

# Simple Guide: **Alcohol and drugs in the workplace**



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## The business case

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Alcohol is part of the culture of many countries and, when used in moderation, is enjoyed by the majority of people and can have beneficial health effects on certain groups. However, the use of alcohol and drugs is growing in society today and the impact is being felt in many different settings, including the workplace.

A recent report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that four out of ten employers believe alcohol misuse is a significant cause of employee absence and lost productivity.

This research also highlighted that one-third of organisations report that drug misuse has a similar negative effect in the workplace.

The Scottish Government estimates that alcohol costs Scotland £418 million per annum from a reduction in output and productivity, and a further £484 million per annum in public services. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report that up to 14 million working days are lost each year due to alcohol-related problems, costing British industry an estimated £3 billion each year.

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## Alcohol policies

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It is estimated that 40% of organisations do not have an alcohol and drugs policy in place to help them manage this challenging issue. Where there is a policy in place, often employers do not actively promote it to staff and only one-third of employers train managers in how to manage these issues at work.

The costs, both human and economic, associated with alcohol and drugs at work, the current legislation and the notable links between alcohol and ill health, suggest that policies are becoming an essential part of good business practice.

Major bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) advise that it is an essential part of good business practice for small and large businesses to adopt an alcohol and drugs policy.

Organisations working towards a Healthy Working Lives Award are required to develop and implement a policy which meets the required standard at the Silver level of the Award Programme.

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# Why have a policy?

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A health policy is a written arrangement developed, agreed and adopted by organisations, that outlines employers' guiding principles and procedures for promoting employee health, safe working practices and complies with health and safety law.

It is also important that employers recognise that there may be ways to address problems of alcohol or drug misuse that could not only help an individual to overcome their addiction, but also tackle other underlying factors that are causing it.

Surveys suggest that employers' reasons for adopting policies include:

## ***Staff performance***

- ✧ 45% of male and 28% of female heavy drinkers report that the after-effects of drinking affected their work in the past week.
- ✧ 75% of problem drinkers are in full-time employment.

## ***Safety***

- ✧ 25% of accidents at work are reported as being alcohol-related.

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# Legal duties and obligations

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Employers and employees are required by law to address the issue of alcohol and drugs in the workplace. These include:

- ✧ Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- ✧ Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

## ***Absenteeism/sickness***

- ✧ An estimated 6-14 million working days in the UK are lost each year due to alcohol-related sickness absence.
- ✧ Absence is the most frequently-cited reason for the introduction of policies relating to drugs and alcohol.

## ***Employee welfare***

- ✧ Organisations who refer employees with alcohol and drugs problems to specialist treatment, or give them rehabilitation support, report more than 60% remained working for the organisation after successfully managing their problem.

## ***Improved communications***

- ✧ Clarify employer and employee responsibilities.
- ✧ Provide clear and consistent messages in relation to procedures and policy rules.
- ✧ Provide staff with access to key messages on alcohol and drugs.

- ✧ Transport and Works Act 1992
- ✧ Road Traffic Act 1988
- ✧ Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

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# The principles

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It is necessary that an alcohol policy is underpinned by the following principles:

✿ **A clear statement of intent**

- A policy should be a written statement of intent outlining how the organisation will deal with the issue of alcohol or drugs in the workplace.

✿ **A commitment to joint negotiation**

- For a policy to work in practice, it should be based on joint negotiation and/or consultation between management, trade unions and/or employee's representatives.

✿ **Clearly stated policy objectives**

- Prevention of alcohol or drugs problems at work.
- Commitment to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of employees.
- Provision of help for employees with alcohol problems.
- Procedures for defining the role and responsibilities of management when dealing with alcohol or drugs problems at work.
- A commitment to education, training and monitoring.

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## Key steps

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Organisations are encouraged to develop a policy to suit their individual needs. The type of policy required will depend upon the nature of the organisation, the culture, size and structure of the workplace and the rationale behind the policy development. It is strongly advised that you seek expert help to assist you in the development of a policy suited to the needs of your organisation.

The following stages should be observed:

- ✿ Seek expert advice from a specialist agency. A list of organisations are included.

- ✿ Develop a mechanism to enable management, trade unions and employees' representatives to participate in policy development, (e.g. joint working group).

- ✿ Develop draft policy.

- ✿ Negotiate and consult with key personnel on the proposed draft policy, (e.g. health and safety representatives, occupational health staff and line managers).

- ✿ Amend draft as necessary, and if appropriate give advanced notice of change of working conditions, (e.g. alcohol-free working environment).

- ✿ Implement policy.

- ✿ Review and monitor policy on a regular basis.

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# The key elements of a policy

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Drug and alcohol policies may be separate or combined documents. Provisions and conditions should include:

## ✿ Introduction

- A clear statement of the need for a policy to protect the health of employees.
- Specific reference to the health and safety risk posed by alcohol and drugs and the health consequences of alcohol and drug misuse.
- Reference to respective legislation.
- The definition of alcohol and drug misuse.

## ✿ Policy rules

- Clear guidance on the organisation's parameters, rules and procedures for dealing with issues relating to alcohol and drug use, and guidelines relating to misconduct and breaches of the policy.
- A clear statement that employees are not allowed to work when affected by alcohol or controlled drugs, and guidance on prescription drugs which may affect their behaviour and/or work.
- Clear procedures for dealing with employees whose work performance is adversely affected by alcohol or drugs.
- If the policy includes testing for alcohol or drugs, specific reference should be made to the testing procedures and circumstances in which testing will be carried out.

## ✿ Implementation

- Communication of policy rules to all staff.
- Equity across all levels of staff regardless of status.
- Education on the impact of alcohol and drugs in the workplace.
- Promotion of sensible drinking as part of a healthier lifestyle.
- Training for managers who are responsible for enforcement.

## ✿ Support

- Details of support available to employees who are identified as having a drug and/or alcohol problem including how to access this support.
- Adhere to best practice when dealing with disciplinary cases involving alcohol or drugs.

## ✿ Monitoring review

- Implementation date and details of the monitoring and review process.

## ✿ Confidentiality

- The maintenance of strict confidentiality, which is fundamental to a policy.

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## Agencies that can provide expert help

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### Professional trainers

NHS Health Scotland, The Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives, Alcohol Focus Scotland, the Scottish Drugs Forum, the Industrial Society and STRADA have trained a network of professionals on the subject of alcohol and drugs in employment. Each agency offers general and specific advice around staff development and can offer training, either towards developing an alcohol and drugs policy, or towards developing staff awareness of the effects and risks of alcohol and drugs in the workplace.

### Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives

Your local Healthy Working Lives team can help you to develop and implement an alcohol and drugs policy as well as delivering/facilitating training and awareness-raising sessions to managers and staff. To find your nearest local team, please contact the Adviceline on **0800 019 2211** or visit **[www.healthyworkinglives.com](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com)**

### Local NHS Boards

These have a range of specialists including those from health promotion and occupational health who can provide you with help. To find your local specialists contact your NHS Board (listed under 'Health Authorities and Services' in your telephone directory).

### Alcohol Focus Scotland

This agency can provide access to specialists in the field of workplace alcohol and drug policies and/or direct you to services throughout Scotland, including a network of local alcohol counselling and support agencies. To find your nearest local contact please visit **[www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)** or phone Alcohol Focus Scotland on **0141 572 6282**.

### Scottish Drugs Forum

The SDF can provide access to specialists in the field of workplace alcohol and drug policies and a range of publications including *Methadone at Work – guidance for employers*. You can also visit the website at **[www.sdf.org.uk](http://www.sdf.org.uk)** or phone Scottish Drugs Forum on **0141 221 1175**.

Talk to the Healthy Working Lives experts **FREE** on:  
**0800 019 2211**  
**[www.healthyworkinglives.com](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com)**