- 3.4.3 Taking a proactive approach to the management of their own stress by communicating early on with their line managers, trade union representatives, or other appropriate colleagues, any concerns that they have

4.0 Definition of stress

4.1 The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*”.

4.2 It is widely acknowledged that some level of stress is a normal aspect of everyday life. In addition, some pressure, if managed correctly, can be positive, motivating and encourage employees to do their best at work. However, the harmful effects of stress, particularly when chronic, are now regarded as having a significant negative impact on the overall physical, psychological and/or emotional well-being of individuals. In addition, it can undermine performance at work and be costly to individual academics.

4.3 This policy focuses on work related stress, however, it is recognised that excessive pressure and demands outside of work – or conflicting demands of work and home – can also play a part. It is difficult to control outside stressors, but to manage work related stress effectively, the importance and interaction of work and home problems must be recognised.

5.0 Individual Risk Assessment

5.1 Regulation 3 of the *Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999* requires employers to assess risks to health and safety from hazards at work. This includes the risk of employees developing stress-related illnesses, and to discharge this duty, employers must offer and carry out “suitable and sufficient” risk assessments.

5.2 The HSE has identified 6 key areas (or “risk factors”) that can be a cause of work-related stress:

- 1) The **demands** of the job
- 2) The employees’ **control** over the job
- 3) The **support** received by employees from managers and colleagues
- 4) **Relationships** at work
- 5) The **clarity of an employee’s role** within an organisation
- 6) **Change** and how it is managed

5.3 Every effort should be made by appropriate WHMAT managers to resolve individual cases of work-place stress proactively and within a supportive environment, which encourages employees to raise concerns and make suggestions for improving WHMAT and the management of stress.

However, it recognises that some employees may choose not to engage in a stress risk assessment process.

- 5.4 WHMAT will adopt the following approach to individual employees who inform us that they are suffering from work-place stress, or appear to be showing signs of stress (see toolkit):

Step 1

If the employee perceives that their manager is the cause of their stress, they can request to meet with another agreed appropriate manager. The manager will signpost the employee to useful contacts and the Employee Assistance Programme (confidential counselling) as appropriate.

Step 2

An informal, confidential chat to enquire about well-being will then be held. If appropriate, the employee will be invited to complete and return the voluntary “stress action check list” within a reasonable period (7 days – see template in toolkit). The manager explains that this is part of WHMAT’s duty of care and risk assessment process and will remind the employee of useful contacts and Employee Assistance Programme (Perkbox Counselling) as appropriate.

Step 3

Manager reviews completed stress action check-list with or without HR support (optional). Manager uses guidance in the managers’ toolkit so they are well prepared for step 4.

Step 4

Manager meets with employee to discuss and agree appropriate support in light of completed “stress action check list” and to complete “action plan” (see toolkit). Guidance notes for managers accompany the checklist to help suggest solutions (see toolkit). Union representation and/or HR support may be beneficial at this meeting, but is optional. Manager may recommend that employee be referred to Occupational Health, signpost them to their own GP and/or encourage access to counselling via Perkbox EAP (see details in toolkit). The employee and the manager work together to complete the action plan and to agree a timeframe for reviewing it (usually 4-6 weeks from this meeting is advisable).

Step 5

Employee and manager hold a meeting to review action plan and to discuss employee progress within agreed review period.

Step 6

If the employee goes off sick either before or during this process, reasonable contact should be maintained in line with *WHMAT’s Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure*.

An employee can choose to withdraw from the process at any stage.

6.0 Group Risk Assessment

6.1 If more than one employee raise the same work-place stressors as a concern within an individual academy with their manager, HR or other designated manager, or a manager wishes to take a proactive approach in response to anticipated change or events, WHMAT will adopt the following approach:

Step 1

HR and/or appropriate manager holds a confidential group conversation with affected employees, to enquire about wellbeing.

Step 2

Depending on the outcome of that conversation, employees will have the opportunity to complete WHMAT's stress action questionnaire, either as individual's or as a group and this can be used as a starting point for a focus group discussion, if appropriate. If at any time during a group discussion an employee would prefer to speak confidentially, the manager should ensure that this will be arranged.

Step 3

Following completion of the checklist, the appropriate manager invites affected staff to take part in a group discussion with the employees (including a trade union representative or HR where appropriate) to talk through the findings of their questionnaire, and the workplace stressors that have been identified. Ensure that areas raised are recorded on the paperwork (see workplace stress toolkit). The emphasis during the group approach should be on the employees suggesting an action plan/creating solutions in consultation with manager/HR as appropriate.

Step 4

After listening to the employees, consider if individuals would benefit from being referred to occupational health, or signposted to counselling or another support service (see toolkit). Guidance notes for managers accompany the stress action checklist to help provide solutions. The manager should work with the employees to create an action plan.

Step 5

Manager ensures final copy of action plan provided to relevant employees and agree an optional date for it to be reviewed as a group, or individually.

Step 6

If employees go off sick either before or during this process, reasonable contact should be maintained by an appropriate manager in line with WHMAT's Sickness Absence Policy.

Employees can choose to withdraw from the process at any stage or may request that an individual risk assessment approach be followed instead of a group approach (see 5.4).

7.0 Stress at home

7.1 A person can experience excessive pressure and demands outside of work, just as much as they can at work. WHMAT recognises that stress can build up in its employees over time because of a combination of factors that may not be all work-related. Nonetheless, the conflicting demands of work and home can cause excessive stress and problems outside of work can affect a person's ability to perform effectively at work. Stressors at home can affect those at work and vice versa (see toolkit).

7.2 Whilst WHMAT cannot be responsible for external stressors, managers need to acknowledge and recognise the importance of effective communication, showing empathy and signposting employees to support as appropriate.

7.3 WHMAT recognises that its employees are not obliged to tell us their personal problems, but there are some practical ways that managers can support colleagues who may be experiencing stress at home:

Be empathetic & proactive – arrange a confidential meeting with the person, allowing them the opportunity to discuss any problems they wish and allowing them time to voice their own concerns. This can be an opportunity to find out whether the person's problems are work-related, personal or both.

Be flexible – consider offering the person more flexible working hours on a temporary basis or allowing them to work from home, or to have paid leave of absence for appropriate appointments such as counselling, GP appointments.

Outline the external and/or internal support mechanisms available – signpost to the Perkbox Employee Assistance Programme or other appropriate interventions that may help reduce stress levels e.g. flexible working policy, family friendly policy, local or WHMAT social events/well-being activities.

8.0 Policy Review

8.1 This Policy will be reviewed 24 months from ratification by the Director of HR, subject to consultation. An earlier review may be required in the event of changes to legislation and/or HR good practice.