**DRAFT Workload management**

A guide for managers

March 2020

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*The ‘Workload management A guide for managers’’ is an adaptation of the ‘Workload management a guide for managers’ developed by the state of Queensland (Queensland Public Service Commission).  We acknowledge their support in the reproduction of content.*

# Introduction

## **Purpose of the guide and how to use**

This guide has been developed to assist managers address workload management issues consistent with the **Workload Management Procedure**. It aims to assist managers work with employee/s to design work practices that promote wellbeing, work-life balance and prevent harm in environments where workload has been identified as a safety hazard.

This guide is just one tool that may be used to support business and operational planning activities. It is important to note that employers have a responsibility under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (**OHS Act**) to provide and maintain a safe work environment, including providing a safe and healthy workload for employees.

As business units within different workplaces vary in what influences their workloads there is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach to managing workload issues across the Victorian Public Service, locally tailored approaches are needed to identify and address specific issues. This guide can also be used proactively to engage with employees to ensure a safe work environment.

Managers are encouraged to modify the contents of this guide to suit their work unit.

## **Principles of good workload management**

Workload management is present in a workplace when tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.[[1]](#footnote-2)  Having too much to do and not enough time to do it has been identified as a significant workplace stressor for employees. Research has demonstrated that it is not just the amount of work that makes a difference, but also the extent to which employees have the resources (time, equipment, support) to do the work well.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Effective workload management requires an understanding and acknowledgement that:

* the employer is responsible for effective workload management to maintain a safe work environment
* the employer is responsible for providing the necessary resources to ensure a safe place of work
* the employee and employer will work together to address concerns about the allocation of work in accordance with workplace health and safety legislation and policies and any relevant industrial agreement
* workload management forms part of normal business and work is allocated and prioritised to support strategic priorities and links to business, operational and workforce planning processes
* there are natural peaks and troughs in terms of workload associated with achieving service delivery requirements
* changes occur in workplaces daily and managers are responsible for managing workloads to ensure local and business area needs are met
* workload allocation considers the training, skill, knowledge, classification and position description of individual employees and the equitable distribution of workload across teams
* decisions regarding workload allocation consider the work-life balance of employees, including making suitable arrangements to cover planned leave to minimise workload impact on other staff
* employees will not be required to undertake work that significantly and regularly exceeds ordinary working hours
* workload management is informed by effective identification and analysis of data/information and accurate and consistent performance reporting
* issue escalation processes and dispute resolution mechanisms are in place and can be used where necessary.

An organisation with good workload management would be able to state that:

* the work employees are expected to do is reasonable for their positions
* employees have the equipment and resources needed to do their jobs well
* employees can talk to their supervisors about the amount of work they have to do
* employees’ work is free from unnecessary interruptions and disruptions, and
* employees have an appropriate level of control over prioritizing tasks and responsibilities when facing multiple demands.[[3]](#footnote-4)

# Process for local resolution

This guide may be used whenever a workload management issue is identified either by an employee or a group of employees pursuant to Stage 1 of the **Workload Management Procedure**. Where possible, issues should be resolved locally.

Where an issue is not resolved, an employee or group or employees may refer the matter to a formal review by submitting a Workload Review Request – refer to Stage 2 the **Workload Management Procedure**.

Employees may seek support of a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) or union delegate at any stage of the process. Both employees and managers may seek the assistance of Human Resources or the department’s/entity’s safety team at any stage of the process.

**Please note:** Where a workload management issue has come to the attention of management through the Hazard and Incident reporting system, care should be taken to ensure that the Hazard and Incident Management Procedure is complied with. If the workload issue presents a risk to employee health and safety, the hazard and incident reporting process should also be followed.

**The five steps for dealing with an issue are:**

| **Step** | **Actions** |
| --- | --- |
| **Step 1 – hazard / incident Identification** | Identify the hazard / incident, collect data and establish benchmarks. |
| **Step 2 - Analysis and risk assessment** | Analyse the issue: review the data to determine underlying, contributing and/or causative factors, understand the risks including impacts and consequences. |
| **Step 3 - Develop options** | If a material or significant risk or consequence is identified, develop a range of options to address the risk and consequences.  If no further action required, communicate this outcome in writing to the employee/s and HSR/s where relevant and include the reasons why this view was formed. The manager will monitor the risk in regular business planning activities. |
| **Step 4 – risk controls** | Develop an action plan to implement risk controls:   * use the hierarchy of controls to prioritise the options into an action plan, identifying immediate actions and corrective actions * communicate these to the employee/s and HSR/s, where relevant, to manage the associated risks * implement the action plan |
| **Step 5 – Review / report** | Review and monitor the outcome. |

### Step 1 Hazard / incident identification

Managing workloads and the daily change that occurs in workplaces forms part of normal business planning. Early identification of issues is important to help work units meet their goals and to maintain a safe and healthy work environment.

Workload issues may be identified in several ways:

* workload management issue reported as a safety hazard or incident
* by an employee or group of employees
* by a Health and Safety Representative
* by a supervisor, line manager, senior manager, board or a client
* as part of the operational planning cycle
* in response to major organisational change
* unexpected peaks in work
* employee leave
* by a consultative committee
* other external factors.

In examining an issue, the privacy and confidentiality of issues raised by individual employees should be maintained.

Indicators of workload issues can be prospective (‘lead indicators’) or retrospective (‘lag indicators’).

Lead indicators may result in either an increase or decrease in workloads and therefore have different impacts on the need for workload management actions. Lag indicators may be used to monitor and measure data in relation to a workload issue.

Some examples of indicators of workload issues

| Lead indicators (prospective) | Lag indicators (retrospective) |
| --- | --- |
| * introduction of new programs or work * organisational change, including staffing changes * new or revised business or strategic plans * service reprioritisation * changes and/or impacts from the external environment such as legislative changes, introduction of new professional or qualification standards * budgetary/economic factors * changes within the work unit’s client base * developments in community expectations * planned leave | * failure to achieve work unit goals or targets * increase in unplanned absences * high levels of annual leave accruals * high rates of overtime * high levels of accrued days off and/or time off in lieu (TOIL) * outcomes of staff opinion or health and wellbeing surveys, e.g. People Matters Survey * increased numbers of complaints (internal and/or external) * above average staffing turnover. |

Data collection may help to identify the extent of any workload issue and whether a problem exists. This approach will be most effective where several relevant indicators are available, the data can be collected over a representative period, and existing systems and processes support the collection of the data.

Lag indicators should be measured against benchmarks for what is considered a reasonable workload in a ‘business as usual’ setting. Where benchmarks don’t already exist, consider developing them to assist monitoring workloads and risks.

**Worksheet 1– Hazard /incident identification of workload issues**, contains examples of workload indicators and measures and can be used to collect data for issue identification. Work teams may identify other relevant indicators and measures that can also be used to assist in identifying workload management issues in their workplace.

## **Step 2 Hazard analysis and risk assessment**

Timely analysis is important. A reasonable timeframe will depend on the complexity of the issue and the workplace context.

Considerations at this step should include:

* What factors, underlying causes, problems or trends are contributing to the workload issue?
* Are these factors short-term, medium term, long term duration or ongoing?
* To what extent are these factors within the control of management, of employees and/or of the work unit generally?
* What is the impact of each contributing factor?
* Is there any kind of causal or correlative relationship between the indicators identified in step one and what are the assumptions underpinning that?
* What is the relative experience, capability and capacity of individuals within the work unit?
* Is there relevant historical and/or empirical data available that could help put an indicator in context? For example, historical data that shows client demand for particular services typically increases in June but decreases again in August.

Consequences of a workload issue can be multi-dimensional – community, health and safety, industrial, economic/financial and political. The relevant supervisor or manager is generally responsible for analysis of the hazard and for maintaining open communication with affected employees within the boundaries of confidentiality obligations.

Employee/s may be asked to be involved in this process, depending on their level of knowledge of the identified factors. HSR/s should also be involved in this process where a Designated Work Group (DWG) and HSR/s are in place.

Support or advice may be sought where relevant, from sources such as your[insert contact details].

**Worksheet 2 – Analysis of work load hazards** provides a template toconsider the range of factors involved, the associated risks and possible impacts on the work unit and employees, including work unit outcomes and health and safety.

**Worksheet 3 – Risk assessment matrix** provides a risk evaluation framework for assessing risk and analysing hazards. Alternative risk assessment tools may already be in use within the organisation.

## **Step 3 Develop options**

Following consultation with employee/s and HSRs where relevant, decisions need to be made about what practical solutions will be used in the workplace to control work demands. Risk control measures for work demands should follow the OHS hierarchy of control.

In some cases, the issue may be resolved at a local level, may be incorporated within business as usual monitoring or may prove not to be a problem.

If no further action required, communicate this outcome to employee/s and HSR/s where relevant, including the reasons why this view was formed. The supervisor or manager is responsible for monitoring the risk in regular business planning activities.

If action is required, develop a list of risk control options or actions to best resolve the workload issues and to manage the associated risks in consultation with employee/s and HSRs where relevant, before determining and communicating final outcome to employee/s.

Risk control options should sit within the context of existing business and/or operational planning. The list of options will need to be prioritized into short, medium and long term, and incorporated into some form of action plan or work plan of which the relevant staff will be advised.

Relevant considerations when developing options include:

* What is the scope of the option i.e. is it a local level application or beyond to potentially an across organisational scope?
* Given the scope of the option, what levels of and mechanisms for approval of the option are required?
* What is the potential impact on the existing workload within the work area, both at point of action and in an ongoing manner?
* Is reprioritisation of services or work performed by the business unit a viable option?
* What level of resource investment or service rationalisation is required e.g. human or financial resources?
* Is there the current capability or capacity to implement the option, and if not, how might this capability/capacity be achieved?
* Are the options realistic, achievable, practical or viable?
* Has there been an appropriate level of consultation amongst affected staff and Health and Safety Representatives where relevant?
* What level of involvement and/or impact does the option/s have on other stakeholders?
* What impact does it have on clients or the community?
* Referencing back to the risk assessment process step, what is the degree of urgency and importance around each of the potential options?
* Do the potential options meet legislative, policy, financial and/or cultural requirements relating to the work area and organisation?
* Are external sources of expertise or advice required to develop the options?
* Have local, national and international level best practice examples, where available, been referred to (ensuring that these are contextualised within the organisation’s culture, environment, capability and capacity)?

**Worksheet 4 – Risk control provides** a template to develop a list of options and actions to best resolve the workload issues and to manage the associated risks. This should be completed in consultation with affected employee/s and HSR/s where relevant.

## **Step 4 Risk controls**

Once an action plan is developed and approved, the risk control options will need to be implemented in a planned, coordinated, effective and efficient manner. The relevant employees should be informed of the approved action plan.

How actions are implemented, measured and evaluated should be linked to existing business operational planning or other approved organisational processes.

Existing organisational planning tools may be used, with the following elements included:

* an identification of the key stakeholders
* a set of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and, timely) performance measures
* identified consultation and communication processes, both internal and external
* an allocation of resources e.g. financial, human, equipment, accommodation
* an allocation of these tasks or procedures
* some agreed timeframes to implement these actions
* development of strategies for the reprioritisation of services and resources where relevant
* a set of tasks or procedures to implement the approved actions
* an approved evaluation mechanism.

The action plan should also incorporate:

* relevant level of change management practices and related communication strategies
* business-as-usual needs
* minimisation of impact on clients and any other key stakeholders
* adherence to legislative, policy and probity requirements e.g. recruitment policy, procurement policy, VPS Agreement and workplace health and safety legislation
* changes to update business and operational planning documents
* adjustments to individual performance development plans.

**Worksheet 5 – Recommended actions for resolving workload risks** provides a template to assist in incorporating factors that should be included and may assist at this stage.

## **Step 5 Review and report**

Workload management activities and actions need to be reviewed to ensure a safe and healthy work environment and continued achievement of desired business outcomes.

After an action plan has been implemented, undertake an assessment in consultation with employee/s and HSR/s where relevant to determine how effective and successful the actions have been in addressing the workload management issues.

The relevant employees should provide input to how the process for review and reporting is conducted, including appropriate timeframes for review and reporting. Timeframes will depend upon the scope of the workload management issue and the details of the action plan.

Factors to consider in the review and reporting process include:

* effective record keeping and documentation of actions and decisions is vital
* performance targets/measures/benchmarks need to be incorporated into the review and understood by all parties
* accurate and relevant data (both quantitative and qualitative) needs to be used
* options for who will undertake the review – depending on the organisation and work unit circumstances, it could be the safety committee, a small working group within the respective work area, another manager, the supervisor or unit manager, a human resources or safety and wellbeing person or an external third party
* apply objectivity and impartiality
* progress reporting may occur at different levels e.g. formalised reporting lines and/or work unit levels.

The organisation has the discretion to determine how the review and reporting process is to occur, the timeframes or milestones for review and reporting, who performs the review, what constitutes the report e.g. the content and extent of the information/data, and at which levels within the organisation the report is provided.

**Worksheet 6 – Review** provides a template to assist in reviewing actions to ensure a safe and healthy work environment and continued achievement of desired business outcomes

**Worksheet 7- Reporting** provides a template report form which may be used to track agreed actions.

# Formal Workload Review Request

Stage 2 of the Workload Management Procedure sets out a process for employees to follow if a workload management issue cannot be resolved at a local level.

An individual employee or group of employees must ensure they have genuinely and constructively attempted to address or resolve the issue, prior to escalation, and can provide evidence of doing so.

Any escalated workload management issue should also be dealt with in a timely and efficient manner. Throughout this process the individual employee or group of employees must be kept updated on developments and progress being made.

For further information refer to the Workload Management Procedure or contact [insert contact]**.**

# Workload Management Worksheets

## **Worksheet 1: Hazard /incident identification of workload issues**

| Workload indicator | Measure |
| --- | --- |
| Number of hours overtime – paid and TOIL | Average hours of paid overtime per employee per week for a representative period of time |
| Number of accrued/flex hours forfeited | Average hours of excess banked time forfeited per employee per month for a representative period of time |
| Number of hours or days personal leave taken | Average number of hours or days personal leave per employee per quarter |
| Number of hours of excess annual leave | Number of staff who have accrued excess annual leave (e.g. beyond eight weeks) |
| Issues arising from work schedules/roster arrangements | Number of shifts that have had fewer staff on roster than required. |
| Number of employees reported as experiencing workplace stress, excessive workloads or work distress issues | Number of workers’ compensation claims for psychological injury  Number of referrals to Employee Assistance Program providers. |
| Number and nature of review of actions requests lodged | Number of review of actions requests lodged over a period of time.  Number of mediations conducted over a period of time. |
| Number and nature of workplace health and safety incidents. | Number or extent of injury-free periods.  Number of days lost time due to injury over a period of time. |
| Number of separated employees/levels of staff turnover | Percentage or number of employees who have separated from the business unit / service area over the last six months. |
| Increasing frequency in the number of casual/temp employees | Number of actual hours worked per employee per week for a representative period of time. |
| Number of vacant positions | Number of vacant positions to be filled over a period of time. |
| Backlog of work | Percentage of project milestones that have been met or failed to be met over a period of time |
| Changed work volume, practices and complexity | Percentage decrease or increase in work volume over a period of time |
| Number and nature of reported stakeholder issues or complaints (includes issues related to quality and timeliness of service delivery) | Percentage or number of stakeholders who have provided written or verbal compliments or complaints about the timeliness of service delivery over a period of time. |
| Changes and/or impacts from the external environment | Changes to predictive indicators |
| Planned leave | Number of employees on planned leave |
| Other | Other |

## **Worksheet 2: Analysis of workload hazards**

| **Key issues**  **(What are the contributing factors?)** | **Extent of impact**  **(If temporary, how long, or ongoing?)** | **Other factors**  **(e.g. within management or employee control, historical work trend, relative experience of work unit members, relationship with indicators?)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Implementation of a new policy initiative during the period |  |  |
| Excessive work demands have reportedly inhibited the taking of TOIL |  |  |
| Organisational change has commenced as a result of a review of functions |  |  |
| Implementation of a new system during this period |  |  |
| Capacity of affected worker (e.g. Significant illness during the period and backfill not possible) |  |  |
| Higher than average stakeholder service demands during the period |  |  |
| Role requirements have changed during this period due to organisational change |  |  |
| Career opportunities for the specific occupational group have increased within the public and private sectors |  |  |
| Advertised positions have failed to attract suitable applicant pools |  |  |
| New federal or state policy has direct link to increasing workload |  |  |

## **Worksheet 3: Risk assessment matrix**

| **Id** | **Key issues**  **(including any identified ‘triggers’)** | **Impact on workload**  **(Identify consequences)** | **Assessment of**  **likelihood** | **Assessment of**  **seriousness** | **Grade (combined likelihood and seriousness)** | **Change to grade since last assessment** | **Date of review** | **Mitigation actions**  **(preventative or contingency)** | **Responsibility for mitigation action(s)** | **Cost** | **Timeline for mitigation action(s)** | **Task**  **breakdown structure** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Example* | *Backlog in processing applications for housing assistance due to significant increase in applications over past 4 months.* |  |  |  |  |  | *1 Jan 2019* | *Complete project plan including full workload analysis.* | *Director* | *Nil* | *20 June 2019* | *Complete draft plan by 1 June.*  *Feedback from team by 12 June*. |

Table 1: Rating for likelihood and seriousness for each risk

| Rating | Description |
| --- | --- |
| L | Rated as low |
| M | Rated as medium |
| H | Rated as high |
| E | Rated as extreme (used for seriousness only) |
| NA | Not assessed |

Table 2: Grade: Combined effect of likelihood/seriousness

| Likelihood | Low Seriousness | Medium Seriousness | High Seriousness | Extreme Seriousness |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Low | N | D | C | A |
| Medium | D | C | B | A |
| High | C | B | A | A |

Table 3: Change to grade since last assessment

| Code | Explanation |
| --- | --- |
| NEW | New risk |
| — | No change to grade |
| ↓ | Grading decreased |
| ↑ | Grading increased |

Table 4: Recommended actions for grades of risk

| Grade | Risk mitigation actions |
| --- | --- |
| A | Mitigation actions, to reduce the likelihood and seriousness, to be identified and implemented as soon as possible. |
| B | Mitigation actions, to reduce the likelihood and seriousness, to be identified and appropriate actions implemented within identified timeframe. |
| C | Mitigation actions, to reduce the likelihood and seriousness, to be identified and costed for possible action if funds permit. |
| D | To be noted - no action is needed unless grading increases over time. |
| N | To be noted - no action is needed unless grading increases over time. |

## **Worksheet 4: Risk controls**

### Example solutions

#### Compulsory

* Consult with employees and health and safety representatives where relevant to determine impacts of new systems, organisational change, new policies, etc. on work demands prior to implementation.
* Ensure workload is adjusted to reflect resourcing, for example employee absences
* Discourage employees from regularly working long hours, taking work home or working through breaks
* Promote work-life balance and encourage employees to take annual leave or holidays when they are due
* Ensure shift rosters are compliant with relevant policies, procedures and legislative requirements
* Encourage a culture where employees feel safe and able to raise workload concerns

#### Short-term

* Review task allocation within the team
* Review work processes
* Conduct skills analysis and relevant training
* Review complexity and size of caseloads
* Reprioritisation of services
* Monitor number of new clients and review workloads as required.

#### Medium term

* Identify if former staff are interested in working part-time or as a mentor to less skilled staff
* Consider spreading out staff start and finish times to cover peak periods
* Consider flexible work arrangements, e.g. compressed working hours
* Arrange for casual staff to be on call to provide additional resources e.g. when ongoing staff are sick
* Review processes to identify efficiencies
* Engage human resources branch to determine strategies to make the area more attractive to potential employees, e.g. job redesign, offer flexible working arrangements, etc.
* Consult with employees to determine impacts of new systems, organisational change, new policies, etc. on work demands prior to implementation.

#### Long term

* Cross train staff in the critical skills that have the most impact on producing outcomes.

| Key issues | Solutions |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

## **Worksheet 5: Recommended actions for resolving workload issues**

### Example short term/Immediate actions

| Action | Who | When |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Identify:   * stakeholders * SMART performance measures * consultation and communication processes, change management * allocation of resources * tasks or procedures and allocation * agreed timeframes * strategies for the reprioritisation of services where relevant * set of tasks or procedures to implement approved actions * performance measures * approved evaluation mechanism * change management and communication * maintenance of business as usual * impact on clients * adherence to legislation * governance requirements to be met. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

### Example of medium to long-term actions

| Action | Who | When |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Identify:   * tasks or procedures and allocation * stakeholders * strategies for the reprioritisation of services where relevant * allocation of resources * performance measures * consultation and communication processes, change management * approved evaluation mechanism * maintenance of business as usual * impact on clients * governance requirements to be met. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

## **Worksheet 6: Review**

| Key issues | Agreed action | Review period | Action officer |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

## **Worksheet 7: Reporting**

| Key issues | Agreed action | Achieved | Reported to XXX |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |
|  |  | Yes  No | Insert date in DD/MM/YYYY format |

1. National Standard of Canada, CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013: *Psychological health and safety in the workplace — Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation* (January 2013) https://www.csagroup.org/documents/codes-and-standards/publications/CAN\_CSA-Z1003-13\_BNQ\_9700-803\_2013\_EN.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)