IEMA Transforming the world to sustainability

Supporting Mental Wellbeing in the Impact Assessment Profession

IEMA Advice Note

Preface

Impact Assessment (IA) is a tough industry to work in. IA is a complex, technical, and iterative process involving collaboration and input from a wide range of stakeholders. Specifically, this note focuses on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and while this is indeed a tough industry to work in, there are many benefits. EIA helps protect the natural environment, and facilitates the identification and mitigation of detrimental impacts. EIA supports design evolution and enhanced project performance to strive for the best outcomes for the environment and results in decision-making that is transparent and informed. When EIA is undertaken at the correct stage of a project, the outcomes can be hugely rewarding.

I have personally, however, experienced significant work and personal pressures that led to elevated stress levels and a decline in mental health, and as such I felt compelled to delve deeper into this complex topic. Together with a group of co-professionals, I began developing an advice note to address this critical issue.

With over 20 years of experience in the EIA field, I have witnessed the role of the EIA Coordinator evolve significantly. Legislative changes, a more litigious environment, risk-averse mindsets among local authorities and consultees, and heightened scrutiny of Environmental Statements have all contributed to this shift. Add to that the challenges of managing client expectations and navigating demanding project schedules, and it is clear why stress levels in the profession are a concern.

These factors underscore the importance of raising awareness about mental health and stress management within EIA. It is vital to equip professionals and organisations with the tools and techniques needed to mitigate risks and provide robust support systems when necessary. By fostering a culture of understanding and resilience, we can better navigate the challenges of our evolving profession.

This advice note, co-authored by myself, Lewis Jenkins (Quod), Mark Cope (RSK), and Kat Gelsthorpe (Jacobs), tackles the critical issue of stress and mental health in the EIA profession.

Part 1 defines stress and outlines common symptoms, while Part 2 delves into the unique stressors inherent in EIA work and the root causes of workplace stress. Part 3 presents key findings from a survey of over one hundred environmental professionals, 77% of whom identified as EIA Coordinators and 94% working in the private sector. Alarmingly, 70% reported that their role negatively impacts their mental health, and 61% would consider a career change due to work-related stress. These statistics underscore the urgent need for greater awareness and effective strategies to address stress.

Part 4 explores practical approaches to managing stress at both individual and organisational levels, alongside ways IEMA can support these efforts. Part 5 offers further reading and resources. The advice note also features three compelling case studies that highlight real-life experiences with work-related stress, its impact on mental health, and the profound effects on personal and professional lives.

We hope this advice note is widely shared, as its insights extend beyond the EIA profession. By fostering open, honest discussions about stress and mental health, we aim to encourage a culture where seeking help is not only accepted but embraced.

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Chair of IEMA's Impact Assessment Steering Group (2023–present)

Introduction

This advice note has been developed by the Managing Mental Health Working Group, part of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Impact Assessment Network. Acknowledging the challenging and often stressful nature of Impact Assessment work, the group was formed to provide advice to EIA practitioners on understanding and addressing stress within their roles. This document represents the culmination of the group's efforts to support mental wellbeing in the profession.

What is stress?

As defined by the World Health Organisation[1] stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall wellbeing.

Stress is the body's response to demands, challenges, or perceived threats, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. It triggers a 'fight-or-flight' reaction, releasing hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which prepare the body to react quickly. While a moderate amount of stress can be motivating and even beneficial in the short term, prolonged or chronic stress can negatively impact physical[2] and mental health (see Table 1) leading to symptoms like anxiety, irritability, fatigue, and weakened immune function.

In modern life, symptoms of stress can be brought on by pressures at work, issues with relationships, financial problems, or other physical or mental health problems. Different people feel stress differently, but typically it manifests as the feeling you're losing control, which can make you feel scared or anxious.

Table 1. Common symptoms of stress.[3]

Physical symptoms	Mental symptoms	Behavioural symptoms
Headaches or dizziness	Difficulty concentrating	Being irritable and snappy
Chest pain or a faster heartbeat	Struggling to make decisions	Sleeping too much or too little
Muscle tension or pain	Feeling overwhelmed	Eating too much or too little
Stomach problems	Constantly worrying	Avoiding certain places or people
Chest pain or a faster heartbeat	Being forgetful	Drinking or smoking more

1   www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress.
2   www.healthline.com/health/stress/effects-on-body.
3   www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/stress.

Stress in Impact Assessment

Practitioners working in Impact Assessment face unique stressors inherent to their profession. Impact Assessment and specifically Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a complex, technical, and iterative process involving collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including developers, project managers, designers, specialist experts, regulatory authorities, and the public. Each stakeholder brings distinct skills, perspectives, and expertise, which, while enriching the process, also introduces considerable detail, complexity, and, at times, differing viewpoints.

Since its inception, EIA has been grounded in legal requirements, as outlined in statutory regulations. An EIA must account for various other environmental assessment and protection laws, as well as policy requirements. EIA continues to be an iterative process, but over time has become more detailed, complex, and arguably more legalistic, increasing pressures on all those involved. With government proposals for Environmental Outcome Reports (EOR), potentially replacing EIA requirements, there is an opportunity for streamlining existing processes. However, the transition to a new regime will no doubt bring its own challenges and stresses.

The EIA Coordinator role

The EIA Coordinator is responsible for collating detailed technical inputs to the EIA. EIA scope varies from project to project, and it would be impossible for the EIA Coordinator to be an expert in Impact Assessment across all factors of the environment. It is therefore necessary for the EIA Coordinator to balance the views of different stakeholders. This is an intrinsically stressful role, with the EIA Coordinator often on the receiving end of pressures experienced from across the project team.

Case Study 1 – Workload pressures

EIA Coordinator #1 was asked to coordinate the preparation of an ES with an unusually short planning programme (six months total). Environmental baseline surveys had previously been completed, but an EIA Scoping opinion had not been sought from the local planning authority (LPA). To ensure an appropriate level of scrutiny of the EIA scope, it was instead agreed to work closely with the LPA via a planning performance agreement (PPA) set up by the planning consultant.

As part of the PPA, it was the intention to provide a complete draft of the ES to the LPA for their comment prior to wider public engagement. However, completion of the technical assessment chapters of the ES and issue to the LPA was delayed, partially as a result of the technical complexity of the proposals. Unfortunate timing meant that the ES report needed to be finalised in August, when staff resources are typically scarce.

Working long hours over a couple of weeks, the EIA Coordinator managed to finalise the ES in the required timescale, ready for issue to the LPA.

However, the pressure on the EIA Coordinator to complete this task, together with other competing project demands and pressures at home, became too much for them to cope with.

The EIA Coordinator consulted their GP as they were experiencing high blood pressure, headaches, sleeplessness and a general feeling of anxiety/worthlessness. The EIA Coordinator and others around them had noticed a change in their behaviour, being more irritable, forgetful and generally less resilient to normal day-to-day challenges. The EIA Coordinator's GP signed them off work for two weeks due to stress, with a further two weeks phased return to work.

The time off allowed the EIA Coordinator to reset their stress levels, but it also allowed time to reflect on the stress triggers. As part of the phased return, a strategy for reducing the risk of these triggers recurring was discussed with the EIA Coordinator's line manager and implemented. The EIA Coordinator is now back at work and is working much more proactively to manage their stress levels.

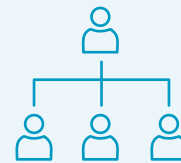# Understanding the causes of stress at work

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has undertaken research to identify the causes of work-related stress within organisations[4]. This research identified six main causes of stress:
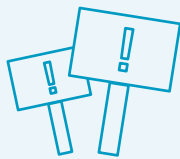
Demands – are not able to cope with the demands of their jobs

Support – don't receive enough information and support

Role – don't fully understand their role and responsibilities

Control – are unable to control the way they do their work

Relationships – are having trouble with relationships at work, or are being bullied

Change – are not engaged when a business is undergoing change

Importantly, the research highlights that stress affects people differently; what causes stresses for one person may not affect another. Factors such as skills and experience, age or disability may all affect whether a worker can cope with any particular trigger of stress.

To investigate the specific triggers of stress in EIA, the IEMA Impact Assessment Steering Group conducted a survey between July and September 2024. The survey, *Managing Stress in EIA*, was distributed to all IEMA members with an interest in EIA and further promoted on social media to invite participation from anyone involved in EIA.

The survey sought insights into stress triggers within EIA, referencing causes identified in research by the HSE. Examples of stressors relevant to EIA were included, with respondents encouraged to share their own experiences and propose useful coping strategies.

The survey was conducted anonymously, and sought to understand how stress is experienced and managed across different demographics within

EIA. This included variations among professions, seniority levels, years of experience, organisational types, and industry sectors. The overarching goal was to identify trends and compile recommendations for coping strategies into a comprehensive advice note based on respondents' feedback.

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4 Work-related stress and how to manage it: causes of stress at work. Available at: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/causes.htm.

Survey results

The *Managing Stress in EIA* survey received 101 complete responses, with 77% of respondents identifying as EIA Coordinators and 94% working within the private sector. The largest demographic group was senior managerial staff, accounting for 51% of participants.

Notably, 70% of all respondents indicated that their role negatively affects their mental health, and 61% reported that they would consider changing their role or career due to work-related stress. A summary of the responses received is presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Summary of Managing Stress in EIA survey results by respondent group
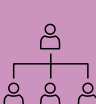
	Assistant/ graduate	Consultant/ practitioner	Senior/ managerial	Director/ professor
Number of responses	7	23	42	15
Number of years' experience	0 to 5	0 to 10	10 to 20	20+
Believe role negatively affects their mental health	67%	86%	93%	79%
Would considering changing their role/career due to stress at work	43%	62%	65%	59%

Among the demographic groups surveyed, assistants and graduates were identified as having the lowest stress levels, with senior/managers having the highest stress levels. Participants in the survey were also asked to indicate which stress triggers are most relevant to them. The top-ranked EIA stress triggers for each HSE stress cause are provided in Table 3 on the next page.

Table 3. *Managing Stress* in EIA survey results top-ranked EIA stress triggers among EIA staff

HSE stress cause at work	Top-ranked EIA stress triggers
Demands – are not able to cope with the demands of their jobs	• Time pressures and tight deadlines • Additional and late client demands • Working in excess of contracted hours

HSE stress cause at work	Top-ranked EIA stress triggers
Control – are unable to control the way they do their work	• Programme delays caused by factors out of your control • Late design changes resulting in reassessment and changes to scope • Reliance on others for information
Support – don't receive enough information and support	• Under-resourcing in the team resulting in addition workload • Lack of understanding in wider project team of EIA Coordinator role/responsibilities • Limited time to undertake training and attend CPDs
Relationships – are having trouble with relationships at work, or are being bullied	• Client-consultant hierarchy and power imbalance • Online meetings/remote working resulting in limited opportunity for building team relationships • Consultees/members of the public can be mistrusting and impolite
Role – don't fully understand their role and responsibilities	• Value of role not recognised by clients/within project team • Multi-disciplinary nature of EIA requires wider knowledge in technical/legal/planning. Given the broad multi-disciplinary nature, it is impossible to be an expert in the multiple disciplines considered • Low confidence, imposter syndrome
Change – are not engaged when a business is undergoing change	• Project changes, e.g., scope, design, personnel • Legislation, policy and guidance change across multiple sectors and disciplines • Personal issues/life changes affecting work-life balance

Case Study 2 – Neurodiversity

EIA Coordinator #2 is an experienced EIA Consultant. Although the EIA Coordinator enjoyed and is very good at their job, in some situations the pressures were too much and was causing a detrimental impact to their health.

The EIA Coordinator had always found social situations difficult, but had learnt to mask these difficulties from a young age. During particularly busy periods at work, the EIA Coordinator would find the pressures of the job too much to cope with, but for fear of being seen to fail was able to use their masking skills to hide any difficulties from their colleagues. Containing these feelings led to strains within the EIA Coordinator's personal life and relationships, ultimately manifesting as symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The EIA Coordinator sought help from their GP, who prescribed a course of medication. However, this did not help to address the underlying cause of the anxiety. The EIA Coordinator therefore decided to also seek specialist advice from a psychologist, who made a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Following the diagnosis, the EIA Coordinator made a disclosure of a disability to their employer's Human Resources department, who then facilitated a meeting with the EIA Coordinator's line manager to discuss a plan for managing the issues that led to them becoming overwhelmed at work. The company also offered reasonable adjustments for neurodiversity, including moving to a desk at a quieter end of the office, noise cancelling headphones and provision of written instructions and feedback wherever possible.

Whilst the EIA Coordinator can still find it difficult during stressful periods at work, they now find it much easier to ask for additional support. The EIA Coordinator has also become an advocate for neurodiversity awareness within the company.

Managing stress in Impact Assessment

Personal level

The responses to the *Managing Stress in EIA* survey highlight that there is a general level of understanding within the industry of the steps individuals can take to support their mental health and wellbeing. Where respondents were asked how individuals can support themselves with their mental health and wellbeing, the responses were focused around eight themes.

Where this relates to supporting themselves within work, the responses are summarised in **Table 4**. **Table 5** summarises how individuals responded when considering how best to support their mental health and wellbeing outside of work.

Table 4. Survey participant responses on how individuals can support themselves with stress at work

	Personal wellbeing practices	• Take a lunchtime walk (preferably in nature) • Wind down with a book or music on your commute • Take your shoes off in particularly bad situations to ground yourself[5]
	Seeking support	• Communicate with colleagues and team leaders regularly
	Time management and productivity	• Prioritise • Schedule breaks – and take them • Leave your desk during breaks • Tackle one big task a day • Block out time for non-project-related tasks (e.g., CPD) • Avoid multitasking • Make lists (before logging off) to get it out of your head • Avoid packing your schedule, leave space around tasks and meetings • Schedule time to prepare for meetings • Treat all necessary non-work appointments like doctors appointments (unmovable, non-negotiable) • Set an alarm for breaks (e.g., use the Pomodoro® Technique[6]) • Make sure you take your annual leave • Aim to complete something on Friday so you don't think about it all weekend • Reduce your workload or work flexibly • Reduce the number of projects you work on at any one time • Forward plan • Create a project structure to avoid tight timelines from the start

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5   Grounding to tackle stress refers to a set of techniques that help bring your focus back to the present moment by engaging your senses, allowing you to detach from overwhelming thoughts and feelings by actively noticing your surroundings and physical sensations, thereby calming your mind and body in stressful situations. You can learn more here.

6   Named after the tomato kitchen timer originally used, the Pomodoro® Technique breaks work time into 25-minute intervals, called Pomodoros, with a short break in between. You may feel that your intervals need to be longer or shorter, and you can tailor the technique to your preferences.

	Work environment adjustments	• Update your MS Teams status to receive fewer urgent messages when you're busy • Identify a place at work where you can practice mindfulness • Try to use a standing desk
	Communication and boundary setting	• Delegate • Do not allow work to encroach into personal time • Work on clear communication with everyone at work • Say no to unreasonable demands • Escalate issues to your line manager • Limit your working hours to your contracted hours • Set boundaries with project team and clients • Manage client expectations
	Social support and team building	• Foster good relationships • Use those good relationships to distribute work fairly • Foster a good relationship with your manager so you know you have guaranteed support • Engage with mental health teams • Talk through issues with peers • Join in with work social events • Ask for help • Take things one project/task at a time • Speak up about unrealistic demands • Talk to colleagues about stress • Be honest with colleagues about the pressures of work
	Cognitive and mindset strategies	• Learn about stress triggers and how to deal with them • Maintain 'big picture' thinking • Create or be part of a culture of wellbeing • Delay responding to emails and messages • Keep focused on wider life activity • Find your positive triggers[7] • Try to find a mindset where you do not take things personally • Use positive affirmations • Develop grit
	Professional development and growth	• Build confidence • Keep learning • Acquire new skills

[7] Often positive triggers can be a place, person or even a smell. One survey respondent recommended candles and oils.

Table 5. Survey participant responses on how individuals can support themselves with stress outside of work.

Personal wellbeing practices	• Personal wellbeing practices • Exercise • Have fun hobbies • Do a 'dopamine detox'[8] • Practice good sleep hygiene[9] • Take a relaxing bath • Eat healthily	• Mindfulness • Meditate • Practice yoga • Walk regularly • Read • Listen to music • Do a creative activity
Seeking support	• Psychotherapy • Talking therapy • NHS Five Ways to Wellbeing[10]	
Time management and productivity	• Don't check your work phone or emails while on leave	
Work environment adjustments	• Spatial separation of work and home areas for remote working	
Communication and boundary setting	• Do not work at weekends if you are not scheduled/contracted to	
Social support and team building	• Spend time with friends and family • Talk through things outside of work to put things into context • Organise activities after work to stop yourself working late	

8   A 'dopamine detox' is a self-imposed break from stimulating activities that trigger excessive dopamine release, such as social media, video games, junk food, or other instant gratification behaviours. The idea is to reset the brain's reward system to improve focus, motivation and self-control. While the scientific validity of a full 'detox' is debated, the practice can help individuals develop healthier habits and regain control over impulsive behaviours

9   Good sleep hygiene refers to a set of healthy habits and practices that promote consistent, high-quality sleep. These habits help regulate your body's internal clock, improve sleep efficiency, and enhance overall wellbeing. Good sleep habits include maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, having a relaxing bedtime routine, limiting exposure to screens before bedtime (preferably no screens for the hour before bed), being mindful of caffeine and alcohol and their effect on sleep, and making sure you're exposed to lots of natural light during the day.

10   The five ways to wellbeing recommended by the NHS are connecting, learning, being active, taking notice (mindfulness) and giving. More information can be found here

Organisation level

Respondents were also asked how organisations can support their staff with their mental health and wellbeing. **Table 6** summarises ways identified by the survey participants that may be implemented by organisations to help manage stress and increase wellbeing for those working in EIA specifically.

Table 6. Survey participant responses on how organisations can support stress management and wellbeing for EIA staff.

	Managing client expectations	• Providing the means to work with clients to manage deadlines collaboratively • Providing the means to communicate effectively and openly with clients (online/digital tools) • Being stronger on scope creep and actual costs • Only allowing staff to work on one time-pressured/complex DCO at a time • Support on managing clients (managerial support in meetings, providing training such as communication, resilience training, conflict resolution) • Supporting staff who say no to impossible deadlines • Encourage staff to set realistic programmes
	Resourcing	• Resourcing to match project size and complexity (proportional resourcing) • More resource available generally (increase in team sizes, for example) • Allow staff to clock sufficient administration time • Reduce time worked over contracted hours
	Training and time	• Provide appropriate and regular training sessions and wellness briefings (at team/project level) • Address and discuss the post-COVID shift in experience levels • Allow for reduced work hours, flexible working and maintaining healthy work-life balance
	Recognition & financial incentives	• Foster a culture of respect for EIA work and the role • Visible top-down recognition of the importance of the role and its complexity • Financial incentives for meeting difficult deadlines • Treating/rewarding EIA roles the same as engineers and specialists
	Increased understanding & awareness	• Acknowledge workplace stress for EIA staff • Allow time, space, and opportunity for open discussions around the job • Encourage suggestions about how to help EIA staff manage stress and increase wellbeing • Develop a good institutional understanding of hidden disabilities and how to support EIA staff with them

Employee stress management is crucial for maintaining a healthy, productive, and engaged workforce. A comprehensive approach to managing stress in staff requires a combination of organisational changes, resources, leadership support, and a focus on employee wellbeing. By addressing both the structural and personal factors that contribute to stress, organisations can create a healthier, more engaged workforce while improving productivity and job satisfaction. **Table 7** provides suggestions on how organisations can support their staff in reducing and managing stress.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1981, employers have a legal duty to protect workers from stress at work. This is the same duty to protect employees as applies for any other health and safety risk in the workplace. The HSE advises that employers should undertake a risk assessment to assess the risks regarding the six causes of stress highlighted above (**Table 3**). Further information can be found here.

Table 7. How organisations can support staff wellbeing and reduce stress.

Foster a positive work environment	Provide stress management resources	Encourage breaks and downtime
• **Encourage open communication:** create a culture where employees feel comfortable discussing their concerns, challenges, and stressors without fear of judgement or retaliation. • **Promote work-life balance:** encourage employees to maintain a balance between work and personal life. Flexible working hours, remote work options, and ensuring time off is respected can help reduce stress. • **Build a supportive culture:** recognise the importance of emotional wellbeing and create an environment where employees feel they are valued and supported colleagues.	• **Employee assistance programmes (EAPs):** offer professional support services such as counselling, mental health resources, and financial advice that employees can access confidentially. • **Wellness programmes:** implement health and wellness initiatives that focus on physical and mental wellbeing, such as meditation sessions, gym memberships, or workshops on stress management techniques. • **Mindfulness and relaxation training:** offer programmes or sessions that teach mindfulness, deep breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques to help employees cope with stress.	• **Promote regular breaks:** encourage employees to take short breaks throughout the day, particularly when working long hours or under pressure, to help reduce mental fatigue and maintain focus. • **Design breakout spaces:** create areas where employees can relax, unwind, or socialise to recharge during the workday. • **Encourage downtime:** ensure that employees understand the importance of taking annual leave or paid/unpaid time off to rest and avoid burnout.

Manage workloads and expectations

- **Set realistic goals:** ensure that workloads and expectations are reasonable. Overloading employees with tasks can lead to stress and burnout. Regularly check in to assess whether employees have the resources and support they need to meet their goals.
- **Delegate and prioritise**: help employees prioritise tasks and delegate responsibilities effectively. Encourage them to break tasks into manageable steps and avoid multitasking when possible.
- **Use technology to help:** tools that facilitate task management and communication (e.g., project management software, collaborative tools) can reduce confusion and enhance productivity, helping employees feel more in control.
- **Resourcing of project teams:** ensure that projects are resourced appropriately.

Provide training, coaching and development

- **Skills development:** offer training programmes to help employees build skills for managing stress, such as time management, conflict resolution, and communication. Provide access to Mental Health First Aid Training through an accredited provider.
- **Leadership development:** train managers to recognise signs of stress in their teams and provide appropriate support, including having regular one-on-one meetings to discuss workload and wellbeing.
- **Conflict resolution:** offer training in conflict management to prevent interpersonal conflicts that can lead to stress in the workplace.

Create opportunities for social support

- **Team-building activities:** organise regular team-building activities to strengthen relationships among colleagues, which can improve morale and create a more supportive environment.
- **Mentorship programmes:** pair employees with mentors, allowing them to talk openly about challenges and share coping strategies.
- **Celebrate successes:** recognise and celebrate achievements, both large and small, to help employees feel appreciated and motivated, which can alleviate feelings of stress.

Promote healthy lifestyle choices

- **Encourage physical activity:** physical health is closely linked to mental health, so encourage employees to be active, whether through gym memberships, yoga classes, or walking challenges.
- **Healthy eating options**: provide healthy snacks in the workplace or access to nutrition resources to promote better eating habits that can help maintain energy levels and reduce stress.
- **Adequate rest and sleep:** emphasise the importance of sleep and recovery, encouraging employees to prioritise their rest to stay productive and resilient.

Offer financial support and stability

- **Fair renumeration:** ensure that employees are fairly compensated for their work and have access to benefits such as health insurance and pension plans. Financial concerns are a significant stressor for many individuals.
- **Financial wellness programmes:** offer resources and workshops on managing personal finances, debt, and budgeting to alleviate financial stress.

Promote autonomy and empowerment

- **Encourage decision-making:** give employees some autonomy and control over their work. Empowering employees to make decisions can reduce feelings of helplessness and stress.
- **Provide flexibility:** allow flexible work arrangements (such as remote work or flexible hours) to accommodate employees' personal needs, which can ease stress caused by personal and professional commitments.

Address workplace culture and leadership	Monitor and evaluate stress levels
• **Lead by example:** leaders should model healthy work habits and manage their own stress in a visible way, demonstrating to employees that it's okay to take care of one's mental health. • **Fair and transparent policies:** ensure that workplace policies are clear, fair, and consistently applied. Uncertainty around rules and expectations can add unnecessary stress.	• **Regular check-ins and surveys:** use regular surveys or check-ins to assess employee stress levels, identify stressors, and adjust workplace policies as needed. • **Exit interviews and feedback:** gather feedback from employees who leave the organisation to identify any patterns or stress-related issues that could be addressed moving forward.

Case Study 3 – Level of experience

EIA Coordinator #3 was a Senior EIA Consultant with four years of consultancy experience. Unavailability of experienced EIA staff within their team meant that the EIA Coordinator was made responsible for coordinating a EIA large development project, with limited support, and at the same time continuing to provide support to others on another project.

The new project had a four-year programme and given its complexity there were a large number of environmental issues to manage, which the EIA Coordinator had little direct experience of. An added challenge was the lack of experience across the wider project team, with others looking to the EIA Coordinator for leadership. As tensions inevitably increased, working relationships became strained across the team, with the EIA Coordinator feeling the most pressure.

The EIA Coordinator felt compelled to work long hours, including late nights, early mornings and weekends. This exacerbated personal issues they were experiencing at the time. Three years into the project, the pressure became too much. Feeling alone and depressed, the EIA Coordinator had a breakdown and was taken to see their GP by a family member. The GP signed them off work for a short period before circumstances allowed them to take a longer period of paternity leave.

The EIA Coordinator later returned to work, has subsequently undertaken training as a mental health first aider, and is supported by a coach that provides advice on personal resilience. This has been valuable for understanding and managing their personal triggers of stress, including how to better define work/personal life boundaries. It has also meant they are better able to support others experiencing stress at work.

Support from IEMA

IEMA wishes to support members that may be struggling to manage stress. Based on the feedback received from the members' survey, IEMA acknowledges the following findings and will seek to implement the following recommendations:

Training and CPD

Views from member survey and working group:
Members requested further training in the form of workshops and webinars to help them develop strategies to deal with stress. Experts could be invited from external organisations to run these sessions for members.

There were a number of suggestions that CPD sessions could be more targeted to groups with similar levels of experience and backgrounds. For example, sessions could be recommended as being more appropriate for members at a certain level. This may help members feel more comfortable engaging in discussions and raising issues that may be contributing to stress.
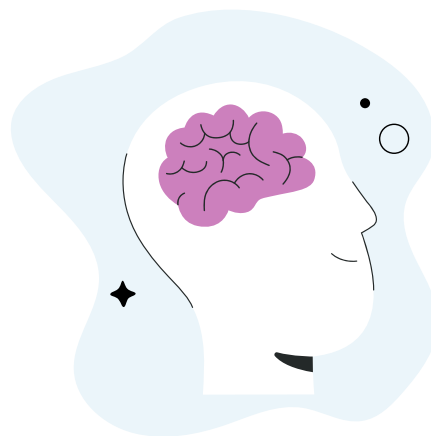
IEMA commitment:
IEMA publishes EIA guidance that is aimed at practitioners, stakeholders and consultees, alongside webinars and working groups organised by the Impact Assessment Network to support members. IEMA's training partners offer a range of training related to sustainability and Impact Assessment and new training is developed over time. IEMA will continue to investigate targeted training and resources for stakeholders including determining authorities on scoping and proportionate EIA. This may help to reduce the scope of EIAs and post-submission queries.

Provision of resources and support

Views from member survey and working group:
Members indicated that they would benefit from resources that focus on stress and mental health awareness for EIA and Impact Assessment professionals. This could be in the form of advice notes that offer practical advice, groups or forums for members to discuss issues affecting their mental health, or one-to-one sessions with a trained mental health first aider. Ideally, these resources should be made easily accessible for all members.

There was a feeling expressed in some of the survey responses that IEMA does not always fully recognise the EIA job role as a highly skilled and challenging profession. Therefore, a focus on resources that specifically target EIA and Impact Assessment professionals would go some way to addressing this.

IEMA commitment:
IEMA is committed to continuing to support EIA and Impact Assessment professionals through the work of the Institute and, in particular, through Impact Assessment Network activities. Through the Impact Assessment Network, IEMA publishes numerous guides to Impact Assessment, as well as the IEMA EIA Outlook Journal, to aid members with practice. Recommendations from this advice note about stress and wellbeing will inform the considerations of the Impact Assessment Steering Group going forward and be incorporated into ongoing and future work programmes where possible.

Advocacy for EIA professionals

Views from member survey and working group:
The survey results demonstrated a feeling among members that EIA is undervalued by other industry professionals and particularly clients. IEMA should seek to help promote the role of EIA Coordinator, which is often poorly understood by non-EIA professionals. Clients in particular do not understand the implications of their decisions (e.g., design or red line boundary changes) on the EIA process.

One suggestion from the survey was for IEMA to produce a guidance document for non-EIA professionals which sets out typical information/design fix requirements, critical paths, dependencies and timescales. Industry accepted guidelines would carry more weight when trying to negotiate reasonable deadlines with a client. The document could also include a 'code of conduct', which all those associated with the delivery of an EIA are expected to adhere to. This could be referred to when someone feels unfairly treated or disrespected.

Some responses also stressed the need for IEMA to consider all types of Impact Assessment and not focus solely on EIA. It is acknowledged that this criticism has not been addressed fully in this document.

IEMA commitment:
As set out above, IEMA continues to provide Impact Assessment and EIA-focused webinars, events, and develop and publish Impact Assessment guidance via the Impact Assessment working groups. Furthermore, IEMA is committed to advocating for better policy and has responded to multiple government consultations on EIA and planning reform, particularly over the past five years since the planning white paper in 2020. IEMA remains a strong advocate for EIA, Impact Assessment and the profession.

IEMA Quality Mark

Views from member survey and working group:
The EIA Quality Mark could be one way to encourage more support from organisations to any employees that are suffering from stress. Additional criteria could include measures that are understood to reduce stress and ensure that employees at all levels are adequately supported.

IEMA commitment:
IEMA is committed to working with EIA Quality Mark members, to highlight the issues raised in this advice note and encourage all EIA Quality Mark organisations to review their own practices regarding managing employee wellbeing. IEMA will support participation for EIA Quality Mark leads as part of the release of this advice note, to encourage engagement with the recommendations contained within, for example, suggesting that a wellbeing discussion or webinar be included in the Continuing Professional Development aspect of the Q-Mark.

Further advice/support or individuals

IEMA encourages all members to speak to colleagues, relatives and friends if they are feeling stressed at work		

NHS

The NHS provides information on work-related stress on its Every Mind Matters website

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/lifes-challenges/work-related-stress

mind

Mind provides advice on how to be mentally healthy at work, with suggestions for what you can do and where you can get support if you experience poor mental health

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/how-to-be-mentally-healthy-at-work/work-and-stress

Mind's helplines also provide information by phone and email

0300 102 1234

Anxiety UK

A charity providing support for people affected by anxiety disorders

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

03444 775 774

BREATHING SPACE

A free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety

www.breathingspace.scot

0800 838587

CAMPAIGN AGAINST LIVING MISERABLY

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably for men aged 15 to 35

www.thecalmzone.net

0800 585858

No Panic
Don't suffer alone
Pick up the phone

Voluntary charity offering support for sufferers of panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder

www.nopanic.org.uk

0844 9674848

SAMARITANS

If you are feeling desperate and need to speak to someone urgently, the Samaritans operate a 24-hour helpline

Helpline: 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

Acknowledgements

IEMA's EIA Quality Mark:

A scheme operated by the Institute allowing organisations (both developers and consultancies) that lead the coordination of statutory EIAs in the UK to make a commitment to excellence in their EIA activities and have this commitment independently reviewed. Founded in 2011, the EIA Quality Mark is a voluntary scheme, with organisations free to choose whether they are ready to operate to its seven EIA Commitments: EIA Management; EIA Team Capabilities; EIA Regulatory Compliance; EIA Context & Influence; EIA Content; EIA Presentation; and Improving EIA practice.

About IEMA

We are the global professional body for over 22,000 individuals and 350 organisations working, studying or interested in sustainability and the environment.
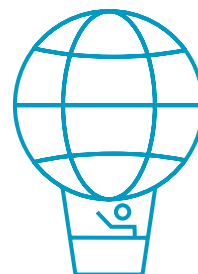
We're committed to supporting, encouraging and improving the confidence and performance of our members. We support public and private sector organisations, governments and regulators to do the right thing when it comes to sustainability and environment related initiatives, challenges and opportunities.

We also work to influence public policy on sustainability and the environment. We do this by drawing on the insights and experience of our members to ensure that what happens in practice influences the development of government policy, legislation, regulations and standards.

The Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (formerly the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment)

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