Newcastle University

SUBSTANCE ABUSE – MANAGERS’ GUIDANCE NOTES

Scope
This guidance is intended to assist managers in dealing with situations involving members of staff and possible substance abuse including:

- Inappropriate or excessive alcohol consumption
- Abuse of prescription drugs or other substances affecting conduct/performance
- Abuse of unlawful drugs

In most cases, the issue will arise as a result of problems with the individual’s performance or behaviour. It may also arise as a purely welfare issue where no explicit behavioural or performance problems have arisen. The guidance is intended to be applicable to all members of staff, including Contingent, Guest, Visiting and Honorary staff, but should be applied proportionately bearing in mind the extent of the commitment/contract between the individual and the University.

While alcohol may be a common element in substance abuse, it is important to be aware that other substances such as solvents, unlawful drugs and prescription drugs can also be involved.

Alcohol consumption at work
As a general rule, alcohol should not be consumed at work except at social events sanctioned by management, such as a celebratory event. These will normally be held at the end of the working day. These events should not allow sufficient alcohol consumption for staff to become drunk or intoxicated. As a manager, you will need to exercise judgment to determine whether, for example, an individual’s alcohol consumption is appropriate in the particular circumstances. The University’s duty of care to its employees extends to University social events and to safe travel home afterwards.

Under the influence at work
As a general principle, no member of staff should be at work when their judgement or performance is impaired by alcohol or any other drug or substance. This would constitute prima facie grounds for disciplinary procedures to be initiated. It is essential that no-one is engaged in safety critical work when their performance may be so impaired. It is your responsibility as a manager to identify any situations where, in your judgement, you believe a member of staff is not capable of carrying out their work properly and effectively. In such circumstances you should send the individual home by a suitable and safe means. (In exceptional cases you may decide that the individual should be sent to hospital). This is to
protect the University, the individual and his/her colleagues from possible risk of damage/harm. You will then need to have a discussion with the individual concerned on the next available working day, which might lead to the matter being dealt with under the disciplinary procedure. You should also be aware of the reputational risk that can arise if, for example, a public-facing employee has alcohol on his or her breath.

While the University does not have explicit rules for blood alcohol levels, even at concentrations below the legal drink/driving limit, alcohol reduces physical coordination and reaction speeds. It also affects thinking, judgement and mood. While there is no general prohibition on members of staff having an occasional drink in their own time during the working day this should not be more than one unit of alcohol; this is approximately equivalent to half a pint of beer or lager, a small glass of wine or a single measure of spirits. As a manager, you are entitled to speak to a member of your staff if you consider that their alcohol consumption is affecting their work, either directly reducing their level of performance, or from a reputational perspective, and to ask that consumption is either reduced or stopped altogether in certain circumstances.

Performance/Conduct
Performance/conduct issues, including unacceptable levels of absence, should always be addressed as and when they arise. More detailed guidance is available in the Capability and Disciplinary Procedures and their accompanying codes of practice and in the Sickness Absence Policy.

Where you believe substance abuse is a contributing factor you are advised to first allow the member of staff the opportunity to put this forward as an explanation of his/her performance or conduct. If it is your judgement that he/she appears to be intoxicated as a result of drug/alcohol/substance consumption, you should ask him or her if he or she is alright. Depending on the circumstances, it may well be appropriate for you to ask if he or she has taken anything (if, for example, the behaviour is strange). It would certainly be appropriate for you to enquire if he or she has been drinking if you could smell alcohol on the breath.

As stated above, if you consider the individual unfit to be at work and/or that s/he may represent a safety hazard you should send the individual home, or to hospital where you consider there may be a health risk.

Where there are longer standing performance issues which you believe may be caused, at least in part, by some form of substance abuse the following points may be helpful.

- The initial approach should normally be sympathetic and helpful, being prepared to treat the substance misuse as an illness/addiction that the University would support the individual to overcome. This approach is conditional upon the individual recognising the issue of substance misuse and actively co-operating in attempts to overcome it.
Performance targets may be set in the normal way, as set out in the Capability procedure and code of practice. When reviewing progress towards meeting these targets, achievements or setbacks in dealing with substance misuse may be taken into account in a similar way to other personal or health issues. While they may give some cause for a sympathetic approach and possibly an extension of time, ultimately it will be essential for the employee to achieve the required level of performance.

As a manager, you will be concerned for the welfare and well-being of your member of staff at a personal level; the University has a duty of care towards all of its employees during the course of their employment. You also have a responsibility to ensure that all your staff achieve and maintain acceptable levels of conduct and performance. Where conduct or performance is not at an acceptable level you must ensure that the member of staff is made fully aware, following the guidance set out in the Capability Procedure and code of practice. If the individual is assessed as being unlikely to achieve an acceptable standard within an acceptable timeframe it is likely to be appropriate to use the full extent of the Capability Procedure, ending in possible termination of employment.

It may be appropriate to refer the individual to Occupational Health where you have discussed the substance misuse issue with the individual and have decided that a referral may help. This could be to:
- better understand the impact on the individual’s ability to carry out their employment
- advise on the likely prognosis of an addiction from a medical/clinical perspective

Welfare of Staff

As a manager it is appropriate that you are sensitive towards the welfare of your staff. If you think that a member of your staff appears to be not their normal self, in terms of their appearance, demeanour, etc., it is reasonable to take them to one side and express your concerns. Be aware of any signals that the employee may be looking for an opportunity to have such a discussion. You can also refer the employee to the Occupational Health Service where he or she requires further help or advice. While you will be supportive if the employee shares any problems, which may include substance abuse (possibly as a means of coping) you will have to accept that s/he may not want to discuss it. Where this is the case, at least you have offered your support which may be taken up at a later date. Common signs of alcohol or other substance abuse are listed in the Appendix. The University website contains links to advice on alcohol and drug use, including advice on recommended limits for alcohol consumption (see https://my.ncl.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/health.htm)
**Unlawful Drugs**

The University cannot condone any kind of unlawful activity on its premises. If you suspect there is any consumption of unlawful substance on University premises you must inform your HR Team at the earliest opportunity. If you believe that a member of staff is using unlawful substances but not on University premises you would approach the issue in the same way as if it was a lawful substance that was being misused.

**Further Assistance**

It is often the case that substance misuse does not come to light in the workplace because the individual is able to manage their substance misuse whilst continuing to perform to an acceptable standard. If you do suspect that there is a substance misuse problem involving one more of your staff you will probably wish to discuss this with a member of your HR Team at an early opportunity. They will be able to advise you.

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<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Staff Committee</td>
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<td>Policy/Procedure Owner</td>
<td>RJC Burrow</td>
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What are the common signs of alcohol abuse?

The following characteristics, especially when arising in combination, may indicate the presence of an alcohol or substance abuse problem.

**Reduced Work Performance**
- Difficulty in concentrating.
- Impaired memory.
- Confusion.
- Periods of high and low productivity.
- Higher accident levels.
- Lowered quantity/quality.
- Missed deadlines and appointments.
- Increased mistakes.
- Customers/colleague complaints.

**Absenteeism and Timekeeping**
- Poor timekeeping.
- Arriving late leaving early.
- Unexplained disappearances.
- Long coffee/lunch breaks.
- Increased unauthorised leave.
- Increased Friday/Monday absence.
- Excessive levels of sickness absence.
- Improbable excuses for absence.
- Imprecise medical certificates.

**Personality Changes**
- Mood changes.
- Irritability and aggression.
- Friction with colleagues.
- Over-reaction to criticism.
- Depression.
- Paranoia.
- Confusion.
- Unreasonable resentments.

**Physical Signs**
- Smelling of alcohol.
- Unkempt appearance/greater care with appearance.
- Lack of hygiene.
- Tremors, sweats, dilated/constricted pupils, marked skin etc.

**General Signs**
- Falling asleep.
- Use of breath purifiers.
- Attempts to borrow money.
- Dishonesty.
- Petty theft.
- Court appearances.
- Deterioration of relationships with family/friends.