**Professional Experience Placement: How to Manage Stress - 5 steps to reducing stress levels**

It's important to recognise that stress is one of the most important factors affecting career well-being.

Managing your professional experience placement work life and your personal life can be stressful. The symptoms of stress are well documented and range from sleep loss to a lack of productivity. At worst, stress can even lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Stress can strike at any time, and knowing how to manage stressful experiences it can make a significant difference to your professional placement experience, career development, overall health and happiness.

**Here are 5 strategies you might wish to experiment with to keep stress from interfering with your everyday responsibilities:**

**1.Evaluate**

The first step is to find out what causes you to feel stressed. The best way to do this is to think back to times you felt stressed and reflect on the circumstances: where were you? What was happening and was anyone else involved? How did you react to the situation?

Keep track of these instances and start looking for patterns. You might discover that your stress is related to a certain task, or perhaps it only occurs when you work extensive hours or if you with a specific staff member. Critically reflect on how you respond to situations or circumstances, evaluate your response: Did it make the situation better or worse? Did you engage in professional behaviour throughout the stressful situation?

**2. Make positive changes**

Once you've identified your stressors it's time to think of ways to control them. Some practical adjustments may be needed: a change in routine, for example, or exploring different approaches to a difficult task. Perhaps you're too perfectionistic, say 'yes' too often or need to ask for help more? Take a step back from your usual way of doing things and consider the alternatives.

**3. Find ways to cope**

While you may not always be able to avoid stressful situations, you can control how you react to them by finding ways to cope with stress. Exercising regularly has been proven to help reduce stress levels, try practising mindfulness and meditation. Find out what works for you, whether that's taking a walk at lunch time, practising breathing exercises or listening to your favourite music, and make it part of your daily routine.

**4. Nurture good habits**

Coping mechanisms aside, there is one fundamental rule that counts for all of us when it comes to countering stress and that is to take good care of yourself. A healthy diet, plenty of sleep and a good work-life balance are all incredibly important in reducing your stress levels. So put yourself first and set boundaries: nobody else is going to do it for you.

**5. Reach out**

 A problem shared is a problem halved, so talking to someone about your stressful day can help: contact - friends, family, mentors, managers, your professional support network, the OPL, Support Co-ordinator or unit co-ordinators.. It's important not to just vent though; reflect on possible solutions, really think the issue through and bring up some suggestions that won't just work for you but for everyone else involved too.

We all experience stress from time to time, but how we manage and respond to the stress situations will impact your job satisfaction and how content you are with your career journey. Make a conscious effort to identify your stressors, find coping mechanisms and, most importantly, take the time to look after yourself.