



STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

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STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

1. POLICY STATEMENT

SEStran is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its employees by introducing and promoting policies to encourage healthier lifestyles. SEStran accepts the need to identify symptoms of stress early and to respond constructively. All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that employees' health is not placed at risk through excessive pressures in the workplace. SEStran also recognises that external pressures in an employee's personal life, such as debt or personal relationships, can produce stress that may impinge upon the employment situation.

2. INTRODUCTION

Legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974, places a duty of care on SEStran to ensure the health (including mental health), safety and welfare of all employees and to create safe and healthy working systems. In addition the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to carry out risk assessments with regards to stress. Notwithstanding, the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) guidance on stress at work states, however, that stress is a workplace hazard that is both predictable and preventable.

Stress has been identified as a major concern to employees and employers alike. However, the pressures and challenges faced in life and at work help to provide focus and motivation and can lead to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction when tasks or goals are accomplished. A certain level of pressure is a positive force in providing people with the impetus to get on with the business of living and working.

People, however, react differently to pressure and each person has a different tolerance level. Too much pressure over a prolonged period can lead to a stress reaction. Stress can be negative and harmful to an individual's health and well-being. It can reduce an individual's ability to function normally and is detrimental to their self-esteem and well being. The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as: -

"the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they worry that they can't cope."

3. SCOPE

This policy encompasses all SEStran employees.

4. MANAGING PRESSURE

SEStran has adopted a three level approach to managing pressure as follows: Prevention; Promotion; Support.

4.1. PREVENTION

SEStran aims to promote a supportive working environment and culture for all employees. As an employer, SEStran aims to take all reasonable steps to ensure that employees' mental or physical health is not adversely affected through stress resulting from work. SEStran will ensure that health and safety systems to assess the risks of stress are established and maintained and are managed effectively, as far as reasonably practicable in accordance with Health and Safety legislation.

Prevention is also concerned with identifying and addressing problems in the workplace. A risk management approach is prescribed to help managers to identify when employees appear to be experiencing problems which could lead to stress. This involves discussing the problems with the employee, identifying the problems, developing an action plan with the employee, implementing the plan and reviewing the outcomes.

4.1.1. MANAGEMENT

Steps can be taken to reduce or control some of the pressures placed on employees. By following good management practice and having regard for employees' welfare the likelihood of stress can be reduced. Some steps their managers should take are outlined below:

- The risk of stress in each job/activity should be assessed and all reasonable steps to minimise this risk taken. Safe systems of work should be introduced to combat stress.
- Employees will be trained and competent at their jobs and know what is expected of them. Requests for training (both professional and for self-development) submitted by staff will be looked on sympathetically by managers.
- Workloads and targets should be reasonable and achievable.
- Supervision and support should be provided within an appropriate working environment and organisational structure. Managers should lead by example and encourage staff to develop their potential.
- Ensure good communication and consultation with employees, particularly during periods of change.
- An awareness of the symptoms of stress and if employees appear to be affected then appropriate advice and assistance are offered.

4.1.2. EMPLOYEES

The onus is not always placed with an employer; individuals can reduce or control pressures on themselves in their lives and at work. They can also take steps to increase their ability to cope with pressure. They should:

- where possible, organise and prioritise work, allowing sufficient time for each task
- give managers early warning of any work problems arising and seek help if it is needed
- maintain good health by sensible eating, exercise, getting sufficient sleep, reducing smoking and drinking, maintaining leisure/recreation activities
- seek help/advice in the event of persistent stress symptoms.

4.2. PROMOTION

SEStran will support the effective implementation of the policy by providing managers and employees with appropriate training, information and professional advice:

- to identify relevant factors and carry out risk assessments in relation to stress
- to assist in early recognition and response to possible signs of stress
- to encourage a general awareness of the nature of stress and its symptoms as they affect employees in the workplace
- to develop a positive and constructive approach to dealing with the problems of stress and its symptoms
- to promote the benefits of a healthy, balanced lifestyle

Information and advice will be provided to employees to help them cope with the pressures that can lead to stress. Promotion will be achieved through training and personal development courses that will help employees develop the skills to manage the pressures in their lives. Appropriate counselling and support will also be provided via external agencies.

Information is also available on the importance of good diet, physical exercise and relaxation.

4.3. SUPPORT

The confidentiality of any records of employees' stress conditions will be strictly preserved and any breach of confidence will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter.

Employees will be granted paid time off or leave, where appropriate, for approved counselling or treatment. Advice can be sought from various sources including the internet and the employee's own General Practitioner.

It is important to identify stress as early as possible. There are some signs that may indicate that an employee is suffering from stress.

- Increasing sickness absence, particularly if frequent and short term
- Becoming accident prone
- Deteriorating work performance such as poor decision making

- Poor relationships at work with managers, colleagues and clients
- Worsening behaviour with loss of motivation co-operation and erratic time keeping, breaches of discipline, increased intake of alcohol/drugs and suspected hangovers
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach upsets, and other ailments
- Mental effects may include nervousness, inability to concentrate and anxiety
- Frequently working long hours without being asked and/or not taking annual leave may indicate that an employee is under pressure and not coping.

Demonstration of these symptoms may be signs of an individual suffering from stress, but equally may be related to some other issue. It is important however, that the symptoms are not ignored and support provided as appropriate.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1. PARTNERSHIP DIRECTOR

The Partnership Director of SEStran is responsible for the effective operation of this policy.

5.2. MANAGERS

Managers are responsible for assessing risks and putting in place safe systems of work and looking after the welfare of employees.

A manager or supervisor, who believes that an employee is experiencing stress should discuss the matter with the employee and, if the employee wants to talk to someone else, arrange for the employee to contact or meet and obtain advice from the Human Resources Adviser. There are a number of ways that this can arise:

- As a result of the manager/supervisor's personal knowledge of individual employee and observation of their general behaviour and demeanor
- Arising from investigations into unsatisfactory conduct, performance and attendance
- During the course of formal disciplinary/performance or absence management hearings.

After an assessment of the employee it may be necessary to discuss with the HR Adviser the possibility of a temporary or permanent redefinition of the duties and responsibilities of the post or to arrange alternative work, where this is available. It is recognised however, that such changes may not always be possible and other options may be required to be considered. In these circumstances managers should consult their HR Adviser. Further options may be considered under the Capability Procedure such as training, temporary

reduction in hours, additional help or redeployment. It is the responsibility of managers at all stages in this process to seek appropriate advice from Human Resources and keep HR informed.

5.3. EMPLOYEES

Employees are responsible for their own conduct and lifestyles and should seek or accept help, where necessary. If a fellow employee is known to be experiencing stress symptoms, colleagues should offer support and understanding, where appropriate.

An employee who feels under excessive pressure and suspects that they are experiencing stress symptoms and wishes to seek help or advice has a number of options available:

- Access help privately through their own General Practitioner and/or directly through appropriate specialist counselling such as Citizens Advice, debt/money advice projects, Samaritans, etc. An employee may choose to seek the support of their manager, who may arrange a meeting with an HR Adviser, if required, who will be able to discuss what help is available to them and what options are open to the employee regarding their post
- Request a private and confidential meeting with an HR Adviser who can arrange counselling/medical advice with the involvement of Service management, as appropriate.
- An employee may also seek guidance from their Trade Union
- Self-referral to the Employee Counselling Service via the Occupational Health provider.

5.4. HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources provider will provide advice, assistance and support to individual employees and managers in interpreting and applying SEStran's Policy on Stress. HR Advisers will arrange appropriate counselling or medical advice. Where employees have been referred by their managers, HR Advisers will act as the main contact, co-ordinate all developments and make any other arrangements as necessary.

Further advice and assistance in individual cases, including advice on arranging counselling support, is available from Human Resources.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Partnership Director, in conjunction with the Business Manager will monitor and review the policy annually.