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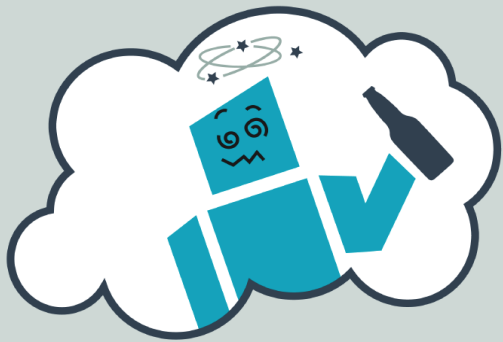
Alcohol

Impact

Students and alcohol | National survey

Research into higher education students' relationship with alcohol

August 2019



53%

Before going to university **over half** of young people surveyed **thought that students got drunk most of the time**



54%

Over half of students regularly **drink at home** or a friends house **before going out for the night**

Over half of students drink alcohol at least once a week

55%

43%

Two fifths of students think **getting drunk** means they'll have a **good night out**



82%

of students agree that drinking and **getting drunk** is **part of university culture**

But... **76%**

around three quarters of students **say they don't have to get drunk** to have a good night out



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1. Introduction | Objective, methodology and survey details

This report presents research completed as part of NUS' Alcohol Impact programme. The programme is a whole-institution approach to responsible consumption of alcohol by students, involving action by local partnerships of students' unions, universities and community organisations. The programme includes an annual survey, designed to identify students' relationship with alcohol at participating institutions as well as providing a means for understanding changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Alongside the data gathered from students studying at institutions participating in Alcohol Impact, in 2018-19 data was also collected from students studying at other institutions across the UK through NUS' database of Extra cardholders. A total of 793 responses were collected.


Within the sample, female respondents were over-represented in comparison with figures gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency across the full Higher Education student population. The initial gender split was 62% female and 37% male. The figures presented in this report have been adjusted to down-weight female response and up-weight male responses to match the HESA figures.

When reading the results, it is worth bearing in mind the characteristics of the respondents, outlined in the following chapter.

This report

This report presents the findings from the survey in the following areas:

- Patterns and practices of alcohol consumption;
- Perceptions of alcohol consumption on campus;
- Impacts of alcohol consumption; and
- Reducing impacts through responsible consumption.

Where significant differences exist between the latest two years of data, these are shown with the following symbol: 

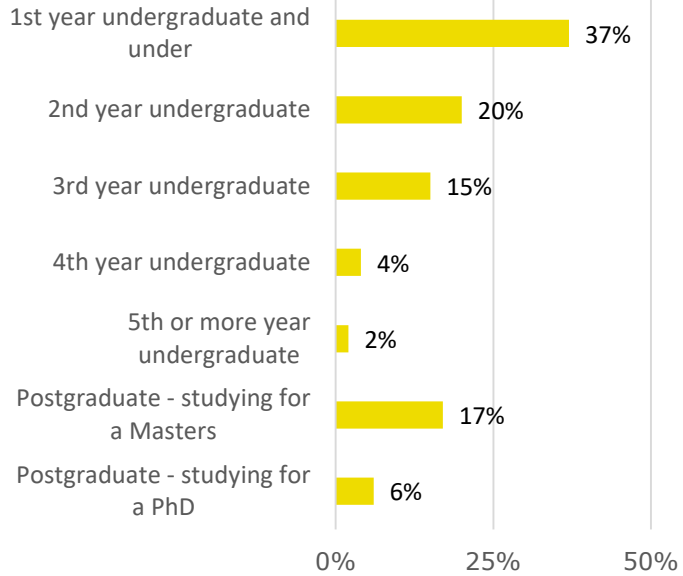
About Alcohol Impact

Alcohol Impact, managed and delivered by NUS, is a whole-institution approach to responsible consumption of alcohol by students. It is a strategic framework and supported accreditation mark designed to bring the students' union and its partner institution together to create the conditions for a social norm of responsible alcohol consumption. The programme offers a mix of an innovative, institution-wide behaviour change approaches and interventions encompassing policy, procedure, campaigns, retailing, and accommodation. To achieve this, the programme encourages strong links with local stakeholders, extending the potential for impact and legacy. These approaches form the basis of the strategic framework for action, with achievements in these areas resulting in accreditation. For further information about Alcohol Impact please visit: alcoholimpact.nus.org.uk

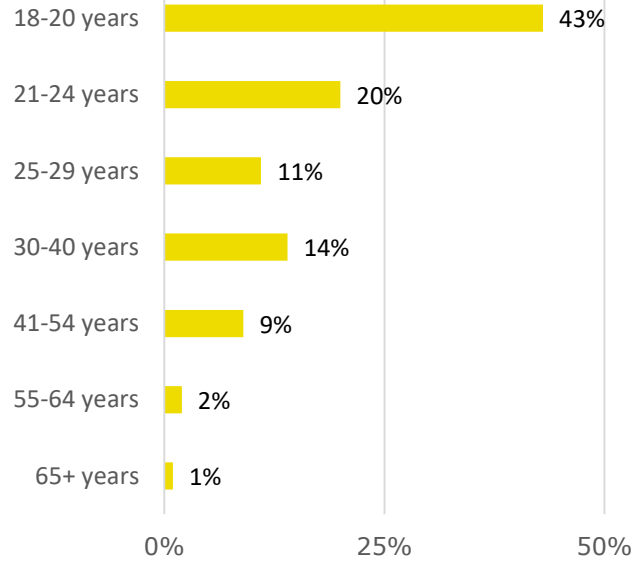
2. The respondents

Respondent demographics

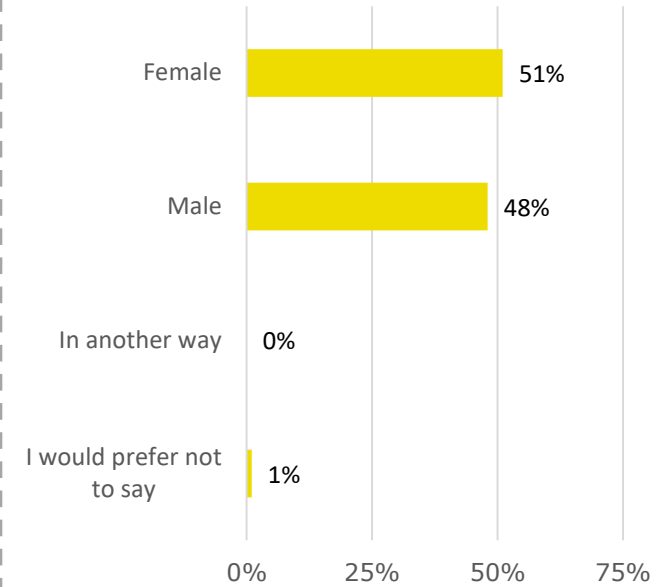
Year of study



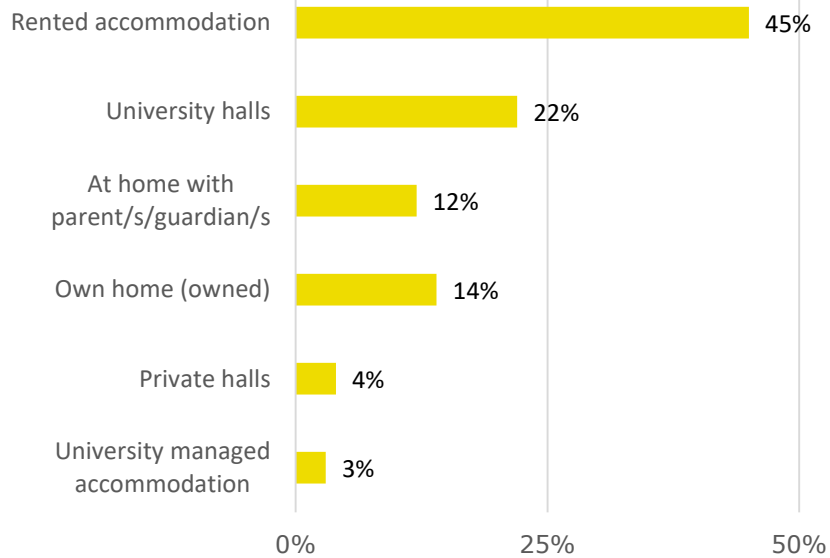
Age



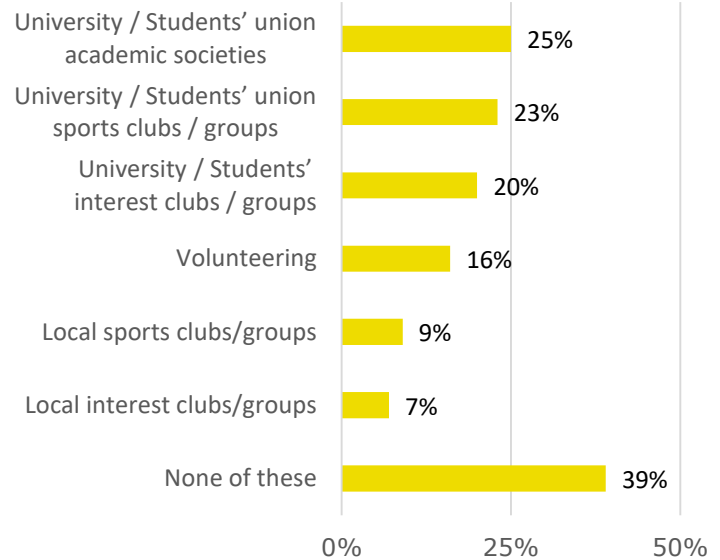
Gender



Accommodation type

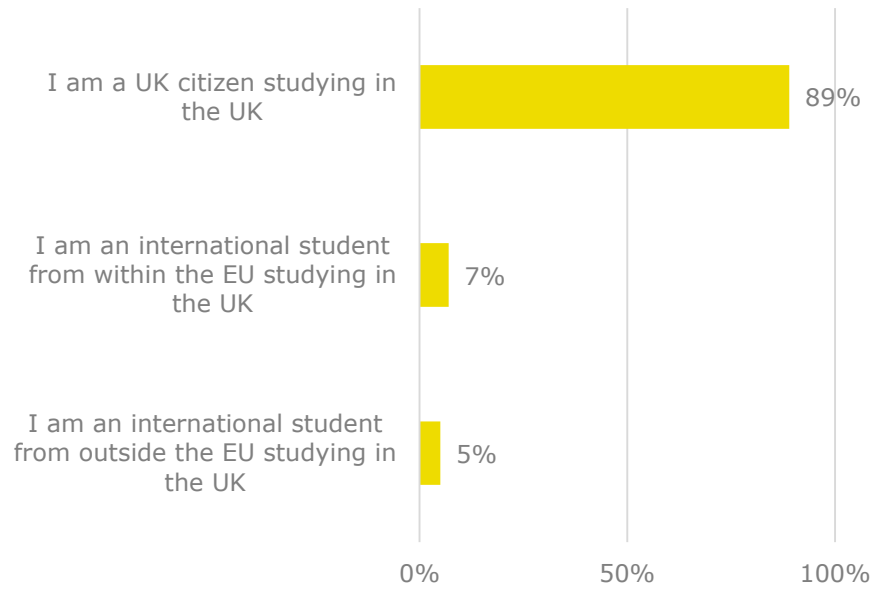


Interests and activities

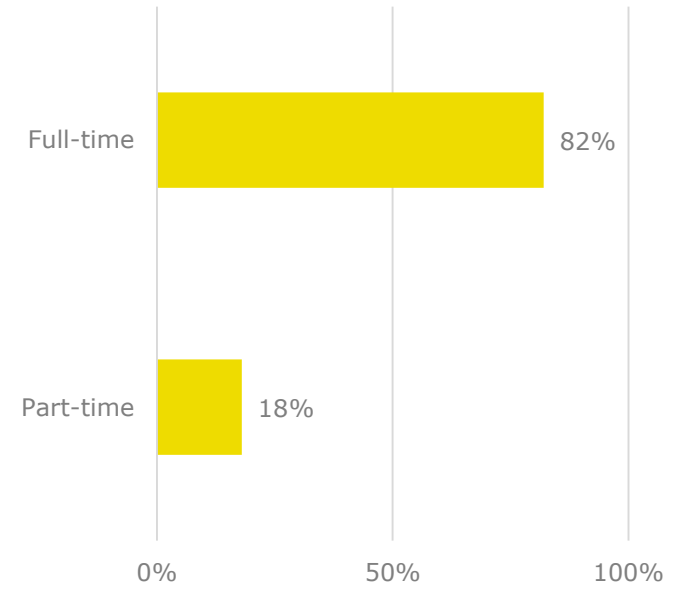


Respondent demographics

Nationality

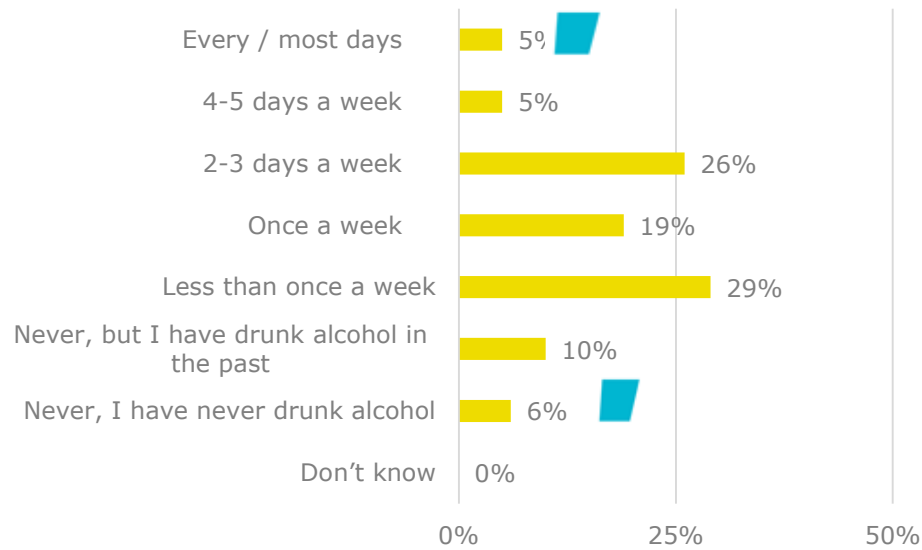


Study status

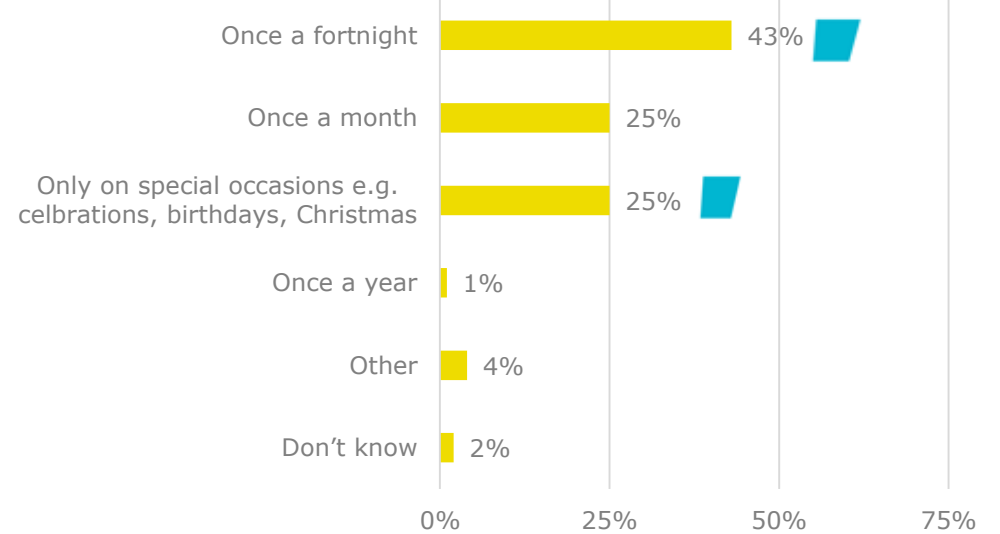


3. Patterns and practices of alcohol consumption

How often are students drinking?



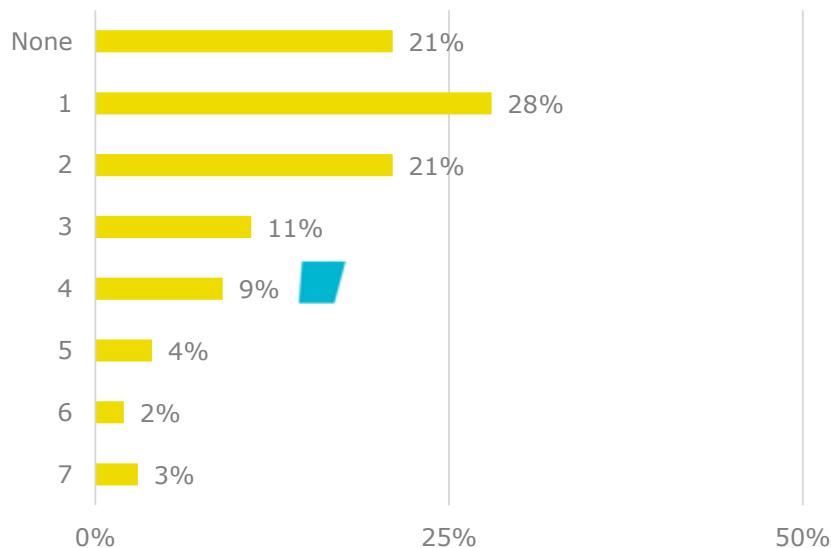
Q. How often, if at all, do you drink alcohol? Base: 819 Balance: No response



Q. You said that you drink alcohol less often than once a week... Base: 235 Balance: Drink alcohol more than once a week and non-drinkers

Respondents most commonly reported drinking alcohol 2-3 days a week (26%, n=210) and over half report drinking alcohol at least once a week (55%, n=447). There has been a significant increase in those saying they are drinking every/most days (up from 2% to 5%).

Of those respondents who reported drinking less often than once a week 4 in 10 said they drank once a fortnight (43%, n=101). A quarter said they only drink once a month (25%, n=59) or on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas (25%, n=60).

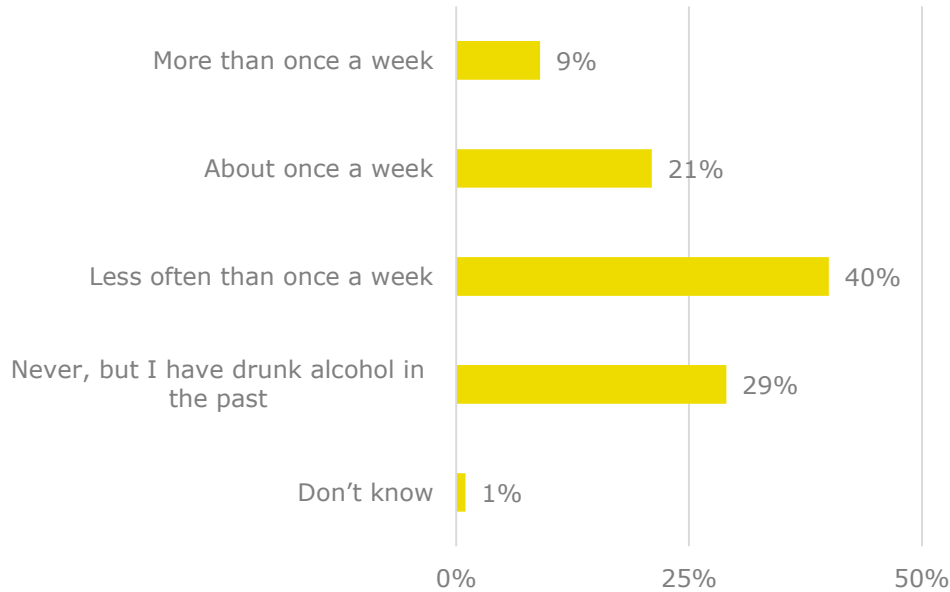


A fifth of respondents (21%) said they had not had alcohol in the last 7 days (n=146)

Amongst those who had drunk alcohol in the last week respondents most commonly reported drinking alcohol on only 1 day (28%, n=191) and in total half report drinking alcohol on only 1 or 2 days in the past week (49%, n=337).

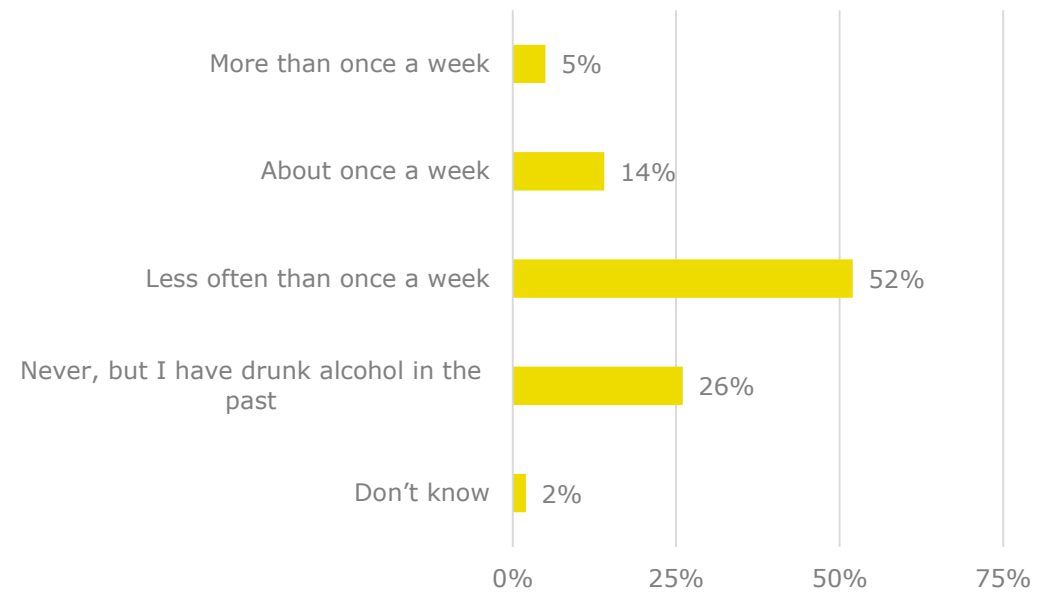
Q. Thinking about the last 7 days, on how many days over this period did you drink alcohol at all, either at home or elsewhere? Base: 684 Balance: No response

How often are students getting drunk?



Q. Approximately how often do you drink alcohol with the intention of getting drunk? Base: 685 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Respondents most frequently report drinking to get drunk less often than once per week (40%, n=274). A third of respondents report drinking alcohol with the deliberate intention of getting drunk at least once per week (30%, n=203). 9% report purposefully drinking to get drunk more than once per week (n=62). A third (29%, n=197) say they never drink intending to get drunk.



Q. And approximately how often do you drink alcohol, not necessarily with the intention of getting drunk, but end up getting drunk anyway? Base: 683 Balance: No response

Respondents were also asked about how often they got drunk unintentionally. Almost 2 in 10 (19%, n=133) of respondents report drinking without the intention of getting drunk but end up getting drunk anyway at least once a week.

What are students drinking, and how much?

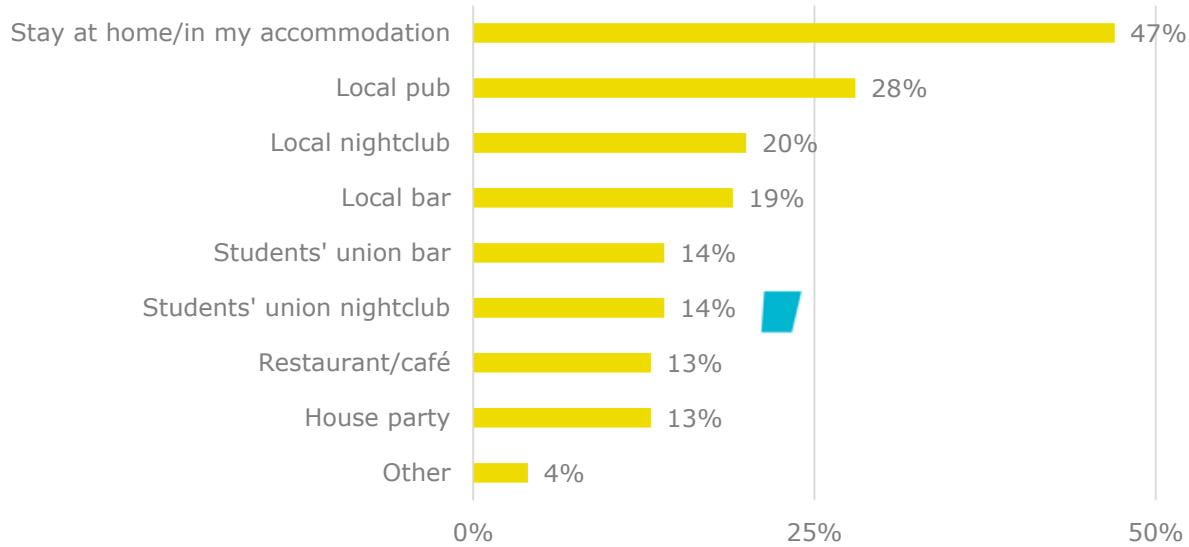
The most commonly reported drinks being consumed in the week prior to completing the survey are measures of spirits (singles and doubles), with respondents also reporting slightly higher levels of consumption of pints of regular strength beer.

Type of drink	Average number of drinks consumed in the 7 days prior to survey completion per type of drink	Average number of units consumed in the 7 days prior to survey completion per type of drink
Bottles of regular strength beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Carling or Bulmers, ~1 unit)	1.0	1.0
Pints of regular strength beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Carling or Bulmers, ~2 units)	1.3	2.6
Bottles of strong beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Stella Artois or Scrumpy Jack, ~1.7 units)	0.4	0.6
Pints of strong beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Stella Artois or Scrumpy Jack, ~3 units)	0.5	1.5
Small glasses of wine (125ml, ~1.5 units)	0.3	0.5
Medium glasses of wine (175ml, ~2.1 units)	0.6	1.2
Large glasses of wine (250ml, ~3 units)	0.8	2.4
Glasses of fortified wine or vermouth (e.g. sherry or port (not wine), ~1 unit)	0.1	0.1
Single measures of spirits or liqueur such as whisky, gin, vodka, etc. (with mixer or without i.e. shots, ~1 unit)	1.7	1.7
Double measures of spirits or liqueur such as whisky, gin, vodka, etc. (with mixer or without i.e. shots, ~2 units)	1.6	3.3
Bottles of pre-mixed drinks such as Bacardi Breezer, Smirnoff Ice, WKD etc (~1.5 units)	0.8	1.2
<i>Total average drinks consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person</i>	9.3	
<i>Total median drinks consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person</i>	6	
<i>Total average units consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person</i>		13.8
<i>Total median units consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person</i>		8

Q. And still thinking about the last 7 days, how many of each of these types of drink have you consumed, either at home or elsewhere?

Balance: no response, not asked of those who said they have never drunk alcohol or if they have it was in the past, excludes those who indicated they had not drunk in the 7 days prior to survey completion

Pre-drinking



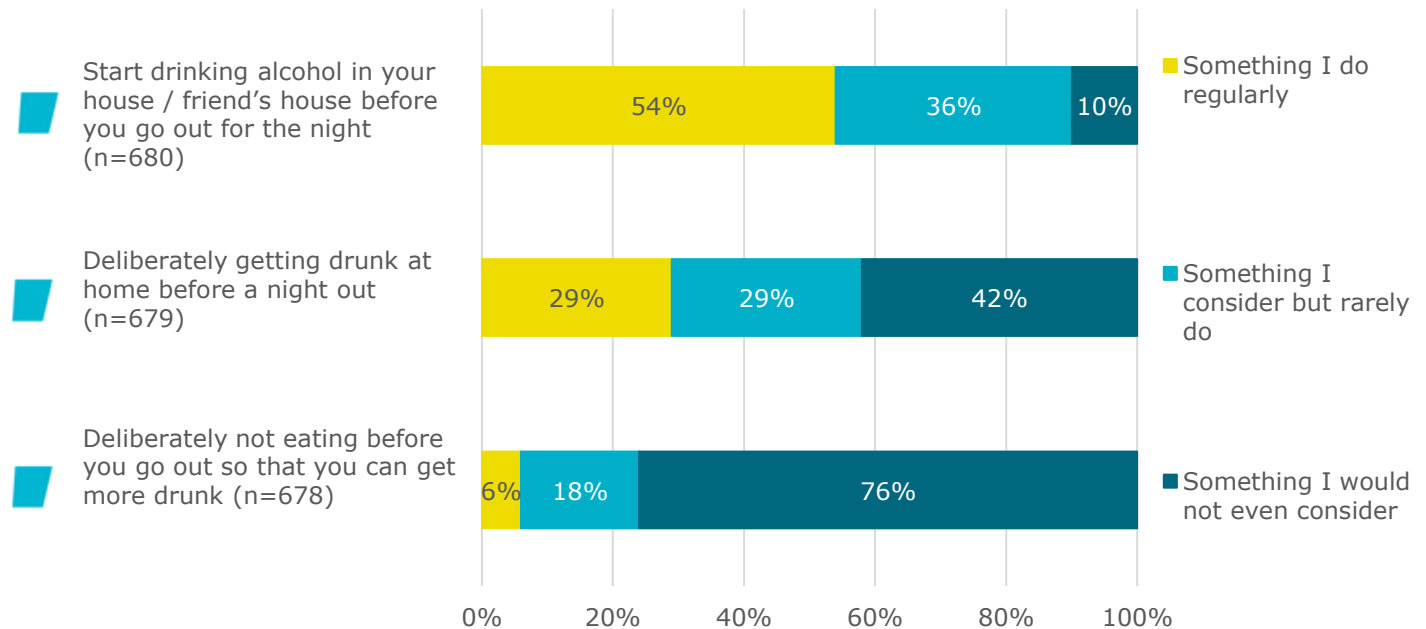
Looking at where students are drinking once a week or more often, the most common location is at home / in their accommodation (47%, n=160). A quarter of respondents report regularly visiting a local pub (28%, n=188). A fifth visit a local nightclub (20%, n=136) or a local bar (19%, n=129).

Respondents are less likely to visit their students' union venues (e.g. 14% visit their students' union bar once a week or more, n=83 and 14% visit a students' union nightclub at least once a week, n=91).

Q. If you are drinking, how often do you tend to drink in each of the following places?
Base: c.678 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Half of respondents say they regularly start drinking alcohol in their own or friends house before going out for a night (54%, n=366) and 3 in 10 (29%) say they regularly deliberately get drunk at home before a night out (n=199). Both have significantly increased since 2017-18.

3 in 4 (76%) would never consider not eating before going out so they can get drunk quicker (n=518).

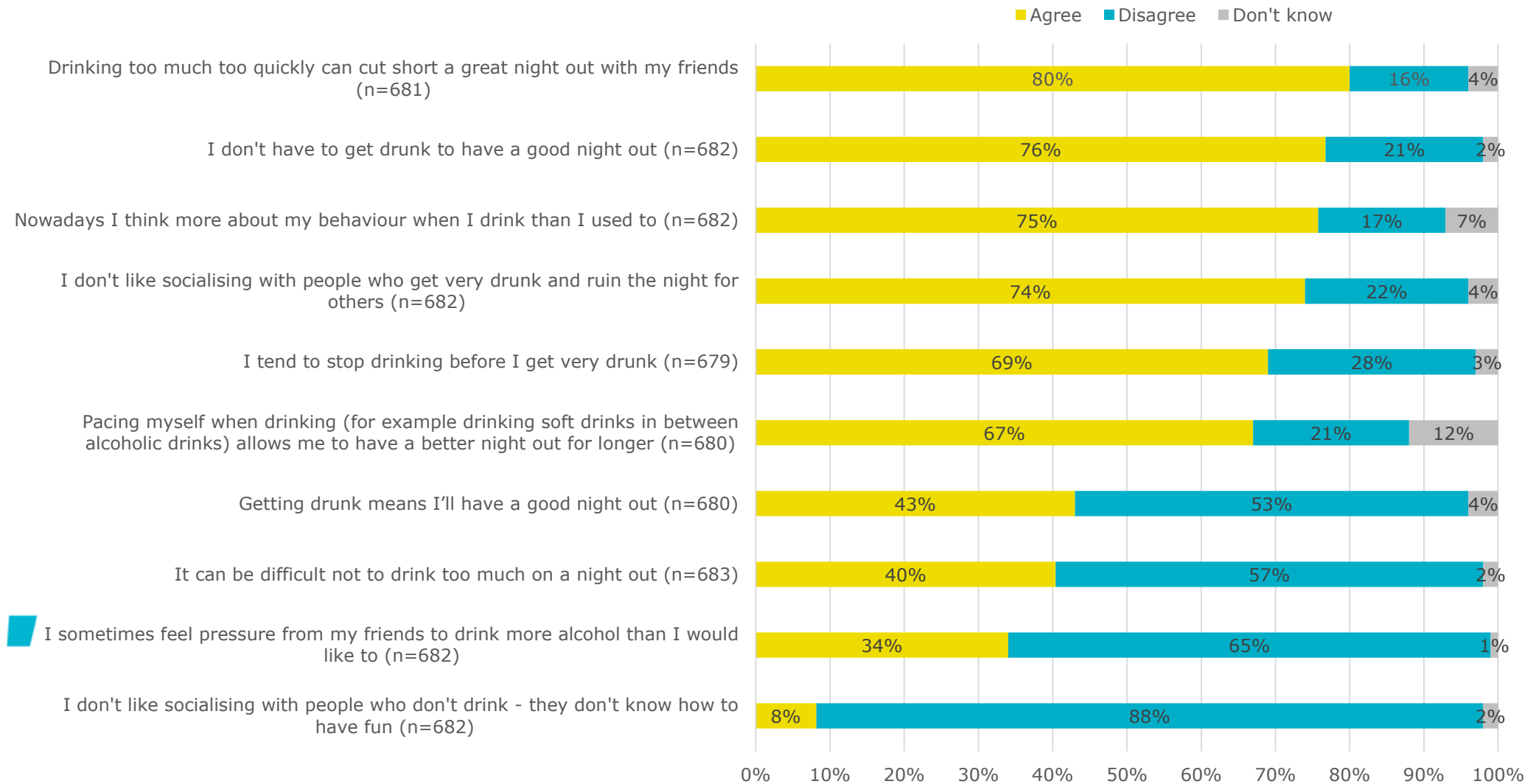


Q. Do any of the following describe your drinking behaviour? Base: (in brackets)
Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Drinking attitudes and behaviours

Respondents are most likely to agree that that drinking too much can cut short a great night out with friends and that they don't have to get drunk to have a good night out (80%, n=544 and 76%, n=521 respectively).

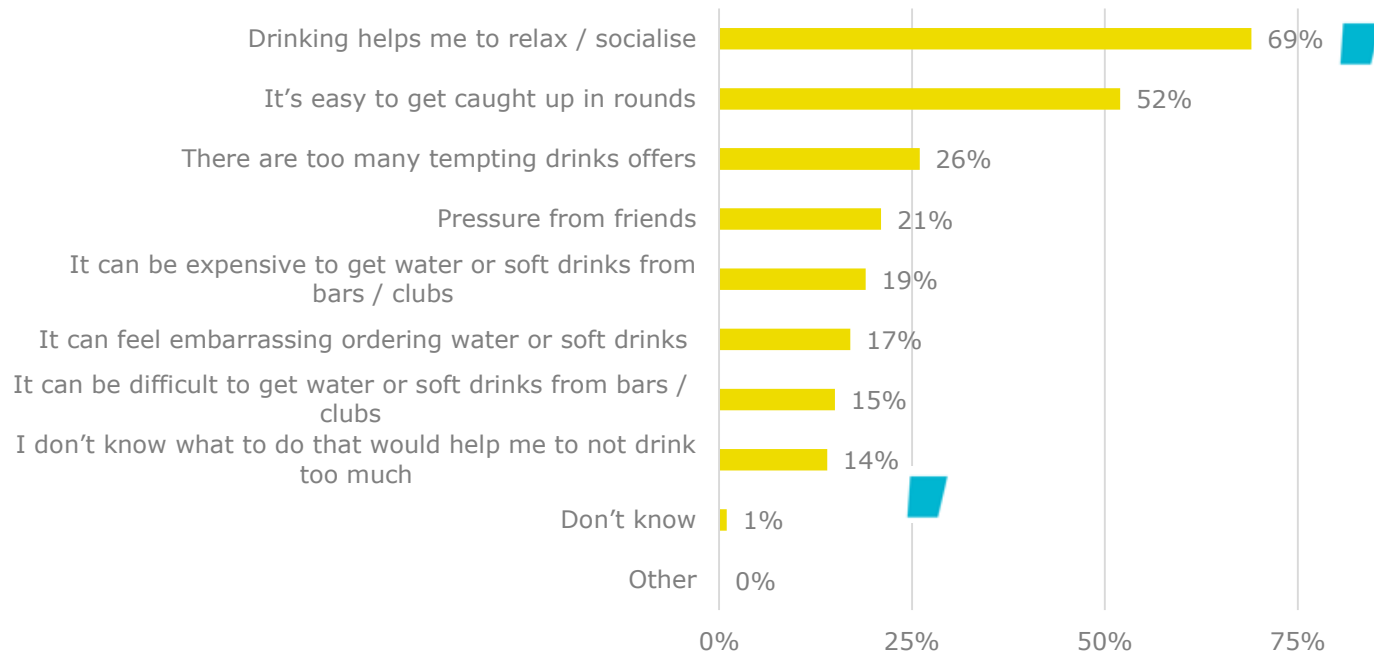
3 in 4 (75%, n=513) say they think about their behaviour more nowadays than they used to and similar proportions (74%, n=505) agree they don't like socialising with people who get very drunk. 7 in 10 say they tend to stop drinking before they get very drunk (69%, n=468). Less than 1 in 10 (8%) say they don't like socialising with non drinkers (n=56).



Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response

Why is it difficult not to drink too much?



Of those who said they found it difficult not to drink too much on a night out, thinking about the reasons why revealed seven in ten (69%) say that drinking helps them to relax/socialise (n=180).

Half of respondents (52%, n=136) say it is difficult not to drink too much when you easily get caught up in buying rounds. Too many tempting drinks offers (26%, n=68) are other reasons for saying they can drink too much on a night out.

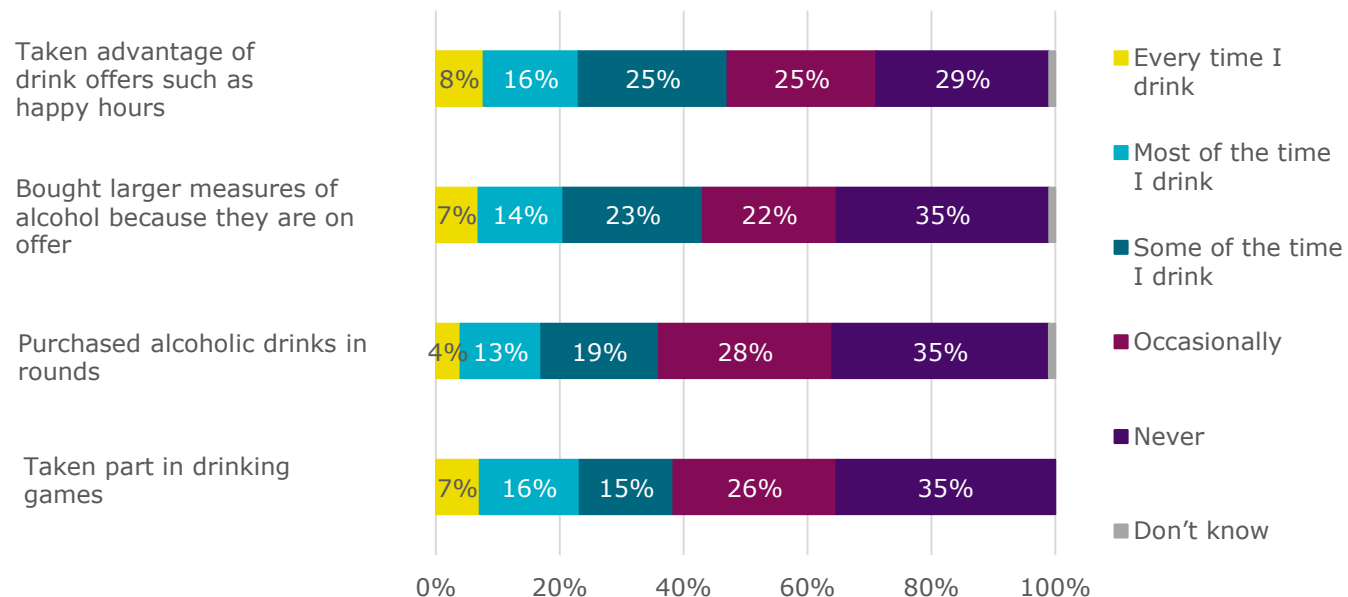
Q. You agreed it can be difficult not to drink too much on a night out - why do you think that?

Base: 262 Balance: No response, those who disagree it can be difficult not to drink too much and non-drinkers

Drinking games and buying drinks

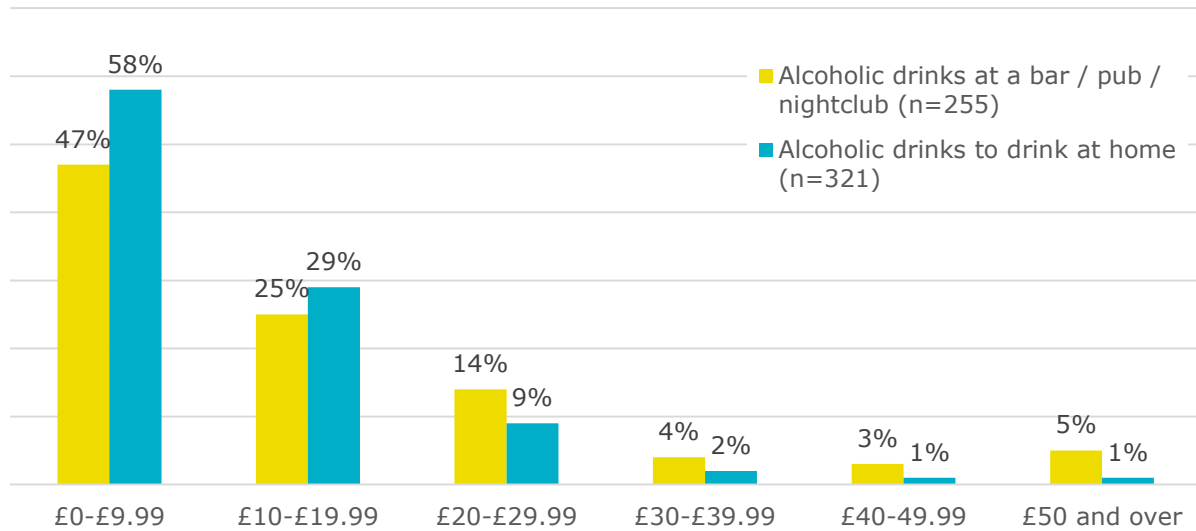
Almost a quarter say they take advantage of drink offers such as happy hours (24%, n=160) and 23% (n=159) report taking part in drinking games either most or every time they drink alcohol. A similar proportion buy larger measures of alcohol because they're on offer (21%, n=159).

The practice of purchasing drinks in rounds is common to 17% of respondents (n=111) who report buying alcoholic drinks in this way every time or most times they drink.



Q. Thinking about your time at university within the last term, please tell us how often you did each of the following. Base: 683 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Spending on alcohol



Q. In a typical week, how much do you spend on the following items?

Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Respondents were asked to provide an approximate figure for their spending on alcohol, both to drink at home and whilst at bars, pubs and nightclubs per week.

In both categories, spending up to £9.99 is the most commonly reported spend on alcohol in a typical week (58%, n=321) report spending this amount on drinking alcohol at home, and 47% (n=255) report spending this amount at bars, pubs or nightclubs). It is worth considering the 'volume' of alcohol that this spend might translate to in the different contexts when reading these results.

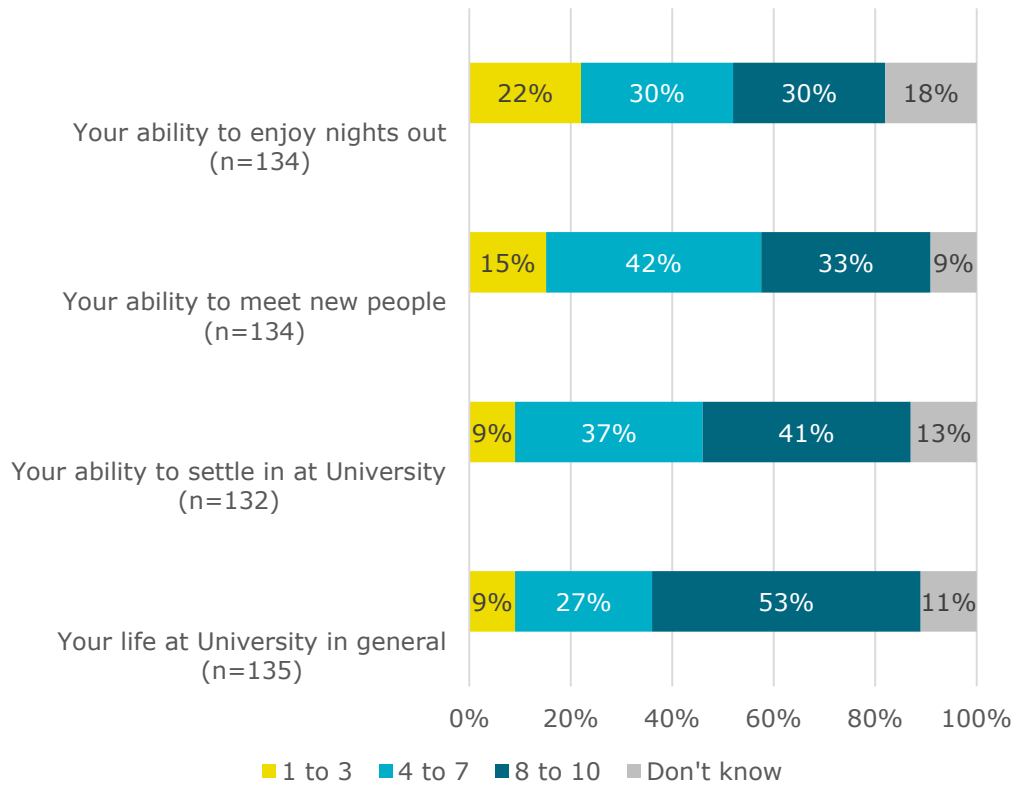
In a typical week the average amount spent on alcoholic drinks in a bar or nightclub is £12.75 and when buying drinks to have at home the average spend is £8.32.

Non-drinkers

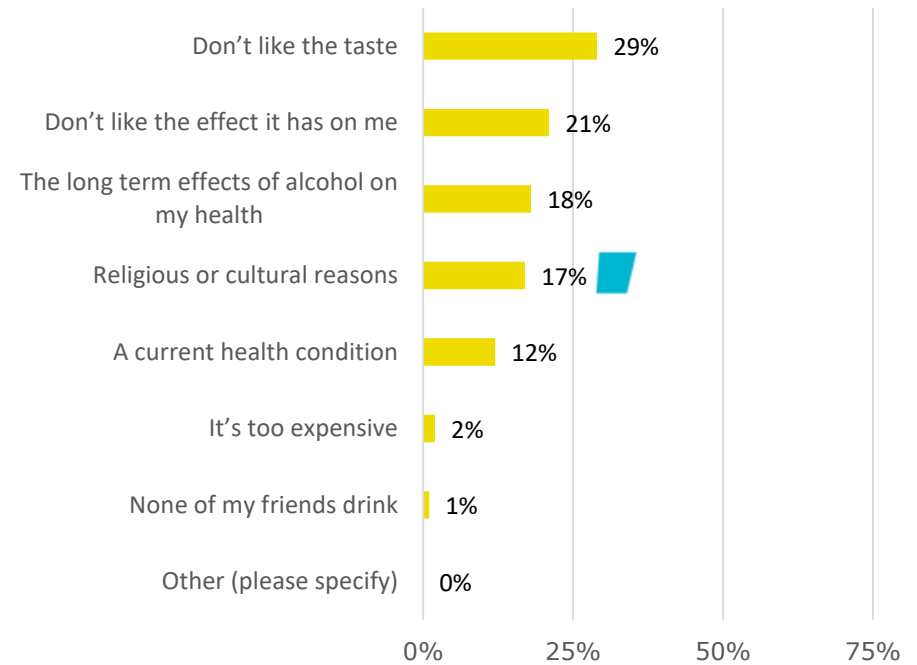
1 in 6 (17%, n=20) of non drinkers say they don't drink because of religious or cultural reasons. This is significantly lower than in 2017. 3 in 10 (29%, n=35) don't drink alcohol because they don't like the taste.

Half of non drinkers (53%, n=72) feel that not drinking impacts positively on their life at university in general. Not drinking impacts most on their ability to enjoy nights out (22%, n=29).

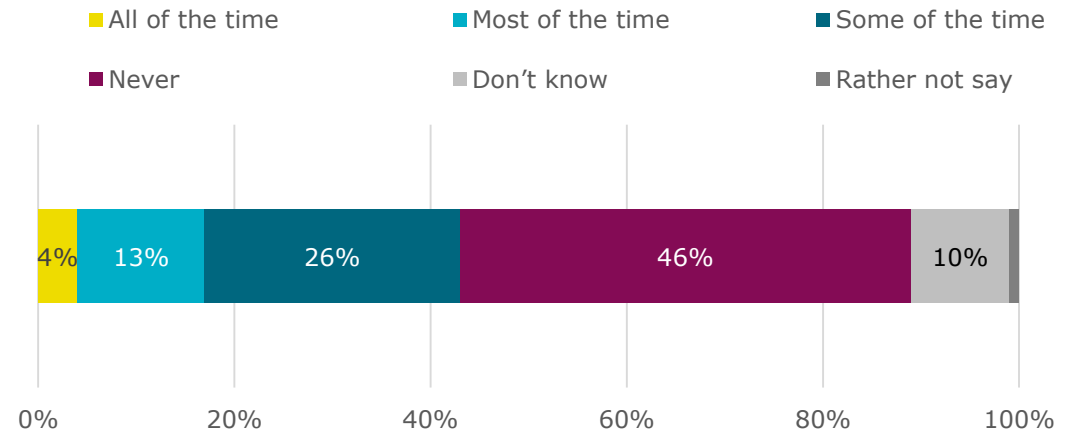
Almost half (46%, n=62) said they have not felt under pressure to have a drink with friends they socialise with, when thinking about the most recent university term.



Q. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 = a very negative impact and 10 = a very positive impact, how do you think that not drinking alcohol has impacted on the following? Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response



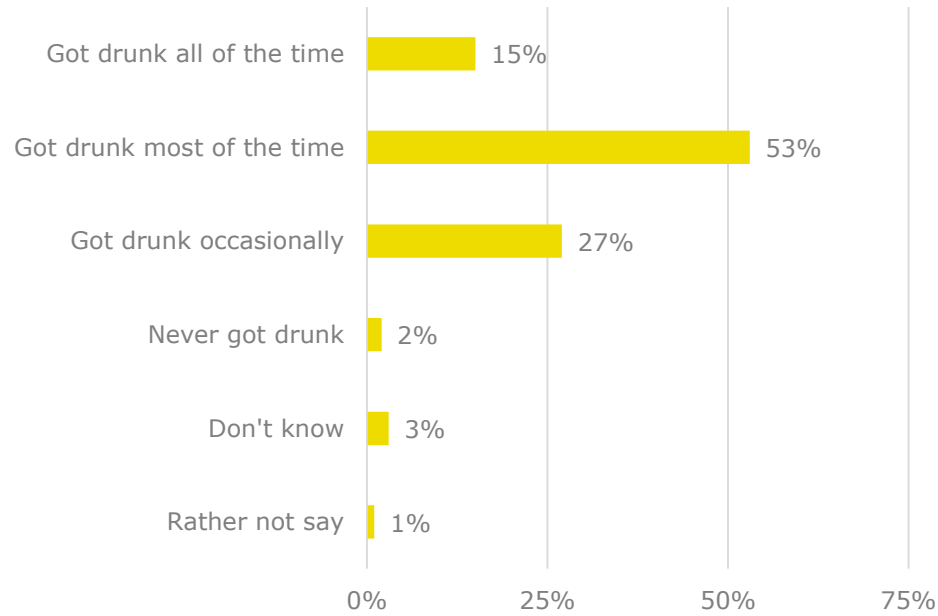
Q. What would you say is your main reason for not drinking, or stopping drinking, alcohol? Base: 119 Balance: No response



Q. Thinking about your most recent university term, when you were socialising with other students, how often did you feel that your friends expected you to drink alcohol? Base: 135 Balance: No response

4. Perceptions of alcohol consumption on campus

Pre-university perceptions



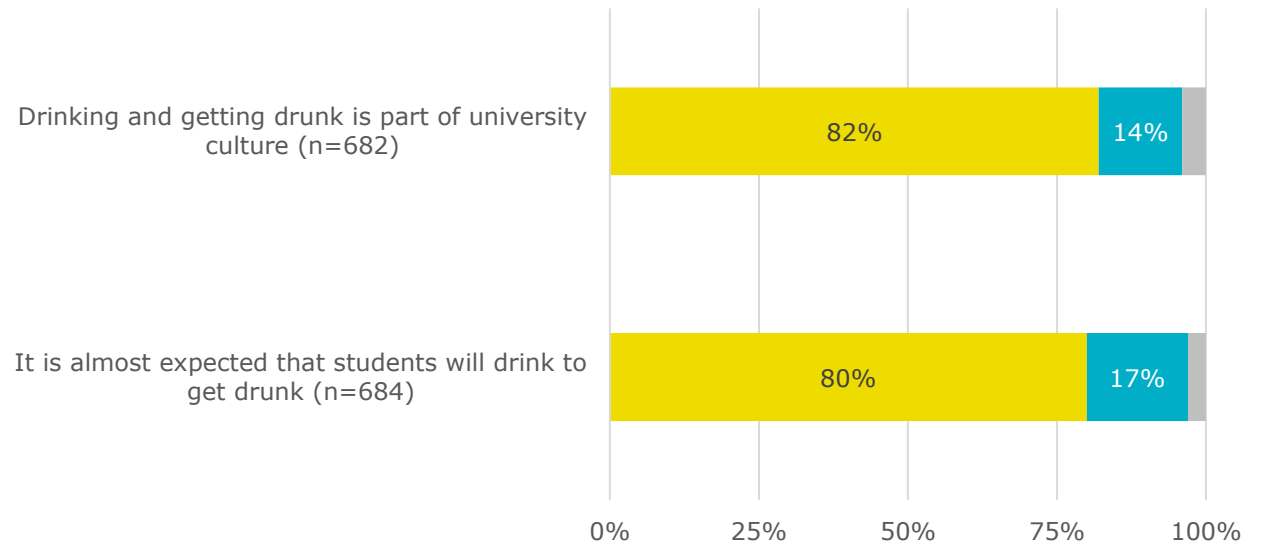
Two in three respondents report that prior to starting university they believed that students got drunk at least most of the time (68%, n=465).

Q. Please select the phrase which best describes your perceptions: Before arriving at University did you believe that students... Base: 684 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Experiences whilst at university

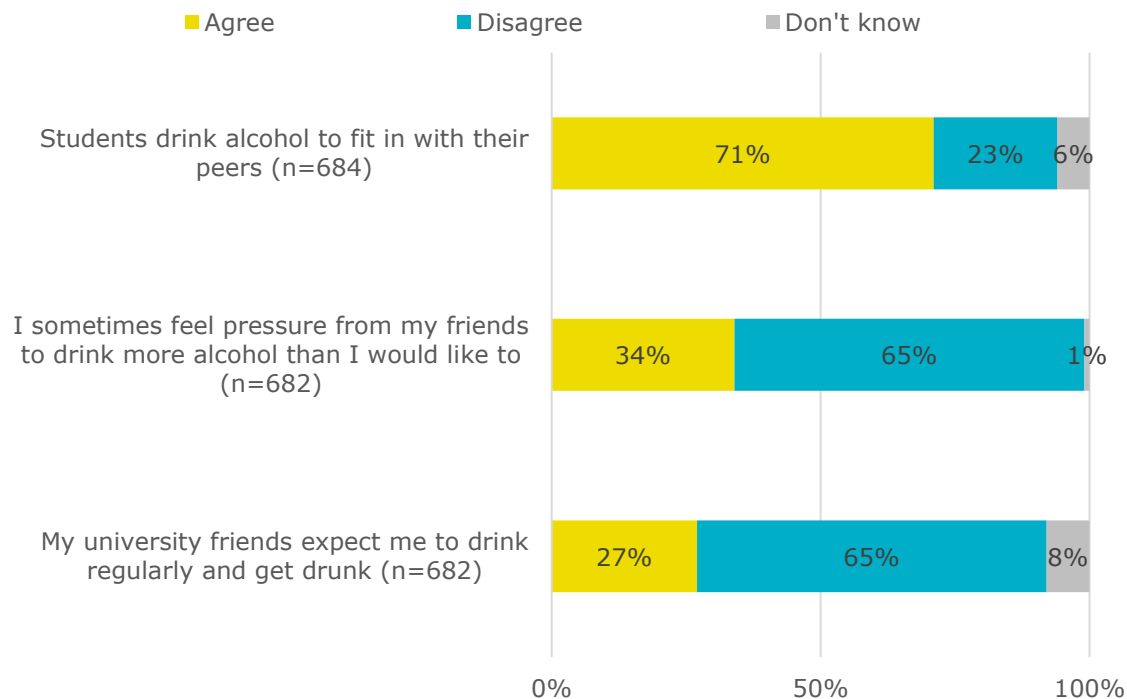
The vast majority of respondents agreed to some extent that drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture (82%, n=561). Similarly, respondents report that it is expected that students will drink to get drunk (80%, n=548).

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know



Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Peers and drinking



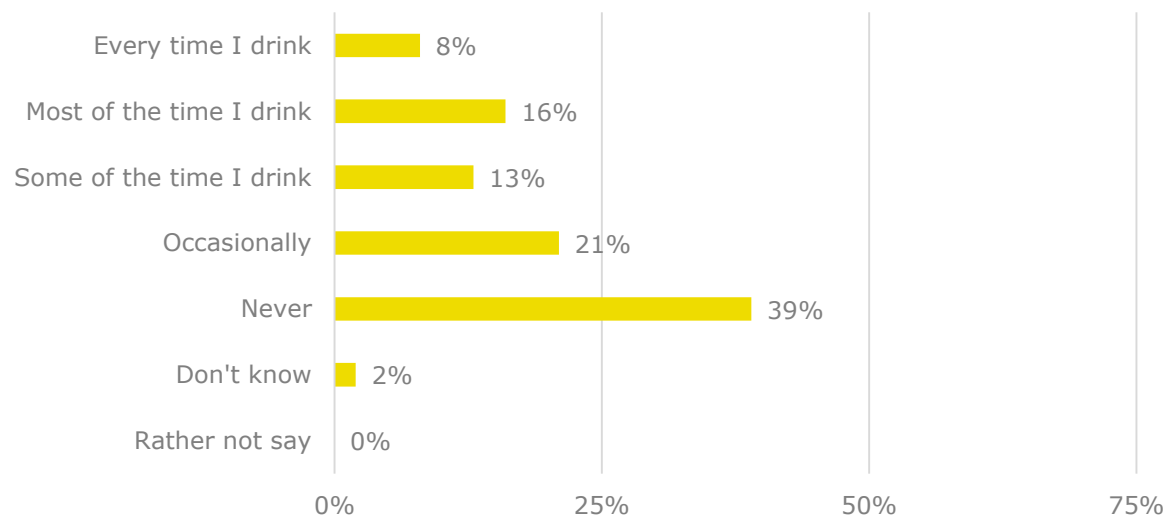
Seven in ten respondents agreed that students drink alcohol to fit in with their peers (71%, n=487).

When thinking specifically about themselves, respondents report a different picture with a third (34%, n=231) saying they sometimes feel under pressure from friends to drink more than they would like to. A quarter (27%, n=185) say their friends expect them to drink regularly and get drunk.

Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Less than 1 in 10 (8%, n=57) said they felt that friends they socialised with expected them to drink alcohol every time they went out with them.

However, 4 in 10 (39%, n=265) said they never felt that they were expected to drink alcohol when out with friends.



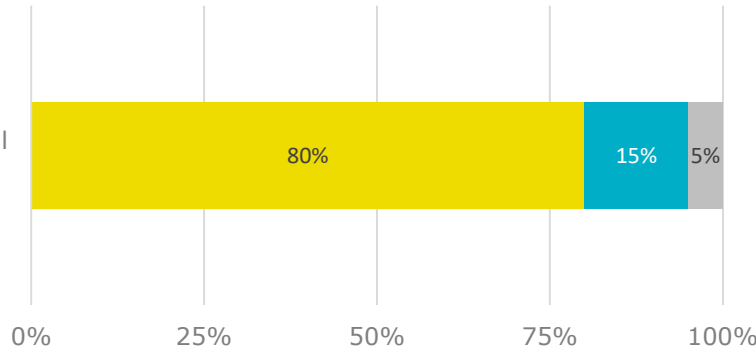
Q. How often have you felt that your friends who you were socialising with expected you to drink alcohol? Base: 683 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

5. Impacts of alcohol consumption

Impacts: Health and social wellbeing

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Few students worry about how much alcohol will damage their health



8 in 10 respondents agreed that few students worry about how much alcohol will damage their health (80%, n=544).

Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: 683 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Over half of respondents (56%, n=383) said they had vomited either after drinking or the following day).

Half (49%, n=335) had woken up feeling embarrassed about something they had said or done the previous night.

More than four in ten (45%, n=306) were unable to remember what had happened the night before.

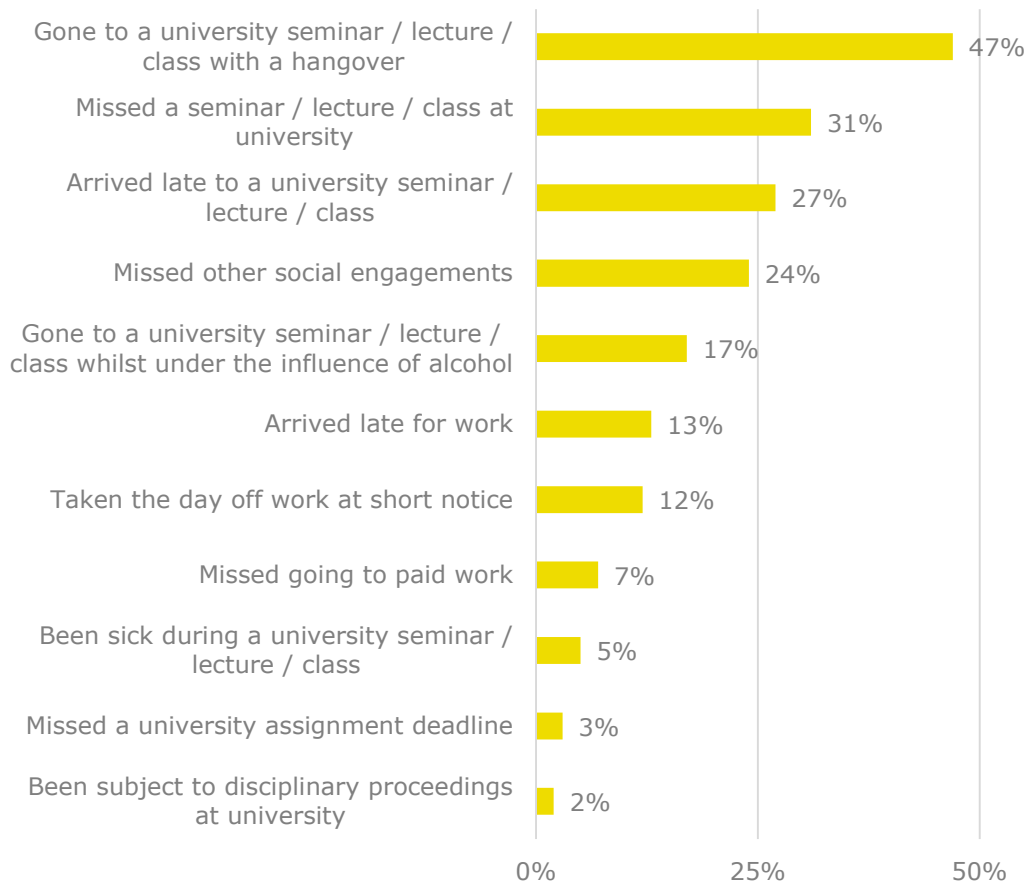


Q. People react differently and experience different consequences when drinking alcohol. Please indicate if any of the following things have happened to you in the last term as a result of drinking alcohol. Base: 675 Balance: No response, non-drinkers and not experienced

Impacts: Study and paid work

Going to a university seminar, lecture or class with a hangover was the most likely consequence of drinking alcohol, mentioned by 47% (n=314), along with missing a seminar or lecture (31%, n=210).

Few respondents report missing academic deadlines (3%, n=19) or being subject to disciplinary proceedings as a result of their drinking habits (2%, n=11).

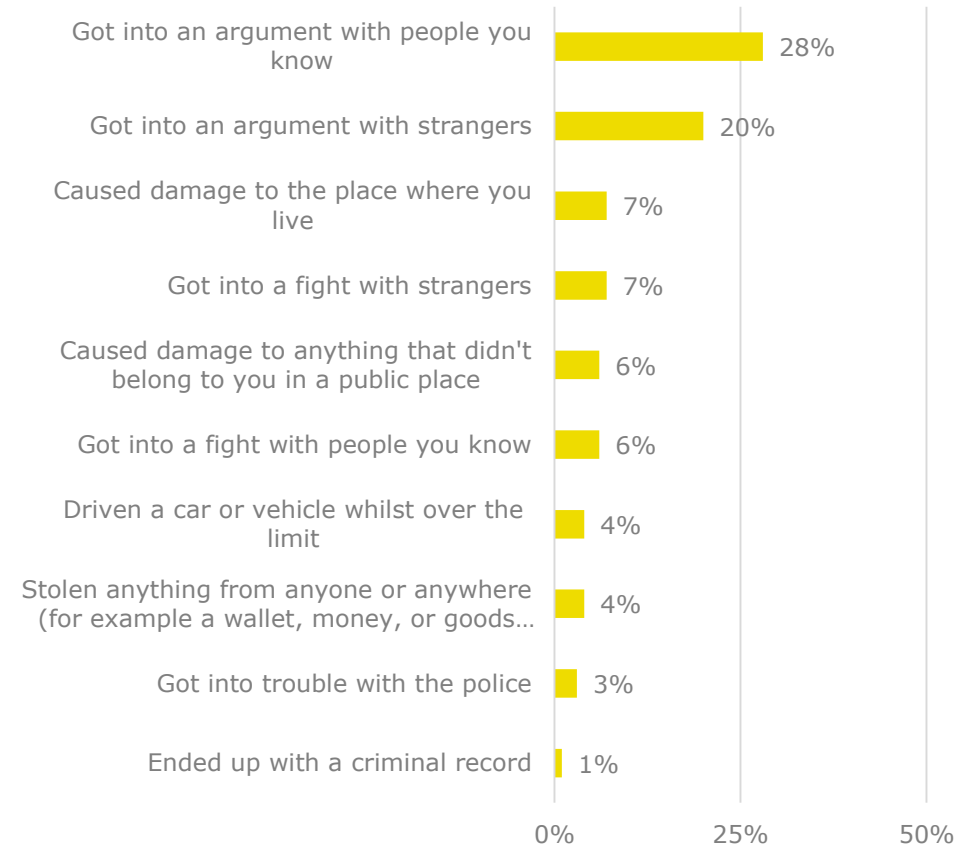


Q. People react differently and experience different consequences when drinking alcohol. Please indicate if any of the following things have happened to you in the last term as a result of drinking alcohol? Base: c.675 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Impacts: Crime and antisocial behaviour

The most frequent form of antisocial behaviour associated with drinking alcohol was getting into an argument with people they know (28%, n=191) or arguing with strangers (20%, n=134).

A low proportion reported occasions where their behaviour led to them getting into trouble with the police (3%, n=17) or ending up with a criminal record (1%, n=7).



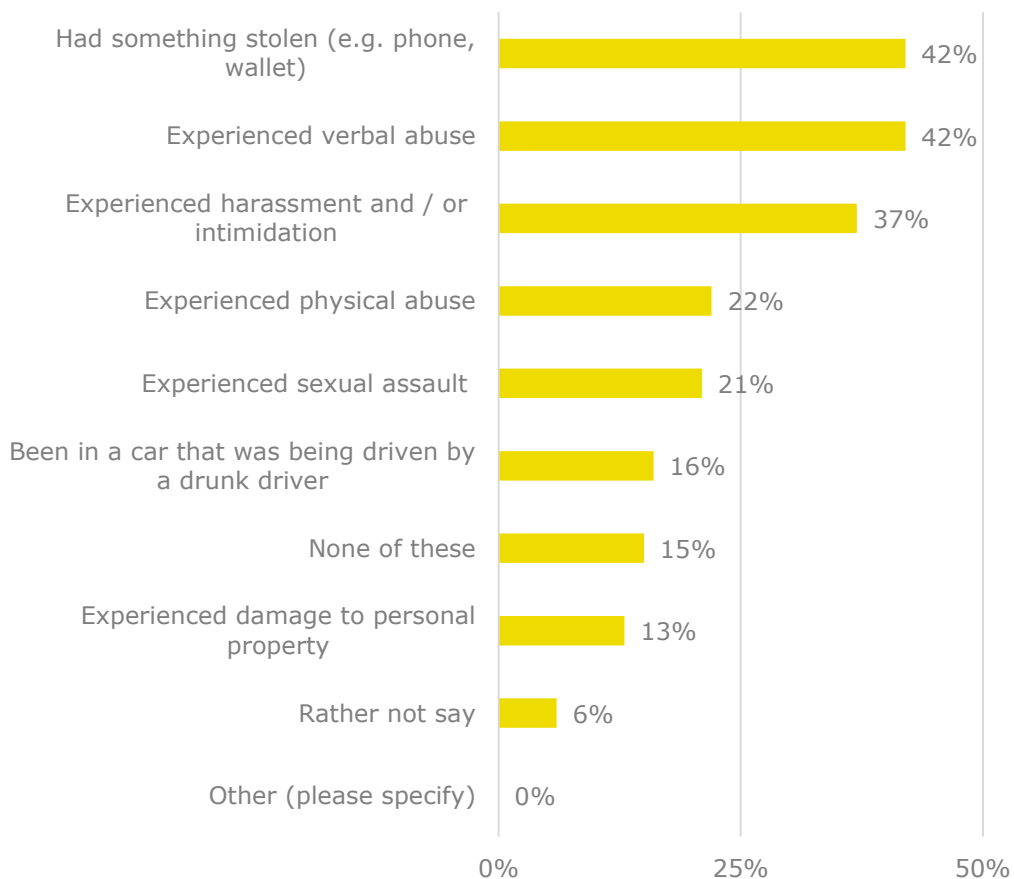
Q. People react differently and experience different consequences when drinking alcohol. Please indicate if any of the following things have happened to you in the last term as a result of drinking alcohol? Base: c.675 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Impacts: Crime and antisocial behaviour contd.

Almost half (45%, n=305) said they had taken risks with their personal safety as a result of drinking.

4 in 10 (42%, n=16) said they had had something stolen from them or had experienced verbal abuse as a result of drinking. 37% (n=14) had experienced harassment and/or intimidation.

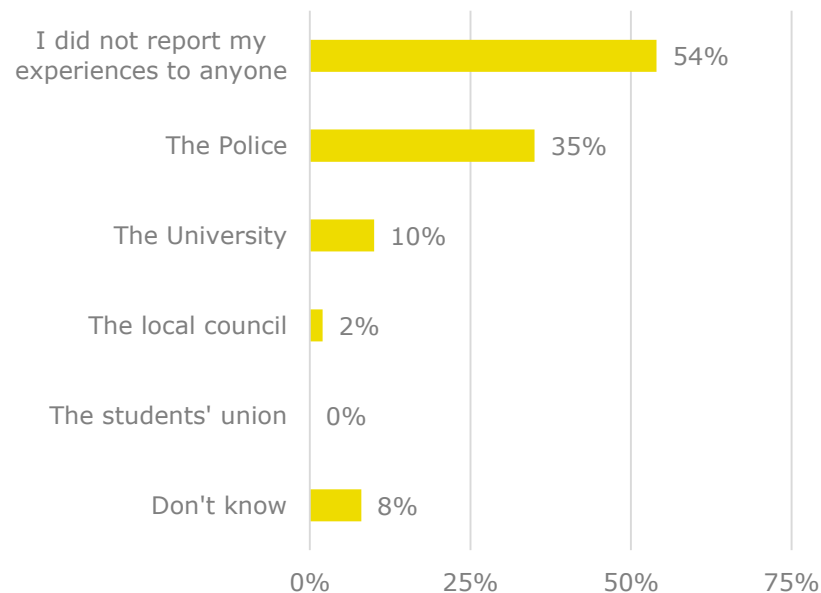
Half of those experiencing crime did not report it (54%, n=19). A third, however, did report their experience to the police (35%, n=12).



Q. Which of the following have happened to you in the last term after drinking alcohol?
Base: 38 Balance: No response and non-drinkers and not victims of crime



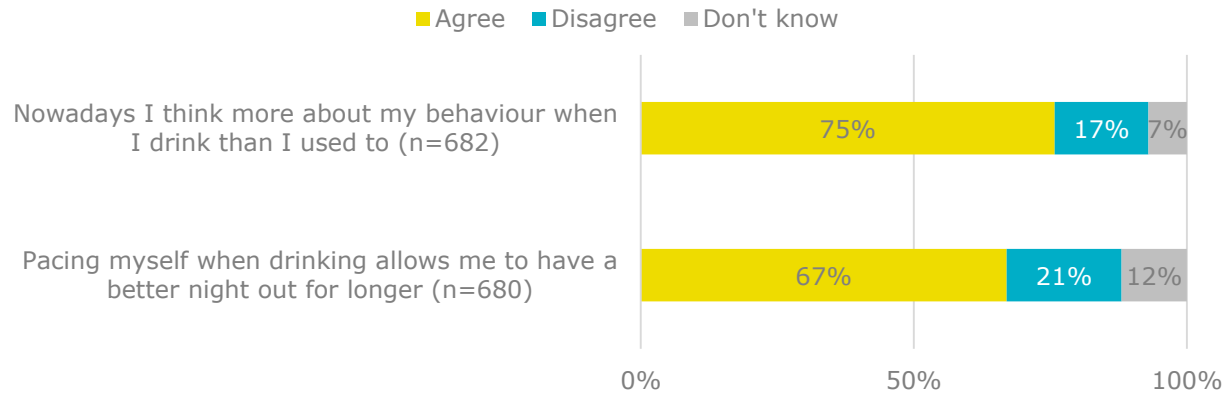
Q. Please indicate if any of the following things have happened to you in the last term after drinking alcohol?
Base: 677 Balance: No response and non-drinkers and not victims of crime



Q. Who, if anyone, did you report this / these experience(s) to?
Base: 36 Balance: No response and non-drinkers and not victims of crime

6. Reducing impacts through responsible consumption

Personal coping strategies

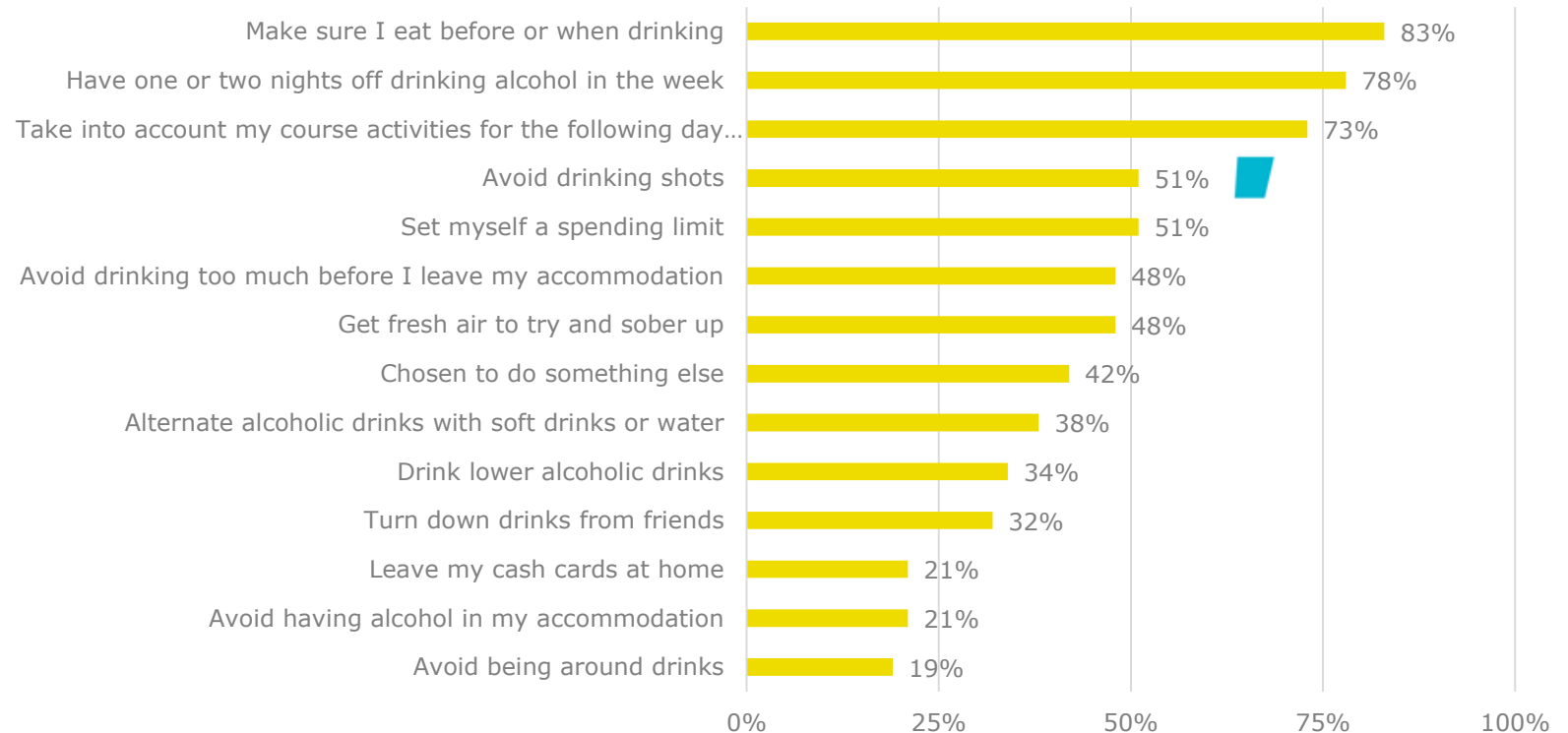


Three quarters (75%, n=273) say that nowadays they think about their behaviour more when drinking than they used to. Two thirds agree that pacing themselves allows them to have a better night out for longer (67%, n=209)

Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response

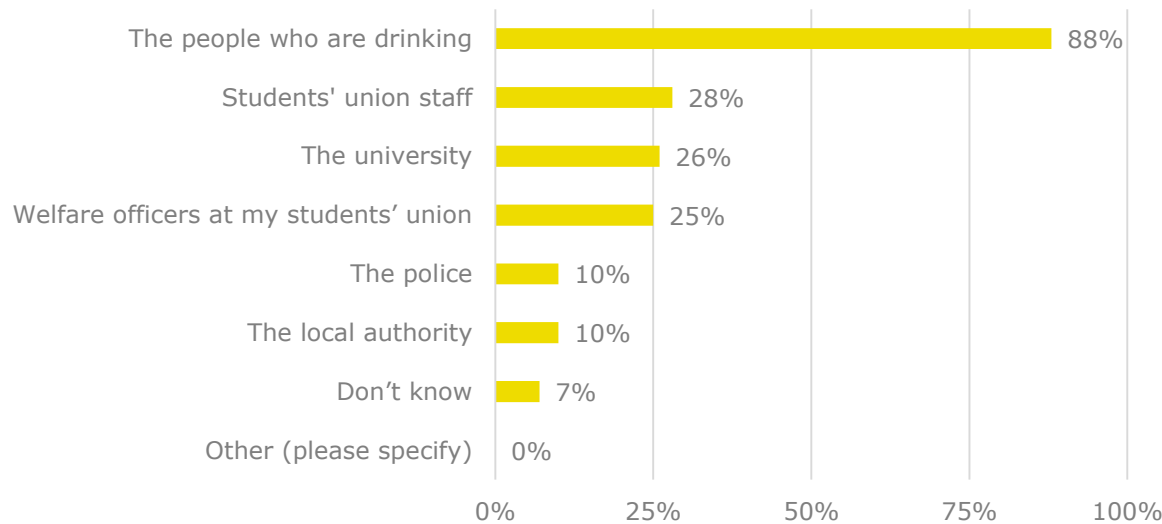
When describing tactics used to control their drinking and avoid getting too drunk, the vast majority of respondents said they try to eat before or when drinking to avoid getting too drunk (83%, n=566).

Other ways to control their drinking include having one or two nights off from drinking (78%, n=527) or take into account their course activities for the following day (73%, n=494).



Q. Here are some things people have said they do to control their drinking and avoid getting too drunk. Have you tried any of these? [Something I do regularly] Base: c.675 Balance: No response

Promoting responsible consumption



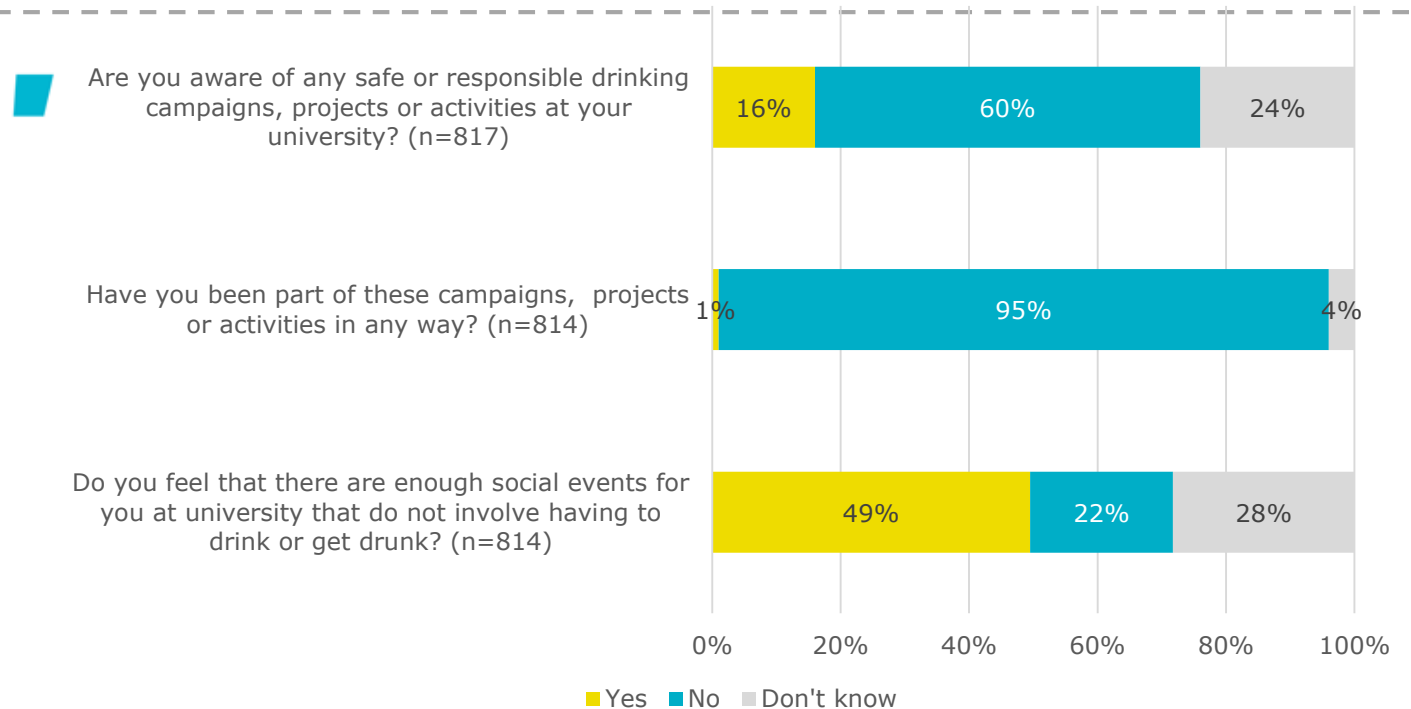
When asked who should be responsible for safe drinking at universities, the vast majority of respondents felt that it was the people who drink who should take responsibility (88%, n=706).

Q. Who, if anyone, do you think is responsible for safe drinking at university?

Base: 805 Balance: No response

One in eight claim to be aware of safe or responsible drinking campaigns/activities at their university (16%, n=129), this having significantly increased since 2017. However only 1% (n=1) had been part of these campaigns/activities.

Although half (49%, n=403) feel there are enough social events at university that don't involve drinking, almost a quarter (22%, n=179) feel there should be more.



Q. Are you aware of any safe or responsible drinking campaigns, projects or activities at your university? Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response

alcoholimpact.nus.org.uk

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