

## MANAGER GUIDE

# TACKLING STRESS AT WORK

In our fast-paced work environment, individuals can find themselves caught in a cycle of negative emotions and behaviours – also known as stress.

This resource is underpinned by the [University Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) along with the [Institution Stress Risk Assessment](#) which is an overarching approach to managing stress at work.

## IMPERIAL VALUES

Our values:

Imperial is committed to an environment in which everyone is able to do their best work in fulfilling our mission. This commitment demands continual reassessment of where we are and where we aspire to be and requires constant attention to improve our working culture.

The Imperial Values embody how we undertake our mission and are vital to its success. They sit at the heart of our research, teaching, innovation and translation, guiding our behaviour as a community and as individuals within that community, equally for everyone in Imperial.

By defining these Values and associated Behaviours and embedding them in our daily working lives we can better understand what is expected of us, recognise positive behaviour and actively address poor conduct. This will enable us to achieve the enduring excellence in research and education to which we aspire and will support our ambition to deliver impact to society through our work.

This framework defines our ambition and identifies and illustrates both positive and unacceptable behaviours. We want it to serve as a guide for you – our leaders, staff and students – to see exactly how you can apply the Values to your work and interactions with each other.

*Ian Walmsley, Provost*

## HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

Imperial Values link in with key work-related factors identified by the Health and Safety Executive as having the potential to cause stress related illness.

- Demands of the job
- Control over how work is carried out
- Support and encouragement provided by management and colleagues
- Relationships within the workplace
- Role within their team
- Management of change

Further information can be found in the HSE document “[Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach](#)”.

## SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

- ❖ Decreased effectiveness and productivity
- ❖ Low levels of engagement
- ❖ Poor working relationships
- ❖ Higher rates of turnover
- ❖ Attendance and timekeeping issues
- ❖ Increased presenteeism

Where this becomes apparent in a team, managers can seek advice from the [People Function](#) and [Talent and Culture](#).

This management guidance can be used either as a standalone manager-led intervention or as part of a two-part process, designed to assist a problem-solving approach to enable the staff member better to understand how their work is contributing to their stress.

Identify your Work Stressors is the employee's opportunity to reflect, spending time working through the questionnaire, considering the relevance of recognised sources of workplace stress to their situation, they should be able to better articulate their difficulties and may have some ideas which will help to resolve them.

Agreeing a Management Support Plan and reviewing it is a critical outcome in the process.

### When to suggest using the "Identify your work stressors tool"

Individuals have varying capacities to cope with factors which can contribute to work related stress. Some people may be more vulnerable to developing illness associated with work related stress than others. For example, those who:

- Have been absent from work due to work related stress or difficulties coping in the past
- Have personal difficulties which may be unrelated to work
- Are inexperienced in their role
- May have experienced a period of uncertainty or change related to their role
- Have a history of significant or persistent physical health problems or disability
- Have a personality type which tends towards perfectionism, over work or being unable to cope with pressure
- Demonstrating behaviours which could be attributed to work related stress
- May experience some form of neurodiversity

As a manager you may become aware of an issue if you observe a pattern of presenteeism or reduced quality or quantity of work output or more subtle behaviours such as procrastination and avoidance of activities or interactions. It can be challenging to address but supportive conversations with reference to your factual observations can open the discussion.

The People Function or Occupational Health may recommend the employee use this tool to help them understand the difficulties they are experiencing. You may be aware of some additional factors that will need to be handled sensitively and in confidence. By anticipating difficulties and finding solutions (adjustments and review of work processes) you will help manage the problem before it becomes a crisis. A manager led Stress Risk Assessment may also be recommended following a referral to Occupational Health.

This tool allows the individual to consider which areas of their work are contributing to their stress. It gives them the opportunity to formulate their thoughts and reflect on the stressors. When they have used the tool they should have a list of issues with examples, this is the first part of the problem-solving approach. When the individual has completed the questionnaire, they are asked to think about changes they can make for themselves, and it is recommended they require a meeting with their line manager to discuss their findings.

If it is apparent to you as a manager that a member of your team is experiencing stress you can lead the conversation by using the Management Support Plan. However, it may be necessary to allow the person time to reflect and they can use the "Identify your Work Stressors tool" as a framework to do this.

### **Taking it forward:**

When an employee requests a meeting, allow reasonable time to discuss the issues raised and arrange to revisit when you have had the opportunity to give their concerns careful consideration. You can use the Management Support Plan below to help summarise the issues and devise an action plan with a review date. If either you or the individual is worried about their health, it would be appropriate to discuss with the People Function and refer to Occupational Health for assessment and advice.

Solutions should assist the individual to be productive and confident in their role, actions such as extending deadlines, assistance with prioritisation, regular 1:1 meeting, home working, collaborative working delegation, addressing training needs along with temporary adjustments to work or processes which may be contributing to the problem while seeking to find a more long-term sustainable solution. Reassigning core responsibilities may be seen as a threat and be counterproductive unless they are identified as primary stressors, and the individual agrees.

Please refer to page six for a more detailed explanation of the topics and the types of adjustment/support which can be put in place. You may not have all the answers or be able to resolve the issues immediately, but by setting a follow-up meeting you can reflect on the discussion and consider what support, training or adjustments which will help the individual.

[Health and Wellbeing](#) aims to support all employees to work in a healthy environment that helps them flourish. Wellbeing benefits both the employees and the organisation to achieve their potential by equipping them with the skills and resources needed to thrive in the workplace and navigate times of uncertainty and change.

## MANAGEMENT SUPPORT PLAN

Use this template to record which areas of concern have been identified and discussed with the staff member to help devise an action plan. Please refer to pages 6-9 for more detailed information.

Employee Name:

Date of Meeting:

Background Information:

### DEMAND

Potential sources of stress include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Workload               | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient challenge | <input type="checkbox"/> Workplace hazards & environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career Development     | <input type="checkbox"/> Skills training & development   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rest                   |  |

Management Support:

## CONTROL

- ☐ I am unable to organise own work
- ☐ I am unable to use my initiative to complete by work
- ☐ Rigid work rotas make it difficult for me to complete my work

Management Support:

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## SUPPORT

- ☐ I do not get useful feedback about my work
- ☐ I feel I have insufficient information to carry out my work
- ☐ I do not have the opportunity to attend training
- ☐ I need Neurodiversity support
- ☐ I have difficulty discussing work issues with my manager
- ☐ I feel unable to ask colleagues for assistance
- ☐ I feel team communication is not effective

Management Support:

## ROLE

- ☐ I am not absolutely clear about the purpose of my job
- ☐ I am concerned about conflicting responsibilities within my role
- ☐ I am not clear about what is expected of me

Management Support:

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## RELATIONSHIPS

- ☐ I feel there are strained relationships withing the team
- ☐ I am being bullied or harassed
- ☐ I am being treated unfairly or without respect
- ☐ My knowledge and skills are not valued

Management Support:

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## CHANGE

What changes are you concerned about?

Management Support:

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

Includes health, disability, social and financial

Whilst outside your direct control, these may indirectly affect the person I their role and supportive measures may improve their ability to work effectively

Refer to the resources available on page nine

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## ACTION PLAN

Agreed plan:

Aim to have SMART objectives with a review date

Review Date: \_

## SECTION 1 – DEMAND

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

Potential Sources of stress include:

Workload/Job Design

Difficulty getting through your workload in the time available

Difficulty in meeting deadlines

Having competing deadlines

Needing or being required to work long hours to complete work

Reporting to/undertaking work for more than one person

Management Actions:

Review the range of duties, responsibilities, and associated deadlines: are they realistic?

Check understanding:

- is the person doing more than is needed?
- review task distribution within the work team, is it balanced?
- review cooperation within the work team, can it be improved?
- help with prioritisation
- assistance with task planning

Are there external factors creating barriers to progress? Where management responsibilities are shared, close communication with managers is essential.

Managers should be responsible for negotiating priorities with each other before instructing and assisting the individual to prioritise their work.

I feel under pressure to take on additional work to assist my career progression/international conference/collaboration etc.

Research staff support (see [ECRI](#))

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Communication:

Constant communication during off-duty time by email, text and phone?

Clarify expectations

Set parameters to reduce/remove unnecessary out of hours work communications

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Skills, training & development:

Not having the necessary skills for the work, you are expected to do.

Discuss perceived lack of skills and provide for training needs

Consider time-management training Consider job [coaching or mentoring](#)

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Insufficient Challenge:

Not feeling motivated by your work

Project activity, talent development

Not having enough work to do

Explore placement or secondment opportunities



Workplace Hazards and environment:	Explore opportunities to optimise the work environment
Unpleasant work environment	Undertake risk assessments for work activities
Unsafe work environment	Seek ergonomic advice from the departmental Computer Health Assessor
Rest:	
Long hours	Schedule work in a way which allows recovery time, particularly after intense/busy periods
Feeling that there is no time to take breaks and holiday	Actively encourage leave to be taken and monitor

## SECTION 2 – CONTROL

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

Potential Source of stress includes:	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

## 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.

Potential Source of stress includes:

Getting little or no feedback on the quality of your work

Give praise for good work

Not feeling able to talk to your manager if you had a problem with your work

Not being given the information you require to do your job

Not feeling able to ask colleagues for help if needed

Not having sufficient opportunity to attend training or take up development opportunities

Ineffective communication within the team

Management Actions:

Use 1:2:1s to give feedback on performance

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

When allocating tasks ensure you give the required information

Create opportunities for collaborative working

Review priorities at 1:1 meetings

Hold regular team meetings. Have standing meeting agenda items for changes, management decisions, Imperial news, Health & Safety etc

Provide opportunities to raise questions

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## SECTION 4 – ROLE

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

Potential Sources of stress include:

Not being clear about what the purpose of your job

Not being clear about what is expected of you

Having conflicting roles

Management actions:

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?

Talk through performance expectations and concerns

Consider providing a mentor to help the person develop their understanding of their role

Clarify priorities

## SECTION 5– RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are about how people work together, respect and behaviour

Potential Sources of stress include:

Feeling that relationships with colleagues or your manager are strained

Being treated in a way you consider is unfair or disrespectful

Being harassed or bullied in your work

Lack of neurodiversity awareness within the team

Being treated differently within the team

Feeling that your skills and knowledge are not being appreciated

Management actions:

Enquire about working relationships in 1-2-1 meetings

Discuss expected behaviour standards in a team meeting

Consider mediation (formal or informal) to resolve interpersonal disputes

Arrange training

Investigate allegations of unreasonable behaviour or bullying

Review how and when you provide feedback on a member of staff's performance

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## SECTION 6 – CHANGE

What changes are you concerned about?

Listen

Seek specific Change Management support and advice

Discuss with the People Function

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## SECTION 7 – OTHER

Are there any other aspects of your work not previously mentioned that you have found stressful?

Discuss concerns

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## 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

Health/disability

Occupational Health Referral  
Workplace Adjustments Policy

Care responsibilities

Flexible working policy/Family Friendly policy

Legal/Financial problems

Confidential Care advice and online