Stress Management Policy

**POLICY UHSP/11/SM/2021**

Health & Safety Policy

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**Stress Management Policy**

# Introduction

The University is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees, and recognises that the effective management of work related stress will directly contribute to our success.

This policy sets out the action necessary to implement the University Health and Safety Policy in relation to staff exposure to work-related stress. These actions are devised to meet the legal obligations on employers from the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, and form part of the Health and Safety management arrangements.

There is a relationship between this policy and other areas of University policy and practice, particularly regarding the steps being taken outside the health and safety management system to develop good practice around mental health and wellbeing. This policy is not intended to regulate those other areas, however the risk assessments and controls required to implement the stress management policy are expected to be complementary to the mental health and wellbeing agenda.

There are clear benefits to preventing work related stress:

* Quality of working life: employees feel happier at work and perform better
* Introducing change: can be easier when work stressors are well managed
* Employment relations: problems can be resolved internally with minimal conflict
* Attendance and sickness absence: attendance goes up and sickness absence goes down when work stressors are well managed
* Staff Retention: is improved
* Staff engagement: is greater

The policy has adopted the approach recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) which uses six ‘***Management Standards***’ that have become established across the UK as a recognised and effective framework for practically engaging in stress management. In keeping with other areas of Health and Safety Policy, risk assessment is a key action, and thereafter a proportionate set of management-led actions to ensure the risks are mitigated and remain at tolerable levels.

The policy also requires increased monitoring and reviewing of work related stress within the existing Health and Safety assurance reporting process, and this should enable us to better understand when and where work related stress requires particular attention.

It is also supported by comprehensive Guidance for managers and others which can be accessed via the staff intranet [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).

which provide tools for

# Scope and Definitions

## 2.1 Scope

This policy requires action to prevent work related stress adversely impacting upon staff including postgraduate research students, who are defined as employees in the University Health and Safety Policy.

Undergraduate student wellbeing, and issues relating to stress experienced by students undertaking their academic work, who are not treated as employees under the Health and Safety Policy, are not covered by this policy. Instead this is managed by a separate set of arrangements delivered by [Student Services and the Guild of Students](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/taking-care-of-yourself/stress.aspx).

The University’s aim is to develop a culture where the organisation, its managers and employees are committed to working together to address the causes of workplace stressors and support the wellbeing of its employees. This policy provides a framework through which we aim to:

* Define stress and the scope of the University’s responsibilities;
* Define responsibilities within the University for managing workplace stressors;
* Support Supervisors, Managers and Line Managers in recognising their responsibilities to identify workplace stressors and conduct stress risk assessments to reduce or control the risk;
* Provide training and support for those with management and supervisory responsibilities, to enable them to develop their management competence and support employees who experience stress.

## 2.2 Stress

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as:

*“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them”.*

The term ***work related ill health***is used when there is an imbalance between the demands placed on an individual, and the individual’s ability to cope. Individuals have markedly different resilience, susceptibilities and coping strategies, and the implementation of this policy will reflect that. Up to a certain level, pressure can be stimulating and motivating and may lead to optimal performance but increasing pressure beyond this level can result in distress, fatigue and deteriorating performance. Interventions such as counselling, exercise and other self-help activities can be useful but may not eliminate the causes of stress if related to work. Stress is often multi-causal and can be a result of a combination of both work and personal issues.

## 2.3 HSE Management Standards

The **Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards** cover six areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. The six key areas are:

* Demands
* Control
* Support
* Relationships
* Role
* Change

A key action within the management standards approach is to develop work related stress risk assessments. Further detail is provided in the accompanying Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx). This Guidance also includes the link to the HSE Workbook which provides examples of practical steps that can be taken to reduce stress in these 6 areas, a worked example stress risk assessment (using the University Generic Risk Assessment Template) and further guidance and links to support for individuals.

It is important that individuals have **the competence and confidence** to manage work-related stress where it is encountered. Within the Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx) there is a **competence check list** that has been developed by the HSE to enable managers to assess their own abilities and experience, and to identify the need for training or other support.

# Responsibilities

In accordance with the approach set out in the University Health and Safety Policy, specific duties related to managing stress are distributed across a number of managers and other role-holders. There are also a number of groups who will support implementation of this policy and also a set of services provided to support duty-holders.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Groups and Committees | * University Health and Safety Executive Group (UHSEG) * College and Professional Services Health and Safety Management Committees * Occupational Health Advisory Group (OHAG) * Joint Safety Advisory Committee (JSAC) |
| Duty holders | * Heads of College, Directors of Professional Services Departments * Senior Managers * Supervisors, Managers, and Line Managers * Employees including Post Graduate Researchers |
| Support | * HR Workplace Wellbeing * Contracted Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) * HR People and Organisational Development (POD) * HR Advisory Services and other areas of HR * Student Services * External agencies |

The following responsibilities are in addition to those within the University’s Health & Safety Policy, and specifically relate to the arrangements for stress management.

## 3.1 Occupational Health Advisory Group

An **Occupational Health Advisory Group (OHAG)** is responsible for advising UHSEG on matters in relation to this policy and will provide termly assurance reports providing information on the status of the risks and implementation across the University.

## 3.2 Heads of College and Directors of Professional Services Departments

**Heads of Colleges (HOC) /Directors of Professional Services (DPSD)** are accountable to the University Executive Board (UEB) for implementation of this policy in the areas they influence or control and are responsible for ensuring:

1. Sufficient senior managers are instructed to implement the policy;
2. The necessary action is taken to ensure senior managers, line managers, supervisors, and other staff are actively engaged in implementing the policy;
3. Specifically, HOC and DPSD must ensure work related stress risk assessments are developed to both anticipate periods of elevated stress in staff, and also in response to known cases of work related stress. See the Guidance to this Policy for tools to support the development of stress risk assessments [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx);
4. Procedures are in place to deal with the findings from the risk assessments, and the monitoring and review arrangements set out below (see part 5);
5. Training identified from the stress risk assessments is provided and refreshed regularly;
6. Any stress management measures identified are promptly implemented.

## 3.3 Senior Managers (M3, Heads of School, Heads of Institutes and others)

Senior managers are accountable for the implementation of this policy to protect staff and PGR students (where applicable to their area of responsibility) through the following actions:

1. Ensure there are sufficient line managers and operational managers identified to implement the policy and to ensure that supervision of staff and PGR students is appropriate in all areas;
2. Promote and support the completion of stress risk assessments;
3. To be aware of and offer internal support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress;
4. To refer individuals as a management referral to Occupational Health and/or suggest they seek [support from the EAP](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/employee-assistance-programme-eap.aspx) when a situation is escalated to them either from the line manager or HR;
5. Confirm that procedures are followed to address findings from the risk assessments;
6. To carry out risk assessments for the activities undertaken by their team and record all significant findings which should be reviewed annually or after any significant change whichever is sooner.

## 3.4 Supervisors, Line Managers and Managers

Supervisors, Line Managers and Managers have the following responsibilities:

1. To put in place measures to minimise the risks of stress, particularly from negative pressure at work;
2. To attend training whenever possible, including People and Organisational Development (POD) training to ensure good management practices are updated;
3. To familiarise themselves with the Health and Safety Executive's stress management standards, see Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx);
4. To carry out and implement recommendations of stress risk assessments within their area of responsibility, ensuring all significant findings are recorded and reviewed annually or after any significant change whichever is sooner. An example stress risk assessment can be found in the Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).
5. To be aware of and offer internal support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress;
6. To refer individuals as a management referral to Occupational Health and/or suggest they seek [support from the EAP](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/employee-assistance-programme-eap.aspx);
7. To monitor holidays to ensure staff are taking their full entitlement;
8. To seek specialist advice from Occupational Health, the relevant HR Advisor and (where relevant to the situation) the College/Professional Services Health & Safety Adviser to manage staff disclosing mental ill health.

## 3.5 Employees (including Postgraduate Researchers)

Employees (and PGR students undertaking work-like activities) are responsible for:

1. Informing their manager if they feel their work is causing them stress;
2. Raising issues of concern with their line manager (or Supervisor, for PGR students) in the first instance. (Advice and support may also be sought from the EAP, HR Services and Trade Union representatives, as appropriate);
3. Accepting offers of support from managers including referral or/and signposting to Occupational Health (OH) or the EAP;
4. Attending Occupational Health appointments as requested;
5. Participating in training when requested;
6. Using their full leave entitlement to support their wellbeing;
7. Supporting colleagues. Signs that a colleague might be experiencing stress could include:
   * Changes in their behaviour and mood;
   * Frequent illness and absence;
   * Reduced productivity, concentration and decision-making.

## 3.6 Workplace Wellbeing

**HR Workplace Wellbeing** are responsible for advising and otherwise supporting Heads of School/Directors to meet their responsibilities as defined under this policy. Wellbeing Services will as necessary:

1. Provide specialist advice and awareness training on risk assessment;
2. Provide a contracted Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide staff with counselling and other advice and support;
3. Support individuals whose health has been affected by stress and have been referred by their managers or who have self-referred to the EAP. For information on [how to refer an individual](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/Managers/Employee-Relations/Occupational-Health-Referral.aspx) to Occupational Health;
4. Advise the individual and their managers and make recommendations to mitigate their stress and any adjustments that may support them;

Support OHAG with the provision of data and information including sickness absence patterns, stress indicators, staff training attendance, for monitoring and review of the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress and the Stress Management Policy.

## 

## 3.7 HR People and Organisational Development (POD)

**HR- People and Organisational Development (POD)** provide or facilitate a range of training that are relevant to the stress management policy. For details see the Guidance relating to the Stress Management Policy. [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).

## 3.8 Employee Assistance Programme

A **Contracted Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** is facilitated by Workplace Wellbeing which provides counselling and other professional advice and support, including for bullying and harassment. Also, the EAP provides advice relating to financial wellbeing and other non-work stress issues impacting on individuals. Where the EAP does not provide clinical or other services, the EAP will signpost staff toward appropriate sources of help.

## 3.9 HR Advisory Services and other areas of HR

**HR Advisory Services and other areas of HR** will provide advice and other support (for example regarding work-relationships and issues which should be considered within the problem resolution frameworks and other HR processes).

1. HR Advisory Services provides a local team of H.R. Advisors and an HR Business Partner for Professional Services and each College who are often the first point of contact for support and advice to managers. In addition there is also a centrally provided Employee Relations Team of Advisors who may become involved to support problem resolution and formal HR processes.
2. The University provides a confidential advice line, via the contracted EAP, for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors. There is a mediation service available for employees who have relationship conflict at work or are currently not at work because of work related stress;
3. The POD facilitated Coaching Academy, and the performance management and problem resolution services which sit outside the Health and Safety arrangements are also relevant and could be seen as stress mitigation measures;
4. There is also a provision for managers to refer individuals, via a management referral, to Occupational Health.

There are many **external agencies** who provide clear information in support of work related stress, a mentally healthy workplace and strategies for managing stress. There are also several alternative places where individuals can turn to access counselling outside of work. These sources are referenced within the Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).

# Implementation of the Policy

## 4.1 Stress Risk assessment

This policy requires stress risk assessments to be completed by line managers and other role holders who influence the work related stress experienced by staff with support from local Health and Safety Advisers and others.

1. The assessment can be done in a number of ways, and the *HSE management standards* are recommended as a useful framework through which many common factors can be considered (although equally other local work and factors may be relevant).
2. Discussion based approach to risk assessment is often most effective, with a record being subsequently created to capture and communicate the significant findings of the assessment. The discussions can include staff, managers, safety advisers, trade union representatives, and HR Business Partners.
3. Stress risk assessments can be for roles, processes and teams or for individuals, and experience shows that where work related stress is suspected, a combination of a number of risk assessments can be effective.
4. It is known that early detection of work related stress in groups or individuals is important, as is quick development of risk mitigation measures.
5. Stress risk assessments for roles, processes and teams or for individuals are to be recorded on the University’s Generic Risk Assessment template, a link to which is available in the Stress Management Toolkit [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx). To aid an Individual stress risk assessment there is also a checklist available to aid the discussion on work-related stressors within the Stress Management Toolkit [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).
6. In all cases, the significant findings of the risk assessment must be shared with those exposed to the risks, and those responsible for the management and supervision of the work.

## 4.2 Anticipating periods of increased stress

Managers can anticipate how the potential for work related risk rises according to different work demands. Therefore a useful exercise that could inform risk assessments would be for a department or team to plot the anticipated periods of high or low demand, that are likely to have an impact upon staff, and which could contribute to levels of work related stress. In some cases this could be a cycle of demands at predictable times in an annual work calendar (for example related to specific seasonal demands or periods during the academic year).

This can then be helpful in ensuring the stress mitigation measures are deployed at the right time, and people are as prepared as they can be for the changing levels of stress.

## 4.3 Training

Line managers play a vital role in the identification and management of stress within the University. They are likely to see the problems causing the stress first hand and will be in the best position to notice changes in staff behaviour that may indicate a stress-related problem as well as often being the first point of contact when an individual feels stressed. It is therefore essential that line managers are equipped with the correct skills and behaviours to be able to manage these situations. The University has a number of management and leadership programmes available for managers. Further information on these can be found in the Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).

It is also important to ensure that staff have the required skills to do their job. This includes having the necessary professional / technical skills for the work and also includes ‘on the job training’. The line manager through the PDR process should identify the need for any additional technical training in the first instance. The Guidance to this Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx) identifies some of the key training courses that are available from POD.

# Monitoring and auditing

Monitoring and reviewing is an important way of finding out whether the measures taken by the University to tackle stress have been effective. The overall responsibility for monitoring compliance sits with UHSEG, but it is expected that there will be routine ongoing monitoring in all areas of the University to ensure effective implementation of the Policy.

The stress management arrangements will be monitored and reviewed by:

1. Managers using the checklist of key management actions in appendix A, to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to reduce the risks associated with work-related stress.
2. Where it is reasonable to do so, information on the prevalence of work-related stress across the University will be collected via anonymous staff surveys and other measures.
3. College/Professional Services Health and Safety Management Committees, who will review and monitor stress management arrangements and concerns, as part of their local health and safety arrangements reviews and when necessary provide stress-related assurances in their Termly Assurance Reports.
4. OHAG who will collect and report on absence data and other university-level indicators and provide stress-related assurances in its Termly Assurance Reports.
5. UHSEG, who will monitor agreed key performance indicators, including staff survey results and action plans, inspections and audits and stress management training needs and plans, submitted by the Colleges and Professional Services Health & Safety Management Committees and the Occupational Health Advisory Group (OHAG)through the termly Standard Assurance Reporting system.

There is also an option to deploy the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Indicator Tool. This is likely to be most effective when applied to a single area, College or Department. Further information and a link to this tool can be found in the Guidance to the Stress Management Policy [Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx).

Where patterns of stress are identified through for example, staff surveys, HSE online stress survey, sickness absence data and exit interviews the relevant duty-holders are expected to take appropriate action to investigate and address the problem.

In all cases, it is expected that involving Trade Unions, HR Business Partners, and other HR Advisers, is likely to be beneficial when looking to respond to the findings of stress surveys and other monitoring exercises. Focus groups, involving staff, are also known to be an effective way to support the creation of action plans.

Compliance with this policy may also be subject to internal or external review by assurance providers such as Internal Audit and the HSE. Action plans produced as a result of these audits will be monitored through the Termly Standard Assurance Reporting system.

# Review

This policy is part of the arrangements made under the Health & Safety Policy and as such will be reviewed every three years or sooner if dictated by changes in legislation or University management arrangements.

# Appendix A Checklist for key management actions

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Duty holder using the checklist** | | College or Professional Service Departments | | Date |
| **Management action** | | Confirmed | Not confirmed | Further action needed to confirm the key management action has been implemented. |
| **2. Organising actions**  Action taken to organise the College, School or Professional Services Department to enable implementation of the Policy. | | | | |
| 2a) | *Organise within the department or team to enable generic work-related stress risk assessments to be developed and shared. Nominate a lead person(s) to develop the risk assessments and ensure they attend the* [*risk assessment training*](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/development/opportunities/ww-course-content/risk-assessment.aspx#id_token=eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJSUzI1NiIsIng1dCI6Ild3dXdRSWFCSWZvRURkbHd4VXpSRUVJbmtvMCIsImtpZCI6Ild3dXdRSWFCSWZvRURkbHd4VXpSRUVJbmtvMCJ9.eyJpc3MiOiJodHRwczovL2Ntcy11b2IuY2xvdWQuY29udGVuc2lzLmNvbS9hdXRoZW50aWNhdGUiLCJhdWQiOiJXZWJzaXRlQWRmc0NsaWVudCIsImV4cCI6MTYyMDIzMzQ5MSwibmJmIjoxNjIwMjMzMTkxLCJub25jZSI6IjQ0MjhkODBmZDgwMDRjYzU4NWQwNDdlNzRkNzk1MDc2IiwiaWF0IjoxNjIwMjMzMTkxLCJzaWQiOiI5ZDQ1YTdlZDk1M2UxNTVhYzI1MGNlMzVjNTY1MTgzNCIsInN1YiI6IjI5MGFkMzk0LTc0OWEtNDc4NC1iNGQ5LTE1NzQ3NGE0OTk3YyIsImF1dGhfdGltZSI6MTYyMDIzMzE5MSwiaWRwIjoiaWRzcnYiLCJhbXIiOlsicGFzc3dvcmQiXX0.NnCF6UoASq0ZoV0vx_9WOG_e9F0-msBS0h_qo8SY661YEDeItBjb-QFUnUR9NqwyoX2YqdiI6LIYKKaVYzilxgZhjBuz8PjwbdZq47FfUG5-aoQJ22UKMFpc5E2Y9XlNOJEyk44nd-14d9ADIyKTnuHXro0RirAvexwRAvmQEZ3tZs-Ibyet3CWuJwYlm-CQXZdteibGcLJTB49phVFihfcX5WoQ8acBno6AW8TNw0DleHM5TRy7ie4KJ21QSE0VHnGiA9yK1j2GV7q3UP5pubQWOJWHk7FP4yXpTBnx3hxgM6rgg8k_LwGmA7BYNu3A7nqNwFwCSaqsz9-HLwqaRg&scope=openid&state=033a7cc8dd14411199d418ba35ea833f&session_state=PoXxElLxAdnvq143DVPcOXPM-j8s5F8aZYC6d_JWHVA.db324abfd5769e5457e4e0f662111823)*.* |  |  |  |
| 2b) | *Develop an understanding of the areas of high demand within the department or team, an annual calendar of demands or other foreseeable activities that will impact on stress may assist this. And discuss with staff other times or processes which are worthy of generic stress risk assessment.* |  |  |  |
| 2c) | *Use the* [*Competency Indicator Tool*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf) *to identify competence and development needs in those developing the risk assessments.* |  |  |  |
| 2d) | *Read through the Toolkit for Supervisors, Line Managers and Managers, available in the* [*Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)*](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx)*and work through the People Management Toolkit (once launched).* |  |  |  |
| 2e) | *Draw up a list of roles, processes and teams that will require a stress risk assessment. Give consideration to which individuals may require a specific risk assessment due to personal vulnerabilities (ie young worker, employee reporting that they are experiencing stress)* |  |  |  |
| 2f) | *Promote the support services available to all staff via the EAP (see link below) regularly and offer internal support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress and encourage them to access professional help through the* [*EAP*](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/employee-assistance-programme-eap.aspx)*.* |  |  |  |
| 2i) | *Consider Mental Wellbeing in the broader context and be familiar with the Mental Wellbeing at work guidance document see* [*Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)*](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx) |  |  |  |
| 2k) | *Seek specialist advice from Occupational Health, the relevant HR Advisor and (where relevant) College/Professional Services Health and Safety Adviser to manage staff disclosing mental ill health.* |  |  |  |
| **3. Risk assessment and control actions**  Take action to ensure the development of **suitable and sufficient risk assessments** prior to any significant exposure of staff to the risk. | | | | |
| 3a) | *Develop risk assessments for the activities undertaken by their team and record all significant findings which should be reviewed annually or after any significant change whichever is sooner.* |  |  |  |
| 3b) | *Where appropriate, based on the findings of the risk assessment, refer individuals as a management referral to Occupational Health and/or suggest they seek support from the EAP.* |  |  |  |
| 3c) | *Implement recommendations of generic and individual stress risk assessments See* [*Stress Management Guidance (birmingham.ac.uk)*](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/workhealth/stress-management-guidance.aspx) *for Stress Risk Assessment Template and Guidance.* |  |  |  |
| 3d) | *Record all significant findings from risk assessments and communicate to relevant people doing or managing the work.* |  |  |  |
| **4. Monitoring and reviewing actions**  Taking the necessary action to routinely monitor and review the effectiveness of all health and safety arrangements, and to quickly respond where improvement needs are identified. See *UHSP Appendix H* for further detail. | | | | |
| 4a) | *Communicate and monitor through local assurance reports, reviewing termly or after any significant change, whichever is sooner.* |  |  |  |
| 4b) | *Be aware of the information regarding local stress risk assessments to be fed into the OHAG’s termly assurance reports providing information on the status of the risks and implementation across the University to UHSEG.* |  |  |  |