

NHBC Stress Management Policy

Effective: October 2010

Version : 1

1 Purpose

NHBC is committed to promoting good health at work and therefore recognising and trying to minimise any negative effects that work or work related issues may have on an NHBC employee.

It is recognised that whilst a degree of pressure can be a positive force at work, continuous excessive pressures can, in some circumstances, develop into stress. Work related stress, resulting from excessive pressures at work, can have a negative effect on health and on performance.

Through the risk assessment process, NHBC will continue to identify hazards and assess all risks to mental and physical health and safety with the objective of reducing those risks, as far as is reasonably practicable.

NHBC also recognises that not all stress is work related but may similarly have a negative affect on performance at work.

All employees are encouraged to discuss any issues that may affect their health, safety or welfare with their line managers or other appropriate management levels.

2. Who's Included

This policy applies to all NHBC employees including permanent and temporary employees, agency workers, contractors, consultants and those who are self-employed.

3 Principles

NHBC accepts that it has a duty of care towards its employees to avoid the harmful effects of work related stress. NHBC also recognises that the levels of demands or pressure, potentially leading to stress can differ for each individual employee.

NHBC employees who consider that they have symptoms of stress are encouraged to seek support and assistance at the earliest opportunity and NHBC will respond to their request in a confidential and supportive manner. Please refer to Appendix 1 for further guidance.

4 Legal Background

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA) and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW) place a statutory duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and to assess risks to which they may be exposed. This could include assessing the risks associated with work related stress.

5 Definitions of Stress

A definition of stress is “a condition experienced when someone perceives that they are unable to meet the demands placed upon them”.

Any set of tasks, responsibilities, and day to day problems result in pressure and demands being placed upon employees in any working environment.

Reasonable demands and pressures are usually positive and motivational and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.

When there are excessive workplace demands or pressures for the individual it could become harmful, damaging performance and undermining their health.

Coping with pressure will also be affected by events outside of work such as bereavement, family sickness, and relationship problems.

6 Recognising Stress

Stress can result in:

- Physical effects, such as raised heart rate, increased sweating, headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, aching neck and shoulders, skin rashes, and a lowering of resistance to infection.
- Behavioural effects, such as increased anxiety and irritability, a tendency to drink more alcohol and smoke more, difficulty sleeping, poor concentration and an inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks and situations

These effects are usually temporary and cause no lasting harm. When the pressures recede there is a quick return to normal.

Where pressures are intense and continue for some time the effects of stress can become more sustained and more damaging, possibly leading to longer-term psychological problems and physical ill-health. Long term stress has been associated with high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, depression, and ulcers.

Harmful stress is more likely to occur when there are:

- Prolonged or cumulative pressures
- Demands placed on an individual leaving them feeling they have lost control
- Conflicting demands causing confusion
- Under utilisation of skills
- High levels of uncertainty
- Prolonged interpersonal conflicts
- Poor leadership or lack of understanding from managers

7 Risk Assessment

The risk of the effects of work related stress will vary with each employee. This is dependent upon work related issues, demands and pressures outside of work, and their own abilities to cope with them.

NHBC have introduced control measures to reduce the risks as far as is reasonably practicable which are set out in paragraphs 8,9, and 10 below together with a managers guide for dealing with work related stress.

8 Monitoring Stress

HR will monitor the following to highlight possible increases in work related stress:

- Trends in the type and frequency of grievance or harassment complaints;
- Causes of sickness absence;
- Stress related issues raised by employees to HR;
- Employee contact with managers, health and safety committee members, and staff association representatives relating to work related stress.

The results of the monitoring will be used to regularly review the need for any possible future actions to reduce levels of work related stress.

9 Reducing Stress

- Clarity of Roles – Managers are responsible for ensuring their employees are aware of exactly what is expected of them through job descriptions, objectives, and ongoing feedback on their job performance
- Training – Managers are responsible for ensuring employees are adequately trained for their roles.
- Consultation – NHBC adopts a participative management style ensuring employees are consulted with regarding any proposed changes affecting their employment.
- Communication – Managers are responsible for ensuring good communication with their team to minimise uncertainty and confusion amongst employees particularly when implementing any changes affecting their roles.
- Management Training – All managers in NHBC will be trained in managing stress to enable them to provide support to employees affected by stress and to be able to adequately assess the issues involved and take appropriate action to improve the situation.
- Management Guide – Management guidelines to dealing with issues of stress is available to support the training received and assist them in dealing with situations that may arise.
- Redeployment – Where all reasonable actions have been taken to reduce the level of stress being experienced by the employee but have not been successful it may become necessary to consider re-deployment into a different role if an appropriate vacancy exists.

10 Support

Appendix 1 shows a guide for employees in dealing with stress.

It is the responsibility of any employee who considers that they are suffering from the harmful effects of stress to raise the matter with their manager.

If the individual does not feel able to raise the issue with their manager they should raise it with HR, a Health and Safety Committee member or with a Staff Association representative.

It is the responsibility of the manager to fully discuss the issues and propose any necessary changes to improve the situation where possible.

The manager will also inform HR of the meeting to enable it to be included in the monitoring process and discuss with HR any need to refer the issue to the NHBC Occupational Health Advisors.

The manager will then arrange a second informal meeting one month (or earlier if appropriate) after any changes have been implemented to assess the improvement.

If the situation has not improved sufficiently the manager will contact HR to discuss further possible changes.

Employees are also able to seek external confidential advice from the Employee Support Helpline by telephoning the freephone number 0800 072 6464

11 Distribution

The current version of this policy is available on the NHBC HUB. Alternatively a copy is available on request from Human Resources.

12 Effective Date

This policy, which may be subject to amendment from time to time, is effective from October 2010, supersedes any such earlier dated policy, procedure, agreement or arrangement.

Human Resources

Appendix 1

Employee Guide – Dealing with issues of stress at work

1. Who to go to if you feel you need help

- **Manager** – Speak to your manager initially who will be more familiar with your job and workload demands. There may be a need to provide support, review the distribution of duties or to provide some training in particular skills/knowledge/areas that would help you work more effectively.
- **HR** – If you are unable to speak to your manager about the issue for whatever reason you could arrange to speak to a HR Business Partner.
- **Staff Association** – If you have a Staff Association representative you can speak to they could assist you in putting forward your concerns to either your manager or to HR
- **Health and Safety Committee** – You can obtain the names of the committee members from the HUB who would be able to raise the matter with either your manager or with HR
- **Occupational Health** – If you wish to discuss with the NHBC occupational health advisors you can contact HR to arrange an appointment
- **Employee Support Helpline** – You are able to call the independent confidential counselling service 24 hours a day 365 days a year by calling freephone on 0845 273 9702.

2. Changes to consider to help yourself at work

How much you can change things for yourself at work will vary depending on the nature of your job but where possible you could consider:

- **Varying work** – If you are able to change the particular task you are working on during the day to vary your workload the variety may help with your level of concentration.
- **Managing your time** – To help you focus on the immediate priorities it may be useful to have priority lists of things to complete during that day or that morning which will focus your attention and make you feel more in control if you are then able to complete items.
- **Not being available for everyone** – Giving assistance, being helpful, supporting colleagues etc are clearly helpful in getting the overall workload completed but sometimes you may need to say no in order to concentrate on your own priorities and getting things completed.
- **Not saying yes to everything** – Realise you cannot do everything and be prepared to discuss realistic time frames or say you are unable to do something rather than say yes to everything and find you cannot cope.

- Several jobs at once – Juggling the varied demands of a busy workload can be very difficult, but if you try to concentrate on completing one particular task it will make you feel as if you are achieving results and making progress rather than having so many tasks to complete and remaining uncompleted.
- Missing breaks – The demands of your job may lead to you not taking breaks for lunch which could result in you feeling more tired later in the day and leading to you achieving less in the long run.
- Organise yourself differently – You may need to look at how you organise your own systems of work, speak with your manager and colleagues who may have useful suggestions, and find out if you are able to make better use of the IT systems available.
- Ask for training – Don't wait to be asked, or for your manager to recognise it, if you feel you need some training to help you with parts of your job, ask for it so you are able to make the necessary improvement.
- Flexibility – Although it is often not possible due to the needs of customers and the demands of the workflow you may have the opportunity to discuss with your manager the possibility of working more flexibly such as varying start and finish times, or varying hours from week to week to help with peak work demands.

3. Changes to consider outside of work

We all face various pressures outside of work and your ability to vary these will depend upon your particular circumstances. It may not be possible to make a significant difference due to your circumstances but there may be some changes which you may wish to consider:

- Home responsibilities – If possible share the responsibilities with others at home for domestic duties to avoid them becoming over burdening, particularly if they include caring for children or elderly relatives.
- Managing your time – The demands at home may be better organised to give you more time for other pursuits.
- Other interests – Wherever possible it helps if you have outside interests which you can concentrate on to help you unwind from the demands of work and help to refresh yourself.
- Relaxation/Exercise – Having time to yourself when you are able to relax and also time to take exercise will better prepare you for the demands placed on you at work.
- Drinking/Smoking – Excessive alcohol or smoking may result from the demands and pressures of everyday life but the longer term effects may make the situation worse rather than better and ideally should be avoided if possible.