Students and alcohol survey - National

Research into higher education students’ relationship with alcohol

2016-17
Before going to university over half of young people surveyed thought that students got drunk most of the time. 51%

Half of students drink alcohol at least once a week. 50%

Just over half of students regularly drink at home or a friends' house before they go out for the night. 54%

Of students agree that drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture. 79%

Nearly half of students think getting drunk means they'll have a good night out. 40%

Over three quarters of students say they don't have to get drunk to have a good night out. 79%

www.nus.org.uk/alcoholimpact
## Contents

1. Introduction | Objective, methodology and survey details  
   3
2. The respondents  
   5
3. Patterns and practices of alcohol consumption  
   8
4. Perceptions of alcohol consumption on campus  
   17
5. Impacts of alcohol consumption  
   20
6. Reducing impacts through responsible consumption  
   24
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 2016-17 data was also collected from students studying at other institutions across the UK through NUS’ database of Extra cardholders. A total of 2004 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 65% female and 34% 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.

**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**
- 1st year undergraduate - 50%
- 2nd year undergraduate - 15%
- 3rd year undergraduate - 11%
- 4th year undergraduate - 3%
- 5th or more year undergraduate - 1%
- Postgraduate - studying for a Masters - 17%
- Postgraduate - studying for a PhD - 4%

**Age**
- 18-20 years - 49%
- 21-24 years - 22%
- 25-29 years - 11%
- 30-40 years - 10%
- 41-54 years - 7%
- 55-64 years - 1%
- 65+ years - 0%
- I would prefer not to say - 0%

**Gender**
- Male - 48%
- Female - 51%
- In another way - 1%
- I would prefer not to say - 0%

**Accommodation type**
- Rented accommodation - 36%
- University halls - 30%
- At home with parent/s/guardian/s - 15%
- Own home (owned) - 9%
- Private halls - 6%
- University managed accommodation - 5%
- Other - 0%

**Interests and activities**
- None of these - 39%
- University / Students’ union sports clubs / groups - 25%
- University / Students’ union academic societies - 23%
- University / Students’ interest clubs / groups - 21%
- Volunteering - 18%
- Local sports clubs / groups - 10%
- Local interest clubs / groups - 6%
Respondent demographics

**Nationality**

- I am a UK citizen studying in the UK - 78%
- I am an international student from within the EU studying in the UK - 11%
- I am an international student from outside the EU studying in the UK - 11%

**Study status**

- Full-time - 88%
- Part-time - 5%
3. Patterns and practices of alcohol consumption
How often are students drinking?

Q. How often, if at all, do you drink alcohol? Base: 2004  Balance: No response

Respondents most commonly reported drinking alcohol 2-3 days a week (23%, n=465) and in total half report drinking alcohol at least once a week (50%, n=1008).

Of those respondents who reported drinking less often than once a week a third said they drank once a fortnight (33%, n=179) and the same proportion said they only drink on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas (33%, n=179).

How often are students getting drunk?

Q. Approximately how often do you drink alcohol with the intention of getting drunk? Base:1570  Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Respondents most commonly report drinking to get drunk less often than once per week (42%, n=652). A fifth of respondents report drinking alcohol with the deliberate intention of getting drunk at least once per week (28%, n=443). 9% report purposefully drinking to get drunk more than once per week (n=146). A quarter (28%, n=435) say they never drink intending to get drunk.
How often are students getting drunk?

- More than once a week - 5%
- About once a week - 14%
- Less often than once a week - 50%
- Never - 28%
- Don’t know - 3%

Q. And approximately how often do you drink alcohol, not necessarily with the intention of getting drunk, but end up getting drunk anyway?
Base: 1566  Balance: No response

Almost 2 in 10 (19%, n=296) of respondents report drinking without the intention of getting drunk but end up getting drunk anyway at least once a week.

How often are students drinking?

- None - 24%
- 1 - 29%
- 2 - 22%
- 3 - 14%
- 4 - 5%
- 5 - 4%
- 6 - 1%
- 7 - 2%

A quarter of respondents (24%) said they had not had alcohol in the last 7 days (n=370)

Amongst those who had drunk alcohol in the last week respondents most commonly reported drinking alcohol on only 1 day (29%, n=450) and in total half report drinking alcohol on only 1 or 2 days in the past week (51%, n=801).
What are students drinking, and how much?

Respondents show a preference for drinking beer / lager and spirits. The most commonly reported drink being consumed in the week prior to completing the survey is single measures of spirits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of drink</th>
<th>Average number of drinks consumed in the 7 days prior to survey completion per type of drink</th>
<th>Average number of units consumed in the 7 days prior to survey completion per type of drink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottles of regular strength beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Carling or Bulmers, ~1 unit)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pints of regular strength beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Carling or Bulmers, ~2 units)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottles of strong beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Stella Artois or Scrumpy Jack, ~1.7 units)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pints of strong beer, bitter, lager or cider (e.g. Stella Artois or Scrumpy Jack, ~3 units)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small glasses of wine (125ml, ~1.5 units)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium glasses of wine (175ml, ~2.1 units)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large glasses of wine (250ml, ~3 units)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasses of fortified wine or vermouth (e.g. sherry or port (not wine), ~1 unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single measures of spirits or liqueur such as whisky, gin, vodka, etc. (with mixer or without i.e. shots, ~1 unit)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double measures of spirits or liqueur such as whisky, gin, vodka, etc. (with mixer or without i.e. shots, ~2 units)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottles of pre-mixed drinks such as Bacardi Breezer, Smirnoff Ice, WKD etc (~1.5 units)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total average drinks consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person 7.0

Total average units consumed in 7 days prior to survey completion per person 10.8

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home / in my accommodation</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local pub</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local nightclub</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local bar</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student's union bar</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House party</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant / café</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student's union nightclub</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at where students are drinking once a week or more often, the most common location is at home / in their accommodation (44%, n=685). A quarter of respondents report regularly visiting a local pub (25%, n=385) and a local nightclub (24%, n=366).

Respondents are less likely to visit their students' union venues (e.g. 16% visit their students’ union bar once a week or more, n=240 and 12% visit a SU nightclub at least once a week, n=176).

Over half of respondents say they regularly start drinking alcohol in their own or friends house before going out for a night (54%, n= 838) and a quarter (26%) say they regularly deliberately get drunk at home before a night out (n=408).

3 in 4 (78%) would never consider not eating before going out so they can get drunk quicker (n=1215).
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=1243 and 79%, n=1234 respectively).

3 in 4 (n=1178) agree they don’t like socialising with people who get very drunk. Similar proportions say they think about their behaviour more nowadays than they used to (72%, n=1126) and tend to stop drinking before they get very drunk (71%, n=1117). Only 1 in 10 say they don’t like socialising with non drinkers (n=143).
Why is it difficult not to drink too much?

- **Pressure from friends - 27%**
- **It can be difficult to get water or soft drinks from bars / clubs - 14%**
- **It can be expensive to get water or soft drinks from bars / clubs - 17%**
- **It can feel embarrassing ordering water or soft drinks - 20%**
- **It’s easy to get caught up in rounds - 49%**
- **I don’t know what to do that would help me to not drink too much - 8%**
- **There are too many tempting drinks offers - 26%**
- **Drinking helps me to relax / socialise - 63%**
- **Other - 0%**
- **Don’t know - 3%**

Two in three (63%) say that drinking helps them to relax/socialise (n=361).

Half of respondents (49%, n=283) say it is difficult not to drink too much when you easily get caught up in buying rounds. Pressure from friends (27%, n=156) and too many tempting drinks offers (26%, n=151) are other reasons for saying they can drink too much on a night out.

Drinking games and buying drinks

25% (n=382) report taking part in drinking games either most or every time they drink alcohol.

A fifth say they take advantage of drink offers such as happy hours (21%, n=325) or buy larger measures of alcohol because they're on offer (21%, n=329).

The practice of purchasing drinks in rounds is common to 16% of respondents (n=239) who report buying alcoholic drinks in this way every time or most times they drink.

Q. You agreed it can be difficult not to drink too much on a night out - why do you think that?
Base: 577  Balance: No response, those who disagree it can be difficult not to drink too much and non-drinkers

Q. Thinking about your time at university within the last term, please tell us how often you did each of the following. 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 (59%, n=884) report spending this amount on drinking alcohol at home, and 51% (n=762) 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 £13.03 and when buying drinks to have at home the average spend is £8.69.
A third (33%, n=124) of non drinkers say they don’t drink because of religious or cultural reasons. 1 in 4 (n=86) don’t drink alcohol because they don’t like the taste of it.

6 in 10 non drinkers (59%, n=252) feel that not drinking impacts positively on their life at university in general. Not drinking impacts most on their ability to enjoy nights out (24%, n=105).

4 in 10 (38%, n=165) said they never felt under pressure to have a drink with friends they socialise with.
4. Perceptions of alcohol consumption on campus
Pre-university perceptions

Half of respondents report that prior to starting university they believed that students got drunk most of the time (51%, n=799).

Q. Please select the phrase which best describes your perceptions: Before arriving at University did you believe that students...
Base: 1570   Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Experiences at university

The vast majority of respondents agreed to some extent that drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture (e.g. 79%, n=1240). Similarly, respondents report that it is expected that students will drink to get drunk (80%, n=1263).

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
Q. Felt that your friends who you were socialising with expected you to drink alcohol?  
Base: 1567  
Balance: No response and non-drinkers

Three quarters of respondents agreed that students drink alcohol to fit in with their peers (74%, n=1155).

A third (32%, n=506) say they sometimes feel under pressure from friends to drink more than they would like to and a similar proportion (30%, n=472) say their friends expect them to drink regularly and get drunk.

1 in 10 (9%, n=147) said they felt that friends they socialised with expected them to drink alcohol every time they went out with them.

However, 4 in 10 (40%, n=632) said they never felt that they were expected to drink alcohol when out with friends.
5. Impacts of alcohol consumption
Impacts: Health and social wellbeing

- Few students worry about how much alcohol will damage their health (81%, n=1273).

Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: 1571  Balance: No response and non-drinkers

- Vomited (either after drinking or the following day) - 54%
- Woke up feeling embarrassed about things you had said or done - 52%
- Was unable to remember what happened the night before - 46%
- Injured yourself - 34%
- Felt you had spoiled someone’s night - 29%
- Had unprotected sex - 20%
- Regretted a decision to engage in sexual activity - 20%
- Passed out or fainted suddenly - 12%
- Don’t know - 7%
- Rather not say - 4%

Over half of respondents (54%, n=844) said they had vomited either after drinking or the following day.

A similar proportion (52%, n=804) had woken up feeling embarrassed about something they had said or done the previous night.

Just under half (46%, n=709) were unable to remember what had happened the night before.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that few students worry about how much alcohol will damage their health (82%, n=1273).
Impacts: Study and paid work

Going to a university seminar, lecture or class with a hangover was the most likely consequence of drinking too much, mentioned by 54% (n=704) along with missing a seminar or lecture (34%, n=530).

Few respondents report missing academic deadlines (3%, n=47) or being subject to disciplinary proceedings as a result of their drinking habits (1%, n=14).

Impacts: Crime and antisocial behaviour

The most frequent form of antisocial behaviour when having drunk alcohol was getting into an argument with people they know (27%, n=416) or arguing with strangers (19%, n=293).

A low proportion reported occasions where their behaviour led to them getting into trouble with the police (3%, n=49) or ending up with a criminal record (1%, n=14).

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.1550 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

- Missed a university assignment deadline - 3%
- Missed going to paid work - 9%
- Arrived late for work - 13%
- Been sick during a university seminar / lecture / class - 5%
- Missed a university seminar / lecture / class at university - 34%
- Arrived late to a university seminar / lecture / class - 27%
- Gone to a university seminar / lecture / class whilst under the influence of alcohol - 16%
- Taken the day off work at short notice - 13%
- Got into a fight with people you know - 27%
- Got into a fight with strangers - 19%
- Caused damage in a public place - 6%
- Caused damage to the place where you live - 6%
- Driven a car or vehicle whilst over the limit - 4%
- Got into trouble with the police - 3%
- Stolen anything from anyone or anywhere - 3%
- Ended up with a criminal record - 1%

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.1550 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

- Going to a university seminar, lecture or class with a hangover - 45%
- Missed a seminar / lecture / class at university - 34%
- Arrived late to a university seminar / lecture / class - 27%
- Got into an argument with people they know - 27%
Impacts: Crime and antisocial behaviour contd.

Two fifths (44%, n=683) said they had taken risks with their personal safety as a result of drinking.

8% (n=102) said they had been a victim of crime with experienced theft of a wallet or phone) whilst out drinking being most likely to be mentioned as having been experienced (48%, n=47). Around a third had experienced harassment and/or intimidation (37%, n=36) or physical abuse (33%, n=33).

Over half of those experiencing crime did not report it (58%, n=54). A third, however, did report their experience to the police (35%, n=32).

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.1500 Balance: No response and non-drinkers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Been a victim of crime</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took risks with your personal safety (such as walking home alone or through poorly lit streets)</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had something stolen (e.g. phone, wallet)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced verbal abuse</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced harassment and/or intimidation</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced physical abuse</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced sexual assault</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced damage to personal property</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in a car that was being driven by a drunk driver</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather not say</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. You indicated that you have been a victim of crime when you have been drinking alcohol. We’d like to know more about your experience of being a victim of crime. Please indicate if any of the following things have happened to you in the last term when or after you have been drinking alcohol. Base: 92 Balance: No response and non-drinkers and not victims of crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students’ union</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local council</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not report my experience to anyone</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. Who, if anyone, did you report this / these experience(s) to? Base: 92 Balance: No response and non-drinkers and not victims of crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not report my experience to anyone</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Reducing impacts through responsible consumption
Almost three quarters (72%, n=1126) say that nowadays they think about their behaviour more when out drinking than they used to. Two thirds say they pace themselves to allow them to have a better night out for longer (65%, n=1022).

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

The vast majority of respondents said they try to eat before or when drinking to avoid getting too drunk (84%, n=1293).

Other ways to control their drinking include having one or two nights off from drinking (73%, n=1123) or take into account their course activities for the following day (71%, n=1099).

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.1555 Balance: No response
## Promoting responsible consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The people who are drinking</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ union staff</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare officers at my students’ union</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local authority</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. Who, if anyone, do you think is responsible for safe drinking at university? Base: 1977 Balance: No response

The vast majority of respondents felt that it was the people who drink who should take responsibility for safe drinking whilst at university (89%, n=1767).

One in eight claim to be aware of safe or responsible drinking campaigns/activities at their university (12%, n=230), only 1% (n=28) had been part of these campaigns/activities.

Although half (52%, n=1037) feel there are enough social events at university that don’t involve drinking almost a quarter (22%, n=444) feel there should be more.

Q. Are you aware of any safe or responsible drinking campaigns, projects or activities at your university? (n=1998)

- Yes: 12%
- No: 64%
- Don’t know: 25%

Q. Have you been part of these campaigns, projects or activities in any way? (n=1986)

- Yes: 1%
- No: 93%
- Don’t know: 5%

Q. Do you feel that there are enough social events for you at university that do not involve having to drink or get drunk? (n=1998)

- Yes: 52%
- No: 22%
- Don’t know: 26%
alcoholimpact.nus.org.uk

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