**Reducing the Health and Business Impact of Drug Misuse**

This article refers to ALL drugs, including alcohol, caffeine, illegal substances and medicines. Any drug has the potential to be harmful if it is misused.

Employee health, wellbeing and quality of life are currently high on most organisations’ agenda, but there is still not enough emphasis on responding to substance misuse issues. This includes the need to adopt a proactive approach to managing the potential risks and effects on an individual, their families, colleagues and the wider society.

Substance misuse is increasing and is often hidden from others until it becomes a problem. Whilst the use of many substances may be limited to outside of the workplace, the risks and effects associated with them can and do still have an impact on an organisation. Statistics show that:

* Alcohol is a factor in up to one in four workplace accidents. (Drinkaware);
* An estimated 1.5 million people are addicted to prescription and over the counter drugs, in the UK. (TUC, 2010);
* Approximately 1 in 5 of people killed in road crashes has traces of illegal substances in their blood (RoSPA);
* People who have substance misuse problems usually have other needs, which may include health, housing, employment. Preventing problems becoming serious and promoting successful recovery are built on a foundation addressing these wider needs. (Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership, 2013)
* The workplace may contribute to some employees’ substance misuse problems;
* Employees may be affected by someone else’s substance misuse. According to UK Drug Policy Commission, in 2008, 1.4 million adults were significantly affected by a relative’s drug use.

Aside from the legal obligations an organisation has for the health and safety of its employees and those that come into contact with the business, the workplace presents many opportunities for early detection and intervention. It also provides an environment to promote the importance of health and wellbeing.

Raising drug awareness through appropriate training and workplace policies can help to:

* Set out employer and employee responsibilities;
* Implement fair procedures in managing substance misuse;
* Provide guidance on processes and confidentiality;
* Improve the health and wellness of employees;
* Encourage employees to take responsibility for their health and quality of life, forming positive behaviours and making healthy choices;
* Improve employee engagement, performance and efficiency;
* Reduce illness, accidents and injuries related to substance misuse;
* Implement strategies that aim to reduce drug related absenteeism, costs of recruiting and training new people, and risk to the company’s reputation;
* Protect employees and the business;
* Maintain a business’ competitive qualities and to attract and retain staff, and the key skills and knowledge that they have.

Employee expectations are increasing and there is clear evidence that when an organisation demonstrates a commitment to the safety and health and wellbeing of its employees, it has immense benefits for the business, those it employs and its customers. With employee health and wellbeing a priority to businesses it is time that substance misuse is given greater attention. Drug awareness is more likely to be successful in the long term, and help to change attitudes and behaviours about drug use, when it is delivered within a valued and inclusive corporate approach, rather than a stand-alone project.