

Causes and signs of stress at work

Introduction

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other type of demand placed on them. Excessive pressure can lead to stress which undermines performance, is costly to employers and can make people ill. The HSE and Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) have made work stress a key target area.

There are six main areas that can lead to work-related stress if they are not managed properly. These are: demands, control, support, relationships, role, and change.

Particular pressures on teachers include:

- lack of control over workload;
- excessive monitoring;
- excessive workload;
- poor pupil behaviour;
- frustrating and ineffective meetings;
- Ofsted/Estyn/ETI/HMIE inspections;
- major changes in working practices;
- threat of violence;
- management bullying;
- sexual, racial or any other form of harassment;
- lack of career progression; and
- large class sizes.

Signs of stress

Signs of stress in colleagues may include behavioural changes such as irritability, aggression, unwillingness to accept advice or co-operate with others, increased use of cigarettes, coffee, alcohol and other drugs, overworking and difficulty in maintaining concentration.

Stress and risk assessment

Health and Safety regulations state that all foreseeable risks and hazards must be assessed and managed, and this applies to stress, as much as it would to working at height or with fire. Therefore, there should be a general risk assessment in place in all schools. Additionally, where a colleague is absent due to work-related stress, there should be an individual stress/risk assessment undertaken.

Work-related stress is rarely an individual problem and should be treated as a collective issue.

Further advice on tackling work-related stress can be found on the NASUWT website and the HSE/HSENI websites.