

Work-related stress

A toolkit for organising around work related stress

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PART ONE: Background

1. What is work related stress?

Work related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as “*The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand place on them*”. They go onto say that stress is not an illness – it is a state. When pressure becomes too excessive or prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop. It can lead to burnout.

It is recognised that people need some pressure to function, and lack of pressure or motivation can be equally as stressful and is sometimes called ‘rust out’.

Stress can be caused by factors outside of work such as money worries or relationship breakdowns, but there are also recognised causes of work-related stress such as lack of management support, excessive workloads, unsafe working environments, bullying and constant changes at work.

The HSE is clear that work related stress is a workplace hazard that can cause harm to health. Just like any other hazard it must be risk assessed and employers must take all reasonable measures to tackle the causes and reduce the risk of employees being made ill from work related stress.

2. How does it affect workers?

Work related stress can present in many ways. For some workers it could be a physical symptom such as headaches, palpitations or stomach pains. It can also make certain conditions worse or more difficult to manage, including asthma; skin disorders; type 1 diabetes or irritable bowel syndrome.

It can lead to poor mental health and the development of anxiety and depression. For workers with existing mental health conditions, it can make their condition worse or more difficult to manage.

Tragically, some workers end up taking their own lives. The HSE recognise that Work related factors may contribute to feelings of humiliation or isolation. An issue or combination of issues such as job insecurity, discrimination, work stressors and bullying may play their part in people becoming suicidal.

Certain groups of workers may be more at risk of work-related stress including Black workers due to systemic racism in workplaces. Those on precarious employment contracts with a lack of job security may also be more at risk.

Work related stress can affect both younger and older workers. A 2022 survey of UNISON’s young members found that stress and workload have a major impact on young members’ mental health: over two-thirds of young members said they “often feel stressed at work” and 59.7% agreed with the statement “No matter how hard I work, it’s difficult to get everything done”. A similar proportion (57.5%) said that they “find it difficult to switch off from work at the end of the day.

Disabled workers may already be managing a mental health condition which could be made worse by work stress. Disabled workers are also more likely to experience harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Plus workers may experience more bullying and harassment in the workplace which can lead to stress.

HSE statistics report that working aged women between the ages of 25 and 54 have significantly higher rates of work-related stress, anxiety and depression than men.

Work related stress can be a serious risk for pregnant workers and their unborn child. Stress has been linked to poorer pregnancy health and possible developmental problems in babies.

3. How does it affect organisations?

Stress, including work related stress, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence; presenteeism (where staff come into work when unwell); high staff turnover; low morale and other issues such as more errors, which can have significant consequences in safety critical workplaces.

Research by the Centre for Mental Health in 2017 put the cost for employers of poor mental health in UK workforce as £35 billion. The costs are broken down to:

- £10.6 billion in sickness absence
- £21.2 billion in reduced productivity at work, or 'presenteeism'
- £3.1 billion in replacing staff who leave their jobs because of their mental health.

4. The extent of the work related stress

Statistics published by the HSE report that in 2020/21 work-related stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 50% of all work-related ill health. In the years prior to the Coronavirus pandemic self-reported work related stress, depression and anxiety was on the rise.

The Coronavirus pandemic has only added to the current high levels of stress, anxiety and depression amongst workers. This is particularly true for those working in health and social care, traumatised by what they were seeing alongside the worry of contracting coronavirus and taking it home to family and friends.

In terms of suicide, occupations with the highest rates of male suicide include construction workers and for female suicide are health and social care workers.

5. Approaches to tackling work-related stress

UNISON supports a collective approach to tackling work-related stress, this means identifying the causes across an organisation or department e.g. excessive demands and taking practical steps to reduce the risk of harm to workers.

However, many employers prefer to jump straight to the individual, suggesting workers should undergo training to help manage 'their' stress, like free yoga or mindfulness classes, or how to build up 'your' resilience.

Whilst some workers may find these activities helpful in providing skills to help them manage during stressful or traumatic events. The "science" behind resilience is based on research that showed when faced with a particular problem, a small group of individuals normally overcome or cope with it. However, this means that the larger group normally fails or gets harmed.

Therefore, attempting to make workers more "resilient" without addressing the underlying causes does not mean compliance with what is required by law. This is because employers must remove the danger of, or minimise the chance of, harm from work-related stress just as they are required to do for other hazards.

UNISON has produced a guide for members on "Resilience and well-being"

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/10/24053.pdf>

Part Two: What should employers be doing?

1. Legal duties

Employers have the same legal requirement to manage work related stress as they have with any other hazard.

The 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act/The Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978 requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999/Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 requires employers to assess the risks of ill health (including stress-related conditions) arising from work-related activities. They must ensure that the hazards are removed, or proper control measures are put in place to reduce the risk of harm so far as is reasonably practical.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999/Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, risk assessments must be suitable and sufficient. The HSE state that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for stress should include the following:

- All the steps in the risk assessment process.
- Focus on prevention and organisational level solutions.
- Include provision for dealing with other issues, e.g. individual issues.
- Ensure commitment from all parties (senior management, employees and their representatives).
- Have arrangements to identify those aspects of the work, organisation or environment that are known to be risk factors for work related stress.
- Highlight the extent and nature of the gap, if any, between the current situation, and what is seen as good practice, e.g. 'the states to be achieved' in the management standards, for each of the identified stress risk areas.

- Involve the workforce:
 - » By asking about their views regarding good and bad features of workplace conditions.
 - » By seeking their suggestions, advice and comments on potential solutions to problems (e.g. improvements to working conditions, changes in the way work is organised, etc)?
 - » By ensuring that people are empowered to contribute and feel that their views are listened to and acted on?
 - » By communicating outcomes (e.g. action plans)?
- Seek to develop and adopt solutions that are 'reasonably practicable'.
- Provide documentation to show what has been done at each stage of the process and that you are implementing the recommended actions.

2. Management standards

The management standards are a tool to support employers to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of stress. UNISON supports the use of the management standards to assess the work factors that can cause stress amongst the workforce and as a means of taking a collective approach to tackling the risks.

The management standards are split into six areas or domains. The domains were developed following extensive research into the main causes of work-related stress including excessive workloads, lack of control over work, lack of management support and poor relationships at work.

Within the domains are a set of standards outlining what needs to be in the workplace to meet those standards.

Management Standards

1. Demands: workloads, conflicting priorities, unrealistic deadlines, emotional demands
2. Control: how much say a worker has in the way they do their work
3. Support: the support and encouragement workers get from their employer, manager and colleagues
4. Relationships: this includes a positive working environment, and procedures for managing conflicts and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. Role: managers ensuring workers understand their roles and that that these roles do not conflict
6. Change: how employers manage and communicate organisational change including consultation.

The steps to take when doing a stress risk assessment are no different than the five steps an employer would take to assess the risk of any other workplace hazards. However, the HSE recommends that employers take an additional step by preparing the organisation.

Prepare the organisation: this means getting senior management commitment and support to take forward any initiatives to tackle work related stress. As the work may need resourcing, it is important that any costs such as staff time, resources and support to take forward the work are counted and covered. As well as senior management commitment it is also important that there is buy in from line managers and that they are given the information, instructions and support to carry out and implement the findings of stress risk assessments in their respective areas. The setting up of a project or steering group with staff side membership as well as human resources and occupational health and health and safety advisors is recommended.

Step 1. Identify risk factors: HSE recommends that employers familiarise themselves with the management standards and the six risk factors (domains) that can lead to work related stress. An understanding that work related stress, should be treated like any other workplace hazard is important at this start

Step 2. Who can be harmed and how: This is where the employer assesses the gap between how they currently reduce the risk of work related stress with the management standards. This is an important stage and employers should be using data that they currently hold such as sickness absence figures, grievances, staff turnover and results of staff satisfaction surveys. They can also carry out a stress survey using [the HSE's stress indicator tool](#). Trade union information and reports on stress should also be used to identify where stress is occurring.

Employers should also look at specific data on how groups with protected characteristics are potentially impacted more from work related stress.

Step 3. Evaluate the risks: Employers should use the data and information they have gathered in step, including any survey results, to evaluate the risks and address any gaps in the 'states to be achieved' within the management standards. The HSE guidance states that employers should make sure they involve employees and their representatives in discussions as they are often best placed to make suggestions on actions that can be taken to reduce stress. The HSE suggest setting up focus groups to discuss the findings.

Step 4. Record the findings: This stage involves recording of the findings and actions from step 3. There may be different actions for different parts of the organisation to take, so it is important that nominated leads are identified. Actions should be time sensitive and prioritised as high, medium and low. Actions should be communicated to employees.

Step 5. Monitor and review: This stage requires the employer to monitor their actions to see whether they are having the desired effect. This can be done by reviewing the data identified in step 2, by speaking to staff and representatives or by carrying out a further survey. The HSE stress that tackling work related stress is not a one off exercise, but a process of continuous improvement. Employers should review stress risk assessments when there are changes planned to work activity or working environments.

Employers do not have to follow the management standards approach but they do have to ensure that they have carried out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks.

For more information on stress risk assessments and the management standards see [What are the Management Standards? - Stress - HSE](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm) <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

3. Other tools that employers can use

The HSE's Talking Toolkits can be used to support employers to have conversations to identify the causes of work-related stress in teams or individuals. They have been developed for smaller organisations to use to gather information from workers on the risks but can also be used within teams at larger organisations, particularly during times of organisational change. There are bespoke toolkits for use in education and health.

The HSE is clear that the toolkits should not be used in isolation as the only measure for tackling work-related stress and employers must still manage any identified risk. The toolkits support the development of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by involving the workforce in identifying the aspects of the work, organisation or environment that are known to be risk factors for work related stress.

The toolkit was also designed to support managers to have discussions with individuals returning to work following time off sick with

work related stress and to support adjustments. However, using it as at an individual level is not a substitute for carrying out stress risk assessments across a team, department or organisation and taking a collective approach.

The toolkits can be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

4. Consultation with safety reps

Under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977, an employer must consult in good time on the introduction of any measures which might substantially affect the health and safety of the employees they represent. In good time means before decisions are made, giving time for representatives to consider the information, get views from members and feedback to the employer. Organisational change, no matter how big or small, can affect the health and safety of employees, so UNISON would expect the employer to consult health and safety representatives on organisational change, including reviewing stress risk assessments relating to changes.

“Never underestimating the effects of minor change. Seemingly small changes can have a big impact on people’s ways of working, their morale, mental health and levels of work related stress.” HSE’s Talking Toolkit

5. Other regulations relating to work related stress

There are other regulations that the employer should comply with to ensure that the causes of work-related stress are tackled including the Working Time Regulations, the Equality Act and the Flexible Working Regulations 2014.

The Working Time Regulations 1998/Working Time Regulations Northern Ireland 2016: these place limits on the length of the working day and week, and make paid holidays a legal entitlement. These requirements may alleviate some of the worst causes of stress – long hours and a lack of rest.

The Equality Act 2010/ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004: stress may be a symptom of an underlying condition that could amount to a disability. Under the Equality Act employers are required, in such an eventuality, to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, such as reducing an employee's workload where they are under stress.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997/ The Protection from Harassment Order (Northern Ireland) 1997: this may be relevant where stress is caused by harassment.

The Flexible Working Regulations 2014/ The Flexible Working Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 introduce a right to make a request to work flexibly under the following circumstances:

- working for the employer for at least 26 weeks
- legally classed as an employee
- Have not made any other flexible working request in the last 12 months

Flexible working supports a better work-life balance which can help reduce work related stress.

For further information and bargaining guidance on these topics can be found in the bargaining guides section of the UNISON website.

Part Three: Organising around work related stress

Now you know the extent of the issue, how it can impact on groups of members and what employers should be doing to comply with health and safety legislation, this section will focus on organising around the issue.

1. Using work related stress as a way of recruiting members and new health and safety reps.

Health and safety is one of the main reasons that workers join a union and with work related stress being a major cause of work related ill health and sickness absence in all workplaces where UNISON has members, it can be used to strengthen the union and grow members.

The [TUC's Health and Safety Organising guide](#) sets out why health and safety issues can be used as an organising tool. These are as follows:

- **Are winnable.** Most experienced union health and safety representatives will have achieved some successes. Often these have been significant and may well have stopped people being injured or made ill.
- **Are widely felt and deeply felt.** Workers often care about health and safety.
- **It affects everyone** in a workplace.
- **Are easy to understand.** Workers experience health and safety problems first and, for far too many, it's part of their everyday experience.
- **Give workers a sense of their own power.** Health and safety is an area in which, given the right issues, all workers can get actively involved and bring about results for themselves.
- **Collective action** and power demonstrate how effective a union can be.
- **Send a message to the employer** that workers will not just put up with whatever they say.
- **Make a difference.** Union health and safety representatives save lives and stop workers becoming ill or injured.

Using a UNISON freebie/giveaway to get people's attention

A UNISON branch issued 'stress balls' to workers in one office where there was a low union membership. A week later they put round an email to all the staff and said that if they felt they needed to use a stress ball then they probably had a problem with stress. Squeezing a ball was not going to make it go away but joining a union might.

As well as recruiting new members, organising around work related stress can be used as an opportunity to identify and recruit new health and safety reps. They may be members who feel passionately about the issue or who have had to take time off themselves from an illness caused or made worse by work related stress, particularly those with protected characteristics who are under-represented as health and safety activists. When planning activity with members around work related stress, spend time raising awareness of the role of the health and safety representative, what rights health and safety reps have and what support and training UNISON offers. Many members might not realise that the health and safety representative's role goes beyond accidents and safety and includes matters such as work related stress and other health at work issues.

For further information and resources on recruiting reps see [UNISON's Be on the Safe Side campaign](#)

2. Body Mapping

You can use UNISON's '[Where is stress hurting you?](#)' poster with a group of members and non-members. The 'Where is stress hurting you?' poster is a form of body mapping. Many health and safety representatives use body maps to see how workers are harmed in their workplaces. Body mapping is participatory – and fun. It can be used where workers speak different languages or don't read well and is a quick way to make sense of complex situations.

Maps can show the different experiences of workers by age, job or gender. Body maps can show the patterns of symptoms and the long-term effects of hazards.

How to Body Map

Step 1

Use the image 'where is stress is hurting you?' or you can also draw an outline of the front or back of a body on a flip chart.

Step 2

Ask people to think about what part of their body is affected by stress.

Step 3

Organise the participants into groups. If you want information by age, for example, divide them into groups based on that category. Give each group coloured markers or sticky dots to mark their symptoms that may be work related.

Use the activity to generate discussion about the issues and educate members on how stress can affect every part of their body and discuss areas that you want the employer to address.

3. Using a survey

A short member survey can help to identify priority areas and what issues members are experiencing in relation to work related stress. You can send the survey electronically, promote it in a branch newsletter and print out copies for members to complete if they don't have access to a computer. Don't ask members to add their name to the survey as this could make them less inclined to complete.

If your branch has access to survey software then this is an easy way to build, distribute and analyse the results. You can collate the findings of the survey and present the themes to management.

You can find a short survey tool on page 21

4. Using HSE's Talking Toolkit

The HSE's Talking Toolkit isn't just a tool for management to use, it can be used by branches to gather evidence from members on the causes of work related stress. Discussions can take place at a member meeting focussing on one or more of the domains and then presented to management. This may be a better approach than carrying out a survey especially where members may have difficulty in filling in a survey. [HSE's Talking Toolkit](#)

5. Education

As a health and safety representative, improving your knowledge on work related stress and mental health at work is also really important and will equip you with arguments to take back to the employer, especially if they are focussing too much on individual level actions as opposed to collective. It will give you more ideas on campaigning and organising. You can find out more about UNISON's mental health and work related stress training here [UNISON learning for mental health | UNISON Learning and Organising](#)

The TUC run courses for representatives on mental health, stress and bullying and harassment at work [Find a course for you | TUC](#)

Members can also take up opportunities to learn about work related stress and mental health.

6. Working with other activists

Don't forget to work with other activists to take forward work around work related stress including branch officers who represent groups of workers who may experience more stress at work such as women, Black, disabled and younger members.

Work with stewards who can help identify hot spots of where there are a large number of grievances, cases of bullying or high sickness absence rates.

Union learning reps can work with you to raise awareness of UNISON learning opportunities for

members around work related stress and mental health.

7. Preparing and taking the case to the employer

Once you've engaged members (and hopefully recruited new members and new health and safety reps), share with members your plans and what steps you will be taking to get the employer to address the causes of work-related stress.

By engaging with members you should have some useful information on what is causing stress in your workplace and evidence that the employer needs to do more to tackle the causes, taking a collective rather than individualistic approach.

Additional data

In addition to the data that you have gathered from speaking with members, you can also use other sources of information which may indicate that work related stress is an issue in your organisation. Use the data checklist on page 23 to gather information.

As a health and safety representative, under Regulation 7 of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations, you have a right to access information held by the employer in relation to the health and safety of members you represent. For further information on your rights see [Safety representatives and safety committees – UNISON Shop](#)

Check on the work related stress or mental health policy

Although it is not a legal requirement, UNISON expects organisations to have either a policy on mental health at work which includes how they are going to address work related stress or a stand alone policy on work related stress.

UNISON's model mental health policy includes a reference to work related stress and risk assessments. [UNISON's Bargaining Guides](#)

If your organisation doesn't have a policy or the policy doesn't mention work related stress, then you can use the model policy to negotiate improvements.

Check on Risk Assessments

Check to see whether your employer has carried out stress risk assessments. If they have, then check the following:

- When were they last reviewed? They should be reviewed at least annually and following any organisational changes.
- Whether the actions within the risk assessments have been implemented and
- Whether they are effective. The evidence you have gathered from members will give you an indication on how effective they are.

8. Securing Action

Once you have gathered your evidence you should take up these issues with management. This can be the most challenging of steps, particularly if the employer doesn't recognise work related stress as a serious issue in their workplace.

One of the functions of a health and safety representative is to investigate workplace hazards and make representations to managers. You can use the model letter on page 24 to raise concerns and request a formal meeting.

You can also take the issue to the health and safety committee and ask for work related stress to be an agenda item.

You should secure a commitment from management to do the following in partnership with UNISON representatives. The HSE supports and encourages employers and unions to work together on work related stress:

- Develop or review an existing mental health or work related stress policy and make sure it contains a reference and commitment to tackling work related stress in line with HSE guidance.

- Gain senior management commitment with resources and recognition that more needs to be done to tackle work related stress.
- Set up a project steering group which include union representation.
- Use the evidence gathered by UNISON and other data to review hotspots, types of stressor and areas that need addressing as a priority. The employer can run the HSE indicator tool to get more data on where stress is a concern and how well (or not) they are meeting the HSE management standards. Make sure that issues identified by members are included in risk assessments.
- Set up focus groups (these could be jointly facilitated by union reps) to find out more and check in on the findings of any surveys or other data.
- Record findings and include action plans and priority areas to tackle, jointly agreed with unions. Ensure that action plans are time sensitive. Employers, with the agreement of the union, can look to get some quick wins first. However, they shouldn't ignore more difficult issues such as excessive workloads/ demands, if these are what are causing stress for most workers.
- Ensure the specific issues affecting workers with protected characteristics are identified and addressed as part of the action plan.
- Train managers on the legal duties of the employer and their health and safety responsibilities to tackle work related stress. Union reps can be part of this training.
- Commit to evaluating the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress e.g. by having it as a standing item at health and safety committee and at regular meetings with staff and by reviewing risk assessments.

Dealing with work related stress isn't a 'one off' activity but a process of continuous improvement especially during times of organisational changes (big and small).

Under Regulation 4a of the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations 1977, you have a right to be

consulted in good time on matters that can substantially affect the health and safety of members.

Step 4: Escalating issues

As with all health and safety concerns union reps should seek to deal with work-related stress through normal channels, such as the health and safety committee, dialogue with the employer, negotiations and collective grievances. Interventions by an enforcement authority should be the next step for a branch after other approaches to remedy an issue have failed.

If you have exhausted internal channels and there are still issues. You can approach the HSE

The HSE will consider investigating concerns about work-related stress where there is evidence that several staff are currently experiencing work-related stress or stress-related ill health. It will potentially look at collective issues, where there is evidence of a structural problem.

The HSE will not investigate individual cases of stress, or individual cases of bullying or harassment, but may consider bullying and harassment as part of a wider organisational failing. The HSE will expect concerns about work-related stress to have been raised with the employer, and for the employer to have been given enough time to respond effectively. Any HSE intervention will focus on the organisational arrangements in place and will not address individual cases. The HSE has also given guidance to Local Authorities, suggesting they use the same criteria for investigations.

How to make a complaint

If you believe that there are grounds for making a complaint to a regulator, and have already tried, and failed, to get the employer to act, the branch should seek to get a dossier of evidence together. That should include the following elements:

Evidence of the Problem

This could be diaries kept by workers, 'body-mapping' collated by health and safety reps, sickness records, survey results, reports from an occupational health specialist or 'employee assistance plan' provider, or anything else that shows that there is a shared hazard or problem that is affecting a number of staff. As a union health and safety representative you are entitled to ask for any information that your employer might have relating to the issue, for example, the finding of a staff survey, or of an external consultant who was brought in to explore the issue.

Evidence of the efforts that have been made to resolve the problem with the employer

This might include letters, reports, emails, or minutes of meetings. It is important to keep a note of conversations and probably useful to confirm key points in writing. If the employer has introduced a 'change at work', such as an organisational change, or a change in responsibilities, or a reduction in workforce numbers without a reduction of workload, or new technologies, and you believe it was not successful, and it was the cause of unnecessary work-related stress, then you would need to document that.

Before formally raising the issue with the HSE, or Local Authority you should inform your regional officer and seek their advice about whether there are any other steps that can be taken to resolve the issue, or other good ideas for evidence gathering.

If you are unable to resolve the issue by any normal means 'trade union health and safety reps' can contact the HSE by completing the [Concerns and Advice form for safety representatives](#). You can only do this if you are a recognised health and safety representative. Alternatively you can use the HSE [online form](#) which is intended for general complaints.

If your employer is overseen, and enforced,

by a Local Authority, then you should contact the section dealing with health and safety enforcement. It might be the 'environmental health department', but some Local Authorities use different names.

When might the HSE or Local Authority investigate allegations of workplace stress?

- When a union rep can provide significant evidence of stressors in the workplace, evidence that these have caused actual ill-health, evidence that the issue has been raised with the employer and evidence the employer has failed to act reasonably.
- When there is evidence of stress hazards that are shared, that harmful work-related stress that has caused ill-health, that the employer has been informed, the employer has made some effort to eliminate or control the stress, but the union rep can show that the employer's response has failed and hence was inadequate.

The HSE is unlikely to act:

- If there is significant evidence of stress and actual ill-health, but the union has not raised the issue with management.
- If there is significant evidence of work-related stress, but no evidence of ill-health to several people as a result.
- If the employer has taken reasonable efforts to eliminate and prevent stress, such as the following the stress management standards diligently.
- If there is complaint of harmful work-related stress by an individual, but not a group of workers with a 'shared experience'.
- If the HSE believes that another enforcement agency has a more appropriate enforcement role. For example, if the shared harmful work-related stress derives from harassment or discrimination and a protected characteristic then the Equalities and Human Rights Commission is believed to be in a better position to act.

- In severe cases, for example, systemic sexual abuse or violence in the workplace, it can be appropriate to report the issue to the Police as a matter of priority.

Step 5: Supporting members

If a member believes they are suffering ill-health due to excessive work-related stress they should visit their GP, or access other NHS services. Those needing urgent help should seek immediate advice and support, including clinical services, if that is appropriate. Health and safety representatives are not trained clinicians, and so colleagues with possible complaints about excessive work-related stress should be advised to seek clinical help if ill-health is being suffered. Additionally, visiting the GP provides evidence of ill-health, which is likely to be useful.

The process of 'going through normal channels' at work and collecting evidence might take some time. A colleague in immediate need of support and possibly treatment should not defer visiting their GP whilst this time elapses. Indeed, quite the opposite. Speaking to a GP can only be helpful.

Despite your best efforts to get the employer to act, there may be members whose health has been affected by exposure to work related stress and who may want to pursue a personal injury claim. Whilst UNISON has been in the forefront of taking forward civil cases for stress, experience tells us that the vast majority of members seeking to pursue a claim for compensation through the union's solicitors are ultimately told that their cases cannot be pursued because they are unlikely to be successful.

For further information and advice on personal injury claims relating to stress read the [Stress Claim Protocol: Information for Branches and Regions](#)

You can support the member by sign posting them to sources of support provided either by the employer or outside of the organisation.

A list of organisations can be found here:

England [Mental health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Northern Ireland [Mental health support | nidirect](#)

Scotland [Mental health services at NHS 24 | NHS inform](#)

Wales [How to access support - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](#)

You can also work with the Branch welfare officer and sign post members to UNISON's There For You. Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact our welfare charity, There for You, which provides a confidential advice and support service for members and their dependants.

11. Feeding back to members and publicising success

Don't forget to feedback progress to members and non-members, particularly those who completed the survey or took part in body mapping or talking toolkit sessions. It is important to show them that the union takes these matters seriously.

No matter how big or small your success share it with members and be open with them if progress is slow or even if you have had to escalate issues via a grievance or take to the Health and Safety Executive.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Work Related Stress Survey

1. On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is not stressed at all and 10 is extremely stressed), tell us where you think you fit. (Please circle a number).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Is your stress

Work related

Home related

A bit of both

3. In relation to work related stress, from a score of 1 to 6 list the main caused of your stress (1 being the main cause of stress and 6 being the least cause of stress)

Cause	Score (1-6)
Demands (e.g. high workloads, excessive pressure)	
Lack of control over work	
Poor working relationships (with managers or colleagues)	
Lack of support from managers	
Role (e.g. not clear about your role, what you should be doing)	
Change (e.g. lack of communication and consultation on changes at work, constant change at work)	

4. Do you think your employer is doing enough to manage work related stress?

Yes

No

5. What, if anything do they do to manage work related stress?

6. What, if anything, would you like them to do to manage work related stress?

Thank you for your contribution

Data Checklist

Data Source	Comments (numbers and hotspots)
Sickness Absence	
Work related stress, depression and anxiety	
Migraines/headaches	
Stomach complaints	
General sickness	
Backache	
Grievance	
Bullying and Harassment	
Discrimination	
Working conditions	
Workload	
Disciplinarys	
Staff turnover	
Equality data	
Exit Interviews (themes)	
Employee Assistant Provider Reports	

Model Letter

Dear {INSERT NAME OF APPROPRIATE PERSON e.g. CEO or Director}

I am writing to you on behalf of {INSERT BRANCH NAME} to raise concerns about work related stress at {INSERT WORKPLACE}.

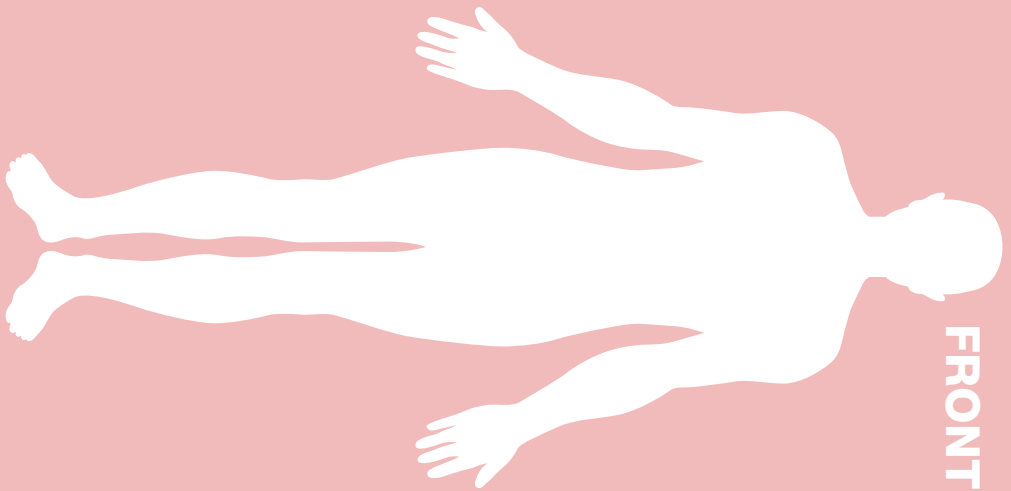
We recently carried out a survey of members and found {ENTER RESULTS OF SURVEY}.

We request a meeting with you to discuss the findings of our survey and other concerns we have from reviewing {additional data, risk assessments, policy {ADD/DELETE AS APPROPRIATE}}.

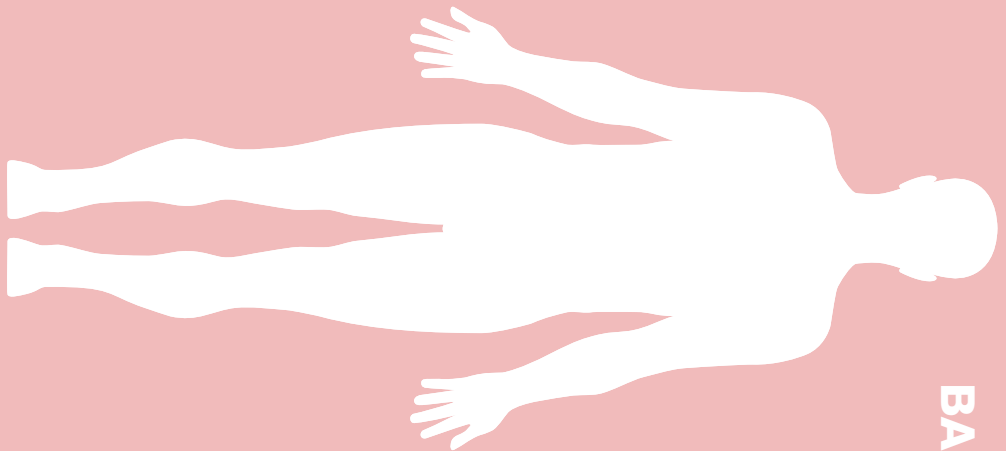
Yours sincerely

{NAME OF SAFETY REP AND BRANCH}

Where is work stress hurting you?



FRONT



BACK



FURTHER INFORMATION

In addition to information available on the Health and Safety pages of the UNISON website, more information can be found below

HSE Stress [Stress at work - HSE](#)

HSE Northern Ireland Managing work-related stress and mental well-being resources | [Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland \(hseni.gov.uk\)](#)

TUC Stress Resources

[Tackling workplace stress using the HSE Stress Management Standards](#) | TUC

[Wellbeing and stress](#) | TUC

[Stress - from Hazards at Work book](#) | TUC

Work Stress Network [Workstress](#) |



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