



## Policy on alcohol and substance abuse

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## **Section A – Alcohol and employment**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Whilst many people in this country enjoy drinking alcohol socially and in moderation, there is a growing recognition that alcohol may contribute to inefficient working, accidents at work, absenteeism and, in extreme cases, health problems and social breakdown.
- 1.2. As an employer, the University is concerned to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its staff and others who may be affected by the activities of staff.
- 1.3. As an employer the University considers that alcohol should not affect the work performance of staff or have a detrimental impact on the university or other members of staff.
- 1.4. It should also be noted that those University staff holding Honorary Contracts with NHS Trusts are also subject to the policies of that Trust whilst working on Trust premises.
- 1.5. It is intended that both sections of this policy shall apply to all levels and grades of staff working in the University regardless of contractual status.
- 1.6. Where the terms Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service is used it should be interpreted as being the line manager appropriate to the employee involved.

### **2. Objectives of this policy**

- 2.1. To identify and promote good practice and to clarify expectations of reasonable behaviour.
- 2.2. To facilitate the early identification of problems related to alcohol amongst staff and the provision of support and/or treatment.
- 2.3. To outline appropriate management action where an employee is suspected of having an alcohol problem.

### **3. Raising awareness**

This policy and the standards embodied in it can only be implemented through an increase in the level of awareness of the issues throughout the workforce. To this end, the Occupational Health Service will provide publicity campaigns, information packs and training events.

### **4. Good practice at work**

- 4.1. The consumption of alcohol by staff whilst at work is considered inappropriate. In particular the consumption of alcohol is not acceptable when work and activities involve hazardous chemicals and substances, the operation of work equipment, machinery and electrical apparatus, work at heights, in confined spaces and when driving vehicles. This includes the use of information systems that hold sensitive data and where error could damage the interest of the University or part of it.

- 4.2. It is not acceptable for the performance of work to be affected by the consumption of alcohol.
- 4.3. Staff should have regard to the potential consequences of substandard performance and to the undesirable effect on some people of even small quantities of alcohol.
- 4.4. “Special occasions” e.g. to mark retirement or other celebrations, at which alcohol may be available and served in moderation, should be authorised by a senior member of staff. A choice of non-alcoholic beverages will be available for those who have to return to work, drive home or choose not to drink alcohol.
- 4.5. Staff should be made aware of the procedure for dealing with a problem drinker and of the strictly confidential nature of that procedure.
- 4.6. Individuals should be encouraged to raise any issue concerning their use of alcohol in strict confidence with their Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service, Occupational Health Department or Human Resources.

## **5. Dealing with the employee who arrives at or returns to work under the influence of alcohol**

- 5.1. Staff arriving or returning to work having consumed alcohol and who are determined by their Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service in consultation with Human Resources to be incapable of carrying out their duties, at risk to themselves or others or of bringing the University into disrepute, must be interviewed immediately and advised of the seriousness of the situation. Where appropriate and following advice from the Human Resources Department, such staff should be sent home for the remainder of the day. Where the situation is considered serious the staff should be advised that the use of the University’s disciplinary procedures could arise. Staff who have driven to work should be advised against driving home whilst under the influence of alcohol.
- 5.2. Where such incidents are repeated staff should be managed in accordance with the procedures in paragraph 3 below.

## **6. Dealing with the employee who is a “problem drinker”**

- 6.1. Alcohol dependence may come to the attention of a Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service in several ways. For example directly from the employee concerned, through information supplied by a colleague or other person, through misconduct or absenteeism, and/or through deterioration in work performance. It should be made clear to those providing information that every effort will be made to keep the source of the information confidential, however, this may not be possible in dealing with the employee involved.
- 6.2. On becoming aware of a serious or potentially serious alcohol problem the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service will, in discussion with the employee, encourage referral to the Occupational Health Department via the Human Resources department. The Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service will advise the employee of his/her right to be accompanied by a Union representative or work place colleague in any discussion.
- 6.3. The Occupational Health Department will offer support and advice and, where appropriate through the general practitioner, facilitate referral to another agency and monitor progress. Subject to the rules of professional confidentiality the Occupational

Health Department will provide advice and information to the Human Resources Department as to the employee's state of fitness in relation to work.

- 6.4. It is of course, also possible for an employee to choose to seek advice direct from a general practitioner or another outside agency. If this is the case the normal standards of confidentiality will be observed. Where time off work for treatment during the working day is needed, the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service will need to be informed of the proposed absence in the same way as for any other health related issue.
- 6.5. Exceptionally, where the health problem is considered serious and resulted in a considerable length of absence from work, arrangements for a return to work will be overseen by the Occupational Health Department working in conjunction with the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service and, where appropriate, the Human Resources Manager.
- 6.6. Where dependence is not eliminated or controlled sufficiently to allow resumption of normal working arrangements within a reasonable period of time<sup>1</sup>, and /or no suitable alternative employment can be found, the University may consider termination of employment under the Sickness Procedures.
- 6.7. Disciplinary aspects in relation to the "problem drinker"
  - 6.7.1. Alcohol dependence is not in itself a disciplinary offence and will be dealt with as any other health problem. The aim is rehabilitation and support, re-entry to the work situation being an important part of the process. It is also important that the appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained, as would be the case with any other health issue. However, inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour whilst under the influence of alcohol may warrant disciplinary action being considered.
  - 6.7.2. Where a Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service is satisfied that an offence or work problem e.g. absenteeism, violent behaviour, or substandard work results from or reflects alcohol use, this must be taken into account in determining the appropriate course of action.
  - 6.7.3. In other than the more serious cases, where the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service and employee acknowledge the health problem and agree a course of action aimed at rehabilitation, disciplinary action may not be appropriate.
  - 6.7.4.
  - 6.7.5. In the more serious cases, disciplinary action including dismissal may be appropriate. However, where an employee acknowledges the problem and agrees to accept appropriate help and/or treatment, this will be taken into account in determining whether, and at what level, disciplinary sanctions are appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> A reasonable period of time" will be judged on the facts of each individual case, the medical advice and the needs of the department appertaining at the time.

## **Section B – Substance abuse and employment**

### **7. Introduction**

- 7.1. The misuse of drugs whether prescribed or illicit, together with volatile substances - will collectively be referred to as “substance abuse” for the purpose of this policy. (See Appendix 2)
- 7.2. The University recognises that excessive or inappropriate use of drugs may result in physical and/or mental illness and may significantly affect work performance.
- 7.3. As an employer, the University has an obligation to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its staff who may be exposed to the effects of substance abuse.
- 7.4. Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the University or an individual, would be colluding in a crime if it were to “knowingly permit the production or supply of any controlled drugs, the smoking of cannabis, or certain other activities to take place” on its premises. The University will not allow staff to be involved in illegal drug activities whilst on University premises. Staff should note that the University will take disciplinary action including referring offences to the Police and any drugs will also be handed over to the Police.
- 7.5. The University may also take action against staff where they are involved in illegal drug activities off University premises, if such activity may have an impact on the university, students or staff. A separate policy on drugs has been developed for the use of students.
- 7.6. It should also be noted that those University staff holding Honorary Contracts with NHS Trusts are also subject to the policies of that Trust whilst working on Trust premises.
- 7.7. It is intended that both sections of this policy shall apply to all levels and grades of staff working in the University regardless of contractual status.
- 7.8. Where the terms Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service is used it should be interpreted as being the line manager appropriate to the employee involved.

### **8. Objectives of this policy**

- 8.1. To facilitate early recognition of, and if necessary supportive treatment for, any employees suspected of having a substance abuse problem.
- 8.2. To outline appropriate management action where an employee is suspected of having substance abuse problems.
- 8.3. To inform staff about the possible consequences if they are caught using or supplying controlled drugs.

### **9. Raising awareness**

This policy and the standards embodied in it can only be effectively implemented through an increase in the level of awareness throughout the workforce. To this end the Occupational Health Department will provide publicity campaigns, information and training events.

## **10. Management of employees suspected of having a substance abuse problem**

- 10.1. Substance abuse in itself is not a disciplinary offence (unless it takes place whilst on the premises and/or has an adverse effect on the individuals performance or brings the University into disrepute) and in most cases will be dealt with as any other health problem. Whilst acknowledging the University's overriding responsibility to ensure the safety of staff and others, the management aim in relation to substance abuse is rehabilitation with appropriate guidance and support provided by the Occupational Health Department. The appropriate standards of confidentiality will be observed throughout.
- 10.2. A suspected problem cannot be ignored; to do so would be risking committing an offence particularly in relation to the Misuse of Drugs Act.
- 10.3. The occurrence of substance abuse may come to the attention of Deans of Faculties/Heads of Schools/Services in several ways, for example, directly from the employee concerned, through information supplied by a colleague or other person, or through the characteristics identified in Appendix 1.
- 10.4. On becoming aware of a potential problem the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service will, in discussion with the employee and if the problem is confirmed, refer him/her to the Occupational Health Department via the Human Resources Department. An employee may be accompanied by a workplace Union representative or colleague in any discussion and must be advised of this.
- 10.5. The Occupational Health Department will:
  - provide support and advice;
  - where appropriate facilitate referral to other agencies;
  - monitor progress;
  - provide appropriate information and advice to the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service via the Human Resources Department subject to the rules of professional confidentiality.
- 10.6. It is possible for an employee to seek advice direct from a General Practitioner, another outside agency or source other than the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service e.g. the Human Resources Department or the Occupational Health Department. If this is the case the normal standards of professional confidentiality will be observed. Where time off work during the working day is needed for treatment the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service will need to be informed of the absence, the same as for any other health related appointment.
- 10.7. Exceptionally where the health problem is considered serious and has resulted in a considerable length of absence from work, arrangements for a return to work will be overseen by the Occupational Health Department working in conjunction with the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service and where appropriate, the Human Resources Manager.
- 10.8. When problems related to substance abuse are not eliminated or controlled sufficiently to allow a resumption of normal working arrangements within a reasonable period of time<sup>2</sup>, and/or no suitable alternative employment can be found,

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<sup>2</sup> A reasonable period of time" will be judged on the facts of each individual case, the medical advice and the needs of the department".

the University may consider termination of employment under the University's sickness procedures.

## **11. Disciplinary aspects in relation to substance abuse**

- 11.1. Where a Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service has reasonable belief, which can be substantiated, that an offence or work problem results from or reflects possible substance abuse, this must be taken into account in determining the appropriate course of action.
- 11.2. In other than the more serious cases, where the Dean of Faculty/Head of School/Service and the employee acknowledge the health problem and agree a course of action aimed at rehabilitation, disciplinary action may be inappropriate. This may well not be the case in the event of any subsequent failure to maintain acceptable standards of performance and conduct in relation to substance abuse.
- 11.3. In the more serious of cases, disciplinary action including dismissal may be appropriate. However, where an employee acknowledges a health problem related to substance abuse and agrees to accept appropriate help and/or treatment, this will be taken into account in determining whether, and at what level, disciplinary sanctions are appropriate.
- 11.4. In serious cases, e.g. where the employee has been suspended due to suspected substance abuse whilst at work or where support/treatment has not controlled or eliminated the problem sufficiently to allow a return to work and where the employee involved is professionally qualified and holding professional registration with their appropriate professional council e.g. GMC etc, consideration should be given as to whether that professional council should be contacted in order for them to take the appropriate action as laid out in their constitution.
- 11.5. Staff should be left in no doubt as to the possible consequences (i.e. disciplinary action and police involvement) if they are caught using, growing, possessing and supplying controlled drugs in the workplace.

# Appendix 1

## Recognising substance abuse

It is important to recognise that the following characteristics, in isolation may appear insignificant, but when appearing in combinations may indicate the presence of a substance abuse related problem.

- Absenteeism:
  - Multiple unauthorised leave
  - Excessive sick leave
  - Absence on certain days, particularly near weekends
  - Excessive lateness
  - Leaving work early
  - Frequent occurrences of certain illnesses e.g. diarrhoea, colds, flu, gastritis etc.
  
- High Accident Rate:
  - Frequent accidents both in and out of work
  
- Difficulty in Concentration:
  - Work requires greater effort
  - Tasks take more time
  - Difficulty in recalling instructions, details etc.
  - Increasing difficulty in handling complex assignments
  
- Spasmodic Work Patterns:
  - Alternate periods of high and low productivity
  - Increasing general unreliability and unpredictability
  
- Generally Deteriorating Job Efficiency (unusual for the individual):
  - Missed deadlines
  - Mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement
  - Wasting materials, supplies etc.
  - Making bad decisions
  - Improbable excuses for poor work performance
  
- Poor Employee Relations at Work (unusual for the individual):
  - Over-reaction to real or imagined criticism
  - Unreasonable resentments
  - Irritability
  - Complaints from co-workers
  - Avoidance of line manager or colleagues



## Appendix 2

“Substance” in the context of this policy includes:

- Illegal Drugs e.g. cannabis, amphetamine, Ecstasy, heroin cocaine.
- Controlled prescribed drugs e.g. methadone, diamorphine, DF118, tuinal, anabolic steroids.
- Other prescribed drugs e.g. diazepam, temazepam.
- Other substances e.g. over the counter medication, solvents etc. which when used inappropriately or excessively can be dangerous.