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When stress is more than just “part of the job” and starts to impact people’s health, the law requires employers to step up. Stress isn’t a vague, personal issue; it’s a health and safety hazard under the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) framework. Acting on the risk assessment you produce for work-related stress is not optional—it’s a legal duty.

## Understanding Stress as a Health and Safety Hazard

Work-related stress is recognised by the **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** as a workplace risk. This means employers must assess how work might cause stress and take reasonable steps to protect employees’ mental health—just as they would for physical dangers like slips or machinery hazards.

The HSE estimates that millions of working days are lost annually due to stress, depression, and anxiety. These conditions can result in lowered productivity, increased absenteeism, and long-term health impairment. So stress at work requires a systematic approach, not a band-aid or “resilience boosting” wellness talk.

## HSE Stress Risk Assessments: What Are They?

An HSE stress risk assessment is a structured process for identifying, evaluating, and controlling stress risks. The core idea is to scan the workplace for factors that might cause harmful stress, then implement [stress management standards demands control support control measures](#) to mitigate them.

**Key components of stress risk assessments include:**

- **Identifying hazards:** What about the job or workplace is stressful? e.g. unrealistic deadlines, lack of support, unclear roles.
- **Who might be harmed:** Which groups or individuals are at particular risk?
- **Evaluating risk level:** How severe and likely are the impacts?
- **Deciding on control measures:** What mitigation actions will reduce or remove those risks?
- **Review and follow-up:** Regularly check if the control measures are effective.

## Why Is “Acting on the Risk Assessment” Crucial?

Completing a risk assessment is only the beginning. If you don’t follow through with practical changes or support, it’s effectively a box-ticking exercise that fails employees and exposes the business to legal risk.

**“Acting on the risk assessment” means you:**

1. Implement identified control measures promptly.
2. Communicate clearly with everyone affected about what’s changing and why.
3. Involve managers and team members in putting solutions into practice.
4. Follow up to monitor impact and gather feedback.
5. Review the assessment regularly and when circumstances change, e.g. new projects or reorganisations.

## The HSE Management Standards: Your Benchmark for Effective Action

The HSE Management Standards for work-related stress provide a proven framework employers can use to benchmark and improve their approach. These standards identify six key areas that affect stress risk:

- **Demands:** workload, work patterns, environment
- **Control:** how much say employees have in their work
- **Support:** encouragement and resources from managers, colleagues, and the organisation
- **Relationships:** positive working to avoid conflict and bullying
- **Role:** clarity about roles and responsibilities
- **Change:** how organisational change is managed and communicated

Use these standards to structure your risk assessment and plan of action. They're not just theoretical—they're rooted in extensive HSE research and real-world application.



## Examples of Control Measures to Mitigate Stress

Control measures for stress must be tailored to the identified hazards but typically fall into these types:

|                                        |                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hazard                                 | Control Measures / Mitigation Actions                                                                  |
| Excessive workload and tight deadlines | Reprioritise tasks, hire temporary help, review deadlines with teams, promote realistic target setting |
| Low autonomy and poor control          | Involve employees in planning and decision-making, flexible working options, job redesign              |
| Lack of managerial support             | Manager training on mental health awareness, establish regular check-ins and supervision               |
| Poor role clarity                      | Update job descriptions, hold team briefings, coach managers to provide clear directions               |
| Poor communication during change       | Detailed change management plans, regular updates, open Q&A sessions                                   |

## Equity and the Equality Act: Recognising Stress as a Disability

Stress can escalate into a disability under the **Equality Act 2010** if it amounts to a “physical or mental impairment” having a substantial and long-term adverse effect on normal day-to-day activities. This status adds additional legal responsibilities for employers, such as making reasonable adjustments.

When acting on stress risk assessments, employers must consider:

- Whether workers with stress-related disabilities need accommodations.

- Adjusting workloads or environments accordingly.
- Being mindful of discrimination and ensuring fair treatment.

Ignoring this exposes employers to discrimination claims and damages workplace morale.

## **Review and Follow-Up: The Ongoing Duty**

Stress risks don't disappear because you tick a box or send a group email. They evolve with changes in workload, people, and business conditions.

An effective stress risk management process includes:

- Regular review cycles—at least annually or with significant change.
- Seeking feedback from staff confidentially about wellbeing.
- Adjusting control measures in light of new information or outcomes.

### **Checklist: What to Email Your Manager to Act on Stress Risks**

- Summary of main stress hazards identified
- Suggested mitigation actions with timelines
- Request for resources/support to implement changes
- Plan for feedback mechanism and review dates
- Offer to collaborate and provide updates

Keeping communication clear, actionable, and professional helps move from assessment to meaningful action.

## **Sharing Knowledge and Actions: Bring Your Team Onboard**

Embedding stress risk controls is not a solo job. It requires collaboration across roles and openness to discuss wellbeing without stigma.

Sharing your plan visually or in simple summaries can help. Consider circulating your stress risk assessment and action plan via platforms your team already uses:

- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- Instagram Stories or Posts
- TikTok short videos explaining key points
- Twitter/X
- YouTube for deeper explainers or webinars
- Telegram groups for real-time updates
- Viber chat for confidential discussions
- Pinterest boards for resources and tips

## **Final Thoughts**

“Acting on the risk assessment” around stress is a critical legal and moral duty. It means moving beyond paperwork to concrete, measurable action. Using the HSE Management Standards as a benchmark helps you

understand and tackle stress hazards systematically. Remember to include ongoing review, fairness under the Equality Act, and communication with staff. Stress isn't an abstract problem: it's an organisational challenge you are equipped to manage.



Want to keep this practical guide handy? Share it on WhatsApp or spread the word on your favourite social platform to help others build mentally healthier workplaces.

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