

WORK stress

The UK National Work-stress Network • workstress.net



Newsletter Autumn 2012

Last call for Conference...

Final preparations are currently being made for the Network's Annual Conference, to be held at the Hillscourt Conference Centre, Birmingham, on November 23rd – 25th. The Dickensian theme is "Hard Times, Great Expectations and Victorian Values"....

Not only are we paying tribute to the centenary of Dickens, that great campaigning author, but recognising also that our own times would provide ample material for his pen! The un-reconstructed Scrooge would doubtless rise high in 21st century banking, and the regime of the Posh Boys – the "Ghost of Christmas that Never Was"? - offers little hope of a latter-day happy ending for Bob Cratchit or Tiny Tim.

Conference booking is going well, but there are still places available – come and join us at Hillscourt, beautifully situated on the edge of the Lickey Hills Country Park, to discuss and debate issues including: the effect of Government cuts on levels of workplace stress (including the increased pressure on workplace representatives), on the mental health of workers and on relationships within the workplace. Conference opens on Friday evening with an informal drinks reception, and during the weekend there will be ample opportunities for networking, and to find out more about what our Network does.

We are currently working to finalise our programme of guest speakers and interactive workshops.

Full details and a booking form may be found towards the end of this Newsletter. We look forward to seeing you at Hillscourt!

... And a call for *YOUR* help!

Like any campaigning organisation, the Stress Network needs to grow. There are many challenges ahead, and we will be best equipped to face them by starting to build now upon the strong foundations already in place. Much great work has been done by successive Steering Groups since the Network was founded in 1994. But none of us, however de-stressed we become, goes on for ever! Some of our key members' thoughts are beginning to turn towards honourable retirement in the foreseeable future. While they may well wish to remain available to advise and consult, it will be for others to take up active roles and ensure that the work goes forward.

We would welcome offers of involvement from those who share the Network's values, and especially from people who may have particular expertise in finance, delivering training sessions or workshops, or event management. We are all volunteers: the Network is funded by donations, fees for the speaking and training services we offer, and by our annual Conference. For those attending the forthcoming event at Hillscourt, there will be a chance to find out more and express an interest. If you are unable to attend, but are reading this Newsletter and interested in joining the Steering Group, or finding out more, please contact **Ian Draper**, whose details are at the foot of the page.

The Network at Hazards 2012

Ian Draper and Vaughan Skirrey once again represented the Network during a busy three

days at the annual Hazards Conference, in the green and pleasant setting of Keele University in Staffordshire. There was brisk business at our display stand and information point; and, in conversations with delegates from all over the country, the reality of rising workplace stress levels and factors was confirmed over and over again. Readers who were unable to attend this excellent event may appreciate the following summary of our contribution.

Stress and Workloads...

As in 2011, Ian and Vaughan facilitated Workshop 14: Stress and Workloads. This was once again sufficiently well subscribed to be run twice, and both sessions featured some animated discussion and good collaborative work from delegates representing a range of trade unions and occupations.

The starting point for our discussions was to highlight some key issues around stress and workload – that UK workers work the longest hours in Europe; that excessive workload is identified by TUC and union surveys as the most frequent cause of work related stress; and that job loss and redistribution of the former workers' tasks increase workload factors almost exponentially.

Working in small groups, delegates were asked to identify and discuss examples of how the current post-recession period was affecting the workplace environment, their own work and that of their members. This year we introduced an interactive 'walk around' exercise: delegates were asked to visit charts containing some statements on how union reps, workplaces and colleagues their role might have been affected by the current government austerity measures, and place dots on a scale showing how strongly they identified with these.

In general discussion it was noted that delegates held a variety of roles in their TU branch/workplace, also that different organisations had been treated differently by the recession and post-recession austerity measures. There was consensus that the

recession and current period had seen a significant rise in stress related issues in the workplace.

The two groups were of similar size and contained a mix of genders, ages, length and type of experience. Although the predominance was of public sector workers, similar situations for both sectors seemed to emerge. Among the major problems identified were:

- Increased unreasonable and arbitrary target setting
- Managers lacking in understanding of the best ways to manage – seeking to impose arbitrary structures
- Greater "pursuit" of workers off sick
- The emergence of managers with no direct background in the industry and lacking in broad experience
- Psychological effects – lack of closure, 'survivors' guilt'
- Time constraints due to excessive workload creating lower levels of service
- High levels of monitoring and tracking individual behaviours in an intrusive way – use of 'spy in the cab' technology and similar methods
- Managers equally under pressure aggravating existing situations and adding to skills gaps
- Reduced staffing levels, creating more work for those remaining with fewer training opportunities and declining skills levels.
- Staff leaving not replaced so those who remain pick up the extra workload
- Increased voluntary release schemes cutting workforce but no related reduction of output as a follow up
- Ideology and jargon are used to disguise the realities of workplace life
- Reduction and decline in HR function and welfare support
- Increasingly adverse working environment as money is less available

- Increased burden on TU Reps due to HR failings
- Increased human error created from excessive pressures and raised expectations – consequences of the business and the individuals
- Targeting so called 'back office' functions
- Aggressive sickness absence monitoring including withdrawal of sick pay
- Cutbacks leading to reduced training and staff being under-trained and resourced
- Increased welfare claims
- Increased client aggression through reduced staffing levels and associated slower response times
- The upper echelons of TUs have little real comprehension of the situation and the ongoing issues

A short discussion in each session considered a simple risk assessment based audit tool which was introduced to participants. Explanation was given as to how to work with this tool and some discussion focused around how it might be used to encourage employers in carrying out in-house more detailed assessments of stress levels, for example through the HSE Stress Management Standards and its on-line tool.

Some examples of success in this process were considered and delegates were encouraged to use an effective tool to ensure a meaningful picture from which to work in improving the situation.

The concluding session of the workshop provided time for delegates in groups to consider strategies for improving the situations in a range of work environments and locations. Delegates were asked to suggest ways of raising awareness and of carrying forward actions to reduce stress levels in their workplaces. The idea was also to consider strategies to ensure that Unions themselves take the matter more seriously and become pro-active in fighting this 21st century blight on the workforce.

Some key strategies which union reps could undertake at local level included:

- More effective H&S Committees with full participation
- Increased training and education
- Raising questions and discussion points at every opportunity.
- Seek better direct connections to legal procedures
- Break down negative cultures and seek to carry greater influence
- More focus on H&S training entitlements as well as Safety Regs
- Take a political viewpoint and ACT!
- Effective local networking
- Highlight successes and achievements especially through Social Media sites – follow the Hazards Campaign pattern!
- Where necessary withdraw goodwill and labour through appropriate procedures
- Insist that Risk Assessments are carried out and followed up – regular reviews of procedures
- Congratulate and celebrate success – provide mutual support and gain recruitment from successes
- Improved use of technology in non threatening ways
- Improve and focus on evidence gathering, recoding data and safety issues
- Job sharing in TU roles, provide mutual support and mentoring for emerging Stewards and Reps; also for general members to help them understand TU processes
- Focus on effective awareness raising through jointly promoted Safety Events
- Grievances can work and apply pressures on managers to act more thoughtfully and effectively. Maintain status quo of work processes during grievances

- “Succession planning” to pass on the baton
- Focus on Individual and Collective responses at the appropriate time

The workshops closed with a commitment from the Network that the concerns and suggestions of delegates would inform our ongoing campaign to highlight and eradicate the causes of work related stress.

Out and about with the Network

Despite the damp squib that was summer 2012, network representatives were frequently on the road, taking the message out through attendance and input into a variety of events in addition to our main booking at Hazards 2012. Here is a brief summary of our activities...

- Address to the All Party Parliamentary Health and Safety Group, House of Commons, July. Ian Draper attended and spoke to a number of MPs. Unfortunately, this coincided with Bob Diamond’s own appearance before MPS, and so the attendance was lower than it might otherwise have been!
- Ian also attended a UNISON event for Coventry & Warwick NHS members, and also the annual UNISON Health Sector Conference in Brighton;
- He also addressed UNISON Eastern Region Safety Reps in their conference workshop on Stress and Workloads; and was a keynote speaker for UNITE’s Co-op Bank and RSA stewards;
- Bob Woods of the Steering Group represented us at a NASUWT event, Stratford upon Avon, October;
- Vaughan Skirrey, Deputy Convenor, led two workshops on TU Reps’ Stressors, at the invitation of the Royal College of Nursing at their Reps’ Conference in Leeds, October.

At the time of writing proposed sessions for UCATT, NASUWT West Midlands Region, UNISON in Coventry and others are in discussion. We were also approached by an international HR Advice company to address a breakfast meeting in London later in the year and details are still being considered.

‘Sun’ stripping stunt exposes bullying culture

Journalists' union NUJ has expressed dismay after a woman doing work experience for the Sun newspaper was asked to strip off and pose with a member of staff for mocked-up pictures of Prince Harry. Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said although 21-year-old Sophie Henderson said she was not forced to do it 'she should not have been asked to in the first place. It was highly inappropriate of the paper to ask the young woman, who presumably wanted to impress, to do such a task. What would have happened if she had said no?'

The NUJ leader said she had presented witness statements to the Leveson phone hacking inquiry 'to paint a picture of the level of bullying in some newsrooms. One member, who had been taunted by members of the news desk because of her weight, was forced to dress in a Lady Gaga-style dress made from meat and walk the streets.' She added: 'We believe that it is no coincidence that where unions are not recognised by newspaper organisations a high level of bullying can be allowed to flourish. That is why the NUJ is calling for the introduction of a conscience clause into journalists' contracts of employment, which will allow them to refuse unethical assignments. We also demand that workers have the right to be represented in their workplaces so they can defend themselves from unacceptable work practices.'

Source: TUC 'Risks' 1st September 2012

Job insecurity linked to soaring hospital admissions

Rising numbers of people are being admitted to hospital with stress caused by the recession, official figures have revealed. A total of 6,370 people were hospitalised with stress in the 12 months to May, a seven per cent rise on the previous year and 47 per cent up on 2007/8 when the economic crisis hit, according to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIS). Those of working age were most vulnerable, with the highest rate of hospital admissions. Overall hospital admissions were up two per cent last year, indicating that admissions for stress, though low, are rising three times as fast. The HSCIS figures do not include the millions who visit GPs, A&E departments or alternative practitioners for stress which are also thought to be increasing. Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology at Lancaster University and an expert on stress, linked the rise in admissions to job insecurity. He told the Independent newspaper: 'I have never seen figures like this before... But the figures do not surprise me. There is a lot of job insecurity out there. It is not just people losing their jobs - there is also the fear of losing their jobs. Those who remain are fewer, with more work to do and more pressure and they are managed by people who are overloaded and also fear for their jobs.' He added: 'People see other jobs going and they fear they are next.' Tim Kendall, deputy director of the Royal College of Psychiatrists research unit, said: 'I work in a unit for the homeless and I see a lot of people who two years ago were in a home with a family and now it has fallen apart.'

Source TUC 'Risks' Newsletter 15 Sept 2012

Stress remains high among nursing staff

Nearly a third of health-care workers suffered from work-related stress last year, prompting speculation that ongoing organisational

change in the NHS is having a detrimental impact on employee well-being.

Findings from the ninth annual NHS staff survey revealed that 30 per cent of NHS staff reported they had experienced stress related to their jobs last year – a rise from 29 per cent in 2010 – while, among ambulance staff, the figure hit 34 per cent.

Overall, 15 per cent of health-care workers reported they had experienced bullying, harassment and abuse from patients, their relatives, or other members of the public. Again, the figures are higher among all staff in mental-health trusts (17 per cent) and ambulance trusts (31 per cent). Around 15 per cent of staff also reported they had experienced bullying, harassment, or abuse from either their line manager, or other colleagues.

Christina McAnea, head of health at Unison, commented: "The staff survey reflects some of the pressures felt by staff, but our own survey painted a much bleaker picture. Unison's survey showed that 85 per cent experienced an increase in workload, and 83 per cent suffered an increase in stress over the past year. She added "The increase in workload is not a coincidence – it is down to cuts in staffing and to a lack of cover for staff on sick, or on leave. And it is not just staffs who suffer – the increase in workload and stress is felt by patients and by workers' families."

The NHS staff survey findings can be found at www.nhsstaffsurveys.com

Present but not correct...The following two stories focus on the growing problem of workplace 'presenteeism'.

We're still sick, we're just sick at work now...

A fall in absence levels could be masking deeper problems in the workplace, as workers fearing for their job take their sickness to work, a new report suggests. The average level of employee absence fell by

almost a day compared with last year, from 7.7 days to 6.8 per employee per year, according to this year's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)/Simply Health Absence Management survey. But the fall in absence levels coincides with almost a third of employers reporting an increase in the number of people going into work ill. CIPD said the threat of redundancies and concerns over job security are shown to contribute to 'presenteeism', with organisations that are expecting to make redundancies in the next six months more likely to report an increase in employees going into work when unwell, than employers that are not expecting to cut jobs. Stress-related absence, which was the most common cause of long-term sickness absence, also appears to be on the increase, with two-fifths of employers (40 per cent) reporting a rise over the past year and only one in ten (10 per cent) reporting that the problem had decreased. According to the survey, organisations who have noted an increase in presenteeism over the past year are more likely to report an increase in stress-related absence over the same period - 52 per cent compared with 38 per cent of those who did not report an increase in people coming in to work ill. Dr Jill Miller, research adviser at CIPD, commented: 'Continuing economic uncertainty and fears over job security appears to be taking its toll on employees. We are seeing employees struggling into work to demonstrate their commitment, suggesting presenteeism can be a sign of anxiety. Failing to address employees' concerns is likely to confound the issue, impact on morale and commitment and may cause or exacerbate stress or mental health problems.'

Source: TUC 'Risks' 6 October 2012

Meanwhile, Shropshire council has been accused by UNISON of 'cheating' workers out of their sick pay and increasing pressure on workers to turn in when ill. The public sector union said it believes sick pay changes forced through by the council combined with 'the

fear of being sacked or earmarked for redundancy could lead to more employees continuing to work or returning to work while still feeling sick - a concept known as 'presenteeism'. The union said changes introduced by the council last October in a bid to cut costs had left workers in a far worse position without delivering the anticipated savings. Last year, the union agreed to end its dispute on the changes because it was promised a binding review. Alan James, branch secretary at Shropshire UNISON, said: 'The reason we ended the dispute in the first place was because we were promised this review would be carried out and the results abided by. We feel cheated and absolutely furious after going along with it, for them to discard it.' He warned that industrial action was an option. According to UNISON: 'Although everyone would like to see reduced absence from work the best way to achieve this is to tackle the underlying causes of ill health in the workplace, not by forcing employees to continue to work or return to work while still feeling sick. This can result in reduced productivity among people who come to work and are not fully engaged or perform at lower levels as a result of ill-health. It can also actually increase sickness absence in the long term.'

Source TUC 'Risks' 13 October

Now to the front line in education.....The following three reports, courtesy of TUC 'Risks', highlight current causes of concern in both schools and universities...

'Punitive' lesson observations target the sick

Teachers in Wales say they are being subjected to 'punitive' monitoring and surveillance practices in their classrooms, teaching union NASUWT had said. Online survey responses from over 1,000 members indicated sick workers were being targeted for extra scrutiny. NASUWT added that only union action has prevented the position worsening.

The survey found that prior to the commencement of the NASUWT industrial action, two-thirds of teachers 'did not find observations to be helpful and more than a fifth stated that they found their school's monitoring to be intimidating.'

The union survey also indicated 'almost half did not believe that observation is applied fairly across the school, believing that other teachers are often singled out for extra scrutiny because they have been off sick.' Chris Keates, general secretary of NASUWT, said: 'Unfortunately, too many teachers, as this survey shows, are being subject to surveillance and monitoring which is designed to be punitive and negative rather than to support enhanced teaching and learning.'

She added: 'One of the most disturbing aspects of the survey is the belief that certain teachers are being deliberately targeted for inappropriate reasons.'

Classroom observation is being used as a punitive management tool to pressurise and intimidate teachers.' Rex Phillips, NASUWT Wales organiser, said: 'The survey has confirmed that the NASUWT was absolutely right to ballot members to enable them to insist on a limit on classroom observation.'

Using observation as a punitive management tool does not improve standards of teaching and learning, it simply demoralises teachers, undermining their ability to teach effectively.'

Teachers angry at official 'work harder' jibe

Teachers already facing a pay freeze have expressed anger after England's chief inspector of schools called on them to 'work harder' or face further hardship.

The comments from Ofsted head Sir Michael Wilshaw, in a 22 September interview with The Times newspaper, reignited union concerns that the Ofsted chief is fronting government policy and ignoring the serious and damaging stresses of the job. Wilshaw told the paper teachers must work extra hours if they want a pay rise. He added that those who were "out the gate at 3pm" should not be promoted. Members of staff who went

the 'extra mile', Sir Michael explained would be paid well and receive promotion.

NUT deputy general secretary Kevin Courtney said Wilshaw's remarks increased fears that he 'wants to be at war with teachers in this country.' He added: 'Teachers' pay should not be determined by head teachers at the school level. We don't want a system where head teachers pick and choose favourites for pay rises.' NASUWT general secretary Chris Keates said: 'It is time Michael Wilshaw stopped playing politics and doing the bidding of the Secretary of State and engaged in a serious debate about how to secure the highest standards and promote excellence throughout the education system.' She added: 'Teachers are in the second year of a public sector pay freeze and evidence shows that teachers who have earned pay progression are being denied it. It ill behoves the Chief Inspector to allow his role to be reduced to being the mouthpiece for the myths and misinformation peddled by the Secretary of State.'

High stress and long hours blight universities

University staffs are suffering 'damaging' stress levels arising from intense workloads and a long hours culture, union research has found.

A report of a UCU survey of 14,000 higher education academic and academic-related staff ranks nearly 100 institutions by reported levels of stress. It concludes stress levels related to workload at all of the institutions were higher than for the British working population as a whole. A second table ranks universities by the percentage of full-time respondents who work more than 50 hours a week. The report's launch marked the start of UCU's campaign against excessive workloads in post-16 education. The union warned the problem of workload and stress is likely to get even worse if universities do not act now. It said as funding cuts start to bite in higher education, workloads will increase and there

will be even greater pressure from students and parents expecting much more for heavily increased university fees. UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: 'We call on institutions to hear this collective cry for help and take action to mitigate the increasingly intolerable pressure on stressed-out staff.' She added: 'As the survey shows, the problem has worsened over the past four years and with funding cuts, increased workloads and rising expectations from students and parents paying much more for their education, the situation is likely to become even worse. Many academics and academic-related staff are clearly under far too much pressure and we know this level of stress in the workplace can be very damaging to mental and physical health.'

NETWORK COMMENT

The very beginnings of the Stress Network were linked to concerns about the stress suffered by teachers and lecturers on the front line, and there is little evidence of real improvement, especially given the Victorian values proudly proclaimed by current OFSTED 'top brass'...

Is that the HSE? Hello?.....Hello?

Row over HSE diminishing workplace health role

A dispute over the Health and Safety Executive's perceived inability to oversee effectively workplace health issues looks set to escalate. A 2nd October article in the Daily Mirror, headlined 'Will work be the death of you?' and based on a head count of HSE's rapidly disappearing complement of occupational health staff undertaken by the HSE union Prospect (Risks 573), warned: 'Workers are being exposed to dangers because of savage health inspectors cuts.' It said the impact of a dramatic decline in the number of occupational physicians and specialist occupational health inspectors employed by HSE would be compounded as 'the Tory-led Coalition wants to free employers of their responsibility to record

workers' absences due to industrial diseases' (Risks 568). In an online response to the article, HSE chief executive Geoffrey Podger said 'it is wrong to claim' occupational health is not an 'important part of HSE's work' anymore. He wrote: 'The number of Occupational Physicians and Inspectors quoted by Prospect also does not take into consideration HSE's use of external specialists, nor the fact that HSE has changed the way it carries out its duties in relation to occupational health issues.' A Hazards Campaign spokesperson, said the HSE's chief's comments 'did not stand up to scrutiny.' He pointed to a September 2012 report from Stirling University (Risks 575) which warned of 'the impending death of enforcement', particularly on workplace health issues. This highlighted instances of HSE presenting the government's deregulatory, resource-slashing plans as evidence-based policy changes, adding it was not just that 'HSE obeyed the government's command - it did it in an extremely partial fashion.'

Source: TUC 'Risks' 6 October 2012

And finally ...

Our presence on social networks is growing, so there are many ways to keep up with what we're doing – visit our web site regularly, look us up on **Facebook** and join the **Tweeting** community if that's your thing.

Hope to see you at Conference in November.

Diary Dates

Stress Network Conference November 24th/25th 2012, Hillscourt Centre, Rednal

Hazards Conference July 19th to 21st 2013, Keele University

EWHN 13th Conference, October 4th to 6th 2013 - Bologna Italy www.ewhn.eu

Stress Network Conference November 22nd to 24th 2013, Hillscourt Centre, Rednal

