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31st March 2025

To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH 2025- HEALTH & WELLBEING COMMUNICATION

Information is provided below to assist branches when undertaking any activities for **Stress Awareness Month 2025**. This LTB is shared as a communication in line with planned Health, Safety and Wellbeing Activities/Campaigns for 2025.

Stress Awareness Month is an event that has been observed since 1992, it serves as a gateway to open conversations about stress, signpost people to the right support and help us all prioritise our mental health. It is promoted by numerous organisations and the NHS. The HSE published annual reporting statistics in November 2024 revealing that almost half of 1.7 million work-related ill health cases were identified as stress related, with over 776,000 workers suffering from ill-health related to stress, depression or anxiety with each person suffering taking an average of 15.8 days off work.

The Health and Safety Executive have recently been funding research into work-related stress under the title Project OSCAR (Occupational Stress Consultation and Research). The Health and Safety Executive have commissioned Affinity Health at Work, the Institute of Employment Studies, the Institute of Occupational Medicine, and the Society of Occupational Medicine to lead the Occupational Stress Consultation and Research programme. This project aims to provide HSE with the evidence base on which to make policy decisions and underpin guidance on the practical actions that employers can take to prevent and mitigate work-related stress relative to **three** research areas.

1. Preventing & Reducing Stress.
2. Defining & Identifying Stress.
3. Examining Barriers & Enablers to Reducing Risk.

The CWU are taking part in this research which aims to:

- Explore how the evolving model of WRS (Work-Related Stress) labelling is received and its applicability across different contexts.
- Identify how the Project OSCAR research findings can be made most useful to relevant groups.
- Gather & use suggestions on how employers and health professionals can improve current practices and what needs to be in place to support this.

This research will result in a final report in early 2026, with the aim to better identify what we know about effective interventions to prevent and reduce work-related stress, with a further sharing of new knowledge and good practice.

Stress Risk Assessments

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by undertaking stress risk assessments and acting on the findings. The CWU has national agreements with all the major employers on both individual and group stress risk assessments.

Members suffering the effects of stress are encouraged to approach their Union Rep, Safety Rep, Mental Health First Aider or seek help, support and assistance without delay should they need help at work, or feel in need of crisis support.

When undertaken correctly, Stress Risk Assessments can be an extremely effective tool to reduce personal stress on an individual level or workplace level.

Shared for information and use are the following embedded documents:

- **CWU Preventing Stress flowchart.**



- cwu preventing
stress flow chart - v2.i

- **CWU Armed forces veterans & Reservists Questionnaire.**



CWU Armed Forces
Veterans Reservists C

These shared documents have been used to beneficial effect within the CWU Mental Health First Aiders networks over several years and have been updated in 2025. They are provided as information, to aid understanding of potential stressors & stress prevention routes.



- The Stress Prevention flowchart is a simple easy to understand step by step guide guide for supporting with individual stress.
- The Armed forces Questionnaire has been produced by CWU MHFAiders and Reps who are ex-Armed forces, it is designed for armed forces Veterans and Armed forces reservists as a Pre-cursor to any Stress Risk Assessment process.

Further information and useful workplace resources can be found by clicking on the links provided below.

[Stress and mental health at work - HSE](#)

[Stress Awareness Month April 2025 | Mates in Mind](#)

If you have any questions or need any further information relating to this LTB, please contact Jamie McGovern on jmcgovern@cwu.org.

Yours sincerely



Jamie McGovern, FRSPH MIIAI
Health & Safety Policy Assistant, Central Services

CWU ARMED FORCES VETERANS / RESERVISTS QUESTIONNAIRE



This questionnaire below is a pre-cursor to any stress risk assessment for anyone identified as ex armed forces or armed forces reservist. The information below once read, should give you a better understanding of potential stressors and risk vulnerability. It can be undertaken by individuals as a self-assessment or with support of a CWU Rep if required. These questions are designed by CWU armed forces veterans for CWU armed forces veterans.

PTSD AND Transitional trauma

Transitioning out of the military and managing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are two of the biggest challenges faced by ex-military personnel. Understanding these stressors is crucial for developing an effective stress risk assessment. Remember PTSD is a recognised disability once diagnosed.

Transitioning

Transitional stress is a significant challenge for many ex-military personnel, often affecting more individuals than post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While PTSD is related to specific traumatic experiences, transitional stress stems from the broader difficulties of adapting from a military lifestyle to civilian life. This adjustment can be deeply unsettling due to the stark contrast between Military life is highly structured, with clear roles, hierarchy, and a strong sense of purpose. Service members are accustomed to a disciplined environment where teamwork, leadership, and mission focus are key aspects of daily life. When they transition into civilian roles, they often lose this structure and sense of purpose, leading to feelings of isolation, loss of identity, and a lack of direction. The civilian world may also seem more ambiguous, with fewer clearly defined roles and expectations.

It is often found in civilian jobs; the workplace culture and dynamics are often less formal than in the military. This can create challenges for ex-military personnel who are used to a different approach to teamwork and authority. They may find it difficult to adjust to the more flexible and less hierarchical environment of many civilian jobs. Communication, the direct and often command-based communication style in the military differ greatly from the softer, more collaborative communication expected in many civilian roles.

This difference can lead to misunderstandings with colleagues or difficulties in building.

Transitioning to the new job is often found to be hard, Military service is often seen as a vocation with a strong sense of purpose, where daily tasks are directly tied to a mission. After leaving the military, many struggle to find civilian jobs that provide the same sense of significance and contribution. This lack of fulfillment can lead to disengagement and dissatisfaction with their civilian work.

A total change in a career for many, the transition involves not only adapting to a new work environment but also the challenge of finding a new job. Skills that were highly valued in the military may not always translate directly to civilian job markets, making it difficult for veterans to communicate their capabilities effectively to potential employers.

All this presents itself and causes isolation and feels like there is no support, military personnel are used to the strong camaraderie and support networks that come with serving alongside their peers. After transitioning, the lack of a similar support system can contribute to feelings of isolation, especially in workplaces where co-worker bonds may not be as close-knit.

Transitional stress can deeply impact on the overall well-being and job performance of ex-military personnel. Understanding these challenges can help employers create more supportive environments and develop programs that ease the adjustment, such as mentorship, skill translation assistance, and fostering inclusive workplace cultures.

By addressing transitional stress, employers can better integrate the strengths and discipline that ex-military personnel bring to their new roles.

PTSD

PTSD can be triggered by a single traumatic event, but it may also result from a series of highly distressing experiences. This is why anyone who has gone through trauma or multiple traumatic events may develop PTSD or C-PTSD.

In the military, PTSD is often referred to as “combat stress.” It is frequently associated with life-threatening situations or witnessing others being injured or killed, such as in explosions. However, military personnel are also deployed to assist during some of the most devastating human tragedies and natural disasters. For instance, a soldier tasked with recovering bodies from rubble or floodwater may not face immediate physical danger, but their mental and emotional resilience is constantly under siege. They often interact with families and friends of victims who have lost loved ones in horrific circumstances.

Military service routinely pushes individuals to their physical and mental limits, engaging in tasks that most people could not handle even for a short time. For some, the impact of such extreme stress and emotional strain is profound and long-lasting. This can heighten the likelihood of anxiety, flashbacks, hypervigilance, and emotional detachment.

PTSD can severely impact daily functioning and relationships, making reintegration into civilian life even more difficult.

PTSD is a disability once diagnosed, therefore it should be treated as such by employers and in line with their own disability policies.

The Relevance of Questions in Any Stress Risk Assessment:

When conducting a stress evaluation assessment for ex-military personnel, the questions need to be tailored to address these unique challenges. It’s important to ask about their experiences with transitioning to civilian life, such as employment, social support, and sense of purpose. Additionally, questions should assess the presence of PTSD symptoms, including sleep disturbances, mood changes, and coping mechanisms. By focusing on these areas, assessments can more accurately identify individuals at risk, leading to better support and targeted interventions.

Answer all 20 questions in order. These are closed questions (Yes or No answers) for a reason and will help quantify risks levels in terms of personal stress.

1. Do you feel your military experience has made it hard to adequately adapt to civilian employment?
2. Are you experiencing difficulties understanding the expectations in your new role?
3. Are you finding it challenging adapting to the pace and environment of your new role?
4. Have you experienced feelings of isolation, or a lack of camaraderie compared to you time serving?
5. Do you feel your new colleagues and management don't fully understand your military background and skill sets?
6. Are you struggling to find a sense of service or fulfilment in your current role?
7. Do you feel unsupported by your employer and colleagues when it comes to your transition?
8. Have you experienced any conflict with co-workers or management due to differences in communication styles or habits at work?
9. Do you feel like you are being under-utilized with the skills you gained in the military?
10. Have you experienced heightened levels of stress or anxiety since starting this role?
11. Are you having difficulty balancing your personal life and the demands of the job?
12. Do you find you struggle to manage your workload efficiently without feeling overwhelmed?
13. Do you find it challenging to talk to your supervisor or HR team about issues related to military service?
14. Have you considered taking time off work due to the stress and anxiety of the role?
15. Do you often have distressing thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares about your time in the military or combat experiences?
16. Do you try to avoid places, people, or activities that remind you of your military service or traumatic events?
17. Do you often feel on edge, easily startled, or find yourself being constantly alert, even in safe situations?
18. Have you felt emotionally numb, detached from people around you, or found it difficult to experience positive emotions?
19. Do you experience feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame related to your military experiences, or have difficulty maintaining a positive outlook on life?
20. Would you find it difficult raising how you feel with a close network of friends/family or a charitable organisation?

Acquiescence Bias (Yea-saying): Respondents tend to agree or say “yes” to questions, regardless of the content. By structuring questions to elicit “yes” answers for behaviors or conditions, this tendency will get responses that are more naturally given, which can result in more accurate data.

Better Alignment with Program Goals: Our goal is to help members achieve the right scores and outcomes, focusing on what is working (or not) through counting direct “yes” responses can reveal positive trends and effective strategies among members. This insight can be used to improve overall care and support strategies.

Reduces Social Desirability Bias: People often want to present themselves in a favorable light. Asking questions that fully allow for “yes” responses can reduce the pressure to hide difficulties. For instance, it’s easier for someone to say “Yes, I sometimes feel stressed” than to say “No, I never feel stress,”

Additional holistic support Questions

Q: Is there anything your employer could help you with in your job role? Such as...Time off around 5th November, Armistice Day participation, Static days off needed for external stress support etc?

Comment Here

Q: Why did you leave? Was it possibly due to disability related issues? Do you currently have any disability needs such as combat related stress or PTSD or physical health issues related to Armed forces service?

Comment Here

Risk Matrix

ANSWERED YES TO ALL 20 QUESTIONS

INTOLERABLE RISK

Intolerable

Working Tasks should be prohibited until the stress risk has been reduced. If it is not possible to reduce the risk even with unlimited resources, work must remain prohibited. Stress surveillance and support is required. Urgently complete stress risk assessment within 48 hours. Occupational health advice will be needed along with other signposting as an immediate priority. An Immediate action plan will be required to try and significantly reduce stress risk for this individual.

ANSWERED YES TO 60%-95% OF QUESTIONS (12 to 19 ANSWERS TOTTALLING YES)

SUBSTANTIAL RISK

Substantial

Working Tasks should be restricted until a support action plan has been produced. Resources may have to be allocated to redesign work tasks to reduce the risks of stress. Where the work task is already in progress, urgent action should be taken. A formal stress risk assessment must be completed within 7 days.

ANSWERED YES 25% -55% OF QUESTIONS (5 TO 11 ANSWERS TOTTALLING YES)

TOLERABLE RISK

Tolerable

Some additional stress controls may be beneficial. Consideration should be given to a robust monitoring process or improvement process that imposes no significant cost burden. Monitoring will ensure that the agreed controls are maintained. Some knowledge upskilling may be required, review and complete this questionnaire again within 1 month.

ANSWERED YES TO 20% (OR LESS) OF QUESTIONS (4 OR LESS ANSWERS TOTTALLING YES)

LOW RISK ADEQUATELY CONTROLLED

Adequately controlled

No additional control is required. Current controls suitable and sufficient to control risks. Good practice to record the questionnaire and review periodically (every 6 months) and share findings with operators.

Document Owners The CWU
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Click on the QR code above to find out more about The Armed Forces Veterans who contributed to the design of this questionnaire, you can also find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant.

CWU PREVENTING STRESS FLOW CHART



CWU Rep or MHFA identify signs of stress
www.hse.gov.uk/stress/signs.htm
Or Employee reports work related stress
and / or personal stress.

The employee is absent from
work with stress (as identified through
a fit note from the G.P, an occupational
health report or 7-day self-certification)

CWU Rep or MHFA approach a manager of choice to arrange a meeting
with the employee as soon as possible to offer Support. Aim to identify
the cause of stress through a guided conversation or by using the
HSE talking toolkit.

Note any stress risk assessment should be done by a competent person

CWU REP OR MHFA to
ensure the business
contact strategy is upheld
during the absence.

Cause identified as the
line manager, arrange for
another manager to the
accept the Duty of care
responsibility.

Cause of stress identified because of a personal issue.

Inform the employee of business and CWU
support available on improving wellbeing.
Establish whether the condition is long term and
if the individual is likely to be covered by the
2010 Equality Act.

Cause of stress identified as work related.

Identify specific causes of stress via a guided
conversation or talking toolkit conversation,
ensure a stress action plan is put in place,
with the employee having full input into the
agreed action plan. Request copies of business
policies on stress & agree to maintain contact
with the employee until the next formal review.

Hold a follow-up meeting (preferably within 1 month) to assess progress against any stress action plan and find out if the situation has improved. Or if any further support is required? Identify if the individual is covered under the 2010 Equality Act? If so, hold formal reasonable adjustment discussions and arrange for any required disability risk assessments and disability passport processes to be completed. Ensure any privacy & confidentiality agreements are upheld throughout all supportive processes.

Definition of disability - What disability means by law - Acas www.acas.org.uk/what-disability-means-by-law