

Alcohol and Substance Misuse Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance provides advice on different situations involving drugs and alcohol. It supports the University's commitment to providing a safe, productive and supportive working environment. It sets clear expectations of behaviour including during work-related social events. Advice is also provided for managers supporting employees with drug and alcohol issues. Following this guidance helps the University meet its legal obligations and uphold its duty of care to all members of the workforce. This guidance applies to all staff categories.

2. Definitions

References to drugs in this guidance cover illegal drugs, "legal highs" the misuse of prescription drugs (whether obtained legally or illegally) and the misuse of other substances (such as solvents). Legal highs are substances which mimic the effects of illegal drugs but are not covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act. Any changes in legislation, which may decriminalise the use of drugs for personal use, will not affect the application of this guidance.

Alcohol misuse is a broad term that encompasses situations where a person drinks in a way that is harmful. Alcohol dependency, also known as alcoholism or alcohol addiction, describes the most serious form of alcohol misuse, where a person has a strong, often uncontrollable, need to drink. This guidance uses "issues with drug or alcohol use" as a catch all term for the broad range of situations that may arise.

Some activities and tasks are potentially hazardous and fitness to undertake these activities is a critical health and safety requirement, e.g. handling hazardous substances or operating heavy machinery. Employees undertaking these types of activities should refer to the department's local rules or the relevant safe operating procedures for information on the safety requirements that apply. Any employee that is unsure of the safety requirements that they need to adhere to, including with reference to alcohol, should ask their line manager or Department Safety Officer for clarification.

3. Prescription medication

There may be instances where an employee is taking prescription medication, in accordance with medical direction, that could have an impact on their work e.g. that make it unsafe to drive or operate heavy machinery or that affect concentration. An employee does not have to tell their manager details of their medical condition or what medication that they are taking but should discuss the impact of medication at work. The manager should discuss and agree to any reasonable adjustments needed to an employee's duties for the period that they are taking the medication. This approach will apply where an employee has been prescribed cannabis or cannabis-based products for medical use.

4. Risks and expectations

The [Health and Safety policy](#) defines the University's approach to ensuring the safety of all members of its workforce. It states that all employees are expected to take reasonable care of themselves and others who may be affected by what they do or don't do.

Consumption of alcohol or drugs can lead to impaired judgment, performance and decision-making, which could pose a safety risk to the employee and others (e.g. colleagues, students and visitors), and put the University at risk.

Employees are expected to use good judgement to ensure that if any alcohol is consumed before work or during a work break it does not impair their ability to undertake their role safely, effectively and professionally. Employees should not drink alcohol at work unless they are at a social event during working time where alcohol may be served (see section 5).

5. Social events and situations

It is recognised that during University life there are events and situations where alcohol may be served e.g. team lunches, socialising with colleagues at the end of the working week, sporting events, celebrations to mark significant events, attending dinners, conferences or work-related hospitality events. Some events may take place within a University setting during or after work. Others may take place outside of normal working hours or at a different location e.g. when representing the University at meetings such as when meeting with government officials or funders or when undertaking collaborative visits.

In any work-related situation where alcohol is available, employees are expected to exercise good judgement and moderate the amount that they drink to ensure that they behave safely and courteously and in accordance with the University's Code of Behaviour. In all situations employees are expected to behave lawfully, this includes complying with legal requirements when driving or cycling.

From a legal perspective, social events, including those outside of working hours like a Christmas or summer party or a leaving event, are considered an extension of employment. Therefore, the University could be held vicariously liable for an employee's behaviour in these situations. For example, if an employee commits an act of sexual misconduct, has a fight or causes an accident after drinking at a work function, both the University and the employee may be held responsible.

Where alcohol is served at a work event, non-alcoholic drinks should also be available. This gives employees a choice and accommodates anyone that chooses not to drink alcohol e.g. for religious or health reasons. Consider scheduling an event where alcohol will be served towards the end of the working day so that employees do not need to return to work afterwards. A briefing note has been produced in appendix 2 providing a helpful reminder to staff about University-related social events for managers to adapt and use. Managers are encouraged to share this with members of their team prior to a social event by way of reminder.

6. Manager actions

A manager may have noticed an employee behaving in a way that has given them cause for concern e.g. erratic or out of character behaviour, unexplained decline in productivity, more accidents, near-misses or injuries, smelling alcohol or drugs. Alternatively, a manager may have been alerted to concerning behaviour by another employee or by a third party. The health and safety and wellbeing of the employee and others should be prioritised in the first instance. The manager should discuss their concerns with the employee at the earliest appropriate

opportunity. Managers may wish to seek advice from their HR contact about how to approach the situation with the employee. The manager should avoid making assumptions, as there may be a variety of reasons for the behaviour observed.

In talking to an employee, the manager should:

- Let them know that they are concerned about them, using examples of behaviour to explain their concerns.
- Ask the employee about their behaviour, approaching the issue sensitively and with an open mind.
- Invite the employee to share with them anything they may wish to make them aware of that may be affecting them and their behaviour.
- Be supportive and non-judgmental.

If the employee discloses that they are having issues with drugs or alcohol, the manager should:

- Suggest they speak to their GP in the first instance, who will have up to date information on the support that is available locally.
- Explain the support that is available from the University Staff Counselling Service and refer the employee if they agree to this.
- Make a referral to Occupational Health where needed to inform decision making and to consider reasonable adjustments.
- Explain to the employee the support arrangements that will apply during treatment (see section 8).
- Be clear that expectations around the use of drugs and alcohol still apply during and after treatment i.e. that they must not attend work in an unfit state to fulfil their role, they must comply with the Code of Behaviour and with legal requirements when driving or cycling.

Remember that an employee is likely to find it difficult to talk about issues with alcohol or drug use. An employee may disclose that their alcohol or drug use is linked to another issue e.g. physical or mental ill health or as a coping mechanism for a particular situation or different problem. Ensure these conversations take place privately. Only share information disclosed with others that have a legitimate need to know, such as Occupational Health, and always in consultation with the employee. Managers should regularly review and follow up with the employee throughout their treatment and seek advice from their HR contact where needed e.g. if an employee experiences a relapse.

7. Colleague actions

If an employee thinks that a colleague is having issues with drug or alcohol use, they may initially encourage them to seek help if they feel able to do this. Alternatively, an employee may wish to share their concerns with their manager or their HR contact.

If an employee is aware that a colleague is unfit to work because of the use of alcohol or drugs, they should inform their manager straight away, especially if they witness unsafe behaviour.

8. Support and treatment

Any employee experiencing issues with alcohol or drug use is encouraged to seek help as soon as possible. Information on sources of support is given in appendix 1. Employees are strongly encouraged to speak to their manager who will discuss arrangements that can be made at work to support them during treatment.

The University will allow reasonable paid time-off for medical treatment e.g. to attend support meetings or counselling that cannot be arranged outside of working time. In some situations, it may be appropriate for an employee to take sick leave, for example if they are admitted to a rehabilitation facility.

Wherever possible an employee should continue in their current role during treatment, however it may be necessary to amend their duties or temporarily redeploy an employee to another role if possible. The manager should ensure that the approach taken is informed by a risk assessment and is appropriate to an employee's individual circumstances. Advice should be sought from Occupational Health at the earliest opportunity. Once an employee has completed their treatment, their manager should support them to return to their original role and duties.

9. Capability and Conduct

If an employee comes to work and their manager reasonably suspects that they are unfit to undertake their role due to the use of alcohol or drugs, they should be sent home immediately to keep them and others safe. Alternatively, in some situations, an employee may need medical attention. If the employee has driven or cycled to work, it may be necessary for their manager to arrange alternative transport to keep them safe.

On the employee's return to work their manager should discuss what happened to establish if this was a one-off incident or if they have an underlying issue with alcohol or drug use.

The manager can seek advice from their HR contact on how to manage the situation.

Where there is an underlying issue with drug or alcohol use, this will wherever possible be treated as a health matter with support offered to access treatment (see section 8). For reasons relating to safety and dignity at work appropriate standards of conduct and performance are expected during and following treatment.

If an employee does not recognise that they have an issue with drug or alcohol use, chooses not to seek help or stops treatment, and their performance or conduct is affected, action may be taken under the capability procedure or the relevant disciplinary procedure.

An incident of misconduct or serious misconduct following the use of drugs or alcohol e.g. damaging University property or sexual harassment, will be addressed in line with the relevant disciplinary procedure. If it is determined that the employee has an underlying issue with drugs or alcohol this may be considered as a relevant factor when considering a disciplinary sanction and recommendations.

Possessing or supplying illegal drugs is a criminal offence. It is also a criminal offence for an employer to knowingly allow its premises to be used for the use or supply of illegal drugs. An

employee may be subject to disciplinary action if they use illegal drugs during working time, on work premise or possess, supply or sell drugs at work. Where an employee has broken the law, they may also be referred to the police.

10. Risk assessments

Some University employees work at venues where alcohol is served or serve alcohol as part of their role e.g. in catering and event management environments. The relevant senior manager is responsible for ensuring that a local risk assessment is conducted for any situation or location where employees serve alcohol or work where alcohol is present. Control measures should be established to address any identified risks, including minimising the risk of employees experiencing sexual harassment, physical violence, discrimination or other forms of unacceptable behaviour.

Control measures should be clearly documented in a way that employees and managers can refer to. Managers are responsible for communicating control measures to all relevant employees, answering questions and explaining them to new members of staff during induction.

Local risk assessments and control measures need to be reviewed periodically to keep them up to date. If working practices change, the risk assessment and control measures should be reviewed and amended if needed. Following any incident related to alcohol, the local risk assessment and control measures should be revisited and updated or strengthened as needed to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future. Managers needing guidance on the risk assessment process should contact the Safety Office.

11. Employees requesting support

If you think that you may have an issue with alcohol or drug use, you should speak to your line manager and be as open as possible so that they can support you to get the help you need. We recommend that you speak to your GP who will be able to provide up-to-date information on how to access local support. Your line manager may also make a referral to Occupational Health. If for any reason you are unable to approach your line manager, you can speak to your HR contact.

Asking for help can be difficult, but anything you share with your line manager or HR will be treated sensitively, confidentially and without judgement whilst protecting the health and safety of you and those you work alongside. Other sources of assistance are detailed in appendix 1.

Appendix 1 External sources of support

In the first instance, employees having issues with drug or alcohol use are advised to speak to their GP, who will have up to date information on the support that is available locally.

Organisations providing support with alcohol use are detailed below:

Organisation	Contact details and information
Change Grow Live (CGL)	Change Grow Live website Cambridgeshire's Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service, provides information and advice on where people can go for local help.
Alcohol Change UK	Alcohol Change UK website Alcohol Change UK is a leading UK alcohol charity that offers support for people looking to change their drinking habits. It provides information about alcohol research, facts sheets and interactive tools that will help people seeking to reduce their alcohol intake. This website also has useful information about the types of free treatment available, provided by either the NHS or other organisations.
Drinkline	Free Helpline: 0800 917 8282 Drinkline runs a 24 hours a day, confidential helpline for people who are concerned about their own or someone else's drinking.
NHS Choices: drinking and alcohol	NHS Choices website National Health Service advice page on safe drinking, units and tips on cutting down.
Drinkaware	Drinkaware website Drinkaware is a charity that works to reduce alcohol misuse and alcohol-related harm in the UK. It provides public education programmes and resources help create awareness such as the free Drinkaware app to track drinking and help people to drink within the recommended limits.
Alcoholics Anonymous	Alcoholics Anonymous website Phone 08009177650

	AA is an organisation of individuals who share their experience with each other and help others to recover from alcoholism.
Al-Anon	Al-Anon website Phone: 08000 086 811 Provides support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking, regardless of whether that person is still drinking or not.

Organisations providing support related to drug use are detailed below:

Organisation	Contact details and information
NHS Choices Website	NHS Choices website National Health Service advice page.
FRANK	FRANK website Phone: 0300 12306600 National drugs awareness site and confidential service for anyone wanting information, advice or support about any aspect of drug use.
Drug Addicts Anonymous	Drug Addicts Anonymous website Phone: 0300 030 3000 Provides a helpline and holds regular meetings where individuals share their experience and seek help.
Narcotics Anonymous	Narcotics Anonymous website Phone: 0300 999 1212 N.A. is a non-profit fellowship of recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stop using drugs.

Appendix 2

Briefing note on University-related social events

This briefing note is a reminder of the expected standards of behaviour at work-related social events held during or outside normal working hours and may include in-person and virtual activities such as Christmas parties, team lunches, and conferences. External social events, where individuals are invited in the capacity of their University role, are also considered work-related.

The University encourages colleagues to enjoy these events but expects appropriate and responsible behaviour to ensure a welcoming atmosphere for all. As these events are an extension of employment, the University's duties continue to apply, including preventing both sexual harassment and discriminatory or negligent acts.

During any work-related social event, all attendees (including visitors, volunteers, retired staff and other third parties) are expected to:

- Consume alcohol in moderation only and ensure it does not impair the ability to work afterwards if needed. Avoid alcohol altogether if the work involves safety-critical tasks. Ensure you are within the legal drink-drive limit if driving after an event.
- Not use or be under the influence of illegal drugs.
- Treat others with courtesy and professionalism. Be aware that the University's [Dignity at Work Policy](#) and [Code of Behaviour](#) continue to apply and bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct or victimisation will not be tolerated. Aggressive behaviour, including verbal abuse, is also unacceptable.
- Not behave in a way that could cause reputational damage to the University or risks breaching confidential University information.

If inappropriate behaviour is experienced during a work-related social event, individuals should be advised to speak to their line manager in the first instance, or contact a [Dignity at Work Contact](#), relevant local HR colleague, or an [HR Business Partner](#) for confidential advice on the reporting process. For further information on the University's proactive measures to prevent inappropriate behaviour, refer to the [Dignity at Work Policy](#) and the [Breaking the Silence website](#).