OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UNIT

POLICY NOTICE - OHSU P8 (1997)

ALCOHOL AND DRUG RELATED PROBLEMS

1 INTRODUCTION

Alcohol/drug-related problems have increased significantly in the UK during recent years. Although they are not a major problem in the University it is, nevertheless, desirable to have a positive policy designated to encourage early identification of alcohol/drug-related problems thus providing the University with a constructive and preventative strategy regarding alcohol/drug abuse amongst its employees.

Alcohol-related problems are defined as any drinking, either frequently or continually, which definitely and repeatedly interferes with a person's health and social functioning and/or impairs their work performance.

Drug abuse refers to the use of illegal drugs and the misuse, whether deliberate or unintentional of prescribed drugs and substances such as solvents. Drug abuse can harm the abuser both physically and mentally and impair their work performance.

The impairment of work performance can lead to, for instance, absenteeism, lost time on the job, accidents, poor judgement and wrong decisions. A distinction must, however, be made between alcohol-related problems and irresponsible behaviour arising from excessive drinking on random occasions.

2 LEGAL DUTIES

Under Sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA), the University must ensure that employees and others are not put at risk by work activities, which therefore obliges the University to ensure that no employee endangers fellow employees at work due to being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Any person who uses or misuses alcohol or drugs may commit a breach of Section 7 of the HSWA which requires that employees take reasonable care of themselves and others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

The University is concerned to provide a safe and healthy working environment. It recognises that this can be put at risk by those who misuse alcohol or drugs to such an extent that it may affect their health, performance, conduct and relationships at work. The policy, which applies to all employees, aims to:-

a) alert employees to the risks associated with heavy drinking and drug taking and to promote a progressive change of attitude towards excessive alcohol and drug abuse.

b) engender a climate which removes the tendency to conceal, deny and cover up the problems and gives both Management and Unions confidence to deal with them.

c) offer encouragement and assistance to employees who suspect or know they have an alcohol/drug-related problem to seek help voluntarily at an early stage.

d) offer employees suspected or known to have alcohol/drug-related problems affecting their work referral to an appropriate source for diagnosis and treatment if necessary.

Having identified an alcohol/drug-related problem, the employee can be reassured that his/her efforts to overcome the problem will be supported by the University's Management structure at all levels.

The policy does not apply to an employee who commits a clear breach of University rules due to overindulgence of alcohol on one or more occasions. In these cases, action will be taken under the disciplinary procedure as appropriate.

The policy requires strict confidentiality on the part of the University, employee and Occupational Health and Safety Unit.

The policy does not constitute a waiver of Management's responsibility to maintain discipline or right to take disciplinary action under existing procedures, nor does it prevent employees access to normal grievance procedures.

Personnel Services are responsible for the implementation of this Policy.

4 ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECURING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF EMPLOYEES

The University will in consultation with employees and their representatives:-

a) advise all existing employees and all persons starting work of the risks to health arising from the effects of alcohol or drugs (including some legitimately prescribed medications);

b) encourage employees, who may have alcohol/drug-related problems to take advantage of the University's referral procedure for diagnosis and treatment;

c) in cases where the effects on work of misuse of alcohol or drugs is confirmed or admitted, agree upon a programme of treatment in consultation with the Occupational Health Physician and the employee;

d) instruct the Occupational Health Physician to co-ordinate, monitor and if necessary participate in the treatment, which may involve recourse to or liaison with, the General Practitioner, Counsellor, hospital outpatient department or in-patient care;

e) provide sufficient information, instruction, and training as is necessary to ensure that all employees have the knowledge required:-

i) to understand the dangers associated with the effects of alcohol or drugs at work and the University policy regarding this;

ii) to understand the University procedures that are to be adopted where there is found to be a deterioration in work performance from these effects;

iii) to understand the legal consequences of their actions.

Managers and supervisors will be given additional training, as necessary, to enable them to deal with any problems that may arise as a result of the effects of alcohol or drugs upon work performance.

f) establish policy rules relating to an employee who is found to have misused alcohol or drugs or admits the same. These rules are reproduced in Section 5.

5 PROCEDURE

a) Identification by the Employee

Employees who suspect or know they have an alcohol/drug-related problem are encouraged to seek help on a voluntary basis and if this is the case the person concerned should contact Occupational Health in the knowledge that he/she will receive a sympathetic hearing and the conversation will be treated in the strictest confidence.

b) Identification of the problem by Others

Should an employee suspect that a colleague has an alcohol/drug-related problem then he/she should, in the first instance encourage the colleague to contact Occupational Health. In the event of that approach being unsuccessful or if the employee considers that matters of safety are involved, the employee should bring the matter to the attention of the Head of the School/Department and the Occupational Health and Safety Unit.

c) Referral to or Involvement by Occupational Health

If the Occupational Health Physician deems the problem such as to require an extended course of treatment the offer of help will be made on the clear understanding that:-

i) the employee will be granted if necessary leave to undergo counselling for treatment and such leave will be treated as sick leave within the terms of the appropriate Sick Pay Scheme;

ii) the University will, whenever possible, try to ensure that the employee returns to his/her job after counselling or treatment. In those cases where this may not be advisable, because of the persons state of health or because full recovery may be jeopardised by returning to the same

job, the University will make every effort to offer suitable alternative employment as close as is possible to that previously undertaken;

iii) the promotional prospects of an employee, who has accepted help and resolved the alcohol/drug-related problem, will not be impaired.

Where employees decline to accept the offer of help, the Head of School/Department will report to the Director of Personnel Services who will assess the circumstances of the situation and may implement the disciplinary procedure if felt appropriate

If there are any further problems following return to employment after or during counselling or treatment, each case will be considered on its merits and, if appropriate, a further opportunity to accept and co-operate with help or counselling will be offered.

However, the University must reserve the right to terminate employment should the employee suffer subsequent relapses or if the risks of a relapse endanger fellow workers or members of the general public's safety.

6 CONCLUSION

This policy seeks to offer help, sympathy and support to employees suffering from alcohol/drug-related problems. Staff should feel free to talk in confidence at anytime to the Occupational Health and Safety Unit (ext 3847) or Personnel Services (ext 2059). Those who are afraid that they might be developing a drink or drug problem should similarly feel free to seek advice.