Drugs

Drug use is a controversial issue and it is not the purpose of this leaflet to tell people how to behave. This leaflet gives information about drugs and their use, so that informed choices regarding drug use can be made. The main reason people take drugs is because they find it enjoyable. Curiosity, peer pressure and the ease of availability may all encourage people to start, or to increase their drug use, but being offered a drug by a trusted friend, who wants you to experience the same pleasure they have, is often how it can begin. Coming to University can be a daunting time and we all want to make a good impression, have fun, make lots of friends and fit in. Drugs are becoming more prevalent and it is increasingly easier for students to experiment with drug use. Drugs are powerful substances with the potential to do physical harm, people under the influence of drugs may not realise the danger they put themselves in. We therefore encourage students to take care of themselves if taking drugs and try to avoid risks that may cause them physical or psychological harm.

Facts about Different Drugs

Drugs fall into four major categories, defined by their main effect (the reason that people take them):

Stimulants

These work on the central nervous system, increasing brain activity. They tend to make the person more alert and less tired, also lifting the user’s mood. Because of this increase in energy, it is possible to stay focussed and perform physical activities over a prolonged period of time. Drugs included in this group are caffeine and tobacco, as well as amphetamines, anabolic steroids, poppers, hallucinogenic amphetamines (including ecstasy), cocaine and crack. High doses of these drugs (except for tobacco) can cause nervousness and anxiety and can cause temporary paranoid psychosis (a loss of reality and a belief that other people are intent on harming you).

Depressants

These drugs reduce brain activity, promoting relaxation and relieving tension and anxiety. They also reduce mental and physical functioning and inhibit self-control. Depressant drugs include alcohol, benzodiazepines such as Valium, Librium and Temazepam, and sniffable substances such as solvents, glues and gasses.
Analgesics
Analgesics are painkillers which reduce sensitivity to emotional and physical pain, giving a sense of warmth and contentment; but with little other physical or psychological effect. Drugs in this group include heroin, opium, pethidine and codeine.

Hallucinogens
These heighten a user’s sensory experience, causing hallucinations, feelings of great insight and heightened mood; and a disconnection from themselves and the world around them. Hallucinogens include LSD, cannabis, magic mushrooms and ecstasy (strictly speaking, an amphetamine).

What can happen?
For most people, taking drugs is purely a recreational activity. But for some, it offers a relief from other problems, and for others, it may be a symptom of other issues, rather than a cause. If you are wondering about your drug use, then you may want to consider the following:

Psychological consequences:
• Are you using drugs to escape from a problem which you might be able to solve if you faced it? If so, you may be perpetuating your shyness, anxiety, depression, unhappiness, etc rather than dealing with it.
• Drugs don’t permanently change our world. They allow us to feel a temporary confidence or happiness, but the effect is usually one of borrowed time. Often the unhappiness or anxiety returns even more strongly once the effects wear off.
• Drugs can cause psychological problems by themselves; they can cause depression, or can trigger anxiety or even psychosis (loss of reality).

Social consequences:
• Drugs are often seriously expensive, so uncontrolled use can lead to financial problems.
• You can quite easily end up in trouble with the law. Although the law may turn a blind eye to personal use of certain drugs, this attitude is not consistent. Sentences for supplying drugs can be heavy and unpredictable. Any conviction for drugs offences may severely limit the opportunities open to you in the future.
• There may be serious repercussions from university authorities if a student is caught using drugs.
• A drugs related offence could seriously prejudice a student’s career opportunities, particularly in professions such as law and medicine.

Physical consequences:
• Drugs can interfere with ability to study; they can affect motivation and concentration.
• Drugs can lower people’s ability to resist harming themselves when they have problems.
• Drugs can lower inhibitions against hurting others.
• Drugs can lessen people’s ability to say no to unwanted sexual encounters, which would otherwise have been avoided.
• Many serious accidents happen under the influence of drugs, as they interfere with perception and judgement.
• There are long-term health risks.

All these things will not happen to everybody; you may avoid any serious mishaps. However, all these consequences are seen routinely enough to suggest they are not exaggerated or unusual.

What can I do about it?

If you want to take more control of your use of drugs, the following suggestions may help:

• Make a list of the advantages and drawbacks of your drug use which are personally significant to you. The above list of possible consequences may help focus your mind. Then decide whether you would like to lessen the disadvantages.
• Keep a diary of your consumption over a week. Be honest about the amounts you are using. Consider whether you could limit your intake by changing your routine so as not to put you in tempting situations.
• Talk to someone you trust about your use; see if they feel you have cause for concern.
• Consider what you are using; in particular note when you use concentrated or particularly dangerous forms of drugs. Can you substitute a less potent alternative?
• Consider the social pressures to consume; can you limit your exposure to these?
• Consider what emotions trigger consumption. Are you using drugs to help deal with certain feelings—frustration, anxiety, shyness, boredom? Can you find alternative means of dealing with these feelings?

• Set yourself a period of abstinence. See whether you can do it, and find different ways of dealing with problems.

**Help and Support**

There is a lot of help available should you find yourself in need as a result of drug use. If you need medical attention then go to your GP or the local Accident & Emergency Unit. The nearest to the university is at Leicester Royal Infirmary, Infirmary Square, Leicester LE1 5WW.

If you want to talk to somebody in confidence, you can contact the University of Leicester Counselling and Wellbeing Service. Alternatively, you may prefer to contact one of the local community specialist services:

**Drug Advice Centre**

96 New Walk, Leicester LE1 7EA
T: 0116 222 9555

**Leicester Recovery Partnership**

T: 0116 2256400
www.leicesterrecoverypartnership.co.uk

**National Drugs Helpline**

Helpline: 0800 77 66 00, textphone: 0800 917 8765
E: frank@talktofrank.com  Web: www.talktofrank.com

Text Message Service: 82111

Free 24-hour helpline for information and advice about drug use.
Release
124-128 City Road, London EC1V 2NJ
Helpline: 0845 4500 215  Web: www.release.org.uk
Advice on drug use and related legal matters.

Turning Point
Stanton House, 21 Mansell Street, London, E1 8AA
T: 020 7481 7600
E: info@turning-point.co.uk  Web: www.turning-point.co.uk
National network of services for people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems or learning difficulties.

Drugscope
4th floor, Asra House, 1 Long Lane, London SE1.
T: 0207 234 9730
E: services@drugscope.org.uk  Web: www.drugscope.org.uk
Aims to reduce drug-related risk

Families Anonymous (Famanon)
Doddington and Rollo Community Association
Charlotte Despard Avenue, London SW11 5HD
T: 0845 1200 660  Web: www.famanon.org.uk
Self-help groups in the UK for families and friends of those with a drug problem.

We would like to thank the Student Counselling Services at Royal Holloway University of London, University of Birmingham and to Mind (National Association for Mental Health) for the use of their material in this leaflet.
Where to find Counselling and Wellbeing

Our entrance is at the rear of the building located directly on the junction of University Road and Welford Road. We have a ramp and there is a large sign on the wall. The building is accessible to wheelchair users.

Contact Details

Counselling and Wellbeing
University of Leicester
161 Welford Road
Leicester
LE2 6BF

T: 0116 223 1780
F: 0116 223 1269

www.le.ac.uk/counselling

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