

## Stress and Wellbeing Policy

### **Introduction**

The Company recognises that its employees are its most important asset and it is committed to providing the support and assistance necessary to enable its employees to undertake their job duties in an environment that is as stress-free as possible. Our aim is to ensure employees' health, safety and wellbeing at work and that they are not subjected to excessive workloads, onerous working practices, a detrimental work environment or any other causes of work-related stress. Employees who have high stress levels are more likely to work inefficiently, behave erratically, have low morale and be absent from work. Work performance and attendance will then suffer. We also recognise that personal stress, while unrelated to the workplace, can adversely affect the wellbeing of staff at work. We want to support the positive mental wellbeing of all our employees and so we will provide appropriate support for staff who are suffering from stress or poor mental health, regardless of its source.

Although this policy refers throughout to employees, it also applies, as appropriate, to all other members of staff, including workers, agency workers, apprentices, volunteers, contractors and consultants employed or engaged by the Company.

The Company is committed to carrying out a stress audit on all aspects of its business to ensure that, so far as reasonably practicable, it does not expose any employees to unnecessarily high stress levels in its work practices and working environment. As part of this commitment, we will:

- ensure risk assessments specifically address work-related stress
- promote a culture of open communication, so that employees feel confident that any concerns they raise about work practices or the working environment will be addressed
- determine if stress in the workplace is a problem, by actively seeking employees' views where appropriate
- review job descriptions to identify any specific job duties that may involve additional stress
- take account of stress and mental wellbeing when planning and allocating workloads, and reallocate work where necessary
- monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking
- monitor holidays to ensure that employees are using their paid annual leave entitlement
- facilitate requests for flexible working where reasonably practicable
- review factors that might indicate stress in the workplace, such as high rates of absenteeism or staff turnover, arguments or decreased performance levels
- implement policies and procedures to address factors that can cause stress at work, or

exacerbate personal stress, in particular so that we can provide a workplace free from bullying, harassment and victimisation

- ensure that the Company's grievance and disciplinary procedures are satisfactory, in particular to deal with complaints and to address inappropriate behaviour through disciplinary action, and are communicated to all employees
- take steps to eliminate, control or reduce work-related stress to as low a level as reasonably practicable (for example, by changing working practices and procedures or workplace conditions, providing information and training to both employees and line managers and improving communication in the workplace)
- ensure that arrangements are in place for employees to report work-related stress or poor mental health to their line managers, that line managers are trained to identify the symptoms of work-related stress and poor mental health and that support is provided to employees who are suffering from work-related stress or poor mental health
- encourage employees to inform their line managers of any stress-related or mental health issues or problems (see below)
- ensure that, where a work-related stress report is made, the underlying causes and actions to remove or otherwise deal with these causes are identified
- ensure that the arrangements for eliminating, controlling or reducing work-related stress are monitored and reviewed for their effectiveness.

### **Understanding stress and mental health**

Stress is the adverse reaction individuals have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. Employees feel stress when they cannot cope with pressures and other issues. For example, employees can get stressed if they feel they don't have the skills or time to meet tight deadlines. Stress is not in itself an illness but, if sustained over a period of time, it can lead to mental and/or physical illness.

Mental health is a term used to describe our state of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing; it affects how we think, feel and act and how we cope with the normal pressures of everyday life. Positive mental health is rarely an absolute state. Factors both in and out of work affect the mental health of employees and move them up or down a spectrum that ranges from good to poor. For example, an employee may generally have positive mental health, but a relationship break-up may trigger a period of depression moving them into poor mental health. Alternatively, an employee with a mental health condition, such as anxiety, may have developed good coping strategies and so, for the majority of the time, they will experience good mental health.

There is an important distinction between working under pressure and experiencing stress. Certain levels of pressure are acceptable and normal in every job role. They can improve performance, enable employees to achieve their full potential and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, when pressure becomes excessive, it produces stress and undermines mental health. Pressures outside the workplace can also result in stress and poor mental health and they can additionally compound normal workplace pressures.

The Company recognises that employees react to similar situations in different ways and that what triggers stress and poor mental health in one person may not affect another.

## **Supporting mental wellbeing and addressing stress**

The Company is committed to providing a system to support good mental health for all employees and to help minimise and alleviate stress and poor mental health in the workplace. It is the Company's intention to deal constructively and sympathetically with stress and poor mental health. Stress or poor mental health will not be treated as a sign of weakness.

We will always support employees in seeking help themselves from their own doctor, specialist or counsellor. In addition, help and information can be obtained from Mind, the mental health charity, at <https://www.mind.org.uk>, or the Samaritans at <https://www.samaritans.org>.

If you feel that your work performance or your mental health is suffering because of excessive pressure or stress-related matters, whether those matters are occurring outside the workplace or within the work environment, you should first raise this with your line manager. [If you feel unable to do so, you should alternatively contact the Human Resources department.]

Your line manager will arrange a meeting with you to discuss what steps can be taken to address the matter or to assist you to deal with it. This may include reviewing your current job role, responsibilities, workload and working hours, reviewing your work environment and/or referring the matter to a more senior manager who may be in a better position to provide guidance and to take the appropriate steps to assist. Alternatively, if your stress is in your view entirely work-related, you may, if you prefer, invoke the Company's grievance procedure or, if appropriate, you may make a complaint under the Company's dignity at work policy.

Please note that if you do not tell the Company you are suffering from stress or poor mental health and are unable to cope, or if the Company is unaware that you have a particular problem, condition or vulnerability, we will not be in a position to help you.

## **Confidentiality**

Information about stress and mental health is highly sensitive. Every member of staff is responsible for observing the high levels of confidentiality that is required when dealing with information about stress or mental health, whether they are supporting a work colleague or because they are otherwise involved in the operation of a workplace policy or procedure. Breach of confidentiality is likely to result in disciplinary action being taken under the Company's disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches of confidentiality will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal.

However, there may be occasions when information about stress or mental health needs to be shared with third parties. For example, where steps need to be taken to address work-related stress such as reallocating work within a team or department, where allegations of bullying, harassment, victimisation or other misconduct require a disciplinary investigation or proceedings to take place, or where medical advice is required on how to support an employee and address issues raised by work-related stress or poor mental health. In these circumstances, wherever possible, the matter will be discussed with the employee concerned before any action is taken.

*D Redhead*

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