



## Exeter College

### Stress Policy

#### 1. Introduction

Being under pressure often improves performance and can be beneficial, but when demands and pressures become excessive they may lead to stress, which can have an adverse impact on both working and personal lives.

Exeter College is committed (as far as is practicable) to protecting the health, safety and welfare of all our employees and workers. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue, and acknowledge the importance of seeking to identify and reduce stressors in the workplace.

This policy is not contractual, but aims to set out the way in which Exeter College plans to deal with the issues of stress at work.

#### 2. Scope of this policy

As stress can affect anyone, at any level in the organisation, this policy applies to all employees.

#### 3. Aim of this policy

Exeter College aims to provide a working environment where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence, and where employees who believe they are suffering from the negative effects of stress feel able to approach their managers, in confidence, in order that the necessary support mechanisms can be put in place. In addition, we aim to assist those who may be suffering from workplace or personal stress by offering confidential support.

This policy therefore seeks to clarify our responsibilities in relation to stress management, raise awareness of this issue and how it can be recognised, and outline what support is available.

#### 4. Legal considerations

The following pieces of legislation apply to this policy:

- the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- the Management of Health and Safety At Work Regulations 1999
- the Equality Act 2010.

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This policy is non-contractual – it does not form part of your terms and conditions of employment.

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## 5. Responsibilities

Legislation requires us to take reasonable steps to look after our employees' mental health and welfare. This means that we need to ensure that they do not have excessive demands placed on them by their jobs. As stress may also be caused by bullying, harassment and violence, we aim to provide a working environment that is, as far as is reasonably practicable, free from these influences. However, we are entitled to assume that all employees can cope with the normal day-to-day pressures of their job: if this is not the case, they have a duty to inform us.

In applying this policy we recognise our responsibilities by:

- a. placing a high importance on the health, safety and welfare of all employees in the conduct of our business;
- b. accepting the legal and moral obligation to provide and maintain a safe and healthy workplace;
- c. seeking to support (where appropriate) employees who request help for stress-related problems; and
- d. asking our managers to be ambassadors of this policy, and ensuring that they set an example themselves in sensible working practices and consider how to get the best out of their staff without affecting their health.

## 6. Definitions

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "*...the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope...*" In other words, stress occurs when the pressures on a person exceed their ability to deal with them.

Workplace stress can be caused by a variety of reasons including: heavy (or light) targets and workloads; insufficient resources; ineffective equipment or tools; long working hours; rapid change and uncertainty; harassment or bullying in the workplace; and boredom.

However, stress may also be the result of personal, non-work related pressures such as ill-health, and/or personal, financial or legal problems.

The symptoms of stress might include: frequent short-term absences; reduced efficiency; minor ailments such as headaches/ migraines; reduced appetite; tiredness; sleepless nights; anxiety attacks; irritability; and increased smoking or drinking. There may also be more serious issues such as heart disease, raised blood pressure, ulcers, excessive drinking and depression.

It is important to bear in mind that stress may come under the definition of "disability". If, in individual circumstances, a medical report confirms this to be the case, as with other disabilities, we will take steps to make reasonable adjustments which may be recommended.

## 7. Procedure

Any employee who believes he/she is suffering the negative effects of stress, rather than worrying about it, is encouraged firstly to talk to his/her manager. If the employee does not feel able to talk directly to the manager, then the Health and Safety Assistant, HR Officer or College Nurse should be contacted.

If necessary, we will carry out further investigations and perform a stress risk assessment. This could include a review of the employee's actual duties against those described in his/her job description. The possibility of changing working conditions or making changes to reduce stress on the employee

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may be discussed, whilst recognising the needs of the employee, his/her colleagues' and our business. Employees should also speak to their own GP if there are any health concerns.

All employees should support their colleagues if they believe them to be experiencing work-related stress, and should encourage them to talk to someone about it.

In all cases, if we are aware that an employee is suffering from stress, we will take such steps as we consider to be appropriate to try to manage the situation. This may include reviewing workloads; providing assistance, training or improved equipment; or transferring to other duties (on a temporary or permanent basis), as appropriate. It may also be relevant to request consent for a medical report

Managers should assess the workload and responsibilities of those returning to work after experiencing work-related stress, to help prevent injury to health. Only as a final stage, and where no alternative action is appropriate, would we consider terminating employment on grounds of ill-health.

## **8. Risk assessments**

Risk assessments will normally be carried out where we suspect or believe that the work may cause stress which could lead to ill-health. This involves identifying pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress, identifying who could be affected by these pressures and taking appropriate steps to deal with them, such as lessening workload or transferring to other duties where appropriate.

The results of the risk assessments and the steps taken will be communicated to all relevant employees.

## **9. Non-work problems**

We recognise that stress due to circumstances outside of our working environment can also impact on an employee's attendance and work performance. Therefore, we would encourage employees to make us aware of any serious problems that are causing them concern so that we can take this into account when assessing performance.

## **10. Professional advice**

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the employee, or the College (in consultation with the employee), to seek medical advice, particularly if it is thought that work may be causing or adding to the stress.

Employees taking medication to control their condition are advised to inform us of what medication they take so that these details may be kept on file, and made available to any medical or first-aid staff called in the case of a medical emergency or accident.

## **11. Communication and training**

This policy accompanies our Employee Handbook. A copy may be obtained from your Head of Department, from the Health and Safety Assistant, or from the HR Officer.

Supervisors and managers/team leaders will be briefed in order to develop "early recognition techniques" for identifying the symptoms of negative stress in both their staff and themselves, and in effective interviewing and counselling skills to ensure employees are encouraged to discuss and resolve this before health problems result.

In addition, we may from time to time organise general health promotion activities within the workplace.

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## **12. Implementation, monitoring and review of this policy**

The Governing Body of the College has overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy. It will be reviewed by the Health and Safety Committee on a regular basis following its implementation, and additionally whenever there are relevant changes in legislation or to our working practices.

Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to the Health and Safety Assistant.

### **Related policies:**

- Bullying and Harassment policy
- Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse policy
- Flexible Working policy
- Grievance procedure
- Health and Safety policy
- Sickness Absence policy

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