



# Managing your

# Mental Health & Wellbeing

NASUWT advice to teachers and school leaders

**NASUWT**  
The Teachers' Union

*The largest teachers' union in the UK*

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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide individual teachers and school leaders throughout the United Kingdom with positive practical advice that will help them to manage and protect their mental health and wellbeing.

Stress and professional burnout among teachers in the UK contributes significantly to an unnecessary and wasteful exodus from the profession. According to a UnumProvident survey published in March 2007, the employment sectors registering the highest level of mental health related illness were public administration, education and health.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts that by 2020 depression will be the biggest single disease burden.

The NASUWT provides members with online access to a teacher wellbeing resource that allows members to benchmark their wellbeing and to identify the pressure points that may give rise to work-related stress.

During the period August 2009 to April 2010, a total of 2,187 teachers and school leaders used the NASUWT Wellbeing at Work tool. Key trends identified were:

- 60.7% of respondents indicated that they experienced regular or constant feelings of stress;
- 20.1% of respondents indicated that they had taken time off work in the last six months due to work-related stress;
- 62.7% of respondents indicated that they had considered leaving the teaching profession as a result of work-related stress in the last six months.

In 2010, the NASUWT published an independent study exploring the experiences of teachers with work-related stress and mental health problems. The resulting report, *Teachers' Mental Health*,<sup>1</sup> explains:

- the factors contributing to teachers' mental health and wellbeing;
- the support available for teachers;
- the role of school leaders in the management of teachers with mental health problems.

This report can be downloaded at [www.nasuwt.org.uk/research](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/research).

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<sup>1</sup> NASUWT (2010), *Teachers' Mental Health: A study exploring the experiences of teachers with work-related stress and mental health problems*.

The *Teachers' Mental Health* report identifies three key actions for the improvement of teachers' mental health and wellbeing. They are:

- to reduce the impact of the known stressors;
- to act proactively and systematically to promote workforce wellbeing;
- to encourage help-seeking and to provide support.

The advice offered by the Union within this document seeks to help teachers and school leaders address these issues.

## 2. Duty of the employer

The employer has a legal duty to protect the health and safety of employees at work. This includes protection against the effects of stress. Employers should identify the causes of work-related stress, assess the risks and take preventive action before illness occurs.

Employers have a duty not to discriminate against disabled people in all aspects of work. According to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the Act) (as amended) a disabled person is someone who has a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial,<sup>2</sup> adverse, long term<sup>3</sup> effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. A mental impairment is a condition that affects 'mental functioning', for example, a learning disability or mental health condition such as depression.

The employer has a duty under the Act not to discriminate against disabled people. There are five types of discrimination:

### (i) Direct discrimination

This is treating someone less favourably simply because they have a disability. Direct discrimination cannot be justified in law.

### (ii) Failure to make reasonable adjustments

Under the Act, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled job applicants and for disabled employees, to enable them to effectively execute their current role or progress through the organisation. An employer cannot justify a failure to comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

### (iii) Disability-related discrimination

This occurs when the reason for the discrimination relates to the person's disability, for example, when a general policy or practice used by an employer ends up having a discriminatory effect on a disabled job applicant, employee or ex-employee. To decide if disability-related discrimination has occurred, the employer's treatment of the disabled person must be compared with that of a person to whom the disability-related reason does not apply.

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<sup>2</sup> 'substantial' means more than minor or trivial.

<sup>3</sup> 'long term' means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months.

#### **(iv) Harassment**

The Act says that harassment of disabled people is unlawful. Harassment can happen when another person talks or behaves in a way that:

- violates a person's dignity;
- creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

#### **(v) Victimisation**

Victimisation is a special form of discrimination. The Act makes it unlawful for one person to treat another ('the victim') less favourably than they treat other people in the same circumstances because the victim has, in good faith:

- brought, or given evidence or information in connection with, proceedings under the Act;
- done anything else under or by reference to the Act;
- alleged someone has contravened the Act.

The 2010 Equality Act places a duty on public sector employers to promote equality and contains specific provisions to ensure that people with disabilities are protected from discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment.

### **3. Stress and mental health**

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'. Excessive pressure can lead to stress, which undermines performance, is costly to employers, and can make people ill.

Most teachers experience pressure on a daily basis. Some pressure can be good for people, even enjoyable. Some people may derive satisfaction from trying to overcome mental or physical challenges. Pressure can motivate people to perform better. However, the pressure must be proportionate to the needs of the situation, the time limits and the individual's capacity to cope and control. This capacity varies according to the individual. Long-term pressure can lead to stress, which can be the cause of mental or physical illness.

Possible symptoms of stress include exhaustion, headaches, increased pulse rate, sweating, and pains in the back, shoulders or neck. It can bring about illnesses such as: heart disease or stroke, high blood pressure, digestive disorders, skin problems, infections, asthma and even cancer. Teachers suffering from stress may also be more susceptible to infections such as colds and flu.

Stress may lead to behavioural changes such as anxiety; panic attacks; fatigue; sleeplessness; becoming withdrawn; depression; mood swings; irritability; neglect of personal appearance; frequent absences; aggression; unwillingness to accept advice or co-operate with others; increased use of cigarettes, coffee, alcohol and other drugs; overworking; and difficulty in maintaining concentration. Personal relationships can also suffer.

## 4. Factors affecting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and school leaders

### 4.1 Managing excessive demands

Work pressure or ‘workload’ can result from either task complexity or quantity. Work overload is increasingly considered to be a major problem for teachers. A recent study<sup>4</sup> reports that most types of teacher work an average of 50 hours per week in term time, with middle/senior managers in primary and secondary schools working on average 51 and 54 hours per week respectively and headteachers working 57 hours per week on average.

All teachers and school leaders working more than six hours a day are entitled to a break of at least 20 minutes during the working day and to an uninterrupted break of 11 hours between the end of one working day and the start of the next.

#### England and Wales

In England and Wales, where teachers are employed under the terms of the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), the Governing Body and headteacher, in carrying out their duties, must have regard to the need for the headteacher and teachers at the school to be able to achieve a satisfactory balance between the time required to discharge their professional duties and the time required to pursue their personal interests outside work.

The Governing Body and headteacher should ensure that they adhere to the working limits set out in the Working Time Regulations 1998 and the Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2007.

Central to achieving this is adherence to the provisions of the National Agreement: *Raising standards and tackling workload*, which has enshrined within the STPCD measures to support employers and managers in this requirement, namely:

- that teachers should not be required to cover for absent colleagues other than in unforeseen circumstances;
- that teachers must have made available to them time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) of children’s work during the normal teaching time of the school, amounting to 10% of their teaching commitment;
- that teachers are not to be required to invigilate external examinations other than in practical or oral examinations;
- that teachers should not be required to carry out clerical, technical or administrative tasks that do not require the skills, experience or qualifications of a teacher;

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<sup>4</sup> Deakin, G., James, N., Tickner, M. and Tidswell, J., (2010), *Teachers’ Workload Diary Survey 2010*, London: Infogroup/ORC International.

- that teachers should be provided with leadership and management time that is not proscribed but that should reflect the weight of the management and leadership role they are engaged with;
- that headteachers should have dedicated headship time; and
- that teachers have an entitlement to enjoy a reasonable work/life balance.

Schools should implement all of a teacher's contractual entitlements and have strategies in place that bring downward pressure on working hours.

A full-time teacher must be available to work 1,265 hours annually over 195 days. Part-time teachers can be required to teach the fraction of the annual hours corresponding to the fraction of full-time pay they receive. Annual hours covers the teaching time and directed non-teaching time.

Where governors and managers fall short of meeting these entitlements, local authorities have powers under the Education and Skills Act to intervene and to take steps to secure compliance with the provisions of the STPCD.

Where teachers are not employed under the terms of the STPCD, they should check the provisions of their individual contracts of employment, conditions of service and local collective agreements.

### **Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, a full-time teacher must be available to work 1,265 hours over 195 days. Part-time teachers can be required to work the corresponding fraction of the 1,265 hours that a full-time teacher is required to teach each year. A maximum of 25 hours a week must be devoted to class contact in a primary or special school, and 22.5 hours a week in a secondary school.

Principals, vice-principals and teachers are required to have a break of at least 30 minutes between 12 noon and 2pm (or between 12 noon and 2.30pm in nursery schools and nursery units in primary schools). Unless employed under a separate contract as a midday supervisor, a teacher cannot be required to undertake midday supervision.

### **Scotland**

In Scotland, a full-time teacher must be available to work 35 hours a week. Part-time teachers can be required to teach the fraction of the 35 hours a week on a pro-rata basis. A maximum of 22.5 hours a week must be devoted to class contact, except for those teachers on the National Teacher Induction Scheme whose maximum class contact time is 15.75 hours per week.

Teachers are entitled to no less than 1/3 of their class contact time as preparation and correction; this works out as a maximum of 7.5 hours, leaving five hours of 'other' time for a full-time teacher. The use of the remaining time (that is, time beyond the combined class contact and preparation/correction allowance) is subject to agreement at school level and will be planned to include a range of activities, such as:

- additional time for preparation and correction;
- parents' meetings;
- staff meetings;
- preparation of reports, records, etc.;
- forward planning;
- formal assessment;
- professional review and development;
- curriculum development;
- additional supervised pupil activity;
- continuing professional development (CPD).

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from excessive demands:

- (i) all employees are entitled to an appropriate work/life balance and teachers are no exception. If you believe the number of hours you work each week is consistently excessive you should find strategies to reduce your hours worked or draw the problem to the attention of your manager;
- (ii) if the school's marking policy is having an excessive impact on your workload or if the workload arising from the planning and assessment of pupils' work is too great, it may be that school systems are overly bureaucratic. Talk to your colleagues about their experiences. It may be that your feelings are shared and that remedial action is required;
- (iii) it may be that your skills are not well matched to the work you are being asked to undertake. If this is undermining your sense of wellbeing you should seek additional support or training;
- (iv) ensure that you take advantage of all non-contact time available to you. All teachers and school leaders need time away from the classroom during the timetabled school day to fulfil key professional duties;
- (v) if your timetabled teaching hours are greater than other teachers with similar responsibilities, draw the matter to the attention of your line manager and seek an appropriate adjustment;
- (vi) be aware that routine administrative and clerical tasks add to your workload but do not require the professional skills, expertise and professional judgement of a qualified teacher;
- (vii) do not agree to unreasonable performance management or capability/competency procedure targets. If your manager applies pressure on you to do so, speak to your union representative. If it becomes clear that targets agreed with your manager are not deliverable, make this known at the earliest opportunity. The NASUWT provides helpful advice on performance management in its publication *Performance Management for Teachers and Line Managers*, which can be downloaded at [www.nasuw.org.uk](http://www.nasuw.org.uk);

- (viii) consider reducing your commitment to extracurricular activities and review your attendance at out-of-hours meetings. NASUWT advice is that teachers should only be asked to attend one meeting per week of not more than one hour's duration;
- (ix) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming, speak to your NASUWT representative.

#### **4.2 Lack of control**

A lack of perceived job control is significantly associated with high blood pressure and heart rate. A lack of freedom to be innovative and make full use of one's skills is also known to increase job stress.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from a perceived lack of professional control:

- (i) if you are constantly having to respond to unreasonable deadlines, make your manager aware of the difficulties that this creates. Ask your manager to consult staff about an appropriate work plan for each term so your time and work can be planned appropriately;
- (ii) ask your manager to consult you about proposed changes that are likely to affect you. The NASUWT believes that staff should not just be advised about changes that affect them. Managers should ensure that you have the opportunity to comment on both the changes themselves and their likely impact before they are implemented;
- (iii) talk to your manager about areas of work where you would welcome the opportunity to exercise greater professional judgement;
- (iv) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming speak to your NASUWT representative.

#### **4.3 Professional support**

While it is inevitable that individual teachers will have different perceptions of what constitutes adequate professional support, what is clear is, where that support is perceived to be lacking, there will be a consequent adverse effect on morale, performance and teacher wellbeing.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from a perceived lack of professional support:

- (i) do not agree to undertake specialist tasks for which you have not been properly trained. If this is currently the case, draw the matter to the attention of your manager and seek early access to appropriate training;
- (ii) identify the classroom support and curriculum resources you need to deliver the results expected of you and seek the support of your manager to secure them;

- (iii) actively seek the co-operation of colleagues where delivery of your work requires their assistance. If this is not forthcoming, seek the assistance of your manager to resolve the issue;
- (iv) seek access to CPD support that will address your personal and professional needs. This may need to be sourced outside of that provided routinely by the school itself;
- (v) seek to ensure that classroom observation is limited to supporting the management of your performance and professional development;
- (vi) ask those who observe you to provide you with a copy of their report and an early opportunity to discuss its contents;
- (vii) if the school building is not conducive to teaching and learning, or your rest facilities are inadequate, make your concerns known to your manager;
- (ix) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming speak to your NASUWT representative.

#### **4.4 Work relationships with colleagues**

It is generally accepted that group cohesion and co-operation is conducive to a healthy working environment and may help protect workers against stress and burnout. Where this sense of togetherness is absent, poor peer relationships manifest themselves in low solidarity, lack of co-operation and interpersonal conflict.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from difficult working relationships:

- (i) if you think you are being bullied, harassed or subjected to other forms of unacceptable behaviour by colleagues, it is important to keep a record of what has happened and to seek an early remedy. Don't keep the problem to yourself. You may find that other colleagues have similar experiences. The Union provides helpful advice on workplace bullying in publications available at [www.nasuw.org.uk](http://www.nasuw.org.uk).
- (ii) if possible, approach the individual to make it clear that their behaviour is unacceptable. The individual may not be aware of the effects of their conduct and a personal approach may be all that is required to improve their behaviour towards you. Consider seeking the help and advice of your manager, union representative or other supportive colleague if you find this difficult;
- (iii) if an informal approach does not work you should seek the assistance of your manager or union representative to address the issue more formally;
- (iv) as a last resort it may be necessary to consider using the employer's grievance procedure;

- (v) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming speak to your NASUWT representative. Doing nothing is not an option.

#### **4.5 Pupil behaviour**

Pupil behaviour impacts significantly on a teacher's sense of wellbeing. Disruptive behaviour can range from low-level disruption, which frustrates the delivery of lessons, to incidents of verbal and physical assault that seek to intimidate staff and often result in short- or long-term breakdowns in physical or mental health.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from unacceptable pupil behaviour:

- (i) speak to supportive colleagues about successful strategies to manage difficult pupils;
- (ii) consider the way in which diverse ability classes are organised and whether the current system best meets the educational needs of learners;
- (iii) be aware of the support offered by managers and school policies in the event of unacceptable pupil behaviour and take advantage of the assistance provided;
- (iv) always report incidents of verbal and physical abuse, discrimination and cyberbullying. Ensure that the incidents are recorded in the school's incident/accident book and ask to be advised of the action taken by the school to remedy the problem;
- (v) if you consider that you are at risk when in contact with a pupil, ask for a risk assessment to be carried out so that the risk can be identified and appropriately managed. The Union offers helpful advice in its publication *Risk Assessment of Violent and Abusive Behaviour*, which can be downloaded from [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk).
- (vi) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming speak to your NASUWT representative.

#### **4.6 Role of the teacher**

Role-related factors most usually contribute to teacher stress when there is a clash of two or more expectations, duties or responsibilities, and fulfilling one makes accomplishment of another more difficult. For example, the current climate of school inclusion and large, diverse ability classes often creates a conflict as teachers find themselves unable to provide for the educational and discipline needs of both the whole class and individual pupils.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat issues arising from their role at work:

- (i) if you are uncertain what is expected of you by colleagues, or how your work impacts upon theirs, raise the matter with them;
- (ii) discuss your role, the expectations you have of colleagues, and that they have of you, with your manager. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, you can make use of your planning and review meetings with your line manager for performance management and performance review staff development. There is no agreed procedure for teacher appraisal in Scotland. Each individual school and authority will of course have an agreed monitoring procedure, which may provide an opportunity for teachers to initiate a discussion;
- (iii) ask your line manager to facilitate a discussion at your next team meeting to address any concerns there may be about working practices that may add to stress for all team members;
- (iv) seek an opportunity to advise your manager of skills you possess that are being underutilised and of ideas you have to put them to best use;
- (v) if, having approached your manager, you continue to be unclear about your role, speak to your NASUWT representative.

#### **4.7 Changes within the workplace**

Unfortunately, many changes within schools and colleges, whether curriculum-related or technological, are implemented without training and with little consultation or regard for the impact of the initiative on those who will be required to deliver the changes. One NASUWT member summed it up as follows:

*'Every new initiative that is suggested by Government is forced on us without consultation as to whether these initiatives are either necessary or beneficial'.*

Perpetual change and lack of job resources not only directly increases the likelihood of burnout but indirectly affects the likelihood of burnout by creating feelings of lack of perceived job control, low access to information and perceptions of inadequate supervisory support.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to address issues arising from changes in the workplace:

- (i) seek to ensure that your manager consults you about proposed changes that are likely to affect you and that you have the opportunity to contribute to a work-related impact statement;
- (ii) ask your manager for appropriate support and training to be provided before the changes are implemented;
- (iii) if, having approached your manager, no remedy is forthcoming speak to your NASUWT representative.

## 5. Stress and mental health difficulties in school leaders

School leaders are not exempt from stress. Indeed, the report *Teachers' Mental Health* indicates that the causal factors of stress among senior leaders are similar to those highlighted by teachers.

Some of the additional pressures identified by school leaders include:

- dealing with the emotive difficulties disclosed to them by both colleagues and pupils;
- improving standards within the resources available to the school;
- balancing the needs of individual teachers and pupils against the needs of the school as a whole.

Regrettably, there appears to be very little 'self-care' and few support services specifically aimed at senior leaders. As a result, school leaders often feel isolated and unable to share their concerns.

Because a headteacher has no directly employed manager to refer to, it is recommended that issues are discussed with a fellow headteacher, chair of governors, union representative, designated local authority support or School Improvement Partner.

The HSE provides a specific facility for managers to assess their own effectiveness in preventing and reducing stress in staff under their direction. Because levels of stress in school leaders is heightened by the levels of stress experienced by the teachers they manage, it is recommended that all school leaders self assess their competencies in this area. This helpful tool can be accessed at [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf).

## 6. Disclosing your difficulties and good practice responses

Teachers struggling with wellbeing or mental health issues are often reluctant to disclose the fact because of the fear that it will affect the way that they are treated within the workplace. Specifically, they feel it will reduce their career opportunities within the school or their chances of moving to another school. Worryingly, the *Teachers' Mental Health* report identifies the perceived stigma associated with stress and mental health problems as being a major obstacle to early intervention and appropriate management.

Employees are not under a legal obligation to disclose their disability or long-term health condition but, if they do not, it may affect their ability to assert their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act.

While decisions over disclosure are deeply personal, the NASUWT encourages members to disclose any wellbeing or mental health problems to their employer as the onus is then on the employer to make reasonable adjustments. NASUWT members requiring support to do this should contact their union representative or National / Regional Centre.

The following reasonable adjustments are among those that might be made available by the employer.

- provision of a confidential mentor;
- regular contact between the employee and the school during sick leave;
- phased return to work strategies;
- timetable adjustments;
- flexible working hours;
- additional class support;
- temporary reassignment of any additional or extracurricular responsibilities.

NASUWT members requiring support to negotiate appropriate return-to-work arrangements should contact their union representative or National / Regional Centre.

The NASUWT believes that sickness-absence management procedures should incorporate the following flexibilities where wellbeing or mental health issues have been declared:

- provisions allowing teachers to plan with their employer any regular absences, such as those needed to attend medical or counselling appointments that can only be provided during normal working hours;
- provisions to discount disability-related absence from a teacher's overall sickness record.

While contact with the employer during periods of sick leave can be difficult, it can help significantly when handled well. Employers should ensure that any contact is supportive, conveys assurance about job security and indicates a commitment to agree an appropriate return-to-work strategy when the time is right to do this.

## **7. Capability and Performance Management**

The NASUWT is clear that there should be a defined boundary between procedures that are meant to offer developmental opportunities to professional teachers, whether through Performance Management in England, Performance Review Staff Development (PRSD) in Northern Ireland, or Appraisal in Wales, and procedures designed to remedy underperformance, often referred to as capability or competence procedures.

Unlike in the rest of the UK, where there are 'performance management' agreements, there is no agreed procedure for teacher appraisal in Scotland.

Each individual school and authority will of course have an agreed monitoring procedure (discussed and agreed at school or LNCT level). It is also standard practice for schools to make reference to the 'quality indicators' in *How good is our school?* (HGIOS).

A headteacher is entitled to observe classroom practice throughout the year. If a member feels they are being targeted for an excessive number of observations they should contact the local office as it may be necessary to utilise the local authority's bullying and harassment procedure. Alternatively this may be a forewarning that the school has concerns regarding their competency and, similarly, contact should be made with the local office.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Code of Competency is in Appendix 2.12 of Part 2 of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers Handbook. This code provides the definition of competence that is used for the Standard for Full Registration and also sets out the process for dealing with short-lived underperformance and long-running underperformance. This code is not intended as a stick to beat fully qualified teachers with, rather it is intended to provide a base line that can be used for professional review and development.

The NASUWT recognises that where there is underperformance by a teacher, there could be a number of reasons for this, to do with an individual's health, emotional state, lack of training or experience, or some other problem. A capability procedure should set out to investigate the reasons for the underperformance and then seek a remedy. It should provide agreed support and time for a teacher to rebuild their practice to an acceptable standard. Teachers should be wary when raising issues concerned with workload that this does not trigger a move to a capability/competence procedure. All too often poor managers will resort to moving to question the capability of a teacher having difficulty, without considering whether they are being managed in an acceptable fashion, or whether an unreasonable expectation is being generated for staff.

Should a member of the NASUWT find that raising an issue of workload leads to mention of such a step being taken, then it would be wise to seek help and guidance from their NASUWT representative or local/negotiating secretary.

Performance Management, PRSD, appraisal or professional review, depending upon which part of the UK you are working in, should provide you with an opportunity to engage in a professional conversation with a line manager, with a view to identifying development objectives and access to relevant CPD. It is important that during the course of such a professional conversation the issue of workload is not ignored. Any objectives or activity agreed should be time bound, achievable, reasonable and reflect the need for a satisfactory work/life balance.

The employer's duty not to discriminate against disabled people extends in a very practical way to issues of capability and performance management. As the definition of a disabled person is someone who has 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial, adverse, long term effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities', it is clear that schools and colleges owe teachers and school leaders with qualifying physical or mental issues a particular duty of care.

Such an employee is entitled to additional protection under laws prohibiting disability discrimination. The dismissal of a disabled employee on grounds of sickness absence is likely to be unlawful unless the employer has first made all reasonable adjustments to enable the employee to remain at work.

The NASUWT is concerned that some schools and colleges seek to invoke capability procedures using ill health as an inappropriate trigger. Similarly, some schools and colleges fail to make appropriate reasonable adjustments when setting performance management targets.

The NASUWT advises teachers and school leaders whose capability is called into question, or whose performance management objectives fail to take into account factors associated with their disability, to contact an NASUWT representative at the earliest opportunity.

## 8. Support and guidance

It is clear that attitudes to mental health and wellbeing must change significantly before many teachers and school leaders will feel able to seek help and support. The NASUWT believes that employers can begin to address this issue by:

- (i) creating a culture in which there is a comfortable recognition that stress may be a useful and natural part of living;
- (ii) challenging the stigma of psychological disorder and mental illness;
- (iii) providing confidential in-house support services offering advice and guidance to teachers and headteachers, possibly through trained mentors;
- (iv) encouraging the self-referral of teachers and school leaders to accessible and discrete counselling services such as those provided by Employee Assistance Programmes;
- (v) securing high-quality support and training for senior leaders, which includes the emotional support of colleagues.

There is a wealth of information on stress and mental health difficulties available to teachers. In general, these are in the form of information and advice that can be accessed in published form or via the Internet.

Useful though these sources are, findings within *Teachers' Mental Health* show that individuals experiencing stress, burnout or other psychological difficulties may, as a function of their current mental state, find seeking out and navigating these sources rather daunting.

For this reason, talking to someone who is prepared to listen to the problem and offer personal support and advice is often the most valuable first course of action.

The NASUWT offers the following advice to teachers and school leaders seeking to combat the effects of work-related stress.

- (i) there are no good levels of stress and you should give urgent attention to resolving the issues that give rise to these destructive feelings;
- (ii) the inability to escape from work-related stress is something that you should not ignore as it is known that prolonged exposure to work-related stress may seriously harm your physical or mental health;
- (iii) if you cannot resolve the issues giving rise to work-related stress personally, you should be raising them with your line management. If you are unable to do this, or have done so previously with no satisfactory outcome, contact your NASUWT representative. If the issues raised are too serious or beyond the experience of your representative, another more senior caseworker may be asked to assist;
- (iv) if you would prefer to speak to someone about these issues outside of the context of your line management or Union you should consider using the confidential advice service provided by the Teacher Support Network.

They can be contacted as follows:

England and Northern Ireland helpline 08000 562 561

Wales helpline 08000 855 088

Scotland helpline 0800 564 2270

Teacher Support Network website [www.teachersupport.info](http://www.teachersupport.info)

- (v) in addition to seeking to resolve the workplace issues giving rise to these feelings, if you regularly experience work-related stress, you should also consider consulting your GP to discuss the matter;
- (vi) if you are unable to speak to an NASUWT Workplace Representative, contact details for your local NASUWT Secretary, Executive Member and Regional/National Centre can be accessed via the 'Member Support' section of the NASUWT website at [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk).

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