

# Menopause in the Workplace Guidance

April 2021

## Policy control

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| <b>Author</b>                    | Julie McLean, Assistant HR Officer   |
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| <b>Benchmarking</b>              | St Andrews University, University of Bristol, University of Edinburgh, University of Strathclyde, University of Plymouth, University of York |

## **1. Purpose and Scope**

The Menopause in the Workplace Guidance applies to all employees of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA).

GSA is fully committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment, and recognises the importance for all employees to be healthy and well at work. It is recognised that whilst employed, a proportion of GSA staff will experience menopause, and although this is a part of life for many, it may not always be an easy transition for the affected individuals.

It is the aim of GSA to encourage a positive approach and normalise the conversation of menopause in the workplace by improving the level of menopause related support and information available to staff.

This guidance document aims to provide staff and line managers with a better understanding of menopause, and raise awareness of the range of menopausal symptoms individuals may experience. It is designed to inform line managers how to support individuals in managing the menopause in the workplace, as well as ensuring individuals experiencing the menopause feel confident and comfortable to discuss menopause-related health concerns and ask for support when required, so they can continue to be successful in their roles.

## **2. Definitions**

### **2.1 Menopause**

The 'menopause' is a stage of life, related to hormonal changes, and usually occurs when individuals are between the ages of 45 and 55. However, menopause can also happen earlier or later for various reasons. If an individual experiences the menopause before the age of 40, it is defined as premature menopause

### **2.2 Peri-menopause**

'Peri-menopause' is the time leading up to menopause when an individual's hormone balance starts to fluctuate and they may begin to experience menopausal symptoms. This can occur a considerable time prior to menopause, therefore references to menopause throughout this guidance should be assumed to include those experiencing peri-menopause.

### **2.3 Post menopause**

'Post menopause' is the time after menopause has occurred. During this stage, menopausal symptoms can begin to ease for many individuals.

### **3. Symptoms of the menopause**

- 3.1 Symptoms of the menopause can differ greatly in terms of type, severity and duration for each individual. Whilst not all individuals will notice or experience significant symptoms, a high proportion of individuals do, and these symptoms can cause mild to severe discomfort on a daily basis.
- 3.2 On average menopausal symptoms last around four years, however some individuals can experience symptoms for significantly longer. Individuals may also experience different symptoms during different stages of the menopause.

Menopausal symptoms can be both physical and psychological, including, but not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Heavy or light periods
- Hot flushes or excessive sweating
- Joint and muscle stiffness
- Loss of confidence
- Memory and concentration loss
- Mood changes
- Palpitations
- Panic attacks
- Skin irritation and dryness

More information on the signs and symptoms of Menopause can be found [here](#).

## **4. Adjustments and Support**

4.1 GSA recognises experiencing any of the symptoms may be challenging and significantly impact an individual's personal and professional life. It may be difficult and stressful to manage these symptoms, and individuals may find it difficult to discuss this matter. Staff are encouraged to make their line manager aware of their circumstances where possible to optimise the level of support and/or adjustments on a day-to-day basis. Confidential advice and support is available, however, from the HR department and via the [Employee Assistance Programme](#). Further sources of support available are detailed in Appendix 1.

4.2 Minor changes to an employee's work environment or role can make a substantial difference in helping them to manage menopause in the workplace. Possible examples of appropriate adjustments and support include, but are not limited to:

- Facilitating a more comfortable work environment by providing access to cold drinking water and if required either a desk fan or a work space nearer a window to assist with temperature control;
- Ensuring there is easy access to clean washroom facilities where sanitary products are available;
- Providing flexibility in working hours where possible, for instance a later start time and/or flexible breaks during the day to help individuals manage their symptoms;
- Arranging regular meetings between the employee and line manager to ensure ongoing dialogue;
- Permitting home working when practical;
- Offering a quieter space for individuals to work if possible to minimise interruptions;
- Ensuring comfort breaks are provided during lengthy meetings;
- In roles where uniforms are required, allowing flexibility to ensure employees feel comfortable to perform their role;
- Potential referral to the Occupational Health Service if further specific guidance is required.

4.3 Other adjustments and support not listed above may also be considered and agreed between a line manager and employee, if deemed reasonable, in managing menopause in the workplace. If required, further guidance regarding adjustments and support can be sought from the HR department.

## **5. The Role of the Employee**

5.1 GSA encourages employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms that are significantly impacting their personal and professional life to contact their GP, who will be able to provide guidance regarding potential treatment options and necessary adjustments in the first instance.

- 5.2 Employees who wish to discuss matters relating to menopause and how this may be affecting them at work, should meet with their line manager to discuss their symptoms and how best to support these. If, for any reason, employees feel unable to discuss menopause-related health concerns with their line manager, they should contact a member of the HR team. A member of the HR team will then provide relevant information to the appropriate line manager and facilitate discussions as appropriate and agreed with the employee.
- 5.3 When discussing menopausal symptoms, it will be useful for the employee to provide examples to help the line manager/member of HR understand the impact symptoms may be having on their performance at work; e.g. suffering nights sweats resulting in a lack of sleep may mean the individual is tired during working hours and has difficulty concentrating on tasks. This detail will enable appropriate discussion and consideration regarding supportive adjustments in the workplace.
- 5.4 GSA understands not all individuals experiencing the menopause will wish or need to discuss this with their line manager or member of HR. Further resources to support employees experiencing the menopause can be found in Appendix 1.

## **6. The Role of the Line Manager**

- 6.1 Line managers must ensure they are familiar with the Menopause in the Workplace Guidance and that no member of staff experiences less favourable treatment due to menopause-related health concerns.
- 6.2 If an employee requests a meeting, line managers should be prepared and willing to have conversations about menopause and handle this sensitively and professionally. Line managers should ask employees general questions about how they are feeling, and should encourage the employee to share any specific concerns. It is strongly advisable that line managers, however, do not directly ask employees if they are experiencing the menopause as it may be a sensitive matter.

It is the line managers responsibility to proactively discuss possible workplace adjustments and support with an employee. Line managers should confirm any mutually agreed adjustments or support in writing to the employee and ensure these are effectively implemented.

- 6.3 Line managers should have regular dialogue with an employee to review if the agreed adjustment or support is still appropriate in managing menopausal symptoms.
- 6.4 Line managers and employees should agree if other colleagues should be informed about any adjustments or support put in place to help an employee manage menopause in the workplace, even if the reason for these is not disclosed.

6.5 Line managers should contact the HR department for additional guidance and information if required.

## **7. The Equality Act**

Whilst menopause is not specifically protected under the Equality Act (2010), if an individual is unfairly treated due to menopause and associated symptoms, this could be considered to amount to discrimination in relation to the protected characteristics of age, sex and disability. A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Some conditions arising from the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act (2010).

An Occupational Health Physician can advise whether an employee's condition is likely to be covered by the Equality Act (2010) and will make recommendations on any necessary adjustments that may be appropriate in order to support the employee either at work or returning to work following a period of absence.

## APPENDIX 1

| <b>Internal Support Platforms</b><br>(details available <a href="#">here</a> ) |   |
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| <b>Employee Assistance Programme</b>   | <a href="https://www.lifeandprogress.co.uk/cic/">https://www.lifeandprogress.co.uk/cic/</a><br>Freephone number: 0330 058 4885<br>Username: glasgowsa<br>Password: employee |
| <b>Silvercloud</b>   | <a href="https://gsastaff.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/">https://gsastaff.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/</a><br>Login: GSA email address<br>Password: Network password       |
| <b>Togetherall</b>   | <a href="https://togetherall.com/en-gb/">https://togetherall.com/en-gb/</a>   |
| <b>External Sources of Information and Support</b>                             |   |
| <b>Daisy Network – Information on POI (Premature Ovarian Insufficiency):</b>   | <a href="https://www.daisynetwork.org">https://www.daisynetwork.org</a>   |
| <b>Menopause at Work</b>   | <a href="https://archive.acas.org.uk/menopause">https://archive.acas.org.uk/menopause</a>   |
| <b>Menopause Matters</b>   | <a href="https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/index.php">https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/index.php</a>   |
| <b>National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guideline</b>      | <a href="https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information">https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information</a>             |
| <b>NHS Information</b>   | <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/</a>   |
| <b>The British Menopause Society</b>   | <a href="https://thebms.org.uk/">https://thebms.org.uk/</a>   |