# Mental health impact assessment

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## A) Overview

Many policies, processes, regulations and projects are proposed each year at universities. The aim was to pilot a method for assessing – *before final decisions are made* – the potential impacts of these on mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) of PGRs and staff. The intention was the results of the analysis influence the development, design and implementation of policy. The pilot was developed in consultation with a small group of UEA academics and managers and was tested with UEA's PGR Executive from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2019, covering five meetings.

## B) Action taken

Each paper presented at UEA's PGR Executive has a cover sheet with a section to asses impacts on 'Equality and Diversity', alongside sections on resource and risk implications. The cover sheet remained the same, but for the addition of a section on 'Mental Health and Wellbeing Impact'. Proposers considered how the proposal impacted the six management standards set out by the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), including demands, control and support on staff and PGRs: https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm

## C) Impacts and outcomes

The system has senior level approval (*Vitae Indicator 0.1*): the PGR Executive is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation. Use of the system is mandatory for members of the Executive, which includes Associate Deans for PGR, Academic Director of UEA Doctoral College and senior professional services staff (*Indicator 0.14 Involvement of other institutional staff*).

The PGR Executive (now named Doctoral College Executive) will continue to use and be influenced by this assessment system, and further work is continuing with specific Faculties (e.g. Arts & Humanities) to use the system for specific large projects such as module reviews. Further work with HR and senior staff at UEA will explore the potential for use in other executive committees, and informing further development of both staff and student wellbeing plans.

Interviews with paper writers, and feedback from the Arts & Humanities Faculty Executive and Courage Festival workshop, revealed that the system was generally liked, and staff and PGRs want it to continue. It made users think about what they wanted to achieve and who may be affected (*Indicators 1.1 and 2.2: Participants find this useful / have greater knowledge*). The system has achieved a change in behaviour - both on individual policies and more generally in the sense that MHWB is a 'legitimate' topic to discuss, with a structured way to do it that is recognisable to existing policy processes (*Indicators 3.6 and 4.6 More open discussion; 4.7 Healthier Research Environment; 4.11 Better system infrastructure*). The assessment had a useful role in agenda-setting. It helped review all potential ideas and examined what could be done as priorities. It particularly laid out actions systematically which may not otherwise be obvious. In one example on role descriptors and workload allocation for PGR academic work, the assessment prompted discussion about whether to make more specific person specifications, and where gaps may be in training and support from staff's Schools. It led to wider discussion too about the allocation of workload and who the gatekeepers are for this. The lead on this case study is available to lead workshops on the assessment system at different universities as required. On a more critical note, an assessment is not a panacea; value judgement is still needed to decide priorities. And any assessment can be a site for political argument revealing things that some would rather gloss over. It is important also to consider who monitors the adequacy of assessments, and what happens if they are not adequate.

## Recommendations
- Assessment ought to be applied to how policies are working *in practice* as well as to the policy intention - i.e. the full life cycle of the initiatives
- The system could be useful for change management generally, for example structuring discussions with staff on main issues they face. This may complement work at senior policy level, which requires identifying key senior leaders and those likely to be sympathetic
- Emphasise how it can make decision-making more efficient, with wellbeing as important for good operation of an institution as well as for its own sake
- Consider going beyond individual universities, for example to Doctoral Training Partnership management boards. These venues may be receptive and freer to innovate than universities themselves