

Alcohol-Free Events

Find out below why it is important to run alcohol-free events, some tips to successful events and some ideas of alcohol-free events that universities and students' unions can run.

Introduction

Alcohol consumption continues to be cause for concern within student populations. There is a growing evidence base of alcohol interventions used within universities, however, one often overlooked intervention is the implementation of alcohol-free events. Research has shown that alcohol-free events are effective at reducing consumption amongst students who attend them, especially women (Patrick, Maggs & Osgood, 2009). However, other research has reported an increase in pre-drinking (drinking before going out) prior to attending an alcohol-free event (Wei, Barnett & Clark, 2010). Looking more closely at this data, the number of drinks and level of intoxication were lower than prior to attending a night out which included alcohol.

Another issue institutions may consider when running alcohol-free events is separating drinkers from non-drinkers, and branding events as 'alcohol free'. It could deter students from attending these events due to predisposed ideas of alcohol-free events being just for non-drinkers as opposed to being open to all.

There may be times however, that non-drinkers want to socialise with other non-drinkers, and not be in the same space as intoxicated peers. Therefore offering entirely alcohol-free events is desirable, however considering other events that are low-alcohol is also advised. The marketing of the event should be considered carefully. It is important to note when an event is alcohol-free so that expectations are managed, however, branding the event as primarily 'alcohol-free' could be off-putting. Some universities and students unions have started to mitigate the effects of this by colour coding events on their website so that students know which ones are low or non-alcohol events, and which ones include alcohol. This way, the event is not being branded as a low or non-alcohol event, however non-drinkers can see easily exactly which events are tailored to them as well as making it open and accessible to other students.

Here are a selection of event ideas for universities and students' unions to run for their students that don't focus on drinking alcohol.

Welcome/Orientation

- Walking tours of the city
- Bus tour of city
- 'Universal Cafe' meet your student officers networking event
- Trip to local supermarket/shops
- Social coffee with student reps in halls
- Tour of the university/college
- Tour of the students' union
- 'Speed friending'
- Meet your halls/house mates

Music/Film Based

- Bollywood themed evening
- Coffee house sessions
- Film nights
- Poetry & spoken word events
- Student showcase
- Karaoke / open mic night
- Comedy night
- Musical dinner dance

Active Events

- Roller disco
- Trampoline park
- Escape rooms
- Climbing centre
- Laser quest
- Silent disco
- Inflatable games
- Old school sports day
- Colour run
- Pool/Snooker challenge
- Table tennis tournament
- Treasure trail / Scavenger hunt
- Ironman / Crazy olympics
- Ice skating

Wellbeing Events

- Animal therapy
- Yoga
- Dance events
- Nature walks
- Wellbeing fayre
- Chill out space
- Massages
- Crafts/Knitting

Food Based Events

- Pizza party

- Tea & toast
- Tea party
- BBQ
- Food crawl
- Afternoon eta
- Bake off
- Takeaway night

Cultural Events

- International/World festival
- Itfar celebration
- Langar

Off Campus Activities

- Shopping centre
- City centre
- Restaurants
- Museums
- Jailbreak
- Zoo/Safari park
- Beach
- Theme park
- Water sports
- Archery
- Comedy club
- Escape room
- Crazy golf
- Attend local community event

Seasonal Activities

- Christmas markets
- Pumpkin carving
- Haunted house

Other

- Murder mystery night
- Games night
- Cards tournament
- Study retreat

Tips for running an alcohol-free event:

- Pulling together the right organisational team is vital to the success of your event. Everyone on the team must believe in the benefits of providing an alcohol-free event and be motivated to see the event succeed.
- Get students involved in the planning and running of the event. They will know what other students are more likely to engage with. They can also help to promote the event to their peers.
- Ask club leaders / residential advisors / elected SU officers to back the event and encourage participation. If it looks like the well-known student faces on campus are excited about it then others will get excited too.
- Provide good quality events.
- Centre your events around food or a particular activity.
- Make publicity about the event clear and enthusiastic.
- Promote the event thoroughly through your website, social media, newsletters or posters.
- Ensure your marketing is engaging and eye catching.

- Provide lots of choice of non-alcoholic drinks. People get bored of the same old soft drinks so why not set up a mocktail stand or get in some alcohol-free beers, or infused with fruit water
- Some universities offer 'inclusivity funds' to support societies running alcohol-free socials. Share some of the highlights from the event afterwards so that students can see how much fun was had and would be more likely to attend an event in the future.

Why is it important?

- At any event, at least 1 in 7 people won't be drinking. This may be for a variety of reasons; religious beliefs, because they are driving, taking medication, do not like the taste of alcohol or have something on in the morning.
- Students may also be trying to reduce their drinking. We know that 79% of students have one or two nights off drinking alcohol in the week. 40% of students choose to do something else other than going on a night out.
- Academic performance and achievement can be affected by the effects of alcohol through lack of concentration and students missing morning lectures or seminars due to hangovers. Organising and promoting alcohol-free events is a good way of counteracting this.
- Alcohol-free events are easier to manage and control. It means the pressure is off for those who don't want to drink, and students can enjoy a healthier social activity.

Photographs

