

University of Edinburgh Substance Use Harm Reduction Statement

STATEMENT

The University of Edinburgh recognises that some members of our community may use substances, whether legally regulated, prescribed or prohibited.

We believe that a harm reduction approach is in the best interests of our community as it encourages open and honest communication and reduces barriers to accessing support when people need help.

A harm reduction approach is one that seeks to maximise wellbeing and reduce the negative health and social consequences that may be associated with substance use. We recognise our responsibilities to ensure that our community is aware of and supports adherence to legal requirements with some forms of substance use in Scotland.

Our approach is committed to the following key principles:

1. Human Rights: We respect the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their substance use.
2. Evidence-Based Interventions: We rely on high quality research evidence to inform our approach.
3. Minimisation of Harm: We prioritise strategies that minimise the health and social risks associated with substance use.
4. Access to Services: We aim to provide and promote accessible, non-judgmental, and stigma-free services for individuals seeking help or information related to substance use.
5. Collaboration: We work in collaboration with members of the University community and other organisations, including the Students' Association, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and social services, to achieve our harm reduction goals.

This statement serves as our commitment to the wellbeing of all members of the University community. We encourage ongoing dialogue, research, and evaluation to continually improve our harm reduction approach.

Some Schools will have policies affiliated to professional working such as the examples below. Please check with your local area for advice.

Management of students with alcohol and substance use problems on professional courses (BVM&S, MB ChB and DPLP)

Students enrolled on the Veterinary Medicine and Medicine degree programmes and the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice courses have responsibilities to demonstrate behaviours that fully align with the expected level of trust bestowed upon them from fellow colleagues and members of the public. In line with the fact that veterinary surgeons, doctors

and lawyers have an obligation to adhere to certain standards in their professional and private lives, students of these vocational programmes are expected to do the same. These expectations are clearly set out by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (1), the General Medical Council (2) and the Law Society of Scotland (3). The vet, medical and law schools at the University of Edinburgh have a duty to ensure that their students demonstrate proficiency not only on academic grounds, but also in the avoidance of behaviours that are likely to cause concern in the context of their future role as practising professionals. This includes the use of alcohol and non-prescribed drugs (4). Vets, lawyers and doctors are required to make decisions which both directly and indirectly impact the health and welfare of others. In addition, vets and doctors have access to a range of drugs, including controlled drugs, which have the potential to cause harm if used inappropriately or without prescription.

For this group of students, evidence or disclosure of the use of illegal substances always leads to a Fitness to Practice investigation for the reasons highlighted above. Part of this process involves the provision of appropriate support; this includes measures aimed at encouraging and assisting the student to adopt a healthier lifestyle and avoid future substance use. Likewise, ingestion of alcohol to harmful levels, or where daily functioning is impaired, would lead to referral to Fitness to Practice.

Medical students who have had time away from studies for treatment and management of alcohol and/or substance problems, are encouraged to agree to random testing on their return.(5)

1. [Fitness to Practise - A Guide for UK Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Students - Professionals \(rcvs.org.uk\)](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/fitness-to-practise-a-guide-for-uk-veterinary-schools-and-veterinary-students-professionals)
2. [Professionalism - key areas of concern - GMC \(gmc-uk.org\)](https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/student-professionalism-and-ftp/achieving-good-medical-practice/professionalism-key-areas-of-concern)
3. <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/media/0vhdy300/fitness-and-properness-guidance.pdf>
4. <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/student-professionalism-and-ftp/achieving-good-medical-practice/professionalism-key-areas-of-concern>
5. [Supporting medical students with mental health conditions \(gmc-uk.org\) – paragraph 93](https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/student-professionalism-and-ftp/achieving-good-medical-practice/professionalism-key-areas-of-concern)