

Student Substance Use Policy

Our Approach

The health and wellbeing of our student community is a key priority. We seek to promote the benefits of healthy choices. We are committed to a whole university harm reduction approach in relation to substance use, specifically in relation to alcohol and drugs.

Imperial has adopted a policy of harm reduction in relation to substance use. "Harm reduction" encapsulates a policy, process or practice that aims to minimise the negative impacts of substance use, both for the individual and the wider community.

The harm reduction approach responds to the use of drugs and alcohol in a way that minimises the risk of harm to any of the university community. It is noted that the use of drugs and alcohol can present risk to individuals, including impacts on health, safety, education, finances and relationships. Excessive or prolonged use of substances can impair judgement and mental capacity, reduce inhibition and increase vulnerability to other risks. The focus of a harm reduction approach is on the wellbeing of a person, rather than on the substance use. The aim is to be supportive without judgement, and to provide advice and assistance to those who are struggling with substance use.

Whilst the university does not condone the use of illegal drugs or the misuse of prescription drugs, we understand that students may engage in this activity or may be impacted by the substance use of others. We seek to reduce the harms that can be caused by substance use or addiction by putting in place a supportive framework. Our assurance is to enable individuals to make informed choices and to protect the university community.

Our Commitment

Educate the university community about the potentially harmful effects of substance use and promote health and wellbeing through discouraging substance use

- To proactively promote health and wellbeing, outlining the potential risks of substance use and giving advice about safer choices.
- To promote a safe and supportive environment in which to study and work, and to provide avenues of education and support for students and staff.
- To provide an inclusive environment for all, that fosters respect for difference; including consideration of cultural factors, personal circumstances, the impact of peer pressure and the effect of behaviour on others.

Deliver a proactive approach to both prevention and early intervention support for students who use substances or are impacted by others who use substances

- To provide support to students who are impacted by substance use, signposting to internal guidance and putting in place relevant support mechanisms for their wellbeing and studies.
- To provide signposting to specialist external support avenues for students who report substance related issues or who are concerned about substance use of one of their peers.

Educate staff about substance use problems to better understand student support needs and appropriate referral channels

- To enable student-facing staff to recognise signs of substance use and handle disclosures.
- To provide resources to enable staff to know where to refer students for help.

University Responsibilities

- Ensure students are aware of this policy and the support available to them.
- Ensure safeguarding processes are followed where applicable.

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- Ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 by providing adjustments where it is deemed necessary and reasonably practical to do so.
- Provide wellbeing support for students who are impacted by substance abuse.
- Provide advice and training to staff to enable them to put in place pathways for support and referral.

Student Responsibilities

- Engage with information and education about drugs and alcohol to enable healthy choices to be made for themselves and others.
- Seek help voluntarily if concerned about their own substance use or are impacted by the substance use of others.
- Encourage other students to seek help if they believe they have a problem, without judgement or disrespect.
- If living in university halls of residence, adhere to the terms and conditions of their licence agreements; further be aware that use of substances in a hall's environment can have significant impact on the wider community. Drugs possession or dealing in halls will be taken extremely seriously and handled through our disciplinary processes.
- If working with external organisations (e.g. placements, projects) comply with those organisations policies relating to substance use.
- Be aware of safety critical activities and adhere to "Dry Roles" principles.

Student Support

Any student who fears they may have a drug or alcohol dependency is encouraged to seek professional help as soon as possible.

A student's own GP will often be the most appropriate source of initial advice and support.

Other services at Imperial can also offer support, including:

- Imperial College Health Centre (for NHS registered students only)
- Imperial College Students' Union Advice Centre
- Student Counselling and Mental Health Advice Service
- Student Wellbeing Advisers

Students may also wish to seek help from more specialist or external services.

Professionally Accredited Programmes (e.g. Medicine)

Students on professionally accredited programmes are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner and must adhere to their specified codes of conduct. Students will face high levels of scrutiny during their studies, particularly whilst on placements and when working with the public. Inappropriate use of drugs or alcohol, or any criminal misconduct, can have severe long-term implications on a planned career.

If there is a concern that a student's fitness to work with patients may be impaired because of substance use, the student must be referred to Occupational Health for assessment.

Occupational Health will:

- Assist in the medical assessment of students where there is concern that the student may have an alcohol or substance use problem that may affect their fitness to practise.
- Monitor progress and advise on compliance with treatment of a substance problem where compliance is a condition for return to or continuation on their course of study after a problem affecting their fitness to practise has been identified.

Conduct

Adopting a harm reduction approach does not mean that drug dealing, supply or other related criminal behaviour will be condoned. Any such misconduct will be treated as a disciplinary case and be referred to the relevant internal and external parties to handle.

The university expects that students will encourage and maintain standards of conduct in accordance with the values and expectations of the Imperial community. This is set out in the [Student Code of Conduct](#) and applied to conduct on and off university campuses and premises.

Student behaviour that does not align with the Student Code of Conduct may be considered formally under the [Student Disciplinary Procedure](#). Use of drugs or alcohol is not normally considered as a mitigating factor in determining sanctions for misconduct.

Legal Context

Drugs

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 clarifies the implications of possession, supply and intent to supply. Imperial is obligated to operate within this framework in relation to the use of illegal drugs and has a duty to cooperate with law enforcement in cases of criminal behaviour. Possession and/or use of illegal drugs on university premises is unacceptable. Sharing drugs with friends (prescription or otherwise) is deemed as supply and therefore also illegal. Any student found to be in breach of these laws may be subject to disciplinary and/or legal action. However, there is still a commitment to a harm reduction approach in personal use cases.

The Psychoactive Substance Act 2016 also outlines the implications and sanctions associated with possession, supply and intent to supply of psychoactive substances. Psychoactive substances refer to any substance intended for human consumption that can produce a psychoactive effect (that is, impact a person's central nervous system).

Alcohol

Several bars and catering outlets at Imperial have licenses to sell alcohol for consumption on the premises. They permit alcohol to be sold to staff and students of Imperial College and their bona fide guests.

In consequence, two actions are illegal:

- Selling alcoholic drinks to people who are neither staff nor students at the university nor their bona fide guests
- Selling alcoholic drinks for consumption off the licensed premises (usually designated bar area)

As stipulated by the Licensing Act 2003, the following actions are also illegal on campus premises:

- Selling alcoholic drinks without a meal where the license is for drink accompanying meals
- Serving alcoholic drink to a customer who in the judgement of the person serving should not be served more alcohol
- Serving alcoholic drink to persons under the legal age limit of 18 years (with some exceptions relating to table meals)
- Allowing a drunken person to be on the premises without good reason (e.g. illness);
- Allowing gambling to take place, with minor exceptions
- Allowing arguments or unsociable behaviour to take place

Staff working in licensed outlets at Imperial should be made aware of these conditions and act accordingly.

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Alcohol may be served by other Imperial staff in specified conditions, such as at residential halls events, on-campus events and Imperial events held in designated spaces where licensing permits.

Confidentiality

Information may be shared within the university to signpost to appropriate support. Information will not be shared outside the university unless the student consents to this or there are serious concerns about the risk of significant harm. Where a student has caring responsibilities for children or vulnerable adults and the nature of their use of drugs and/or alcohol presents a risk to those they care for, information will be shared under safeguarding guidance.

In some circumstances it may be felt necessary to contact a student's trusted contact. This will be considered in line with the [specified procedure](#).

The university may be required to make external disclosures, for example to the police. Where this is needed, personal data sharing will be compliant with UK GDPR guidance and the Data Protection Act 2018.

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Definitions

Substance Use – drinking alcohol, taking drugs or a substance (either legal or illegal), either intermittently or continuously, such that it adversely interferes with an individual's health, work or study performance or conduct, or affects the work performance and/or safety of themselves and others.

Drugs – prescription medicines where the prescription medicines have not been prescribed for the person possessing or using them and/or such prescription medicines which are not taken in accordance with a doctor's direction; includes any substance (other than alcohol) either legal or illegal that produces physical, mental, emotional or behavioural changes in the user. These include medical cannabis products and cognitive enhancing drugs.

Controlled Substances – includes all chemical substances or drugs listed in any controlled substances acts or regulations applicable under the law. These include drugs used routinely in the treatment of ADHD.

Related University Policies/Procedures

Fitness to Practise
Fitness to Study
Guidance on Dry Roles
Safeguarding
Student Code of Conduct
Student Disciplinary Procedure
Student Trusted Contact Consent