a workplace guide to

preventing work-related stress

Contents

Introduction

Employers have legal and moral duties to assess, manage and minimise workplace stress and there are proven methods for doing it. Work that is well designed, well organised and well managed is good for our health. However, poor quality work is physically and psychologically harmful.

Work-related stress makes someone ill every two minutes and rates are rising. It makes hundreds of thousands of people fall ill each year – more than any other workplace health issue.

Attitudes towards mental health are slowly changing for the better. Many employers accept that stress is a major problem and are waking up to their role in supporting employees with mental ill health. But this is not yet universal and too few employers know how to prevent it.

Tackling stress is a key priority for Prospect. We expect employers to:

* carry out a stress risk assessment
* remove or minimise organisational sources of stress
* consult employees and, where applicable, work with health and safety representatives to tackle stress.

The workplace – and employees' relationships with their employers – is changing, which can compound more established sources of stress.

The boundaries between work and home lives are blurring. More people:

* work from home
* work in centralised hubs
* are doing 'agile' working
* hot desk, or
* have no fixed workplace at all, leaving them isolated.

Cost saving means teams are getting smaller, workloads get bigger and time-poor staff struggle to look after themselves and each other.

New technologies dictate the work of experienced and knowledgeable professionalss. Meanwhile, toxic work environments can lead to increased reports of bullying and harassment.

The study of health and psychology has generally, focused on 'me' and 'I'. But there is growing evidence that 'we' and 'us' – the communities we are part of – are a key element in managing and preventing stress.

Research has shown that adequate social support and social integration has as significant an impact on mortality as quitting smoking, and a greater impact than factors like obesity and physical inactivity.

As a Prospect member, you are part of a huge community in workplaces across the UK. Whether you are a member or a health and

safety rep, this guide will help you understand what stress is (chapter 1), what causes it (chapter 2) and why drawing on 'we' and 'us' by building a sense of community in your workplace is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal (chapter 4).

Chapter 7 outlines what employers should do to prevent stress. Chapters 8 and 9, which explain stress risk assessments and how to carry them out, will be of more use to health and safety reps. But members interested in seeing how stress is tackled in practice are likely to find it useful too.

A toolkit in chapter 10 has resources to help health and safety reps take action.

1. What is stress?

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

1.2 All stress is damaging. Some people claim that some stress is good for you, but it would be more accurate to say that some pressure is good. Pressure can make us more alert and help us to perform better. Deadlines, job interviews or public speaking can get the best out of us.

1.3 This is fine when it is short-lived, but sustained or relentless pressure that exceeds our ability to cope can damage our health. Common situations outside work that cause stress involve money, relationships or moving house.

1.4 Common risks in the workplace include change and uncertainty, bullying and workload.

1.5 What causes one person to experience stress may not affect another, as various factors can affect our ability to cope. Social support from our colleagues, family and friends is one of the most important. Skills and experience, age or disability may affect whether we can cope with prolonged, intense pressures.

1.6 Anyone can become stressed — it is an entirely normal emotional response to the pressures and difficulties we face in life and not an indication of weakness.

1.7 Studies have examined whether people with certain personality traits (such as hardiness, self-esteem, neuroticism) are disposed to or inoculated against stress. The relationship is not strong and the 'negative' characteristics might well be symptoms of stress rather than causes.

1.8 While stress isn't a mental health condition, it can cause depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions. Despite the distinction between stress and mental health, both are forms of psychological harm that must be prevented.

1.9 Stress can also lead to physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease and joint and muscle problems and cause us to develop, or worsen, bad habits such as smoking or drinking.

2. Am I suffering from stress?

2.1 Stress affects people differently. To varying degrees, it can affect us emotionally, mentally, behaviourally and physically. But stress tends to have common symptoms. And if it is an issue in a particular workplace, the organisation may develop "symptoms" of its own.

How you may feel emotionally or mentally

- overwhelmed
- irritable and "wound up"
- anxious or fearful
- lacking in self-esteem
- racing thoughts
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty making decisions
- irritable or aggressive
- depressed
- fearful
- a loss of interest
- neglected, alone
- a loss of sense of humour
- bad or ugly

How you may feel physically

- headaches
- muscle tension or pain
- sleep problems
- frequently tired
- eating too much or too little
- restless, twitchy
- cramps or muscle spasms
- pins and needles
- high blood pressure
- sick or dizzy
- indigestion or heartburn
- lack of appetite
- sexual difficulties

How you may behave

- drinking or smoking more
- snapping at people
- avoiding things or people you're having problems with
- denying there's a problem
- frequently crying
- biting your nails
- hiding your true feelings
- finding it hard to talk to others
- restless

2.4 Research has shown that stress adversely affects organisations in terms of:

- business output and performance
- staff performance and productivity
- resource use or profitability
- flexibility, agility, creativity and innovation
- staff turnover and intention to leave
- customer and staff health and safety
- corporate reputation
- attendance levels
- staff recruitment
- customer satisfaction.

2.5 You may be at risk of stress if:

- your work is building up
- you stop taking your breaks
- you are subjected to unacceptable behaviours such as bullying or discrimination
- you work alone, or in a workplace with poor social support
- you work excessive hours.

3. What can cause stress at work?

3.1 The following list covers situations that can cause stress at work but there are many more. Are any of these present in your workplace? Are there any factors which cause stress in your workplace that aren't listed here?

Bullying and harassment

3.2 All employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, in a working environment free from discrimination and harassment. Harassment and bullying are most often exercised by people in positions of power, such as supervisors or managers, as a means of control. But they may also be used by colleagues of equal status.

3.3 Harassment and bullying have a detrimental effect on the health, safety and performance of an individual or group. When harassment is tolerated, every employee is affected. It creates an atmosphere of hostility, undermines any sense of community and causes people harm.

Work intensification

3.4 Austerity or the drive for higher profits mean that more is demanded of fewer people. Employees face increased workloads, greater responsibility and tougher deadlines. As well as being a significant source of stress, work intensification can also make it more difficult to look after ourselves and make healthy choices and help colleagues through difficult times.

Long hours

3.5 Full-time employees in the UK work some of the longest hours in Europe. Reasons include fear of job loss, trying to secure promotion and work intensification (see above). Long hours can also be triggered by peer pressure or organisational culture.

3.6 Modern working life can blur the boundaries between our home and work lives. Laptops, smartphones and cloud computing mean we can work anywhere at any time. While technology has enabled many people to work flexibly, the competing demands of work and home life can leave employees isolated and struggling to switch off at the end of the working day.

Performance management

3.7 Performance management reflects the increasingly competitive world of work and the preoccupation with accountability. Performance management systems that rank employees according to their performance are of particular concern.

3.8 They often take an individualised approach to assessing work which fails to consider context. An organisation's performance is inherently the result of collaboration. Employees often find performance management systems punitive. The middle managers who have to administer them often find them inappropriate and unfair.

Insecure work

3.9 While the number of people in work is high, one in ten of the UK workforce are in jobs that are poor quality or insecure and this has an impact on mental and physical health. Insecure work includes people employed on zero hours contracts, those in insecure temporary work – including agency, casual and seasonal workers – and low-paid self-employed workers.

3.10 Insecure and unpredictable hours and pay – and the pressure to agree to work so that future work isn't forfeited – can make people stressed and anxious.

Change

3.11 In some workplaces, change seems the only constant. Too often, change is imposed from above with little thought given to the habits and culture of the organisation or the workers who are expected to adapt to it. Even if change is implemented as planned, it sometimes has unintended consequences, such as creating an uncaring and bossy culture.

3.12 Uncertainty breeds anxiety and stress, and poor communication or outright secrecy can jeopardise trust and cause resentment.

4. The important role of social support in tackling stress

4.1 We are social creatures. We derive a sense of self from belonging to social groups – be that membership of a team, organisation, occupation or trade union, for instance. Or our gender, sexual orientation, race, the neighbourhood where we live, our hobbies and interests and so on.

4.2 We derive meaning and emotional satisfaction from our social identities and we are more willing to give and receive support to others who share them.

4.3 Social support, co-operation and compassion – described as 'toxin handling' – can help us to resolve and reduce the disappointments, misunderstandings, frustrations and hurt that can be part of working life.

4.4 Social identity is necessary for effective teamwork but is also important for our physical and mental health. People who join a social group, such as a choir or residents' association, are less likely to be depressed. The more a person identifies with a group, the less likely they are to feel depressed.

4.5 People who share a social identity are also more likely to successfully resist efforts to undermine them and make greater efforts to bring about change, such as confronting and removing the things that cause stress.

4.6 While our social identity can be a source of meaning, it can also be a source of distress if others undermine, challenge or abuse it in some way. Threats to our social identity can come from:

- discrimination and bullying against individuals or groups,
- acts that disrespect a shared purpose
- seeing someone else treated badly.

4.7 Work design can impede our opportunity to develop social identity and give and receive support. When social support disappears from organisations – due to factors such as workload, organisational downsizing, relocation and restructuring, 'agile' working, homeworking, change – the toxin handling process can break down and lead to an increase in bullying and other forms of unacceptable behaviour.

4.8 Employers should have an important role to play in encouraging this peer support and building identity. It should be considered when introducing workplace changes, for instance. But not everyone works for employers who do this.

4.9 Building identification with the union and colleagues and consequently supporting one another because of it, is itself a way to collectively tackle a cause of psychological harm.

4.10 Anyone can take steps to build social support and identity in their workplaces and negotiate with employers to improve them.

4.11 Members should think about ways to bring colleagues together, particularly those who are isolated or facing excessive demands. You can do this through initiatives as simple as:

- union meetings to discuss stress
- establishing an informal support group for line managers or specialists to share ideas and challenges
- charity events or
- starting a walking group.

5. How unjust workplaces cause harm

5.1 A well-developed body of research demonstrates that unjust or unfair workplaces lead to psychological harm. Studies have found that employees working in teams with a low degree of perceived fairness in procedures and relationships have a higher risk of developing depression.

5.2 Staff who feel they are treated unfairly at work are at increased risk of being off sick more frequently and for longer.

Examples of perceived unfairness can include:

- selection procedures for promotion or redundancy that seem to give preferential treatment to certain people
- performance management procedures that are at odds with effort and reward
- management withholding information during periods of change, and
- unfair pay and reward systems.

5.3 Disciplinary procedures and complaints processes can be a significant source of organisational injustice. Employers are placed in the position of judge and jury, in breach of natural justice. Perceived unfairness can be particularly acute during periods of change.

5.4 Just workplaces effectively address diversity, inclusion, equality and stigma.

5.5 There are four types of justice relevant to the workplace:

- **distributive justice**: the way in which outcomes such as pay, seniority, time off or workload are distributed across employees should be proportionate to the inputs
- **procedural justice**: the consistency with which practices and procedures are implemented and the fairness of the decision process
- **interactional justice**: the interpersonal, day-to-day tone of the workplace and how employees are treated
- **informational justice**: the extent to which there is transparency about what is going on.

5.6 Systems and procedures should be designed to promote and uphold each of these facets of justice, with particular attention to harassment and bullying, performance appraisal, discipline, conflict resolution, layoffs, selection for promotion or redundancy, staffing and change.

Case study: Electricity supply industry

The high-hazard nature of the electricity supply industry (ESI) means that safety incidents have the potential to become disciplinary matters. But these processes can be experienced as unfair if an employee simply made an honest mistake.

Moreover, a focus on discipline can lead to reticence about disclosing the root causes of the incidents. Therefore the ESI developed a system for investigating incidents called 'panels of inquiry', which are still used by networks companies and many generators.

These panels, which consist of a safety manager, a line manager and a union-nominated health and safety rep for significant incidents, carry out the investigation, focusing on analysing the root cause.

Other specialists, managers and employees may join the panel or give evidence as facts unfold and additional expertise is needed.

Members attending panels are usually given exemption from disciplinary action in return for honest feedback. If it is clear that the individual's behaviour is potential gross misconduct, the company will normally stop the process so a full disciplinary review can occur.

6. How employers should manage stress

6.1 Most work-related stress can be prevented. As it is *work*-related, it is your employer's duty to do it, though everyone has a role to play.

6.2 Managing stress effectively requires good engagement and partnership working between employers and employees. Although many measures to tackle stress are straightforward to implement, they do need commitment and resources.

6.3 Although the examples in Chapter 3 are all consequences of how organisations are run or work is designed, employers tend to look at individual solutions to stress, not organisational ones.

6.4 Some people say that it is difficult to tackle stress because everyone reacts to situations differently. While this is true, health and safety law is about managing and reducing exposure to things that cause us harm, not necessarily preventing the harm itself.

6.5 Many things in the workplace have the potential to cause us psychological harm and these need to be tackled.

6.6 To help with this process, the Health and Safety Executive developed the Management Standards. These are six statements about the ideal design of work in organisations.

6.7 Failure to manage these factors causes stress and is associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates.

6.8 Because they are standards, they can be used to assess and benchmark how well an employer is managing the risk of psychological harm occurring and develop methods to reduce that risk.

6.9 The overarching themes of the six standards are:

- **demands** – issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **control** – how much say people have in the way they do their work
- **support** – the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **relationships** – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **role** – whether people understand their role and do not have conflicting roles
- **change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

6.10 The list of things that cause stress in chapter 3 will fall into at least one of these categories. For example, excessive workload and long hours fall into the demands and control categories. Harassment falls into the relationships category.

6.11 However, the Management Standards do not cover all work-related issues that can cause psychological harm. They do not take organisational justice into account and do not address social identity in all its complexity – see chapters 4 and 5.

7. The Management Standards

7.1 The following paragraphs are adapted from HSE's workbook *Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach*: bit.ly/hse-standards-workbook

7.2 To what extent do you think your workplace meets the standards? Could any of the examples below be quickly and easily implemented where you work? Are some of them already in place?

Demands standard

7.3 *"Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs"*

What should be happening:

- the employer provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work
- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands
- jobs are designed to be within employees' capabilities
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what their job involves
- hold regular team and individual meetings to discuss workload and challenges

- set realistic deadlines and ensure sufficient resources are available for staff to do their jobs (eg time, equipment etc)
- ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking their job
- provide support to those less experienced or under pressure
- change start and end times to help employees cope with external pressures (eg child care, poor commuting routes)
- develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours
- ensure assessments of physical risks are up to date, including physical violence and verbal abuse and take steps to reduce unwanted distraction or disturbances.

Control standard

7.4 *"Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work"*

What should be happening:

- where possible, employees have control over their pace of work
- employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative
- employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging work
- the employer encourages employees to develop their skills

- employees have a say over when breaks can be taken
- employees are consulted over work patterns.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- agree systems for staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, eg through project meetings and one-to-ones
- hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working
- allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward
- talk about how decisions are made – is there scope for more staff involvement?
- talk about the skills people have and whether they are able to use them to good effect
- negotiate shift-work schedules that do not impose on staff.

Support standard

7.5 *"Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors"*

What should be happening:

- the employer has policies and procedures to adequately support employees
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff

- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues
- employees know what support is available and how and when to access it
- employees know how to access the required resources to do their job
- employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- include stress/emerging pressures as a standing agenda item for staff meetings
- establish networking/support groups for employees, eg line managers or specialists
- ask employees how they would like to access managerial support, eg 'open door' policies or agreed times when managers are able to discuss issues and concerns
- develop training arrangements to ensure competencies are up to date and appropriate
- talk about how the organisation could support people having problems outside work
- disseminate information on other areas of support, such as the HR department, mental health first aiders, occupational health, counsellors or charities
- provide opportunities for career development.

Relationships standard

7.6 *"Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, eg bullying at work"*

What should be happening:

- the employer promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness
- the employer has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- develop a written policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour and for reporting incidents. Communicate these to staff
- develop and implement a policy on equality, diversity and inclusion
- agree and implement a confidential system for people to report unacceptable behaviour
- agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work
- identify ways to celebrate success, such as informal lunches

- encourage good, honest, open and respectful communication at all levels in teams
- provide opportunities for social interaction among employees
- provide support for staff who work in isolation
- create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other
- agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure people are aware of them.

Role standard

7.7 *"Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities"*

What should be happening:

- the employer ensures that the different requirements it places on employees are compatible
- the employer provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities
- the employer ensures that the requirements it places on employees are clear
- systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- display team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual roles
- ensure job descriptions are clear about the core functions and priorities of the role
- hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months
- develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff and ensure that team members understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit
- define work structures clearly, so team members know who is doing what and why.

Change standard

7.8 *"Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change"*

What should be happening:

- the employer provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes
- the employer ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals

- employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs
- employees are aware of timetables for changes
- employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Possible ways to achieve the standard:

- ensure all staff are aware of why change is happening – agree a system for doing this
- define and explain the key steps of the change
- ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme and consult at an early stage
- agree and establish a system to communicate new developments quickly
- ensure staff are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs
- provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change
- review unit and individual work plans after the change to ensure objectives are clear and workloads are appropriately distributed.

8. Stress and the law

8.1 Employers are legally required to tackle stress. As with hazards that can cause us physical harm, employers must assess the risk of us sustaining psychological harm and take steps to prevent it from occurring.

8.2 The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees and other people affected by their work activities.

8.3 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on this duty, requiring employers to carry out a "suitable and sufficient" assessment of risks to employees' and others' health and safety.

8.4 A stress risk assessment is therefore a legal requirement.

8.5 A suitable and sufficient assessment, both for physical and psychological risks, involves five steps:
- identify the hazards that could cause harm
- decide who might be harmed by those hazards and how
- evaluate the risks
- record the findings and implement controls
- review the risk assessment and update if necessary.

8.6 The factors outlined in each of the six Management Standards – and Prospect would argue justice and social identity – are the hazards that should be considered during the risk assessment.

8.7 In this sense, the Management Standards take care of the first step of the assessment. Steps two, three, four and five are outlined in the next chapter.

8.8 Following the Management Standards approach is not a legal requirement. But by following it, employers will be meeting their legal duties to carry out a "suitable and sufficient" risk assessment.

8.9 Employers who do not follow the Management Standards must work out how they are going to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by other means.

8.10 Does your employer have:
- a stress risk assessment
- a stress/mental health policy
- a health and safety policy
- a bullying and harassment policy?

8.11 Health and safety reps have legal rights which enable them to access information or documentation held by their employer which is relevant to help them fulfil their functions.

8.12 If you're a health and safety rep, but you're not sure whether your employer has a stress risk assessment or policy, ask them.

9. Implementing the Management Standards approach

9.1 The Management Standards highlight the importance of involving unions and employees at every stage in the process of developing management systems and preventative measures.

9.2 Introducing the Management Standards without proper consultation is unlikely to be effective or supported by employees.

9.3 This chapter outlines a step-by-step approach to implementing the Management Standards, adapted from TUC and HSE guidance.

Before you start: prepare the organisation

9.4 Secure commitment from employees and senior managers. Management commitment and support is vital in tackling the issue and committing adequate resources. It may be necessary to make a business case for tackling stress to get management on board. This could set out how much money stress-related sickness absence costs the employer or how much money is spent replacing staff who have left the organisation because of stress. See chapter 10 for useful data sources.

9.5 Establish a working group to oversee the process. This could be the existing health and safety committee, or a sub-committee of it. There should be union involvement and, where available, HR, health and safety and

occupational health specialists. Ideally this group should include a senior manager.

9.6 Consider the project planning. Tackling stress is not something that can be done overnight, so it is important that the group has realistic timescales. Health and safety reps should be given sufficient time to deal with the additional demands.

9.7 Consider the timing and mechanism for communication. A good communications strategy is crucial – employees must feel informed and involved at every stage.

9.8 Develop an organisational stress policy (see chapter 10) if necessary. Check what other policies, procedures and initiatives you already have in place – they may achieve some of the steps.

Step one: understand the Management Standards (or, identify the hazards)

9.9 Ensure everyone understands the Management Standards approach and how it should be applied. Provide staff and line managers with necessary information and training.

9.10 Health and safety reps may need additional training. Although you should ask your employer to provide training on the standards for both management and health

safety reps, contact your branch's full time officer if you are interested in union training.

Step two: work out who can be harmed and how

9.11 Look for the hazards – gather data. Employers can use a stress survey, such as the HSE's indicator tool (see chapter 10) and pre-existing evidence to identify whether there is a problem with work-related stress. Existing sources of information include sickness absence data, productivity data, staff turnover, disciplinary or complaints data, accidents, occupational health data and feedback from staff.

9.12 Assess any gap between current performance and the Management Standards. Probably the easiest way to do this is to use HSE's indicator tool questionnaire, which maps directly onto the Management Standards and provides detailed information about how the organisation is performing. Whether or not the indicator tool is used, stress hot spots should be identified and prioritised for action.

Step three: Evaluate the risks

9.13 Hold focus groups. Take the data and its analysis from the previous step and talk through the conclusions with employees to develop interventions to tackle sources of stress. Data analysis can only give a broad indication of the underlying issues. To find out what is affecting employees, you have to ask them.

9.14 Develop preliminary action plans. Key outputs from the focus groups are preliminary action plans, containing suggestions and recommendations for action at different organisational levels. Different focus groups may produce a number of preliminary action plans.

Step 4: Develop and implement the action plans

9.15 Record the findings. An effective way to do this is to produce and share an action plan, with interventions to reduce stress and goals to work towards. This will help to prioritise, demonstrate commitment and provide a benchmark against which to evaluate and review. If there have been several strands to the project, the steering group should collate the sections into an overall action plan.

- There are three levels of intervention for reducing stress: primary, secondary and tertiary. The further 'upstream' one is from stress, the more likely it is that the intervention will be effective and the more people it will protect.
  - Primary prevention – addressing its root cause by changing elements in the way work is organised and managed.

- Secondary prevention – developing individual skills in stress management through training, eg stress awareness

- Tertiary prevention – reducing the impact of stress on workers' health by developing rehabilitation, return-to-work systems and occupational health provision.

9.16 Agree the action plan with health and safety reps and management. Share the final plan and timetable with employees.

9.17 Implement your action plan!

Step 5: Review the action plan and update if necessary

9.18 Workplaces, staff members, technology and ways of working change. It is therefore important to monitor and review the effectiveness of any interventions and revise them if necessary. The questionnaire can be repeated to check whether there has been progress towards achieving the standards.

9.19 Decide what further action or data gathering is needed. If the solutions are not working, think about what else can you do. If the solutions are working, can they be rolled out across other parts of the organisation?

10. Toolkit for action

10.1 Although attitudes towards mental health are changing for the better, not everyone works for an employer who knows how to tackle stress. If this is the case in your workplace, you might need to get creative – either by gathering evidence demonstrating that stress needs to be addressed or taking some action that will help you and your colleagues deal with it.

10.2 Remember the power of social support, outlined in chapter 4. Building it and drawing on it should form part of your action.

10.3 You may need to do some investigative work and build a case to put to management demonstrating that stress needs to be tackled. If you are working without management support, there will often be sources of stress in your organisation that you and other members cannot address.

10.4 Once you have identified the factors driving stress, think about what you can and cannot address and identify your priorities for negotiating improvements.

10.5 Useful information held by your employer can come from:

- **Sickness absence data** – how much of this is stress related? Remember: employees may hide their real reason for taking leave.
- **Employee stress or wellbeing survey** – many employers carry these out, but only report the headline information. Full

datasets could give more clarity about which areas of the organisation are struggling with stress, and why.

- **Productivity data** – lower than expected performance (when compared with previous years or between different parts of the organisation) may indicate a problem.
- **Staff turnover** – a higher rate of staff turnover than expected in an organisation or team/department may indicate a problem. Exit interviews may capture whether stress was a reason for people moving on.
- **Accidents** – stress can affect people's ability to concentrate and symptoms of stress include difficulty sleeping. Do accident reports suggest that stress or fatigue were a factor?
- **Occupational health or employee assistance programme data** – it should be possible to get statistics on the number of people with stress referred to occupational health or the employee assistance programme.

Case study:
Metropolitan Police Service branch

Prospect members working in forensics were struggling under the weight of mounting workloads after years of austerity in the Metropolitan Police Service.

The branch decided to launch a member stress survey which provided a wealth of information about issues driving stress. The information was broken down across different demographics, such as teams, grades and age groups, so stress hotspots could be identified.

The results showed that change was a particular problem, with staff perceiving it to be badly managed.

The survey provided concrete evidence of organisational problems. Armed with the results, the branch started to negotiate a comprehensive action plan with the MPS.

10.6 You don't have to rely on information that is supplied by your employer. There are other sources of information that you can gather. Here are some tools to help and sources of information.

- **Workplace and body mapping** – this is a collective approach to uncovering hidden or obscure hazards in your workplace. Body mapping helps gather health information such as diseases, injuries, stress symptoms and other common patterns of ill health. Workplace mapping helps gather information on hazards such as chemicals, work at height, lone working, bullying and harassment, long hours, etc. It can help reps prioritise further investigation and action. http://bit.ly/body-workplace-mapping

- **Union case work** – this evidence, obtained direct from constituents, develops during a rep's normal activity. While you may only handle the worst cases, personal case work can provide in-depth information.

- **Member survey** – carrying out your own survey can gauge whether there is a problem in your workplace and, if there is, how bad it is. Alternatively, you may know what the issue is, such as workload, long hours, or bullying, and simply want to gather evidence to present to management. Think carefully about what you want to capture in the survey, and how you will use it. Survey templates can be found at:

  - **HSE Management Standards stress indicator tool.** This is a 36-question survey designed to gauge how well an organisation performs against the Management Standards. http://bit.ly/stress-standards-tool

  - **Bullying survey** http://bit.ly/workplace-bullying-survey

  - **Bullying Risk Assessment Tool** http://bit.ly/bullying-RA-tool

  - **Long hours survey** http://bit.ly/WLB-survey

  - **Justice survey** http://bit.ly/org-justice-survey

Prospect guides

- Harassment and bullying: http://bit.ly/MG-bully
- Equality at work: http://bit.ly/MG-equality
- A workplace guide to dealing with sexual harassment: http://bit.ly/sexual-harass-pro

HSE resources

- HSE resources and guidance on stress: www.hse.gov.uk/stress
- Model stress policy: http://bit.ly/hse-model-stress-policy
- Stress management line manager competency tool, a standard outlining behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress: http://bit.ly/manager-stress-comp
- Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach: http://bit.ly/hse-standards-workbook
- Joint TUC and HSE guide,Tackling workplace stress using the HSE Stress Management Standards http://bit.ly/hse-tuc-stress

Other resources

- NHS guide to understanding stress: http://bit.ly/nhs-moodzone
- TUC workbook, Mental health and the workplace: http://bit.ly/tuc-mental-health

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