

National Assembly for Wales / Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
[Health and Social Care Committee / Y Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#)

[Inquiry into alcohol and substance misuse / Ymchwiliad i gamddefnyddio alcohol a sylweddau](#)

Evidence from National Union of Students – ASM 28 / Tystiolaeth gan Undeb Cenedlaethol y Myfyrwyr – ASM 28

NUS and NUS Wales: Information for the HSC Committee

Existing research on students and drinking behaviours:

There are currently 2.5 million students in British higher education, which incorporates 43% of the entire 18-24 year old populationⁱ. There are 165 higher education institutions. Evidence suggests that students consistently report higher levels of consumption than the wider young adult group, claiming to drink nearly double the amount in a week of every type of drinkⁱⁱ.

Students report consuming nearly double the amount for every type of drink, with glasses of wine at nearly three times as manyⁱⁱⁱ. It is also more common for students to go out with the intention of getting drunk than it is for the wider young adult audience, with 53%^{iv} vs. 48%^v reporting doing this at least once a week, although students report unintentionally getting drunk less (32%^{vi} vs. 37%^{vii}).

Starting university presents a significant life change for students, with many moving away from home, establishing new groups of friends and living alone for the first time. This level of life change means that students are particularly susceptible to developing new habits and behaviours while at university^{viii}. This appears to be particularly key around alcohol consumption, with the expectations around the university lifestyle, as well as new peer pressures having the potential to make new students vulnerable to adopting harmful drinking patterns.

85% of students report believing that drinking and getting drunk is a fundamental part of the student experience and drinking to excess is expected^{ix}. This belief creates a vicious cycle where perceptions that other students are drinking, and that being drunk is an integral part of the university experience push students to drink more than they might otherwise.

Despite the belief that getting drunk is fundamental to the university lifestyle, 40% of students report that drinking alcohol has had a negative experience on their university life in general^x. Students report experiencing the same alcohol-related harms as the wider population, with a slightly higher tendency to get into trouble with the police (although not statistically significant)^{xi}.

Young people in Wales are more likely to be referred by their GP for alcohol addiction and/or abuse than for any other substance. The strain that this puts on the Welsh NHS cannot be underestimated. The figures for referrals have been dropping year on year, and that is to be welcomed. We hope that such a trend will continue. Further information on this can be found [here](#).

British universities' response towards binge drinking has been mixed, university staff recognise some of the issues surrounding students' excessive alcohol consumption, but as yet, it is not a priority. While most appear to have alcohol policies, they are different at each university, not enforced, and the level of knowledge about them among staff is very low.

It is important at this point to clarify that students are certainly not a homogenous group and their drinking behaviours reflect this. Student drinking behaviours are influenced by a wide range of different factors. Many students choose not to drink for a variety of social or cultural reasons.

Many of the articles on British university students and binge drinking are limited to single university studies or specific student groups so caution should be taken before extrapolating these findings to the wider population. Students' unions and chaplaincies have traditionally taken a lead in this area, but the efforts have been localised to specific areas of the campus and again are dealing with consequences rather than prevention. To effect change we need an institution wide approach to responsible alcohol consumption.

Previous NUS work on responsible alcohol consumption:

In the past NUS has worked with Drinkaware to deliver the '[Why let good times go bad?](#)' campaign to students' unions across the UK, with most displaying campaign materials and a smaller sample bringing the campaign to life on their campus through sponsored club nights.

Although the campaign achieved some successes over its five year period, Drinkaware's own evaluation identified that it had not achieved a significant shift in young adult's behaviour and suggested a different approach needed to be taken (Independent review of the [Drinkaware trust, 2013](#)^{xii}).

NUS have also worked with Drinkaware, the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers to produce guidance for both students' unions and license enforcement officers on how to work in partnership and tackle the problems associated with [commercial bar crawls](#). This was in recognition of the high levels of alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour that took place during these events, as well as the resulting impacts to students' health and wellbeing.

With a growing literature on social norm perceptions as both predictors of drinking behaviour, and the focus of interventions, there have been various pilots of challenging social norms in order to change the drinking patterns of students. This includes work conducted in 2011, by [DECIPHER](#), in partnership with [NUS Wales](#) and [Drinkaware](#), to assess first year university students' perceptions of peer drinking behaviour and consequences in four Welsh Universities. Further information can be found [here](#). However drawing any conclusions around the effectiveness of these interventions is difficult, as the evidence for their success is mixed.

While there is lack of evidence of approaches towards behaviour change in the UK involving alcohol, there are examples from other areas, particularly around environmental initiatives in universities. The [Green Impact](#) scheme run by NUS is an accreditation and awards scheme for teams or departments throughout an institution whereby staff are encouraged and supported to change their habits and working practices to more environmentally sustainable ones.

First developed in 2006, it has now become a successful behaviour change and staff engagement model that over 155 organisations from different sectors use. Last year, over 40,000 staff made

25,000 changes as a result of the programme across 46 universities and colleges and 105 students' unions. The programme has become so successful that it has now been extended to run in hospitals, small businesses, dentists and a number of schools.

There are a range of factors, unique to the university campus, that influence students to drink more than the wider young adult audience, and these need to be tackled before direct student messaging can be successful. There is also evidence to suggest that once harmful drinking patterns have been established at university, they are more likely to continue into later life.

Introduction to Alcohol Impact

NUS and NUS Wales takes the welfare of students very seriously and our new [Alcohol Impact Scheme](#) works with students' unions and institutions to change attitudes towards drinking and building healthier, safer, more productive student communities.

Our pilot runs across England and Wales. We are working with **Swansea University** in Wales, other institutions that we are working with in England can be found on page 3 of this document. Once effective behaviour change can be shown we would hope for the programme to expand rapidly across institutions nationally.

The information we have is still limited and we are not able to fully understand the picture of university students and what works in changing this groups drinking behaviours. We hope with the learnings from our Alcohol Impact pilot to be able to identify and go on to recommend effective policy. A brief summary of our pilot is detailed below.

Summary of Alcohol Impact pilot

We have submitted this paper in conjunction with our first Baseline survey data report. As the baseline survey data report is not yet published, we would ask the committee to not share this data externally. We will look to publish our data, once we have completed our extensive research programme.

1. Background

In April 2013, we began to explore how we might change student behaviours by creating a social norm of responsible alcohol consumption at a key moment of change in student lives. This built on NUS' established and successful pro-environmental behaviours change work that received catalyst funding from Defra in 2010/11.

The result is that NUS will seek to reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder associated with higher education through the piloting of an innovative, institution-wide behaviour change programme called Alcohol Impact. We will achieve this through the creation of an accreditation mark that universities will see as a 'badge of honour', that will provide a framework for institutions and students' unions to undertake important, impactful interventions through policy, procedure, retailing and accommodation that ultimately lead to an institution-wide social norm of responsible consumption with excellent potential legacy through behaviour change and habit formation.

As well as demonstrating impact attributable to the interventions, we will create a robust evidence base from our work, identifying the links between students, alcohol and crime and disorder, which will future support the development and evolution of the programme.

2. How the universities were chosen

Our model is based on a creating a strong partnership between students' unions and their parent institutions. A range of institutions were selected for the pilot to ensure it was representative of the diversity of the sector. These variances included institutional mission groups (e.g. Russell Group, Million+, etc.), their geographical location (campus vs. urban; northern vs. southern); demographic trends (ethnicity and age of the student profiles), as well as attempting to cluster them to create local exchange and dialogue, and help us with ease of delivery. Some institutions were also identified by the Home Office as being in their [local action areas](#).

During the pilot year we will be working with the following eight institutions:

Name of Partnership	Number of students
Liverpool John Moores University and Students' Union	22,585
Loughborough University and Students' Union	15,460
Manchester Metropolitan University and Students' Union	32,465
Royal Holloway University of London and Students' Union	9,565
Swansea University and Students' Union	14,360
University of Brighton and Students' Union	21,310
University of Central Lancashire and Students' Union (control)	28,720
University of Nottingham and Students' Union	35,540
	180,005

3. Accreditation criteria and scores

In March 2014 a collaborative workshop was held to give all seven pilot partnerships the opportunity to meet us, the Home Office and each other, to find out more about current trends in research around alcohol and students, and share interventions that have previously been delivered. It also served to collect ideas from them for the criteria that formed the backbone of Alcohol Impact.

Subsequently the accreditation criteria were developed collaboratively with the Partnerships and the Home Office through a series of open discussions, the process helping to instil an important sense of ownerships with the partner institutions.

We have 46 criteria [A1-01 – A1-46], which includes 17 Mandatory and 29 optional criteria. This gives a total overall score of 181 and we have set the threshold score for [accreditation](#) at 60% of the marks, a score of 109 or more including points from the mandatory criteria (70 points). In addition to this there is the option to form three site specific criteria [A1-47–A1-49] this allows pilot partnerships to craft the workbook, making it bespoke to suit their own local needs. Each criterion is scored between 1 and 10 in terms of difficulty (with 1 being the least impactful and easiest to implement and 10 being the most impactful and difficult to implement).

4. Workbook and microsite

The [workbook](#) includes further information on why we are asking for each criterion to be met, the research behind this, how we will audit each criterion and linking to examples of good practice. We have also launched our [microsite](#), this will continue to be updated over the coming months, with examples of interventions being delivered and sharing of good practice, so please do refer back to it!

5. Steering groups

Pilot partnerships are now working through the criterion to see how they might attain and what they want to do as a result of them.

One of the mandatory criteria asks for pilot partnerships to form a steering group - a group of key individuals that can support and implement Alcohol Impact through the life of the pilot. All pilot partnerships have now formed their steering groups. Due to the nature of the programme, the variety of members of the group varies locally. Steering groups should be student led and are likely to include commercial services, student services, teaching staff, policy makers, senior university management, students' union staff and officers.

Alongside a diverse blend of internal roles and remits, some steering groups include some non-financial involvement from external stakeholders such as the NHS, Police, city council and fire services.

6. Interventions

Through carefully planned interventions, formulated through the use of the [Individual, Social and Material](#) model (ISM), and with the support of ISM author [Andrew Darnton](#), have worked with the pilot institutions and their students' unions to develop interventions that form the criteria. As part of the mandatory criteria [A1-35], each partnership needs to pilot one or more innovative interventions on responsible alcohol consumption.

Partnerships have focused on a variety of different local issues, which have included:

- Pre-drinking in groups in halls
- Damage in halls
- Peer-pressure to drink more than students want
- House party safety
- Student safety after a night out
- Drink-driving
- Binge drinking

Interventions have included:

- Use of breathalyser's as an educational feedback tool
- Communication campaigns, video clips
- Alcohol/quiet spaces at large events
- Safer taxi schemes
- Working with fresher's helpers to develop pledges to shift the culture of welcome weeks to focus on non-alcohol related events such as 'raveminton' and other events.
- Working with external companies to deliver alcohol free events such as giving out free food and non-alcoholic drinks.

7. The pilot

The initial pilot will run from April 2014 to April 2015. Subject to the results of this pilot, The Home Office will consider recurrent funding for a second year to allow the NUS to take the project to scale, with the aim of no grant being required in year three, at which point NUS would plan for the scheme to be expanding rapidly on a self-funded basis, with institutions paying to be audited and accredited.

8. Monitoring and evaluating impact

Three surveys, alongside diary studies and focus groups will be deployed to monitor changes in attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of crime & disorder over the period of the pilot.

9. Auditing

A team of volunteer student auditors will be recruited from nearby universities and colleges and trained (alongside staff from the organisation where appropriate) to audit the programme in March/April 2015. Each Partnership is audited to verify the results of the programme, provide teams with support, and identify good practice examples. NUS will oversee the audit process to ensure credibility, consistency and fairness.

Once results have been verified, a national Alcohol Impact awards event will take place in June 2015 to celebrate the individual and collective achievements of our seven pilot partnerships. The plan is that Partnerships will be reassessed every three years for the accreditation.

Colum McGuire, NUS VP Welfare
Beth Button, NUS Wales President
07 January 2015

Endnotes

ⁱ Geall, J. Youth Marking Strategy 2013 conference, held 16th April 2013

ⁱⁱ NUS Services Limited (2013), 'Why let good times go bad?' campaign evaluation, commissioned by Drinkaware

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} NUS Services Limited (2013), *op. cit.*

^v Millward Brown (2012), *op. cit.*

^{vi} NUS Services Limited (2013), *op. cit.*

^{vii} Millward Brown (2012), *op. cit.*

^{viii} Thompson, S. et al (2011), "Moments of change" as opportunities for influencing behaviour: A report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs', The New Economics Foundation, Defra, London

^{ix} NUS Services Limited (2013), *op. cit.*

^x NUS Services Limited (2013), *op. cit.*

^{xi} Drinkaware KPI research, prepared by Ipsos MORI, 2013

^{xii} Independent review of The Drinkaware Trust (2006–2012), prepared by 23red, 2013