

Wellbeing Policy

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** Policies will be reviewed more frequently if legal changes or good practice require*

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1. Policy Statement

North Kent College (“the College”) is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees and applying practices which promote the wellbeing of its staff. The College recognises the importance of fostering psychological as well as physical health by identifying and then minimising or mitigating those issues in the work place that can cause unreasonable stress.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Work, generally, is good for you and the beneficial effects of work are greater than the harmful effects of prolonged absence. A working environment that promotes and sustains positive health and wellbeing is one that is challenging, stimulating and enriching and contributes to high quality teaching and learning. However, prolonged exposure to stressors can be a major factor in reduced staff performance, commitment and motivation, increased sickness absence and loss of productivity.
- 2.2 The College believe that the measures set out in this document will contribute to creating and maintaining a healthy work environment; minimise the potential for ill-health and provide support for those experiencing problems.

3. Employment Legislation

- 3.1 The College acknowledges its duty to provide a healthy and safe environment under the legal obligations imposed by the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

3.2 Definitions

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”.

There is an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. The point at which workplace pressures become excessive will, of course, vary with individual levels of tolerance and with levels of pressure in other areas of life at particular times. Stress may affect people in a variety of ways, and in serious cases may be a causative factor of a physical or mental illness.

3.3 HSE Management Standards

The Health and Safety Executive has set out Management Standards for organisation to control and manage stress and the College has adopted these standards. The standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

| Standard | Examples |
|----------------------|--|
| Demands | Workload, work patterns and the work environment; |
| Control | How much say the person has in the way they do their work |
| Support | The encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues |
| Relationships | Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour |
| Role | Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles; |
| Change | How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation |

- 3.4 Employers are not under a legal duty to prevent ill-health caused by stress due to problems outside work, e.g. financial or domestic worries. However, non-work pressures can make it difficult for staff to cope with work and, consequently, their performance at work may suffer. Therefore, being understanding to staff in this position is in the College's best interest.

4. Policy Principles

- 4.1 The College will seek to identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to identify measures necessary to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress, in accordance with the HSE Stress Management Standards.
- 4.2 These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed by management and relevant Health and Safety Representatives, through the Health and Safety Committee where necessary and appropriate 4.3The College will consult with Union/Staff Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- 4.3 The College will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in best practice techniques in the management of stress.
- 4.4 The College will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors; primarily via the Employee Assistance Programme.
- 4.5 The College will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the College's agreed stress management strategy, in line with the HSE Stress Management Standards.

5. Responsibilities

This Policy places specific responsibility on individuals within the College. These are:

5.1 Line Managers

- 5.1.1 conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their Department;
- 5.1.2 ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are issues relating to organisational and procedural changes;
- 5.1.3 ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties;
- 5.1.4 ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities;
- 5.1.5 monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded;
- 5.1.6 monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking;
- 5.1.7 monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement;
- 5.1.8 attend training as requested in good management practice in health and safety;
- 5.1.9 familiarise themselves with the Dignity at Work Policy and ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their areas of responsibility;
- 5.1.10 be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, eg bereavement or separation;
- 5.1.11 Providing accurate and timely information to HR in respect of staff sickness absence;
- 5.1.12 carry out return to work interviews and provide support to facilitate the smooth return to work after a longer period of absence including sickness and maternity leave;
- 5.1.13 liaise with HR or Health and Safety Representatives where appropriate for advice; and
- 5.1.14 have completed the on line safety media module relating to stress and line manager responsibilities.

5.2 Human Resources

- 5.2.1 give guidance to managers on the Wellbeing Policy;
- 5.2.2 record all absences and monitor for developing patterns;
- 5.2.3 assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics;
- 5.2.4 use of exit questionnaires to identify potential issues and follow up with exit interviews where appropriate;
- 5.2.5 advise managers and individuals on training requirements;
- 5.2.6 provide guidance and support to line managers during the recruitment and selection process to ensure the “right” person is recruited into the role.
- 5.2.7 provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment; and
- 5.2.8 manage the Occupational Health contract and arrange for referral to Occupational Health, where appropriate, when a staff member is experiencing a health issue and when first diagnosed with a stress or other mental health issue in order to establish what assistance the College can offer.

5.3 Employees

- 5.3.1 be aware of the potential signs and symptoms of stress and mental ill-health (see appendix A) and raise any issues of concern with your Line Manager, HR or Health and Safety Representative;
- 5.3.2 accept opportunities for counselling/Occupational Health referral when recommended and actively engage with the College Employee Assistance Programme;
- 5.3.3 ensure that bullying, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated and are reported through relevant channels; and
- 5.3.4 have completed the on line modules related to stress.

5.4 Functions of Health and Safety Representatives

- 5.4.1 Health and Safety Representatives must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress;

- 5.4.2 Health and Safety Representatives must be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys;
- 5.4.3 Health and Safety Representatives must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process;
- 5.4.4 Health and Safety Representatives should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR;
- 5.4.5 Health and Safety Representatives should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to workplace stress;
- 5.4.6 Health and Safety Representatives should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every twelve months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

None of the above may be construed as inferring a duty on any Union Appointed Safety Representative or Representative of Employee Safety.

5.5 Role of Health and Safety Committee:

- 5.5.1 The Health and Safety Committee will perform a pivotal role in monitoring the effectiveness of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety; and
- 5.5.2 The Committee will provide advice to the SLT on the success, or otherwise, of this policy and suggest improvements as appropriate.

6. Supporting Health and Wellbeing at North Kent College

6.1 Performance Management

- 6.1.1 HR Monitoring of sickness statistics to identify staff with sick level associated with stress or other mental health issues;
- 6.1.2 prompt management action to resolve situation;
- 6.1.3 annual appraisal of all staff - not linked to pay or promotion;
- 6.1.4 Staff Development Policy which includes professional development, career development and personal development programmes; and
- 6.1.5 communication with all staff via a variety of methods.

6.2 Teamwork

- 6.2.1 "Bottom up" method is used to gather information which can inform decisions;
- 6.2.2 College Management decisions are communicated to staff through regular, minuted team meetings and StaffNet.

6.3 Provision of Support

- 6.3.1 Management awareness of stress related issues;
- 6.3.2 College Employee Assistance Programme with release from duties to attend appointments where face to face counselling meetings are arranged;
- 6.3.3 use of occupational health service (See Appendix B); and
- 6.3.4 no blame culture.

6.4 Change Management

- 6.4.1 change management policies which aim to reduce the effect of change on all staff and limit the number of redundancies by seeking alternative solutions where possible;
- 6.4.2 aiming to create a secure and safe working environment for all staff;
- 6.4.3 meetings with senior managers at regular intervals, such as Joint Negotiating Committee; and
- 6.4.4 all staff have access to the aims and objectives from the College's Strategic Plan.

6.5 Staff Health and Wellbeing

- 6.5.1 opportunity to use College sports and gym facilities (See Appendix B) occasional special events, such as Employee Assistance Programme briefings;
- 6.5.2 opportunity to subscribe to cost effective private health care and or health cash plans (See Appendix B);
- 6.5.3 a range of College policies to help staff with their work-life balance including flexible working, annual and special leave (time of for dependents and compassionate leave) and contractual maternity/adoption/parental leave provisions.
- 6.5.4 eye tests and prescription spectacles (See Appendix B);

6.5.5 regular staff stress surveys and, where appropriate, focus groups; and

6.5.6 SLT overview of lecturing staff teaching hours.

7. Other College Policies and Procedures

The College has a number of other policies which may be considered relevant alongside the Wellbeing Policy, depending upon the issues affecting an individual member of staff e.g. Capability Policy, Dignity at Work Policy and Sickness Absence Policy. Advice and support regarding the application of these policies is available from HR department and copies of all College Policies & Procedures can be found on StaffNet.

Appendix A - Guidance and Information for Staff

1. Recognising Stress

The following symptoms may indicate that an individual is suffering from excessive levels of personal stress. Some of these may not be stress related but could indicate other potentially more serious underlying conditions. The purpose of noting this is not to cause undue concern but to suggest that where symptoms persist, individuals consult their General Practitioner.

1.1. Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms

1.2. Cognitive Symptoms

- 1.2.1. memory problems;
- 1.2.2. inability to concentrate;
- 1.2.3. poor judgment;
- 1.2.4. seeing only the negative;
- 1.2.5. anxious or racing thoughts; and/or
- 1.2.6. constant worrying.

1.3. Emotional Symptoms

- 1.3.1. Moodiness;
- 1.3.2. irritability or short temper;
- 1.3.3. agitation, inability to relax;
- 1.3.4. feeling overwhelmed;
- 1.3.5. sense of loneliness and isolation; and/or
- 1.3.6. depression or general unhappiness

1.4. Physical Symptoms

- 1.4.1. aches and pains;
- 1.4.2. diarrhoea or constipation;
- 1.4.3. nausea, dizziness;
- 1.4.4. chest pain, rapid heartbeat;
- 1.4.5. loss of sex drive; and/or
- 1.4.6. frequent colds.

1.5. Behavioural Symptoms

- 1.5.1. eating more or less;
- 1.5.2. sleeping too much or too little;
- 1.5.3. isolating yourself from others;
- 1.5.4. procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities;
- 1.5.5. using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax; and/or
- 1.5.6. nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing).

2. Ways of Dealing with Stress

Remembering that the stress response is the body's way of reacting to perceived threat or danger, there are three main ways that we can manage our stress:

2.1. Change the environment to prevent/remove the stress

Useful strategies include:

- 2.1.1. discussion with your line manager;
- 2.1.2. make a list of priorities and stick to it. Do the easiest first – you get a feeling of achievement as you proceed through the list;
- 2.1.3. plan your time and try to keep to schedule;
- 2.1.4. tackle one thing at a time;
- 2.1.5. be assertive - saying "No" or "Not Yet" to people;
- 2.1.6. asking for help; and
- 2.1.7. ensuring you take your breaks, lunchtimes, holidays.

2.2. Reduce the fear/tension by talking it through with someone

For example, manager, colleague, friend, counsellor. All of us are likely to feel stresses at some point in our lives and may need some help.

- 2.2.1. talking generates ways of getting help;
- 2.2.2. talking it out helps stop circular thinking;
- 2.2.3. release the feelings: laugh and cry;
- 2.2.4. explore another perspective; and/or
- 2.2.5. set some goals (for next week, next month, next year)

2.3. **Look after yourself**

- 2.3.1. take up exercise - you may find learning a relaxation exercise or attending a yoga class beneficial. Alternatively, you may find that vigorous exercise such as swimming or walking has a greater effect on you;
- 2.3.2. avoid too much caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes or other stimulants;
- 2.3.3. go for walks, get fresh air;
- 2.3.4. listen to music;
- 2.3.5. plan to eat an enjoyable nutritious diet, take a proper meal break and sit down and spend time over your food;
- 2.3.6. ensure you get enough sleep. Plan a couple of early nights a week. Find ways of relaxing and “switching off”;
- 2.3.7. often getting involved with a hobby/interest that demands intense focus and concentration is beneficial;
- 2.3.8. give yourself positive messages: “I know I can cope”. “I’ve dealt successfully with difficult situations before”;
- 2.3.9. enjoy your time away from work – plan activities you enjoy; and/or
- 2.3.10. if you notice that you are always criticising yourself, practice giving yourself praise and recognition. Celebrate success.

Appendix B – Sources of Support for Health and Wellbeing

1. Occupational Health

The College's Occupational Health Service are experienced, qualified specialist medical and nursing advisers. The emphasis is on the promotion of good health at work and the prevention of ill health in employees.

Occupational Health provide advice and guidance on all matters relating to health at work including where appropriate, advice on reasonable adjustments and adaptations to a person's job or workplace to be considered by managers.

The service currently used by the College is Dr Simpkin who is based in central London supported by the OH Service at Darent Valley Hospital.

2. Employee Assistance Programme - Tel: 0800 716 017

The service is designed to help individuals deal with a range of problems, no matter how big or small which may affect their personal lives or performance at work and is free and confidential. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The EAP also offers onward referral to telephone or face-to-face counselling where appropriate.

3. Eye tests

Any member of staff who during the course of their duties is required to operate a computer is advised to have an eye test on a regular basis, for which the College will make a contribution to the cost (up to a maximum of £15 in any one year).

Staff who require spectacles for the operation of computing equipment only (i.e. spectacles are not required for driving, reading or any other reason) may claim for the cost of frame and lenses to a maximum of £70. A letter will be required from the optician stating that the spectacles are for computer work and for no other reason.

4. Gym facilities

The College gym at Dartford is available for staff use every weekday from 5pm. Use of the facilities are free of charge, however all new users must complete a health questionnaire, induction and £30 induction fee prior to use.

5. Simply Health Cash Plans

A health cash plan allows you to claim back the cost of regular health appointments and treatment, like the dentist and optician. You can also claim back the cost of less frequent healthcare, such as a visit to a chiropodist or a physiotherapist. Premiums are made directly from salary by Payroll and there are different levels of cover to suit everyone.

6. Inspirations Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy Salons

Inspirations Salons are located on both the Dartford and Gravesend campuses (although Beauty is only available at Dartford Campus). The salons are open most weekdays and on selected evening to offer a comprehensive range of hairdressing and relaxing beauty therapy treatments at a minimal cost both to both staff and the general public. For further details call the Dartford Salon on extension **1501** or the Gravesend Salon on extension **1606**.