

TO: Assembly

FROM: Sophie Hofels

RE: Harm Reduction Policy and Practices

DATE: 25 November 2021

Assembly notes:

- Two in five university students in the UK are regular drug users, with 56% having admitted to trying them at least once during their studies (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43892950>).
- Hard drugs are used regularly and commonly. Students buy drugs for nights out, events, and major music activities.
- Last year, four students in the north east died. Their deaths were most likely caused by drug misuse (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-54413820>).
- Students have reported several incidents of drug sniffer dogs being sent around colleges to SSDP Durham. We see this as hugely counterproductive and potentially life threatening for students when they choose to take illegal drugs. If students are in their room whilst the dogs are going around, there is a high chance they will take their whole supply all at once in order to avoid being caught. This can be really dangerous and depending on what the students are taking, lethal.
- Students are also far less likely to seek emergency medical attention in the case of overdoses, due to fear of reprisals from colleges and universities. Several students have reported to SSDP Durham that in times of severe illness due to the effects of illegal drugs, they have chosen not to seek emergency help due to being scared of being expelled or sanctioned. The university must see this is an incredibly dangerous and extreme threat to make to students, and one which risks lives. (Neurosight Survey, 2020)

Assembly believes:

- Durham University must change their policies towards illegal drugs immediately in order to prevent more harm being caused to its students. SSDP Durham believes that the only practical policy in place should be one geared towards education and harm reduction, as opposed to threats and punishment
- The current 'no tolerance' drug policy at this university has tremendous negative effects on students. Students don't have easy access to information on how to sensibly consume drugs and on what to do in an emergency, they don't have drug testing kits accessible and are reluctant to seek help in emergency situations because of the fear of punishment. This has to change. The university can no longer ignore the reality of widespread, prolific drug use amongst its students, and every year the likelihood of a student overdosing remains high.

- It is proven that education people about sensible drug use, e.g., how to take them safely, which drugs are safe/ or dangerous to mix, etc. minimises the risk drugs carry with them (Ritter, A., & Cameron, J. (2006). A review of the efficacy and effectiveness of harm reduction strategies for alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. Drug and alcohol review, 25(6), 611-624).
- Our key aim is to be able to supply students with drug testing kits. This is in place at several other Russell Group universities which has been a huge success. (University of Bristol, University of Newcastle, University of Birmingham, University of Manchester;
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/29/testing-kit-or-ban-how-universities-are-tackling-student-drug-use>)

Assembly resolves:

To mandate the Welfare Officer to lobby the University for a reduce harm policy and practices such as but not limited to:

- Educating students from the start of their university education on sensible drug use, and how to recognise the dangers. Having harm reduction workshops in fresher's week just like the anti-racism and consent ones that are currently running would be a good start.
- Having a good support system in place, e.g., having nightline volunteers, welfare officers and others who are in contact with students being harm reduction trained, or having good counselling services for students with problematic drug use would be a good way to assure students' wellbeing.
- Providing drug testing kits.
- Having physical harm reduction leaflets supplied to students can also help raise the issue and educate more people.
- Publish a harm reduction statement instead of having a drug policy.
- Lobby for free advice from the university and the Students' Union.