Policy and Guidance on prevention and management of work-related stress

Policy and Guidance
Version 1 March 2005
Prevention and management of work-related stress

Introduction

Work-related stress has become a high-profile issue. The regulatory authorities for health and safety, principally the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), whilst still targeting other perhaps more traditional subject areas, are now focusing on psychosocial hazards of the workplace and their harmful effects. This has resulted in enforcement action being taken. In addition successful cases have been fought in the civil courts against employers citing failure to meet their duty of care.

Behind these lines of action lies a perception that more people are actually suffering from work-related stress, resulting in varied measurable outcomes, such as increased sickness absence and reduced work output.

The harmful effects of work-related stress can be mitigated and in some cases prevented by adopting positive management strategies. No employer can guarantee to protect the psychological welfare of each member of staff, but measures can be put in place to support those staff that do experience work-related stress. This document refers to and supplements the MRC Statement on the Prevention and Management of Stress at Work and sets out Guidance on the implementation of MRC policy in Council establishments.

Policy

The MRC’s policy on work-related stress is set out in its Statement on the Prevention and Management of Stress at Work, published as Appendix 9 of the Health Management Policy. This guidance complements that Statement. The Statement confirms that MRC will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees and provide safe systems of work. It also sets out ways in which staff can take a number of positive measures to improve their ability to cope with situations they find stressful.

Scope

The Policy and Guidance is applicable in all MRC establishments. External Scientific Staff (ESS) will be able to apply aspects of the strategy relating to the prevention and management of work-related stress to their teams (specifically through Guidance Note 1 and the distribution of Guidance Note 4 to MRC contracted staff).

Action required

Institute and Unit Directors are required to meet the requirements of MRC Policy on the Prevention and Management of Work-related Stress and to do this where practicable through the application of related MRC Guidance. ESS team leaders should apply the guidance within the context of their host’s organisation and arrangements.

The actions required are set out in the Director’s Summary.

This document is available on our website at http://extra.mrc.ac.uk/HSS/
Director’s summary

The prevention and management of work-related stress

This document refers to MRC policy on the prevention and management of work-related stress and then provides guidance on the application of that policy in MRC establishments.

No assumption has been made on the presence or absence of members of staff experiencing work-related stress in any one establishment. Emphasis has been placed upon applying good management to minimise the potential for stress. This complements the parallel strategy of ensuring so far as we can that systems are in place to support any individual that does experience stress.

Scope of guidance

There are 4 Guidance Notes. They include management guidance, guidance for all staff, guidance on risk assessment applying a staff survey, and guidance on the mechanisms in place within the MRC to support staff who may be experiencing work-related stress.

The management guidance outlines the key areas identified by HSE in their guidelines as those where good management should minimise the risk of work-related stress. The six areas are:

- Demands - ensuring staff can cope with demands
- Control - encouraging staff to have a say in what they do
- Support - providing support for staff
- Relationships - maintaining acceptable behaviour
- Roles - understanding of roles and responsibilities
- Change - ensuring staff can cope with change

Action

Directors are required to do the following:

- Minimise the potential for work-related stress through positive management (see Guidance Note 1)
- Set up a Focus Group with representatives from the different functions and teams to review work-related stress through a benchmarking exercise and, where appropriate, to plan a staff survey.
- Ensure the distribution of Guidance Notes 1 and 3 to key management personnel and all members of the Focus Group, and Guidance Notes 2 and 4 to all staff.
- Use the findings from the benchmarking exercise and survey to modify present systems where the need has been identified in order to minimise the potential for work-related stress.
- Ensure staff are aware of the support available to them if they should experience stress in the workplace.

Head Office and regional human resources staff will be pleased to assist the implementation of this policy and guidance.

MRC Human Resources Group

(Human Resources Advisory Group and Health, Safety & Security Section Headquarters Office)
Stress management

Guidance

The following notes will guide units through the processes of investigating for the presence of work-related stress, minimising the potential for its occurrence, and ensuring systems are in place to support staff who experience work-related stress.

It is essential that there is full commitment from both senior management and staff to the success of implementing this strategy.

Separate guidance is provided for management and for staff, initially to gain commitment and then to guide them through the processes.

The first objective is to review the management systems in place, to ensure as far as possible they are designed to minimise the potential for stress at work.

The second is to identify those areas where stress at work might exist at present or where there is the potential for it in the foreseeable future.

The third is, where the need is identified, to consult staff through the use of a survey to identify potential sources of pressure that in turn might cause personal stress.

The fourth is to modify existing systems where appropriate, in the light of the results of the survey.

Finally, the fifth is to review the systems put in place at appropriate intervals.

It is suggested that the first three objectives may best be achieved through the Focus Group, who would report their findings to senior management.

Guidance Notes

Guidance Note 1  Management guidance

Guidance Note 2  An introduction for all staff

Guidance Note 3  Assessing the risks

Guidance Note 4  Supporting the staff

Further assistance on the implementation of this policy and guidance can be obtained by contacting your Regional Safety Coordinator, or through the support functions identified in Guidance Note 4.
Guidance Note 1

Management guidance

Prevention and management of work-related stress: An introduction

What is stress?

Every job creates a certain amount of pressure and sometimes it is this pressure that motivates us to do a job well. Stress is our body's reaction to excessive pressure. If we are under excessive pressure or 'stress' for a long time this may lead to physical or mental illness (such as depression or heart disease). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as

"the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them".

Why you should manage these risks

It pays to do so – it benefits the unit or team

Employers who manage the risks associated with workplace stress can enjoy the benefits of reduced sickness absence, better performance, less frequent and less severe accidents, better relationships with colleagues and external contacts, and lower staff turnover – all linked to improving performance.

The legal duty – taking a proactive approach

Good practice, ensconced in health and safety legislation, requires employers to set out policy, plan for safety, organise staff for safety and thence manage identified hazards and risks. The latter is achieved through risk assessment and making decisions on how to manage the risks.

For each significant risk identified, we are required to apply risk control measures. First we are required to take steps to avoid exposure to risk, then to make changes to reduce the frequency and amount of exposure and then take steps to minimise any possible harmful effects. The legislation requires, as part of risk control, to adapt work to the individual with respect to workplace and work design1. We are also required to focus on risk prevention in respect of social relationships and work organisation, conditions and environment.

Finally, when determining the measures needed to prevent or control risk, we are required to give priority to measures that protect the majority of staff over those that focus on the individual.

1 The full text of Schedule 1 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 is found at Annex 1.
These principles apply to all workplace hazards and risks including those described as psychosocial such as stress: solely providing counselling for employees is insufficient.

**Neglecting responsibilities – publicity we should avoid**

There have been several court cases where damages have been awarded against employers for work-related stress. These are characterised by an employer failing to deal properly with situations where an employee experienced stress, allowing the employee to continue in the stressful situation. In addition, HSE has now taken action against an employer for failing to carry out a proper stress risk assessment.

**The moral duty – costs to our employees**

The costs to those suffering from stress can be calculated realistically. Not only does stress affect the physical and mental health of the individual but also it has an impact on family and social relationships, personal and family circumstances.

**What are potential causes of stress at work?**

The recognised potential causes of stress at work include:

- Poor communication and inappropriate management style
- Lack of training, resources and opportunities to develop
- High workload, unsociable hours, inflexible working arrangements
- Uncomfortable or unsafe working environment
- The nature of the job, such as working with the public or working alone
- Lack of control over work demands or lack of support
- Lack of feedback on performance and feeling undervalued
- Organisational change and lack of job security
- Interpersonal conflict

**How should we approach these issues?**

**Introduction**

MRC is addressing the issue of stress at work by requiring its establishments to

1. Apply the principles of good management to as far as reasonably possible prevent stress at work

2. Identify the potential causes of stress in each establishment and develop a plan to eliminate or minimise those stressors

3. Support those staff that experience stress at work.

This guidance note focuses on the principles of stress prevention through good management. The HSE has proposed standards for management that address the six key areas included in the preceding paragraph. Those are:

- **Demands** - ensuring staff have the ability to cope with demands
- **Control** - increasing the extent to which staff have a say in what they do
- **Support** - providing support for staff
- **Relationships** - maintaining acceptable behaviour in the workplace
**Stress management:**

- **Role** - ensuring staff understand their roles and responsibilities
- **Change** - coping with change

**Demands**

The MRC functions in the competitive world of research. Funding and hence employment depends as much on past and present achievements as on future plans. Yet it is essential that the right balance is struck to allow staff to work as effectively and efficiently as possible without excessive demands being placed upon them.

In order to protect the workforce as far as possible from excessive demands, units should work towards the following objectives:

- To provide realistic deadlines for work
- To provide appropriate training to ensure staff competence
- To vary work and work patterns
- To build appropriate breaks to the work schedule
- To provide a work environment that supports the staff (e.g., avoids distraction, noise, disturbance, etc)
- To ensure that the workforce are free from external threat of intrusion and violence (the latter applies to fieldwork as well)

Identifying these objectives includes recognition that failure to apply them may increase the potential for work-related stress.

**Control**

The basis of this is to give as much control as is reasonable to the staff to organise their work. Much of this can be determined at the initial project programming. A realistic timetable should be set that considers the individual capabilities of each member of the team and sets a timetable that allows the team members flexibility in how they achieve their objectives within the agreed timescale. Key issues are therefore to:

- Allow staff some control over their pace of work
- Allow staff some control over how they work
- Involve staff in decision making with respect to their own work patterns

Agreed work patterns should be respected with appropriate monitoring.

**Support**

This is central to staff development and thus shares many common goals with Investors in People (IIP). The key objective is for managers to keep 'in tune' and 'in touch' with their staff. Regular opportunities should be given for dialogue in one-on-one meetings, where concerns can be raised by the manager or member of staff. In addition, team progress meetings could include as a regular item consideration of the pace of the work and any emerging pressures.

A key component of the discussions, in particular mid- or full-term appraisals, should be ways that members of staff develop to their full potential.
Stress management: Guidance Note 1 - Management guidance

On the other side of the coin, managers and staff should be made aware of the support available to staff should things unexpectedly go wrong. An outline of that support framework is included in Guidance Note 4.

Included within this component are the various support functions that assist the research programme. These include administrative and functional support. Within this framework lies the health and safety structure. This has to be built on a positive safety culture, where management and staff understand and fulfil their own responsibilities and duties and promote safe working.

Key objectives for management are to:

- Hold regular meetings with staff as individuals and within teams
- Ensure that line managers are available to staff in such a way that ensures reasonable access whilst respecting the needs of managers
- Make optimal use of the appraisal process to identify areas for and encourage staff development that relates to their role and function in the unit programme
- Ensure staff are aware of and make appropriate use of the support available to them both within the establishment and corporately
- Ensure staff are aware of support available to them in the event of their experiencing stress at work

Relationships

Much of this focuses on issues of defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and prompt resolution of conflict.

Positive aspects also include managers building teams based on interpersonal as well as work-based skills and including the acquisition and improvement of those skills as part of their overall development programme.

Managers should not forget that a team sometimes functions necessarily in part through individuals working a significant proportion of their time on their own. In these circumstances, time should be set aside for team meetings to avoid feelings of isolation.

Key issues are to:

- Encourage open communication
- Ensure an inclusive culture that supports staff working in isolation
- Establish a code of acceptable behaviour and do not allow any unacceptable behaviour

Role

Key to the success of the MRC, at corporate as well as establishment level, are that –

- All managers and staff understand their own roles, both in isolation and as part of the overall programme of research or support
- Systems are in place to ensure staff develop in their roles to their full potential and to the benefit of the MRC.

Once again, the objectives are synonymous with those of IIP.

The first step is to ensure full and comprehensive induction of any new member of staff or any staff significantly changing their role within the establishment. As part of that process,
Stress management: Guidance Note 1 - Management guidance

Each member of staff should be informed and instructed on their role, including clarification of their own objectives in the context of their team.

This is not however a one-off process and regular meetings and staff appraisals can and should be used to resolve any ambiguities and problems as well as set new objectives.

Some key issues are therefore to:

- Ensure comprehensive induction is in place
- Clarify roles in the context of individual and team objectives
- Ensure well-defined job descriptions
- Hold regular meetings to ensure objectives are being met and to set new objectives
- Encourage staff to be open about their concerns or uncertainties.

Change

It is widely accepted that it is not change itself that causes stress amongst the workforce but the uncertainties that surround and infiltrate the process of change. If managers wish to carry their workforce with them and reduce the risk of key staff leaving or at best, staff feeling isolated from the decision-making process, then managers should be open at all times.

Many changes are instituted to improve performance and working practices. It is important therefore that staff are made aware as soon as practicable about the likelihood of changes taking place, why they are happening and how they will happen. Most of all staff need to know how the changes will affect them personally. Where staff perceive the changes to be positive, they are likely to embrace and facilitate the process. Where the news is less good, knowledge of what is planned for them can reduce the potential levels of stress and enable staff to cope with the changes.

It may be that managers to senior level may have little choice over the ‘why’ or the timing, but they can manage the process of communication. Where decisions have been made that are irrevocable or inevitable that will affect some or all of the staff, staff should be informed as soon as possible.

Thus, the key actions are to:

- Explain to staff why changes are taking place in the context of corporate or team objectives
- Engage staff in the change process
- Act promptly to defuse uncertainty
- Never underestimate the potential effects of change, however small.

Summary and next steps

This guidance has set out the principles that, if applied, should reduce the future incidence of stress in the workplace. Applying the highest possible standards of pro-active management is however only part of the overall strategy for the reduction and minimisation of stress.

The following guidance notes are designed to raise staff awareness and to provide guidance on how to identify potential problem areas in your establishment through risk assessment,
Stress management: Guidance Note 1 - Management guidance

how to create a plan to address those risks and how to provide support to your staff in the event of them experiencing stress at work.
Guidance Note 1 Annex 1

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Schedule 1

(This schedule specifies the general principles of prevention set out in Article 6(2) of Council Directive 89/391/EEC)

(a) Avoiding risks;
(b) Evaluating the risks that cannot be avoided;
(c) Combating the risks at source;
(d) Adapting the work to the individual, especially as regards the design of workplaces, the choice of work equipment and the choice of working and production methods, with a view, in particular, to alleviating monotonous work and work at a predetermined work-rate and to reducing their effect on health;
(e) Adapting to technical progress;
(f) Replacing the dangerous by the non-dangerous or the less dangerous;
(g) Developing a coherent overall prevention policy which covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors relating to the working environment;
(h) Giving collective protective measures priority over individual protective measures; and
(i) Giving appropriate instructions to employees.
Guidance Note 2

An introduction for all staff

Working together to tackle work-related stress

The role of the MRC

The MRC has a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees. In addition, it has a duty to not put at risk any person not his employee through its activities. In particular, it has a duty in this context, to assess the workplace risks that may cause stress and affect your health and put control measures in place to avoid or reduce them. This guidance sets out the first important step – to raise awareness of these risks.

The MRC’s first priority is to do all it can to prevent the incidence of work-related stress through good and positive management. Guidance Note 1 focuses on that aspect.

The MRC’s strategy for the management of work-related stress involves a five-step process. The requirement to apply each of the steps and specifically the use of the staff questionnaire included in Step 3 will depend in part upon the number of staff, the spectrum of work activities and the outcome of Step 2. Steps 2 and 3 will be managed by a Focus Group formed specifically for the purpose and representative as far as possible of all groups of staff. Details on carrying out steps 2 and 3 are described in Guidance Note 3.

The steps are:

Step 1 Raising awareness
Step 2 Benchmarking: reviewing the current situation
Step 3 Identifying the potential causes of work-related stress and assessing the risks (principally through the use of a questionnaire distributed to staff)
Step 4 Avoiding and/or reducing any risks identified
Step 5 Reviewing progress

The aim of this approach is to identify and reduce the risks and minimise the potential for individuals becoming ill as a result of stress.

The role of employees

Staff have a specific role in the task of identifying the causes of stress through the risk assessment process. You may be asked to complete a questionnaire. Your views about how things can be improved will also be very helpful to the MRC in reducing the risks that are identified.

By working in partnership, we can create a healthier environment in which to work. There may be many issues that, with the ideas and assistance of staff, can be improved. There

2 With respect to certain aspects of health and safety management, ‘employee’ has a broader definition than simply those under direct employment by the employer and the term ‘staff’ is used here to define all those under the management control or supervision of the MRC.
may also be others that may be less easy to resolve or which may be out of the control of the MRC.

True partnership however requires commitment and a recognition of and willingness to accept personal responsibility. We all have a legal duty to cooperate in the implementation of health and safety measures provided by the MRC. In this case, staff should be open with line managers if they experience a problem, specifically in relation to experiencing stress at work.

**Signs of stress**

There are certain signals which may suggest that we are experiencing stress. These include:

- Headaches, indigestion, aching muscles
- Disturbed sleep and fatigue
- Change in appetite, increase in alcohol consumption, smoking or drug taking
- Loss of concentration, shortened temper, loss of self-esteem, feelings of a lack of calm.

There may be other causes for these symptoms, so medical advice may be required.

**Causes of stress**

Stress can result when demands are too great from our home life, or relationships, or work, or a combination of these.

Work-related stress may be caused by:

- Poor communication and inappropriate management style
- Lack of training, resources and opportunities to develop
- High workload, unsociable hours, inflexible working arrangements
- Uncomfortable or unsafe working environment
- The nature of the job, such as working with the public or working alone
- Lack of control over work demands or lack of support
- Lack of feedback on performance feeling undervalued
- Organisational change and lack of job security
- Interpersonal conflict

Staff should not forget however their responsibility to themselves and others. In particular, line managers at all levels can function more effectively when they are fully aware of problems experienced by their staff. Thus, the corollary of good management is the full openness and cooperation of the staff.
What you can do if you believe you are already experiencing stress

It is important to establish why you think you may be experiencing stress. If you think you are, try to identify what is causing you to feel this way. It may be a combination of factors that are not all work related.

If you feel you are experiencing stress at work it may help to talk to someone. It would be the best solution if you felt able to talk to someone at work, if possible your line manager. If you feel you are unable to talk to a friend or colleague then you may wish to speak to an independent person. If you wish to retain all confidentiality and not discuss your problems with management, your GP should be able to provide details of services available in your local area. Alternatively, you have access to all those identified in Guidance Note 4.

If the stress is caused by work then it is important that you try to talk to someone at work. Work-related stress is a health and safety issue and there may be something that can be done to help.

Being sensitive to other members of staff

Guidance Note 4 outlines the support structure and range of help available to all staff. Although it is important that you know and understand your own limitations, you should nevertheless be observant and sensitive to your colleagues’ demeanour and behaviour.
Guidance Note 3

Assessing the risks

1. How to manage the risks

Five step process

Step 1  Raising awareness

Raising awareness
In order to gain the commitment of all staff in the risk assessment process it is important to raise awareness of organisational and local issues. This guidance, complemented by the active participation of your Regional Safety Coordinator, is designed to assist this.

Gaining commitment
It is important to involve the staff in each step of the process, so establishments should set up a Focus Group with representatives from all levels, functions and teams. Depending on the size of your establishment, this group may have between four and ten members. One member of the group should be appointed as the coordinator. The role of co-ordinator is central to the process and thus the selection of the most appropriate individual is crucial. The Director should appoint a person who is respected by the staff, will demonstrate commitment to the risk assessment process and communicates well with staff at all levels.

Demonstrating commitment
The MRC has demonstrated its commitment to this process by publishing its Statement on Stress as Appendix 9 of the Health Management Policy. Guidance for management and staff is included in the previous two Guidance Notes. This Note guides you through the process of identifying potential stress factors and initiating a programme to minimise the threat of harm from stress.

Step 2  Benchmarking: assessing the current situation

In order to review the current position and set targets for improvement you need to identify whether there are any indicators that people are working under pressure. High sickness absence, high turnover of staff and low morale can suggest that people are working under too much pressure. You should review these issues to see if there are any signs.

A benchmarking exercise can review the systems in your establishment. The exercise will show where you may need to improve these systems to reduce pressure on employees and should be completed by the Focus Group. Where potential problem areas are identified through this exercise a staff survey should be carried out using the questionnaire provided.

Step 3  Identifying the causes and assessing the risks

The questionnaire has been prepared for distribution to staff. This questionnaire is also being used for Investors in People. Larger establishments may find it easier and more
rewarding to sub-divide the staff into groups (e.g. functional or scientific) and conduct separate surveys.

**Step 4  Avoiding and reducing the risks**

The conclusions of the benchmarking exercise together with the survey responses will identify any areas of concern that require attention. In deciding upon what action to take, it is important to consult with your staff, set timescales and identify the person or persons responsible for implementation of each action.

**Step 5  Reviewing progress**

If improvement actions are well-defined within timescales, the impact of your efforts can be monitored and reviewed.

### 2. Benchmarking – assessing the current situation

The **Focus Group** should manage the benchmarking exercise. The purpose is that as a group, and not as individuals, it makes an initial appraisal or estimate of the state of play in your establishment.

The matrix, based upon the six areas identified by the HSE as key for the management of work-related stress and included as Annex 1, sets out first the six areas for measuring management performance, second a brief description of the measurable for each area and finally a grid that describes 5 levels of performance against that measurable. It would help the group to familiarise itself with the content of Guidance Note 1 before commencing the exercise.

The descriptions placed against level 4 reflect the highest standard. Level 0 reflects the lowest standard with the highest potential for stress management failure.

The group should scan the table column by column and mark the box that most closely reflects their collective perception of the present situation. This should enable the group to estimate where resources and effort may be required.

Additional information, where available, should be studied by the group to help inform their opinion. This may include generic (but not personal) information on sickness absence, staff turnover, productivity (appraisals may help identify problems here) and accident records.

If any boxes 1 or 0 are marked, the requirement for a full staff survey is indicated. If all perceived performance levels are marked as boxes 3 and 4, there should be no need for a staff survey. Where any boxes are identified at level 2, the decision on whether or not to conduct a survey can be assisted by consideration of other parameters, such as sickness absence and the rate of staff turnover, as well as how many performance areas are marked as level 2. However, even where the **Focus Group** decides not to proceed with a survey, box 2 markings should lead to recommendations for improvement.

In the minority of situations, the group may not be able to reach a consensus position. This itself is a real and potentially valuable reflection of differing perceptions amongst staff. Solutions may include acceptance of the majority position, direct recommendations for improvement without the need for a survey or a decision to carry out a staff survey.

A survey of each individual member of staff, that addresses the same issues in a different but objective way, can however not only complement the benchmarking exercise but also produce more definitive and accurate information. Once the initial benchmarking exercise is completed, the group should move on to conduct the survey if the need has been identified.
Staff survey- assessing the risk

The survey tool used in this exercise can also be used for the establishment’s assessment for Investors in People (IIP) unless you have already completed an IIP survey within the last twelve months. The questions are so arranged to enable extraction of the IIP data separately from that for assessing Stress at Work.

The survey exercise should aim to include as many staff as possible. In larger establishments, it may be preferable to subdivide the staff into manageable teams or divisions.

The purpose of the survey is to establish the perception and experience of staff to the way the establishment manages the six major areas of importance identified by the HSE as potential generators of stress.

The questionnaire is included as Annex 2 of the hard copy. It is also provided electronically as an Excel spreadsheet. Each member of staff should complete a form either on hard copy or electronically. The collected data can be entered on the spreadsheet and analysed using the guidance provided below. The analysis will enable identification of those areas that the staff perceive to be those of relative strength and weakness. Where significant strengths are identified, this information should be fed back to staff. Identification of areas of relative weakness will enable the establishment to look at those more closely and decide how improvements can be made. The analysis should be done by the Focus Group and include consultation with staff. Recommendations for improvement should then be forwarded for consideration by senior management.

Survey analysis

The Focus Group should appreciate that each question addresses an aspect of the six criteria for good management. There are six questions on each of the criteria plus a further 12 that relate to IIP. Each question requires the member of staff to decide how strongly they agree with the statement on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating they strongly disagree and 5 indicating the strongest agreement. The principal analysis will be to identify the number of responses in each category for each question and for each group of questions relating to each of the criteria. The first priority should be to establish if there is evidence of the potential for work-related stress related to one or more of the six criteria through analyses of each group of questions. This does not rule out one question posing a particular problem in your establishment.

Reviewing progress

The Focus Group should ensure that all measures introduced by management as a result of the survey and intended as an improvement have a measurable outcome. Thus if, for example, one establishment found that overall the demands of work were perceived as being unacceptably high, then the review should be able to seek and receive feedback from the staff that reasonable and appropriate measures introduced as a consequence of the survey have had the desired effect of reducing the demands.

The frequency of review will depend upon the seriousness of the perceived problem. Where a significant issue is identified and the establishment wishes to generate a rapid and significant improvement, then a review may be appropriate in six months. On the other hand, if no serious problem is identified then improvements could be monitored after a year.
**Benchmarking Tool**

**Instructions:** The benchmark contains 6 columns. Each of these represents an identified area for managing work-related stress. Please read down the first column, on ‘Demands’ and highlight the statement that best describes your organisation. Repeat for each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demands</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Roles and responsibilities</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The management of work-related demands</strong></td>
<td>The degree of control over work</td>
<td>Staff development and support</td>
<td>Interaction and behaviour</td>
<td>The clarity of roles, feedback</td>
<td>The management of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic demands are set for work. Staff are trained and competent for the tasks they are required to do. Work patterns are varied within appropriate constraints. Work stimulates the staff to use skills. Regular breaks are built in. Work environment is conducive for work. There is no threat of intrusion or violence.</td>
<td>There is a culture of creativity and innovation. Staff have the freedom to adopt their own methods of working as much as possible and are encouraged to use their own discretion.</td>
<td>Staff related processes are integral to the establishment’s success and are continuously reviewed and improved to ensure that staff have the resources and motivation to do their job effectively. There is a positive safety culture and staff are organised for safety.</td>
<td>The establishment is proactive in ensuring that people are treated fairly by managers and colleagues, embedded in a culture of mutual respect. Open communication is actively encouraged.</td>
<td>The performance management system is continuously reviewed and improved. Ensuring that everyone is clear about their role and given feedback. Comprehensive induction is in place. Staff are encouraged to be open about concerns.</td>
<td>Organisational changes are always very well communicated and staff are consulted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set targets are mostly realistic. There is a training programme in place for staff. Work patterns are varied and generally apply the acquired skills. Breaks are encouraged. Work environment is generally good. There is little threat of intrusion or violence.</td>
<td>Staff have the freedom to adopt their own methods of working and are encouraged to use their own discretion.</td>
<td>Staff related processes are continuously reviewed and improved to ensure that staff needs are met and they perform effectively. Attitudes to safety are generally positive and safety support is organised.</td>
<td>The establishment is proactive in ensuring that people are treated fairly by managers and colleagues. Open communication is encouraged. Lone workers are considered as part of the team.</td>
<td>Staff are very clear about their responsibilities. They are given regular formal feedback regarding their performance. An induction programme is in place. Openness amongst staff is welcomed.</td>
<td>Organisational changes are generally very well communicated and staff are consulted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress management:</td>
<td>Guidance Note 3; Risk assessment</td>
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<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td>There are no realistic targets set. No training is available for staff. Work patterns are inflexible. Regular breaks are not available. Work environment is unacceptable. There is a significant threat of intrusion or violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Setting of realistic targets is limited. Some training is available for staff. There is little flexibility in work patterns. Breaks are available but not encouraged. Work environment is mostly acceptable. There is a threat of intrusion or violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Some reasonable targets are discussed and set. Training is usually available for staff. There is some flexibility in work patterns. Breaks are made available. Work environment is acceptable. There is limited threat of intrusion or violence.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff have some freedom over the way they work, although it is accepted that this is not always possible. Where appropriate they are encouraged to use their discretion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff related processes are in place to ensure that staff' needs are met and they perform effectively. These are not reviewed. Safety issues are considered and support is generally available.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The establishment will generally take action if it feels that people are not being treated fairly by managers and colleagues. Communication is satisfactory with most staff. Some attempt is made to prevent lone workers feeling isolated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff are generally clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are given formal feedback regarding their performance. Induction covers most essential areas. Openness amongst staff is variable between teams.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organisational changes are usually communicated but there is limited consultation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff have little control over the way they work even though other methods may be appropriate. They are not often encouraged to use their discretion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff related processes are partially in place attempting to meet the needs of staff and ensure they perform effectively. These are not reviewed. Safety issues have generally been addressed although support does not fully meet the needs of the establishment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The organisation will occasionally take action if it feels that people are not being treated fairly by managers and colleagues. Some staff communicate poorly. Lone workers are rarely considered.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff are not always clear about their responsibilities. They receive occasional feedback regarding their performance. Induction is in place but incomplete. Staff are generally not encouraged to be open with concerns.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organisational changes are rarely communicated and staff feel unsure about what is happening.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There are no staff management processes in place, eg recruitment is by word of mouth, there is no feedback on performance, etc. There is little awareness of these issues. Attitudes to safety are unsatisfactory.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The organisation takes no action if people are not being treated fairly as there is a general lack of respect for others across the organisation. Communication is poor. Lone workers are not considered.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff are not at all clear about their roles and responsibilities and do not receive any feedback regarding their performance. There is no induction programme in place. There is no platform for staff to voice their concerns.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There is no communication of organisation changes and staff are the last to know what is happening.</td>
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Survey questionnaire

Completion of questionnaire

We would like you to complete the following questionnaire. It addresses various aspects of your work and asks you how strongly you agree with the written statement.

Please tick the appropriate box according to your agreement with the statement ranging from ‘1’ which indicates you strongly disagree with the statement to ‘5’ which indicates you strongly agree. So the more you agree with the statement, the further to the right you place your tick.

If you use the electronic form, please ensure you read the instructions accompanying that form before completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaires are anonymous.

The results of the survey will be used as appropriate by management to focus on areas for improvement in the ways staff work together in your establishment.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Note: the term ‘MRC’ is used in some questions, denoting the MRC as the employer. It may be more appropriate when answering some questions to regard your ‘Unit’ or ‘Establishment’ as being, or representing, the ‘MRC’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are trained and competent to do what is expected of you</td>
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<td>You have sufficient resources (time, expertise, equipment etc) to carry out your job effectively</td>
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<td>Your establishment has a positive attitude to health and safety</td>
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<td>You would be assertive with external collaborators, clients, customers etc who were difficult or abusive, should the occasion arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>You would be assertive with colleagues who were difficult or abusive, should the occasion arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your physical work environment is satisfactory</td>
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<td>You can influence the way you work</td>
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<td>You can control the pace of your work</td>
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<td>You feel able to show initiative and use the full range of your skills in your job</td>
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<td>If you had concerns about your work environment, you would be able to raise these in the knowledge they would be taken seriously</td>
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<td>You can determine when you take breaks from your work</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are encouraged to develop new skills to take on new and challenging work</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are able to offer support to colleagues when they need it</td>
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<td>If you felt you needed help from a manager with something, you would know how to obtain it</td>
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<tr>
<td>The MRC encourages you to seek help and support when you need it</td>
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<tr>
<td>You get good supportive feedback both on what you do well, and where you could make improvements</td>
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<td>You believe the MRC would be flexible/supportive in allowing you to manage or cope with a crisis in any non-work commitments (family, dependants, etc)</td>
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<td>You have access to adequate support at work to assist in managing work-related problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>You aware of how you could look to resolve any workplace conflict that affected you personally</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are aware of what the MRC regards as acceptable behaviour at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>The MRC values and encourages openness, honesty and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>You feel free to raise issues concerning ongoing interpersonal conflicts at work with the appropriate person</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are aware the MRC may take disciplinary action against unacceptable behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your manager organises your team to make the best of working relationships</td>
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<td>You received a comprehensive induction before or soon after starting your current job</td>
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<td>You are clear about your roles and responsibilities</td>
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<td>You have a clear plan of work for the next few months</td>
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<td>You do not feel you have to work with too many conflicting demands</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are clear about how you personally contribute to the overall goals of the MRC</td>
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<td>You are able to raise any concerns you might have over your role or responsibilities with your line manager</td>
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<td>If there are changes in your work or in your unit that affect you, you always understand the reason for those changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>If there are changes that are likely to directly affect your job, you would be given the opportunity to understand these changes before they are implemented</td>
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<tr>
<td>The pace of change in your establishment is acceptable to you</td>
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<td>You are aware of arrangements to help and support you during any changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational changes in your establishment are well communicated</td>
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<td>You feel sufficiently consulted about organisational changes in your establishment</td>
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<td>You believe that the MRC is genuinely committed to supporting your development</td>
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<td>You feel encouraged to improve your own performance - and other peoples'</td>
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<td>You feel that your contribution is recognised/valued</td>
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<td>You receive the training that you need to do your job regardless of your type of post/band, full/part time etc</td>
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<td>You feel able to explain, in your own words, MRC's purpose and priorities and how these relate to your job</td>
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<td>You are able to give examples of actions your immediate manager/supervisor takes to support your development and your performance at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>After you receive training or development, your manager/supervisor or someone appropriate, discusses with you what you got out of it and how you can apply the learning you gained to your work</td>
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<td>You can explain how your development has helped to improve your own performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>You can explain how your development has helped to improve your team's and the MRC's performance</td>
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<td>You can provide examples how employee feedback on development and people management leads to improvements at the MRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>You understand what your manager should be doing to lead, manage and develop you effectively</td>
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<td>You can describe how you are encouraged to be involved in decision making and also to take on some responsibility for making decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>If there are any comments you would like to make that reflect positive aspects of working in your establishment, please write them here</td>
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<tr>
<td>If there are any comments you would like to make that reflect aspects of working in your establishment that you feel could be improved, please write them here</td>
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Guidance note 4

Support for staff

Introduction

Within its policy, the MRC states that its prime objective for the prevention and management of stress is to prevent or minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the potential for stress amongst its workforce.

The MRC recognises however that each individual is different and that in certain circumstances members of staff can experience stress. In those instances the member of staff has a number of options from which to seek help. These are discussed briefly here but your local HR staff will be able to provide further details on the corporate and local provisions.

The Health Management Policy, which incorporates the MRC statement on stress, contains advice and direction for staff on many issues relating to staff health and welfare. We recommend that staff familiarise themselves with the content of this policy which can be found in the Staff Code Part 2 Section 48.

Staff support options

1. Line manager

If you feel you are experiencing stress while at work you should, as the first option, consider approaching your line manager for help. The MRC is committed to providing training for line managers in leadership skills, including dealing with stress at work. It is hoped that most staff will be comfortable with this option and gain the understanding and assistance of their line manager in helping to deal with the problem as far as possible. If the problem is work-related, then information included in Guidance Note 1 may be of assistance to both your line manager and yourself.

Your line manager in turn may advise you to seek help from one or more of the following options. This should also be the first route taken in the hopefully rare circumstances where you feel unable or unwilling to approach your line manager.

2. Senior managers

If preferred, for example if the relationship between yourself and your line manager does not permit direct discussion, it is open for you to seek the assistance of a senior member of staff who may be able to explore new avenues or facilitate discussion with your line manager.
3. Human resources staff

Local and corporate HR staff can be approached in total confidence and may be able to help you. If they cannot offer a way forward themselves, they will be in a good position to redirect you to appropriate assistance and support.

4. Corporate Welfare

The MRC Welfare officer is located at Head Office. He offers a confidential counselling service for staff. In cases of employee’s ill-health, where the individual is referred to the Council’s Occupational Health service provider (see next paragraph) the Welfare Service will be notified of the referral.

Some establishments have a local welfare officer. Your local HR staff can inform you if your establishment has a welfare officer. These are trained in initial one to one interviewing and where appropriate can arrange for contact with third parties, for example the Corporate Welfare Officer.

5. Occupational Health

The MRC has a corporate Occupational Health Provider. Details can be obtained from your local HR staff. The MRC expects its staff to be referred to the provider via their line manager but in exceptional circumstances, if for example you are seeking confidential advice on a matter that affects your ability to perform your work to the full, self-referral is permitted.

Some establishments make use of local OH providers. The conditions for referral are as for the corporate provider. Some local OH providers may not provide a confidential counselling service. Local HR should inform you if counselling services are available through your local provider.

6. Other welfare provision

The MRC may provide additional confidential counselling services. You should approach your local HR staff for information on the availability of these services.

7. Support from trade unions

MRC recognised trade unions may provide a counselling service for members. You can approach your union or your local safety representative for further information on these services. The union may also be able to offer support in the process of trying to resolve your situation.

8. Corporate and local health and safety support

You can contact your unit or regional coordinator for help and advice. The first priority is to assist you in addressing your problem and seeking a successful resolution. This process however could also help an establishment to ensure that its policy and strategy on stress management is up to date and relevant.