

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL POLICY

1. Terminology

The term 'drugs' unless otherwise stated is used to refer to all drugs:

- All illegal drugs (those controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) and the amendment order (April 2019)
- All other psychoactive substances not currently covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act but which fall under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 (Legal Highs- see appendix 1)
- All legal drugs, including alcohol, tobacco, and volatile substances
- All over-the-counter and prescription medicines.

The South Thames College Group has a strict and robust policy regarding illegal drugs and alcohol. This means that all incidents will trigger the disciplinary process. Students under the influence, in possession of, or dealing drugs and alcohol will usually be suspended whilst the matter is investigated and in most cases this could lead to exclusion from the College.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all students. Staff are included under the Code of Conduct and disciplinary policy: 4.1.4 'alcohol and illegal drugs'.

3. Aims of the policy

- To reduce the harm that illegal drugs cause to members of the Colleges Group and to society
- To prevent students becoming problematic drug users
- To ensure that students who might develop drug problems are identified early and receive support before problems escalate
- To encourage students to seek advice and help if they have any drug-related issues
- To ensure that no student is on any Colleges Group campus under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- To keep illegal drugs off the Colleges Group campus.

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the Student Disciplinary, Safeguarding and Fitness to Study policies.

4. Approach

There will be 3 ways in which the Colleges Group will attempt to meet these aims through:

- Education
- Support
- Enforcement

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5. Education

It is clear that many students want drug education and particularly value the opportunity to explore attitudes and relate what they know and learn about drugs to their own life experiences.

The aim of drug education will be to provide opportunities for students to develop their knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes about drugs to help them make healthy and informed choices. The College Group must accept that a large percentage of students are statistically likely to have already experimented with or used illegal recreational drugs. For these students a harm-minimisation approach which aims to ensure students know where the dangers lie, and how they can be avoided, is more effective than a “Just say no” approach. Colleges Group staff should never suggest that the abuse of alcohol or the use of illegal recreational drugs is condoned, but should enable students to make informed choices about drugs, highlight the associated risks involved and inform students of appropriate support services.

The Colleges Group will use a variety of methods to educate students about the issues concerning drugs:

- Providing on-going access to information and advice, for example through displays throughout the Colleges Group sites, booklets and posters, access to computer-based information and internet advice
- The tutorial system, where there will be the minimum of one session a year on drug-related issues
- Through subject studies where relevant, for example Health and Social Care, Construction, Engineering, Sport, Public Services, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy. Staff are expected at all times to present the problematic aspects of taking legal and illegal drugs whilst acknowledging that drugs such as alcohol and illegal recreational drugs can be superficially pleasurable or bring rewards (e.g. the inappropriate use of steroids), recognising that “Just say no” strategies are often ineffective
- Enrichment activity around healthy lifestyles
- Bringing in external speakers to input into drug education.

6. Support

Personal and Pastoral tutors are available to discuss issues, including drug use, with students. The Student Services team also provides non-judgemental support and ensures that students feel confident in seeking their help without fear of reprimand or being judged. Staff will make explicit to students the level of confidentiality that can be offered. They cannot promise total confidentiality, but if a student discloses information about drug use or possession in College, which they wish not to be shared, this should be honoured unless it puts the student or another member of the College community at risk. Confidentiality is normally assured for discussion of events that may have taken place outside the College community unless staff feel that the student is seriously at risk.

If a student discloses information about the use or possession of Class A or B drugs at the College Group, then it is the duty of the staff to bring this information to the attention of the Head of School or Duty Manager and staff will have to inform the student that this is the case. If the student is at risk of further harm, normal safeguarding procedures will be followed, to decide what actions should be taken in the interest of both the student and the College community.

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7. Enforcement

Although education and support are considered the most important aspects of this Policy, being in possession or under the influence of illegal drugs, selling illegal drugs or being under the influence of alcohol on site or during College activities (e.g. trips and visits) cannot be tolerated by the College Group and there are necessary disciplinary procedures in place to deal with these situations.

At student inductions, all students sign the Code of Conduct Contract to confirm that they will abide by the Colleges Group rules for appropriate behaviour. Where the Code of Conduct is broken by students, action will be taken, for example:

- If a student is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs whilst on Colleges Group premises the Head of School or Duty Manager will decide the appropriate action to be taken. This will usually be immediate suspension while an investigation takes place and appropriate sanctions taken under the Disciplinary Procedure
- In serious cases involving illegal drugs, the matter may be discussed with the police. However, the penalty for this type of gross misconduct would involve suspension by the Head of School or Duty Manager immediately while an investigation takes place and could include permanent exclusion from the Colleges Group.
- The College Group reserves the right to investigate the contents of students' bags etc. if they have reason to believe that illegal drugs have been brought onto the premises for consumption or sale to other students. Refusal to comply with a request to show the contents of bags etc. will result in the student being suspended from the Colleges Group immediately and appropriate sanctions taken under the Disciplinary Procedure
- If there is reasonable suspicion that a student is in possession of Class A or Class B drugs for sale to other students, then the police will be called and asked if they wish to search the student. This type of gross misconduct would involve immediate suspension by the Head of School or Duty Manager while an investigation takes place and could include permanent exclusion from the Colleges Group
- If, as a result of any routine search, what appears to be illegal drugs or preparatory grinders etc. are found, a member of the Security Team will confiscate them and arrange storage in the relevant College safe. The Police will be contacted to arrange confirmation and collection.

In all cases of the breach of the code of conduct relating to drugs and alcohol, the issue will be discussed with or communicated to parents/carers for those students under 18 years old.

Any disciplinary procedure resulting from a breach of this policy will not focus exclusively on drugs and alcohol but will take a holistic approach to the student's well-being.

8. Students at risk

All staff should be aware that some students may be particularly vulnerable to drug misuse (and other social problems). This would include:

- Students who are looked after or who have recently left care
- Students with poor attendance
- Students with severe special educational needs
- Students with mental health problems
- Students in contact with the criminal justice system
- Students who live with drug-misusing parents/carers
- Students who are homeless

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- Students who are involved in prostitution.

Tutors and teachers and support staff should take special care of these students to identify early signs of drug-misuse. These signs might be:

- sudden changes in mood or outlook
- a sudden and rapid decline in attendance, performance or punctuality at College
- deteriorating relationships with other students and staff
- borrowing or stealing money from the College staff and students
- being unnecessarily secretive about actions and activities
- a sudden change of friends
- deterioration in personal hygiene and appearance.

If staff notice any of these signs, it is wise in the first instance not to jump to conclusions. They may have nothing to do with drugs and many of them can simply be symptomatic of adolescence. However, they might also be signs of unhappiness for other reasons. If staff have any concerns then they should always discuss them in the first instance with other staff who teach the student, or with a member of the safeguarding team: it is better to be over-concerned than ignoring what may be a serious problem for the student's well-being.

It is the duty of all members of staff to inform the Lead or Deputy Lead Safeguarding Officer, if they believe that a student is actively at risk from drug use/misuse. They will decide what actions should be taken in the interest of both the student and the College community.

9. Medical emergencies

If there is a medical emergency involving a student believed to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the medical needs will take precedence over any disciplinary intervention. A First Aider should be called to provide immediate care and, if there is any doubt, an ambulance summoned.

10. Review

The policy will be reviewed on a bi-annual basis and when there are substantial changes to personnel or related policies.

11. Roles and responsibilities

The Colleges Group Management Team will monitor the implementation of the policy and:

- ensure staff are aware and comply with the procedures
- actively promote this policy
- take corrective actions when issues for improvement are identified.

All staff will act on any concerns regarding drug use in accordance with this policy.

12. Policy Distribution and Communication

A copy of this Policy is posted on the College Group websites.

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Appendix 1

Psychoactive Substances- previously known as ‘Legal Highs’

The Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, introduced a blanket Ban from 26th May 2016. Although some of these so called ‘legal highs’ were legal in the past, since the Act was passed, none of the drugs are legal to produce, supply or import (even for personal use e.g. on-line) for human consumption. This includes selling them and giving them away for free (even to friends), when they are going to be taken to get high.

The ‘legal highs’ that were made illegal as class A,B or C drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act, are still covered by that legislation. However, all other psychoactive substances not currently covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act now fall under the Psychoactive Substances Act. Psychoactive substances are defined in the Act as: ‘A substance intended for human consumption that is capable of producing a psychoactive effect’.

The main effects of almost all psychoactive drugs can be described using four main categories: stimulants, ‘downers’ or sedatives, psychedelics or hallucinogens or synthetic cannabinoids.

Examples

- The chemicals, sold under names such as spice and black mamba, are designed to give users the same effects as drugs like cannabis and cocaine
- Laughing gas, otherwise known as nitrous oxide, laughing gas comes in canisters and is used recreationally after being inhaled, often out of balloons. It gives users a light-headed euphoric feeling that lasts for several seconds, but due to it depriving the body of oxygen, can be fatal when taken in excess
- Salvia, unlike other legal highs, Salvia comes from a plant. When smoked or chewed, it can create a hallucinogenic experience.
- Mephedrone – The drug which also goes by the name ‘mcat’ and ‘meow meow’ mimics the effects of many amphetamines such as speed and MDMA, providing the similar feelings of elation, but with a potentially deadly impact on the heart and nervous system. It is currently a class B drug

Consequences for individuals

The Police have powers to seize and destroy psychoactive substances, as well as carry out searches of people, premises and vehicles. Offenders who break this law will face up to seven years in prison for the supply, production and possession with intent to supply, importation or exportation of a psychoactive substance for human consumption.

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