

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE STUDENT HELPER SCHEME Q & A

1. How did the Scheme come about?

It was the JCR's idea but has been worked up by the Domestic Bursar, College Nurse and Dean. It ran for the first time in 2011-2012 during Michaelmas and Lent Terms, and during the last few weeks of Easter Term (other than the night of the May Ball!),

2. What is the Student Helper Scheme?

The Scheme is designed to ensure the appropriate care of students who return to the College drunk to the point of incapacity. These are people who are literally "legless drunk" but who do not have complicating conditions or injuries that might require them to be sent immediately to A & E.

3. What can happen to a drunk in this state?

He or she is in a very dangerous condition if left alone. He or she is in such a helpless state that he or she may asphyxiate on his or her own vomit. There is a real risk of death. (By the way, we say "he or she" deliberately – it is not just a male problem).

4. How many of these people are there?

The numbers are very small indeed and represent only a minute fraction of the College population. But the risk of death or serious injury in this state is so acute that we need to have proper plans in place.

5. Why is it the College's business?

We are a residential community that ought to care for its own members. A legless drunk is likely to be someone's best friend or colleague in College. Some students do have real problems in dealing with drink. The Scheme allows student members of the College to assume responsibility for a problem in their own midst.

6. How does the Scheme work?

Student helpers will be given some very simple training in how to keep watch over a person who is drunk to the point of incapacity. The porters will have already filtered out anyone who needs to be sent immediately to A & E. Helpers will be asked to sign up to be on call for some nights during the term (see more on signing up below). They need to be contactable, on-site and sober for that night. Subject to demand, helpers are free to choose their least sociable night.

If the porters call helpers out, they will need to come to the Forecourt Lodge where the porters will help them take charge of their drunk. Helpers will be given written guidance sheets to remind them of what to do. They will then have to maintain regular contact with the porters throughout the night until their drunk is out of the danger period. At the very least, that means staying awake! There will be one male and female helper allocated each night.

7. How likely am I to be called out?

We already have many volunteers who contribute to the scheme, and some of them are extraordinarily generous about signing up. There were about seven call-outs last year. The chances are that you will sleep through your allocated night blissfully undisturbed. The more active and willing helpers we have in the scheme, the less likely it is that any one of them will be called out.

8. What's in it for me?

A fair question. Most importantly, you will have done something to make the College a safer and more caring place. Training of this sort is a good CV point. We are open to suggestions about other forms of recognition.

The rewards may not be remunerative but we like to think they go beyond giving you a warm feeling of virtue! The Dean provides food and drink for all new and continuing helpers during a training event in the Michaelmas Term. Helpers who sign up for the most nights each term can earn vouchers for dinner out at a restaurant, and there are free double Hall tickets to anyone who signs up for a minimum of 20 nights over the year.

The College will also pay £100 to any helper who is in fact called out. But if you don't want to be paid, you can waive the money or ask for it to be donated to charity. When you consider the importance of the responsibility you would take on, £100 isn't such a large sum.

9. And the drunk?

The Dean deals with all cases of students who are reported as drunken and incapable and in culpable cases, he or she will refer to the current 'tariff' of penalties which is included in the Dean's Statement of Practice which is published and reviewed annually.

10. What about legal liability?

The College owes a legal duty of care to drunken and incapable students whom it has discovered and begun to attend to. Student helpers who work as part of the scheme are discharging the College's duty of care. Helpers themselves are not legally liable.

"Amateur" helpers who look after drunken friends without any formal involvement from the College are actually exposed to a greater risk of legal liability than properly trained student helpers who work under the College's legal umbrella.

Also, student helpers who work as part of the scheme are not engaged in a "regulated activity" under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2007. If they only do what the scheme asks of them, they are not providing "relevant personal care" within the specialised meaning of the Act.

All trained student helpers will be DBS checked.

11. How do I sign up?

Each term, all trained helpers will be provided with a link to an online form, where they will be invited to sign up for some nights on call. The aim is for one male and one female helper to be on call each night of term. Helpers are kindly asked to commit to at least two nights on call each term. We sometimes send out chaser emails asking people to cover nights that are still empty. Make a note of your nights on call in your own diaries. If your contact phone number changes, please advise the Dean's Assistant.

Ernest Laue (Dean)

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