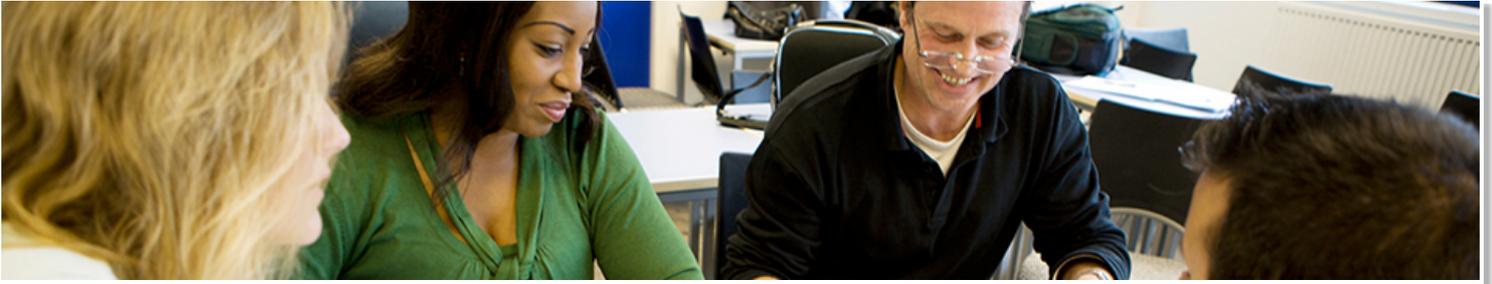


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## Supporting your health and wellbeing

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With rising workloads, job changes and funding cuts, teachers, trainers and staff are facing more pressure than ever before. We look at how to get the right support for a better work-life balance.



A growing number of employers are struggling with stress, with workloads cited as the main reason for the high percentage of staff taking time off work. In a recent [Guardian survey of more than 4,000 teachers](#), 82 per cent described their workload as “unmanageable”. Teacher’s union [NASUWT reported similar findings](#), with 83 per cent of teachers saying they have experienced more workplace stress in the last 12 months, with three quarters suffering from anxiety.

### Work-life balance

When the demands of work interfere with your personal life, you may want to change the way you respond to difficulties encountered in everyday work situations – and in doing so, reduce the number of sick days taken.

Creating space between your work and home life isn’t always easy to manage, but there are some positive steps you can take. For example, you may want to:

- consider flexible working
- find time to meditate, exercise or dedicate to a hobby
- set aside fixed periods to answer emails, use social media, and clear expectations about response times.

Managers need to be mindful about setting reasonable expectations around communication, meetings and contact with students. At the same time, employees need to feel confident they can approach managers with any problems.

## Classroom dynamics

A negative learning experience can be stressful, and students often sense when a teacher or trainer is 'not in control'. However, experienced teachers recognise that each group will have a different dynamic – and good classroom dynamics is all about empathy and cooperation.

Stuart Barlow, Vice Principal, Curriculum, Sparsholt College Hampshire, is running the project 'Raising Aspirations' in conjunction with the Education and Training Foundation. He explains how understanding can help: "We hope to get staff to interact with students by understanding their intrinsic motivations and how these impact on behaviour; to see, for example, that nobody comes in intentionally to be uncooperative or perform below expectations.

"By increasing mutual empathy we can get them to work together rather than from a perceived position of power. We should, through this approach, reduce the stress involved in the teacher/student interaction; enabling both to focus upon how they develop peak performance, rather than just battling through to the end."

## Self-awareness

Having a better understanding of how to react to situations will improve your self-confidence and help you feel more secure in your role. Although it's tempting to see bad experiences as someone else's fault, this attitude can have a negative impact on your health and wellbeing.

A better strategy may be to understand how our behaviours and reactions to difficult situations are a contributing factor. When a manager offers constructive feedback, do you reject or reflect? Sometimes critical feedback can take time to digest. It may help to tell your manager you need time to consider any points made. Similarly, managers need to give employees space to absorb feedback.

## Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is our ability to use emotions to understand others, social situations, and ourselves. It also means being able to regulate our emotions to achieve emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Ultimately, developing and improving your emotional intelligence will give you more opportunity to solve any personal and practical problems.

[Daniel Goleman identifies four aspects of emotional intelligence:](#)

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness (empathy)
- relationship management (social skills).

Read more about emotional intelligence via the [EBSCO research journal readership and career skills collection](#) (exclusive content available to SET members only).

## Bullying and harassment

Being subjected to psychologically damaging behaviour can have a significant toll on your long-term health, yet many individuals suffer years of bullying or harassment without seeking help. At the same time, it can be hard to recognise the symptoms of bullying when it often takes different forms. In his blog '[What is workplace bullying](#)', Tim Fields, author of *Bully in Sight: How to Predict, Resist, Challenge and Combat Workplace Bullying*, says: "Management is managing; bullying is not managing. Anyone in a position of authority whose supervisory, motivational or leadership skills amount to bullying demonstrate their inadequacy as a supervisor, motivator or leader." His advice is to always put your health first, even if that may ultimately mean leaving your job.

## Resilience in the face of change

Resilience is needed in all aspects of our life and is increasingly becoming part of the curriculum. Kathryn James, ETF Associate, says institutions are seeing the importance of developing resilience as a way of protecting health and wellbeing: "Many providers are putting measures in place to help staff talk about resilience. Without compromising confidentiality, they can bring cases to structured staff meetings and talk about how they handled a situation, and ask for ideas on how they could have handled it better.

"Other ways staff are dealing with it is to buddy up with a colleague and support each other. More formal and structured practices, such as staff counselling or Employee Assistance Programmes, also help. One college I talked to recently said they were looking at how to develop skills in staff to build resilience in learners, as well as for themselves."

Whether you are affected by change or a poor working environment, it's worth remembering there are different opportunities to consider within the sector. It may help to:

- find out how your skills are transferable
- look at developing your skills through a range of CPD activities
- talk to a careers coach to discuss possible moves and progression.

## Accessing support

Being open about your health and wellbeing at work can feel daunting. In addition to speaking to HR or visiting your GP, you can access advice and support from a range of different sources, including:

- Teacher Support Line: 08000 562 561
- NUT Advice Line (members only)
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE): Management Standards for work-related stress
- The Stress Management Society
- ACAS
- Fit for Work: 0800 032 6235

Article written by **Deborah Talbot**, a journalist and researcher who writes about society, culture and cities, and has worked as a university lecturer for over a decade.



## Related links

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- > [Men and mental health - what does it mean for education and training](#)
- > [Staff health and wellbeing at work](#)

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