

Tackling Drinking Games

According to the Alcohol Impact Survey (2017), 34% of students take part in drinking games either most or every time they drink alcohol. Students who engage in drinking games are at increased risk of blackouts, peer pressure, not knowing their limits and alcohol poisoning.

Drinking Games

Drinking games are a high-risk social drinking activity consisting of rules and guidelines that determine when and how much to drink (Polizotto et al., 2007). Currently, there is no standard definition of “drinking games.” However, a common conceptualisation is that drinking games are social drinking events that are played according to a specific set of rules that specify when and how much players should drink, designed to promote the rapid consumption of large amounts of alcohol to facilitate inebriation, and involve performing a task (Zamboanga et al., 2013).

Zamboanga et al. (2014) conducted a review of literature which intended to foster a better understanding of drinking game behaviours among college students and improve efforts to reduce the negative impact of this practice on college campuses.

Zamboanga and colleagues report that involvement in drinking games has also been linked to serious negative drinking consequences among university students (e.g., Alfonso & Deschenes, 2013; Grossbard, Geisner, Neighbors, Kilmer, & Larimer, 2007; Polizzotto, Saw, Tjhung, Chua, & Stockwell, 2007; Zamboanga, Leikowski, Rodriguez, & Cascio, 2006). Researchers have investigated involvement in drinking games and reported risky sexual or unwanted sexual behaviours. One large multisite study found no association between unwanted sexual advances and drinking games participation among university women (Pino & Johnson-Johns, 2009).

Research also shows that those who typically played drinking games while pre-drinking, versus those who did not, reported higher levels of alcohol use while pre-drinking and experienced more negative consequences (Hummer, LaBrie, & Lac, 2011; Hummer et al., 2013). Thus, there is consistent evidence that playing drinking games as a form of pre-drinking poses a health hazard for students.

Through the work conducted by Alcohol Impact partnerships there have been five initiatives implemented to attempt to tackle pre-drinking: targeted staff training, student alcohol policy, discipline procedure, event check-lists and alternative activities. Some examples of this work are detailed below.

Staff Training

Lancaster University: The Lancaster partnership does not permit drinking games on campus in all bars and venues. Venue Managers and bar staff are made aware of this through the Universities Responsible Alcohol Retail policy and this is also emphasised during staff training and induction.

Canterbury Christ Church Students' Union (CCSU): The CCU partnership have held discussions with the bar manager from their CCSU bar 'The Lounge'. It has been reiterated that all members of door and bar staff are subject to training in support of the Responsible Retailing of Alcohol and Welcome Events policies, reinforcing the banning of student-led drinking games. Any students participating in such games on the premises will be asked to stop by a member of staff and advised that it is against bar policy to do so.

Keele University and Students' Union: At both Keele SU and halls bars staff training it is reiterated that there is a ban on drinking games within these venues. It is clearly stated in the Student Alcohol Policy what is defined as a drinking game, this is used to monitor occurrence of such behaviours. This is also discussed regularly in the Bars Operations Group (membership includes the DPS from each venue) which meet every couple of months to ensure all venues are on the same page and that there is consistency in the monitoring and response to drinking games.

Durham Students' Union: Training for bar staff and for student leaders (who organise events) include discussion of responsible and inclusive drinking and how to avoid inappropriate and unsafe activities such as drinking games.

Alcohol Policy

Lancaster University: Lancaster has a Responsible Alcohol Retail Policy which outlines prohibited behaviour in drinking outlets which includes drinking games. This is specifically for bar staff who deal with monitoring behaviour in the bars during retail hours. There is a designated staff member who enforces this working in the evenings (usually the personal licensee holder). These guidelines are disseminated to students via posters in bars.

Durham Students' Union: Durham SU Alcohol Policy prohibits initiation ceremonies and drinking games. The University Alcohol Policy does not allow inappropriate and excessive consumption of alcohol such as drinking games. University Bar Standard Operating Procedures state that University Bars must "ensure that university staff do not carry out, arrange or participate in any irresponsible alcohol promotions on licensed premises that involve supplying alcohol at below the minimum price (e.g. as incentives, prizes or rewards), or for drinking games or any other activities that involve 'speed drinking'", and they reinforce the University's Alcohol Policy with regards to drinking games; "...University policy not to sanction any events or activities which encourage inappropriate and excessive consumption of alcohol such as drinking games, and a zero tolerance approach towards initiation ceremonies".

The Union MMU: The Union MMU has published a Student Activities Policy on Social events, Initiations and Alcohol. This includes advice on how excess alcohol can lead to ill-health and anti-social behaviour, and that The Union MMU expects all membership clubs, societies and groups to ensure that the consumption of alcohol is managed appropriately, promoting moderation and responsible behaviour at all times. Activity and sport involvement and participation should never put students in situations where they feel bullied, harassed or intimidated. The Union MMU recommends that all clubs, societies and groups develop their own policies and procedures for

managing student behaviour and alcohol misuse within their activities. The Union also provides a generic code of practice to clubs/societies/groups for this purpose.

The Students' Union at University of West England (UWE): It is part of the operations policy to stop any drinking games that do take place in any three of the students' union bars. This is enforced by the assistant manager or supervisor on shift that day. The SU have seen that students do not undertake drinking games within the bar space on a regular basis.

Keele University and Keele Students' Union: All venues on Keele campus have implemented an outright ban on drinking games. This is reiterated in the Keele Student Alcohol Policy which emphasises that drinking games are not allowed and students will be asked to stop and leave the premises if they are deemed to be engaging in this activity. Evaluation of this process however found that although there was a decrease in students reportedly engaging in drinking games regularly, there was an increase in drinking games socials occurring in off campus venues. To mitigate the effects of this we have now made it clearer what students can and can't participate in. Any game or activity that requires or encourages individuals to drink a quantity of alcohol within a time limit, or to drink as much as possible are still banned, as per the [Mandatory Licensing Conditions](#). However, other elements such as singing, chanting or forfeits that don't involve drinking are still allowed but closely monitored by staff.

This includes any game or activity that requires or encourages (or is designed to require or encourage) individuals to drink a quantity of alcohol within a time limit, or to drink as much as possible. This does not include "drinking up time", shortly before the end of licensed hours.

Event Checklists

Durham Students' Union: When students request to book a space in the students' union they are required to say what the booking is for. If the event includes a drinking game element they are not allowed to book the space.

Lancaster University Students' Union (LUSU): Similarly, LUSU require student groups when organising events to submit a summary of activities they are proposing as a compliance procedure and this has led to declining events which propose activities that include drinking games.

Discipline Procedure

University East Anglia (UEA): UEA have a 'Red Card' system in place whereby any violation of the alcohol policy, including participation in drinking games, will result in a verbal warning from a member of staff. If the issue continues a student may be given a red card, which bans them from the premises until they discuss their behaviour with a member of staff in a one on one meeting.

Alternative Activities

The Union MMU: The Union MMU Basketball team have created an alternative 'drinking game' for members of the team who may not want to participate in the drinking games. Instead of playing beer pong, they allow members the option of playing water pong instead where water or soft drinks can be used instead of alcohol. On one occasion, the team used this as a basis for an alcohol-free event where they raised money for charity.

References

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