

Managers' Guidance - Workplace Stress Risk Assessment and Support Plan

Work is an important part of life, and some pressure is both normal and healthy. Many people feel energised by busy periods, new challenges, or taking on responsibility. However, stress becomes a problem when the pressures of work exceed someone's ability to cope over a sustained period.

“Stress” is not a personal weakness, a lack of resilience, or something people should be expected to manage alone. It is often a signal that work-related factors- such as workload, clarity of role, team dynamics, or the way change is managed - are creating conditions that could be harmful if not addressed.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”*. Work-related stress is therefore an organisational issue, not an individual one, and must be managed using the same principles as any other workplace risk.

Stress can affect people differently. A situation one person finds manageable may feel overwhelming to someone else, depending on a range of factors such as experience, confidence, health, disabilities, caring responsibilities, neurodiversity, or what is happening in their life outside work. These differences are completely normal.

What matters is that managers recognise early signs of stress, take concerns seriously, and work with their staff to identify and reduce the work-related factors contributing to the pressure. Early action helps prevent issues from escalating, protects wellbeing, and supports performance and engagement across teams.

Imperial uses the HSE Management Standards to guide this work. These standards identify six key areas of work that, when poorly managed, are most likely to create stress: Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role, and Change.

This guidance explains how managers should use these tools, what their responsibilities are, and how to create a supportive, problem-solving environment where staff feel able to speak openly about stress before it becomes harmful.

This guidance explains how managers at Imperial should identify, discuss, and address work-related stress with their staff. It supports the use of:

- [Identify Your Work Stressors](#) (optional, employee-led reflection tool)
- [Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan](#) (required when concerns arise)

The aim is to help managers hold supportive conversations, understand the root causes of stress, and put in place practical, proportionate actions that reduce risks and support wellbeing.

Your Role

Managers do not need to be experts in mental health - but you are responsible for:

- Recognising early signs of work-related stress
- Creating a safe, open environment where concerns can be raised
- Holding timely wellbeing conversations
- Completing the Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan whenever needed

- Implementing and reviewing agreed actions
- Monitoring workloads and work patterns
- Signposting to support, including People Partners and Occupational Health
- Modelling healthy working behaviours (breaks, boundaries, respectful communication)

When should you take action?

Managers must complete a Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan whenever:

1. A staff member raises that they are feeling stressed – whether through a conversation, email, wellbeing check-in, or by sharing their Identify *Your Work Stressors* responses,
2. Any absence attributed to stress, or mental health related conditions
3. If you, as their manager, observe signs of stress.

Common indicators of stress to look out for with your staff include:

- Reduced performance or output
- Presenteeism or repeated short absences
- Avoidance, withdrawal, irritability, or emotional changes
- Missed deadlines or difficulties prioritising
- Changes in communication style

If you are concerned about stress, you should start a supportive conversation and begin the risk assessment process.

Tools

<p>Identify Your Work Stressors (Employee Tool)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional • Helps the staff member reflect privately on which work-related factors are contributing to their stress • They may choose to share some or all of their responses with you • Useful when someone needs time to think before meeting 	<p>Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan (Manager Tool)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required when stress is identified • Completed together by the manager and staff member • The staff member owns their personal copy • Managers keep the automated email with agreed actions and review dates • Used to understand stressors and jointly create a plan to reduce or remove them • The People Function can review anonymised trends to improve organisational support
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The Process:

Step 1: Start the conversation

If they have raised the stress concerns, use this as the basis to start the conversation. If you have noticed they might be stressed but they have not raised it, use factual, neutral observations such as:

“I’ve noticed you’ve seemed overwhelmed / quieter / under pressure recently and I wanted to check in.”

Explain that:

- Stress is common and can be work-related
- You want to understand what’s going on
- There is a structured process to support them

If the staff member prefers time to reflect, offer the Identify Your Work Stressors tool if they have not already completed it

Step 2: Meet to complete the Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan

In the meeting:

- Focus on work-related stressors,
- Listen actively and without judgement
- Ask for examples to clarify each stressor
- Discuss what the staff member feels would help
- Agree on practical, realistic actions (examples at the end of this document)

If external or personal factors are contributing, acknowledge them sensitively and signpost to support - but focus the plan on workplace adjustments.

Step 3: Record actions and confirm next steps

The automated email provides a record for both of you.

Managers should:

- Store the email securely where it can be retrieved for review meetings
- Share actions with colleagues only where operationally necessary, with the individual's consent and with sensitivity

The Support Plan is not stored in the employee's HR file.

Step 4: Follow up and review

Agree on a review date - usually every **6-8 weeks**, depending on the situation.

A review meeting should explore:

- What's improved?
- What's still challenging?
- Are any actions no longer appropriate?
- What needs adjusting?

Stressors often change over time, so review is essential.

You should seek help immediately if you feel there is an urgent risk of harm. In these cases, contact:

- Your **People Partner**
- **Occupational Health**
- **Confidential Care (EAP)**
- **Security or emergency services** if there is an immediate risk

Management Actions

As you complete the Workplace Stress Risk Assessment & Support Plan, you will need to input what actions will be taken and support put in place. To help you with this, below are example actions for each of the sources of stress. This is not an exhaustive list, and you will need to work in partnership with the member of staff to put in place support that is right for them. If you need further advice, please speak to your People Partnering Team.

SECTION 1 – DEMAND

Demand includes such things as your workload, working patterns and your work environment.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
<p>Workload/Job Design</p> <p>Difficulty getting through your workload in the time available</p> <p>Difficulty in meeting deadlines</p> <p>Having competing deadlines</p> <p>Needing or being required to work long hour to complete work</p> <p>Reporting to/undertaking work for more than one person</p>	<p>Review the range of duties, responsibilities, and associated deadlines: are they realistic?</p> <p>Check understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -is the person doing more than is needed? - review task distribution withing the work team, is it balanced? - review cooperation withing the work team, can it be improved? - help with prioritisation - assistance with task planning <p>Are there external factors creating barriers to progress? Where management responsibilities are shared, close communication with mangers is essential.</p> <p>Managers should be responsible for negotiating priorities with each other before instructing and assisting the individual to prioritise their work.</p> <p>Strategic advice/mentoring programme/ECRI</p>
<p>Communication:</p> <p>Constant communication during off-duty time by email, text and phone?</p>	<p>Clarify expectations</p> <p>Set parameters to reduce/remove unnecessary out of hours work communications</p>
<p>Skills, training & development:</p> <p>Not having the necessary skills for the work, you are expected to do.</p>	<p>Discuss perceived lack of skills and provide for training needs</p> <p>Consider time management training</p> <p>Consider job coaching or mentoring</p>
<p>Insufficient Challenge:</p> <p>Not feeling motivated by your work</p> <p>Not having enough work to do</p>	<p>Explore attending a micro development session</p> <p>Project activity</p> <p>Explore placement or secondment opportunities</p>
<p>Workplace Hazards and environment:</p>	

Unpleasant work environment	Explore opportunities to optimise the work environment
Unsafe work environment	Undertake risk assessments for work activities Seek ergonomic advice from the departmental Computer Health Assessor Discuss any unsafe behaviours raised and put plans in place to rectify them
Rest: Long hours	Schedule work in a way which allows recovery time, particularly after intense/busy periods. Reiterate what reasonable working hours are
Concerns about work backlog after annual leave	Put in place cover for when the individual is on leave and/or work on strategies to reduce workload around leave periods
Feeling that there is no time to take breaks and holiday	Actively encourage leave to be taken and monitor throughout the year
Career development Pressure to take on additional work for career progression	Discuss career aspirations and what is necessary, reasonable, and realistic for their next career step. Emphasise the need for wellbeing alongside progression aspirations.

SECTION 2 – CONTROL

Control is about the amount of influence you have over how you do your work.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Rigid work routines or rotas	Increase scope for the person to set their own work routines
Limited opportunity to organise your work yourself	Seek comment from staff in 1:2:1 and team meetings on how work is organised
Limited opportunity to exercise initiative in getting your job done	Discuss tasks where the person feels that they could act on their initiative Invite staff to contribute towards changes in procedures at the planning/development stage
Requests for a hybrid work pattern	Discuss work patterns that are feasible within the requirements of the role and the work-location framework Discuss flexible working arrangements if necessary

SECTION 3 – SUPPORT

Support is about the resources, the support and encouragement provided by your manager, your colleagues and by Imperial to help you manage your job.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Getting little or no feedback on the quality of your work	Use 1:2:1s to give feedback on performance Give praise for good work
Not feeling able to talk to your manager if you had a problem with your work	Set up regular 1-2-1s with privacy. Let the individual know when they can speak with you

	Actively engage with the ARC process if not already done so
Not being given the information you require to do your job	When allocating tasks ensure you give the required information
Not feeling able to ask colleagues for help if needed	Create opportunities for collaborative working
Not having sufficient opportunity to attend training or take up development opportunities	Discuss current workload and priorities and set aside time for relevant development opportunities
Ineffective communication within the team	Provide opportunities to raise questions Hold regular team meetings. Have standing meeting agenda items for changes, management decisions, Imperial news, Health & Safety etc
Neurodiversity support	Encourage a meeting with the EDI Centre Consider attending the Neurodiversity for managers training

SECTION 4 – ROLE

Role is about understanding the purpose of your job and being clear about your responsibilities.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Not being clear about what the purpose of your job	Review most recent ARC - what has changed? Review the person's job description – is it up to date, does it provide a clear overview of the job and responsibilities, is it realistic?
Not being clear about what is expected of you	Talk through performance expectations and concerns Consider providing a mentor to help the person develop their understanding of their role
Procrastination	Discuss what may help them focus Talk through how they can get support and help when they get stuck on tasks. Explore online procrastination tools
Having conflicting roles	Clarify priorities. Talk through with the individual the different areas of work and help them understand the comparative time-sensitivity and importance of the different areas

SECTION 5- RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are about how people work together, respect and behaviour.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Feeling that relationships with colleagues or your manager are strained	Enquire about working relationships in 1-2-1 meetings If needed, reach out to the People Function arrange a Facilitated Conversation
Being treated in a way you consider is unfair or disrespectful	Discuss expected behaviour standards in a team meeting If there is an issue with a specific individual, speak to them sensitively and directly where appropriate or escalate the issue if necessary

Being harassed or bullied in your work	Consider resolution (formal or informal) to resolve interpersonal disputes
Lack of neurodiversity awareness within the team	Arrange training – the EDI centre can provide training and advice
Being treated differently within the team	Ask questions to explore the concerns If needed, reach out to the People Function arrange a Facilitated Conversation If needed, investigate allegations of unreasonable behaviour or bullying
Feeling that your skills and knowledge are not being appreciated	Review how and when you provide feedback on a member of staff's performance Discuss with the member of staff what ways of being appreciated are meaningful to them

SECTION 6 – CHANGE

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Changes	Discuss what changes they are concerned about Listen empathetically Speak with your People Partner if needed.

SECTION 7 – OTHER

For this section, discuss any other concerns they have and ask questions to explore how they are feeling about it.

If you are not sure on what appropriate actions/support to put in place are, say you will take it away and reach out to your People Partnering Team.

SECTION 8 – EXTERNAL FACTORS

Difficulties in our lives away from work can temporarily reduce our ability to cope with our job, leading to stress at work. As a manager, you are not expected to be able to solve any external problems a member of staff is experiencing, but you should signpost them to the support that is available.

Source of Stress	Example Management Actions
Health/disability	Occupational Health Referral Workplace Adjustments Policy
Care responsibilities	Flexible working policy
Legal/Financial problems	Confidential Care advice and online