

Policy on alcohol and drug misuse (staff)

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Updated March 2007 following consultation with senior managers and the trades unions and to add clarification to the drug misuse paragraph (4); update references to the former Employee Support Unit (paragraphs 6, 10 & 11); and update the sources of help (Appendix 1)

Policy updated September 2011 following consultation with the unions; SMG & SRC

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April 2025: Reviewed by HR and Health & Safety teams. Clarifications made.

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Policy on alcohol and drug misuse (Staff)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The university has a legal obligation to provide and maintain a safe working environment and to discharge its duty of care to staff and others on university premises. We therefore seek to ensure that use of either alcohol or drugs does not have an adverse effect on the safe and efficient running of the university or the health of our staff.
- 1.2 Alcohol or drug misuse can impact negatively on health and safety and/or work performance and may result in unacceptable conduct towards other individuals. We therefore expect our staff not to misuse either alcohol or drugs during working hours on University premises/during University-led activities.
- 1.3 Staff are asked not to cover up for colleagues that may have an alcohol or drug misuse problem as this will not help the member of staff in the longer term.

2. Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- To outline our policy on consumption of drugs and alcohol at work and the responsibilities of staff in this regard;
- To support managers in dealing with potential drug and/or alcohol misuse/dependence by staff;
- To outline the assistance and support available to members of staff when drug and alcohol misuse/dependency is identified;
- To encourage and support self-referral or intervention at an early stage of misuse or dependency; and
- To assist in maintaining levels of performance and work quality and reduce drug and alcohol misuse related absence.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all London Metropolitan University staff.

4. Definitions of terms used in this policy

The term '**drug misuse**' refers to the use, possession, trade, distribution and other activities involving illegal drugs controlled under relevant drugs related legislation, such as cannabis, ecstasy, heroin, cocaine and amphetamines; the misuse of legally prescribed drugs (e.g. tranquillisers or sleeping pills) and other substances (e.g. solvents).

Alcohol is considered to be a drug but is listed separately because society tends to regard it differently from other drugs. Measures to deal with alcohol problems in the workplace are however similar to those for other drugs and substances.

A dependency problem is defined as any drug abuse which interferes with a member of staff's health and social functioning and/or performance or behaviour. There are two types of dependency. One is of a physical nature, where the person needs regular amounts of a substance to function 'normally'. The second type is psychological: the effect of habitual substance use. This occurs when individuals are trying to deal with stress, depression, or anxiety; or are trying to make themselves feel better.

5. Consumption of alcohol and drugs during the working day

- 5.1 We recognise that staff have the right to consume alcohol off university premises but positively discourage consumption of alcohol during the working day as the adverse effects of alcohol last beyond the immediate period the alcohol is consumed.
- 5.2 Staff must not report for duty under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances and ensure that they are fit to carry out their role at all times.
- 5.3 Specifically, those staff who perform safety-critical roles or engage in activities for which alcohol or substance consumption might endanger their safety or that of others, must not possess, be under the influence of, or consume alcohol or substances during working hours. This includes but is not limited to operating any vehicle, machinery, tools or equipment and the handling of potentially dangerous substances.
- 5.4 Staff are not permitted to operate equipment, work in laboratories and workshops or perform other work related activities on University premises under the influence of alcohol or substances.
- 5.5 Where an individual may be required to take prescribed medication, if any doubt exists as to the probability of such medication impairing the ability of the individual to perform their work tasks in a safe manner, then advice must be sought prior to the commencement of the activity e.g. from medical practitioner.
- 5.6 **Academic content and research**
Academics and staff responsible for experiments involving the consumption or use of alcohol or substances must ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken and that an adequate control of inventory is in place.
- 5.7 There are, however, certain circumstances when managers may make an exception, for example at Christmas and other special occasions/University events. On such occasions, advance approval should be sought from the Dean or Director. Staff will be expected to behave in a responsible manner at all times. Drivers, for example, are advised to find alternative means of transport home.

6. Possible indicators of alcohol and/or drug misuse

The misuse of drugs and alcohol by members of staff may come to light in various ways. The following behaviours may indicate drug and alcohol misuse, especially when arising in combination or as a pattern over a period of time.

- erratic performance
- unusual irritability or aggression
- patterns of depression or fatigue (often after the weekend)
- a tendency to become confused
- sudden mood swings
- deterioration in working relationships including overreaction to real or imagined criticism, unreasonable resentments and isolation from colleagues.
- irrational and increasingly strange behaviour
- arguments and withdrawal from social situations
- increased short-term sickness absence
- poor time-keeping
- increased number of mistakes

Other factors such as illness or stress can however also produce these signs and it is therefore recommended that each individual situation be thoroughly examined before any action is taken.

We recognise that there might be a difference between a member of staff for whom drugs, alcohol or other substances have become a problem and a member of staff who is found to be in breach of this policy. The latter would normally be seen as a conduct problem, which would be addressed under the [disciplinary procedure](#) and the former as a potential health issue, which would be dealt with under the [sickness absence procedure](#) but this would depend on the individual circumstances and the impact of the member of staff's dependency or conduct on their duties and responsibilities at the university.

7. Dealing with unacceptable conduct or unsatisfactory performance at work related to alcohol or drugs consumption

- 7.1 If a manager considers that their concerns about a member of staff's performance and/or conduct might be related to alcohol or drug misuse, they are advised to arrange to meet them as soon as possible.
- 7.2 At this meeting the manager is advised to discuss their concerns regarding the member of staff's performance or conduct including the behavioural indicators (section 6 refers), which suggest possible drug or alcohol misuse.
- 7.3 If, following this meeting, the manager's view remains that the member of staff's unsatisfactory work performance or conduct is due to either alcohol or drug misuse, they are advised to inform

the member of staff to this effect and alert them to the assistance that the university is able to offer them to help them to overcome this dependency (Section 8 refers).

- 7.4 The manager is also advised to inform the member of staff that, whilst this support is being provided, the university requires their performance and/or conduct to improve to an acceptable standard and that if improvement is not made it may be necessary to take disciplinary action.
- 7.5 If the member of staff does not accept that alcohol or drugs are the cause of their performance or conduct problems (whether or not the manager believes otherwise) the matter should be dealt with as a disciplinary or ill-health issue, whichever is judged appropriate. Encouragement should be given during all stages of the disciplinary or ill health procedure to assist the member of staff in recognising their drug or alcohol dependence.

8. Employee support

- 8.1 Staff who consider that they may have an alcohol or drug-related problem/dependency are encouraged to seek confidential help and advice from the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (counselling service); the [Occupational Health Service](#); their GP; or relevant external agencies (see Appendix 1).
- 8.2 All parties should acknowledge that a full recovery may take time.

9. Absence due to treatment for alcohol or drug-related problems/dependency

- 9.1 Any appointments made to receive treatment during work hours should be agreed in advance with the line manager.
- 9.2 Members of staff may need to take sick leave while undergoing any treatment and will be required to produce medical certificates to cover any period(s) of sickness absence that exceed seven calendar days.)
- 9.3 Any prolonged absences will be dealt with in the same way as any other long-term sickness absence (under our sickness absence procedure) and may ultimately lead to termination of employment upon the advice of our [Occupational Health Service](#).

10. Relapse

- 10.1 When a member of staff who has received assistance and support suffers a relapse, the case will be considered on individual merit. Advice will be obtained from our [Occupational Health Service](#) as to how much more treatment or rehabilitation time is likely to be required for a full recovery. At the manager's discretion, more treatment or rehabilitation time may be given to help the member of staff to recover fully.

10.2 If the member of staff relapses on more than one occasion, unless there are very exceptional circumstances, the ongoing performance and/or conduct issues will be dealt with under the [sickness absence or disciplinary procedures](#) as appropriate.

11. Dependency raised as a mitigating factor in a disciplinary interview or hearing

11.1 If a member of staff's alcohol or drug problem/dependence is raised as a mitigating factor in a disciplinary interview or hearing, it is recommended that the interview or hearing be postponed and the member of staff then referred to our [Occupational Health Service](#) for advice on the assertion made. It is also recommended that the member of staff is encouraged to seek support and advice from our [Employee Assistance Programme](#). Following receipt of the advice from the [Occupational Health Service](#) the disciplinary process would be reconvened.

12. Confidentiality

A member of staff with an alcohol or drug misuse problem has the same rights to confidentiality as they would for any other health-related condition. This information is considered to be sensitive personal data under the current data protection legislation and therefore should not be disclosed to anyone other than the Occupational Health Service or Employee Assistance Programme provider, without the express consent of the member of staff.

In some situations, it may be the case that, in order to resolve the problem, the member of staff may not be able to continue in their job whilst they are receiving treatment. In such an instance the reason why the member of staff is away from work should only be disclosed to those who need to know e.g. the line manager and the Occupational Health Service or Employee Assistance Programme provider.

Any breach of confidentiality will be investigated and where appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

13. Serious misconduct caused by alcohol or drugs

13.1 If drugs are found or suspected to be sold, it should be reported immediately to the university's security team. Selling illegal drugs is a criminal offence, so the local police will typically become involved. They will handle the legal aspects of the situation, including any arrests or charges.

13.2 When a member of staff consumes alcohol or drugs during the working day such that their work performance is affected, it is recommended that the manager meet with the member of staff to advise them that this is unacceptable and they may be sent home. If the member of staff is severely incapacitated they may need to be escorted from university premises and taken to a place where they are considered to be safe. Consideration may also need to be given to suspension from duty under the disciplinary procedure.

Such occurrences will be investigated by the line manager and may result in possible disciplinary action, which could ultimately lead to dismissal.

- 13.2 Members of staff found in possession of illegal drugs (as defined by relevant drug related legislation) or believed to be buying or selling illegal drugs will, following an investigation in accordance with the disciplinary procedure, be deemed to be committing an act of gross misconduct which may result in summary dismissal.

14. Monitoring and evaluating the policy

The effect of this policy will be monitored by looking at the following areas:

- number of accidents and periods of absenteeism which can clearly be related to alcohol or drug misuse;
- disciplinary warnings (including dismissal) relating to alcohol or drug misuse;
- clarity of rules governing the consumption of alcohol during the working day;
- availability of non-alcoholic drinks at University functions;
- awareness of sensible drinking and basic facts about alcohol; and
- how the respective responsibilities under this policy are dealt with.

Appendix 1

External sources of advice and help

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

Free National Helpline: 0800 9177 650

Telephone: 0845 769 7555

email : help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

[Drinkaware](#)

Camden and Islington Alcohol Advisory Service

[Camden & Islington Alcohol Advisory Service](#) is part of Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust. This is a confidential outpatient service offering advice and treatment, assessment, community detox and individual key working. Sessions are held in different locations in Camden and Islington.

[Narcotics Anonymous UK](#)