

UCC, Alcohol & the Student Experience

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UCC, Alcohol & the Student Experience¹

1. Rationale

1.1 Public Health Alcohol Policy

The National Alcohol Policy, published in 1996, aims to promote the health of the population by reducing the prevalence of alcohol-related problems. One of the actions in the National Policy was the development *of a campus alcohol policy that would promote sensible drinking among students and limit campus-related drinks industry sponsorship.*

The National Lifestyle Survey (SLÁN, 1999) reported that the vast majority of young adults consume alcohol, half of young people engage in high-risk drinking when they typically drink and about one-third drink over the recommended weekly intake.

In recent times University authorities have expressed concerns about alcohol promotion practices on campus in the context of high-risk drinking among students impacting on student academic achievement, student personal problems and student attrition. An initial response to these concerns was discussed among a small number of third level institutions regarding a code of practice for the promotion of alcohol on University campuses. Further impetus was provided by the Minister of Health and Children at the launch of a three year Alcohol Awareness Campaign when he *invited and encouraged all third level institutions to develop guidelines and campus alcohol policies* and offered to facilitate the process.

In 1998, the Joint Board for Student Affairs, subsequently called the JBSE, developed the Drinks and Litter Monitoring Group which no longer exists. DLMG aimed to address concerns about the promotion of alcoholic drink on the campus and the damaging effects of excessive consumption by students of the University. This initiative resulted in a number of significantly positive changes, including elimination of alcohol promotions and alcohol advertising by Clubs, Societies and the Students' Union and the provision of alternative social and recreational options.

¹ From here on referred to as the Alcohol Policy

In October 2001, the Minister for Health and Children launched a "Framework Document for Developing a College Alcohol Policy". This policy has been drafted having regard to this Framework and the work of many national groups.

It has been accepted in recent years within UCC that the problems of alcohol consumption are not confined to the campus. Accordingly the University and the Students' Union must recognise that their roles extend beyond the campus boundary. The UCC Alcohol Policy seeks to take an appropriate view of the relationship of students with alcohol.

1.2 University Environment

As well as being a place of learning and a place of work University College Cork is also a community with many kinds of social interaction in which alcohol may play a valuable role.

Diversity of opinion and freedom of choice have long been part of the University's academic tradition. However, freedom of choice brings with it personal responsibilities which include the obligation to respect the rights of others and to comply with the University's rules and regulations.

The ethos of University College Cork is not only to promote positive learning experiences and academic excellence but also to promote a caring and supportive community where students in need of assistance are given the necessary support. The University is also obliged to provide a safe working environment for all students. Any activity or practice that constitutes a hazard must be eliminated or minimised to reduce injury or loss. When people engage in high-risk drinking, academic performance, health, personal relationships and safety suffer.

However, alcohol issues cannot and should not be tackled in isolation and must be seen within a broader context of lifestyle issues and a supportive university environment.

1.3 Student Life

The period of late adolescence and early adult life is a transitional phase for students where new freedoms, new relationships and adapting to a different environment provide daily challenges

on top of the academic challenges of new courses. An important aspect of university life is the opportunity to make new friends. Students often make these new friends in the context of Students' Union, Clubs and Societies and also in the context of the university bars.

However, excessive socialisation can over-stretch students both financially and academically contributing to exam failure and student drop-out. First year students with poor coping skills to manage the stresses of the new university environment are particularly vulnerable and may develop an over-reliance on alcohol. While exam stress and difficulties adjusting to university are common problems for students, there are also specific problems faced by a minority of students. This stage of life is also characterised by a vulnerability to mental health difficulties which may be exacerbated by heavy alcohol consumption.

1.4 Policy Development

The Academic Council Student Experience Committee brings together academic staff, students and professional services representatives to consult, develop and share good practice on matters affecting the welfare and well being of students. As such it shall adopt rules aimed at addressing concerns surrounding the promotion of alcohol to UCC students and the damaging effects of the excessive alcohol consumption on the academic achievements and lifestyles of students.

1.5 Review and Evaluation

The Academic Council Student Experience Committee shall act as a forum to receive feedback. A communication strategy that *talks* and *listens* to students is essential. Awareness of issues is crucial in a student population which experiences a constant rate of change with a new intake each year. Evaluation of the achievement of the stated objectives needs to be undertaken by the Alcohol Action Network Group of UCC Health Matters annually and a report produced by this Network Group including any proposed amendments for approval by the Academic Council Student Experience Committee.

2 Aims of the University's Alcohol Policy:

2.1 The aims of the University's Alcohol Policy are to:

- a) Ensure that campus life is conducive to the health and wellbeing of students.
- b) Ensure that the University environment is safe for students and staff and complies with health and safety regulations. Student Safety is the utmost priority.
- c) Promote the University as a supportive environment, which enables students to make choices that promote health and well-being.
- d) Provide supportive services for students who may require assistance during their time at the University.

The specific objectives include:

- a) Promoting the health and wellbeing of students.
- b) Promoting personal responsibility and social obligation to the campus community and to the local community.
- c) Enhancing a campus environment where responsible drinking behaviour is the "social norm".
- d) Promoting responsible drinking behaviour and discouraging high-risk drinking behaviour (Appendix A)
- e) Providing an atmosphere free from pressure to drink for those who choose not to drink.
- f) Providing alcohol-related information and education for all students.
- g) Supporting and promoting alternatives to drinking thus creating choice and a balanced social programme.
- h) Promoting opportunities for interventions to reduce high risk drinking.
- i) Promoting a caring environment for those who experience difficulties related to alcohol.
- j) Providing confidential and effective supports for those who seek assistance as a result of problem drinking.
- k) Reducing the incidence of alcohol-related problems among the University's students.

3. Integrated Policy

An integrated approach encourages those who drink alcohol to do so responsibly and prevents commercial interests from excessive alcohol promotion. Accordingly the following five policy areas are incorporated into the University & Students Union policy:

- a) Increasing education and awareness of responsible consumption of alcohol
- b) Encouraging alternatives and choice
- c) Regularising sponsorship, marketing, promotions and selling of alcohol
- d) Providing campus support services
- e) Student discipline

3.1 Increasing Education & Awareness of Responsible Consumption

Students are expected to be responsible for their actions at all times and to respect the rights of all members of the campus community.

- a) In cooperation with the relevant University groups, the University community will promote responsible drinking behaviour and increase awareness of the potential harmful or negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption.
- b) Student orientation at the start of the academic year will incorporate initiatives to raise awareness of available programmes and services for all students and to promote a message of responsible drinking behaviour.
- c) The student body will be actively involved in the development, promotion and delivery of alcohol education as part of a health, wellbeing and life skills course or workshops involving innovative methodology.
- d) The Students' Union should campaign actively on the dangers of excessive use of alcohol.

3.2 Encouraging Alternatives and Choice

- a) The University will actively support the development of attractive, alcohol-free environment on campus for those who wish to enjoy an alcohol-free evening with friends.
- b) The Students Union will also, with the cooperation of relevant University Offices, develop and promote alcohol-free programmes involving cultural, social and entertainment

activities for students.

3.3 Controlling Sponsorship, Marketing, Promotions and Selling

3.3.1 Sponsorship

- a) The University will sustain a proactive approach to help student clubs and societies continue to find alternatives to sponsorship by drinks companies.
- b) Alcohol sponsorship is not compatible with the University's sports and athletics ethos. It links alcohol use with the healthy pursuit of physical activity and could be used as a way to circumvent the national advertising codes which prohibit the linking of alcohol with enhanced physical performance. Sports clubs and societies must seek alcohol free sources of sponsorship and support.

3.3.2 Alcohol Promotions

- a) Alcohol promotions that encourage the rapid and/or excessive consumption of alcohol are prohibited e.g. beat the clock.
- b) Alcohol promoters must provide free food as part of any promotion event.
- c) Alcohol in bulk, such as kegs, cases of beer etc, may not be provided as prizes or rewards to individuals or groups.
- d) UCC is a closed campus – as such - off-campus drinks companies are only allowed within the bars.
- e) Promoters of external bars and nightclubs are strictly prohibited from advertising on campus unless approved by the Students' Union.
- f) Venues or organisations which attempt to promote to students by breaking the alcohol policy may be 'black listed' by the Academic Council Student Experience Committee . Those venues or organisations on the list may not be used by Student Clubs and Societies or the Union until they are removed from the list. Non-compliance may lead to severe penalties in the first instance by their relevant Executive body and ultimately Academic Council Student Experience Committee.

3.3.3 Advertising Code

- a) Alcohol advertising posters will be confined to the campus bars.
- b) Advertising of social and entertainment events will not use alcohol as the inducement to attend.
- c) Student activities shall not use alcohol as a primary incentive to membership.
- d) Advertising of social and entertainment events will not encourage excessive use of alcohol or high-risk drinking nor place emphasis on quantity and frequency of alcohol use.
- e) Advertising will be limited to the advertising of brand names of beer, stout, spirits or the name of the manufacturers.
- f) Alcohol advertising on campus will;
 - Not portray drinking as a solution to personal or academic problems
 - Not portray drinking as necessary to social, sexual or academic success
 - Avoid demeaning sexual and discriminatory portrayals of individuals
 - Not associate drinking with using machinery, driving, activities in water or heights or other activities where safety could be compromised.

3.3.4 Distribution Controls

(i) On Campus Licences

- a) The licence under which the club is allowed to sell alcohol is a Club Licence.
- b) Under legislation, the club is absolutely forbidden to admit to membership, or to allow being on the licensed premises, anyone who has not reached his or her eighteenth birthday.
- c) Membership shall normally be open to those registered as students or staff and those included within its Club' Constitution
- d) All visitors must be signed in by means of a visitors' book

(ii) Limiting Harm in the Drinking Environment

- a) Training in Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) will be provided for all those serving alcohol in campus bars.

- b) Alcohol may not be served to intoxicated persons; it is a criminal offence.
- c) Campus bars to promote practices to prevent drunkenness such as serving food and low cost non-alcoholic drinks.
- d) High-risk sale promotions will be avoided, such as 'drink until you drop', pub crawls and drinking competitions.
- e) Non-alcoholic drinks and food will also be available at functions and social events, will be given equal prominence and be actively offered as alternatives.
- f) Awareness of coercion and the attributes of coercive behaviour in relation to alcohol will be disseminated to students and staff.
- g) Alcohol consumption will be confined to designated areas on campus.
 - Licensed premises are available within the Aras na Mac Leinn (Club Aras), Mardyke Grounds (Pavilion bar) & the Catering complex (Old College Bar).
- h) Students are not permitted to bring their own drink into the licensed premises or to take any drink out with them.
- i) Where General Services are informed in advance, recognised student activities may organise functions and receptions within other areas of campus.

3.3.5 Avoiding Excessive Consumption with Free Alcoholic Drinks

- a) Maximum 2 free drinks per person for any on-campus function.
- b) Maximum 1 free drink per person for any off campus event by a recognised student activity.
- c) Where alcoholic drinks are being provided soft drinks must also be made available.
- d) Provision of free alcohol must be accompanied by food.
- e) No double measures of spirits (or more) to be provided.
- f) A minimum price limit per drink to be established annually by relevant Bar Committee (SU have majority). Soft drinks must be available at a reasonable price.

4. Providing Campus Support Services

4.1 Onus on the University to Develop Alternative Social and Recreational Opportunities

- a) A schedule of entertainment should be organised by the Students Union as an attractive alternative to pub-based recreation.
- b) The new Student Common Room provides an attractive alcohol-free social space.

4.2 Campus Support Services

- a) Student support services (health, counselling, etc) will develop ways to increase awareness of high-risk drinking among those students availing of University services.
- b) Individuals with concerns about their own use or another person's use of alcohol will be encouraged to seek confidential assistance on or off campus.
- c) The uLink Programme of student peer mentoring is a valuable support for first year students.

5.0 Student Discipline

- a) Students drinking alcohol in on-campus venues are expected to use alcohol in a responsible manner.
- b) Being under the influence of alcohol on-campus in a manner in which you are of danger to yourself and/or others will be deemed to be an offence in the context of the University's Code of Discipline.
- c) Being under the influence of alcohol will also not be accepted as an extenuating circumstance in the case of any other offences such as engaging in violent or destructive behavior in the context of the University's Code of Discipline.

6.0 Monitoring of Alcohol Policy

The Students' Union will monitor Students' Union events, the Societies Guild will monitor Societies' events and the Clubs Executive will monitor Clubs' events and will make annual reports to the Academic Council Student Experience Committee.

7.0 Alcohol use at off-campus Student Events

Organisers and participants in all off-campus student events are reminded of the need to ensure that the sale, distribution and consumption of alcohol at these events is conducive to the responsible consumption of alcohol by participants. These events include but are not limited to Formal Balls, Field Trips, Sports Tournaments and Society events.

Appendix A

Responsible (Lower Risk) Drinking Behaviour

- Consideration as to whether you will drink, what you will drink and how much you will drink before drinking.
- Eating a full meal before drinking.
- Selecting a safe way to get home (public transport, walking with a friend, designated driver) before drinking.
- Always knowing what you are drinking, where your drink came from and keeping it in sight at all times.
- Avoid mixing alcohol drinks or drinking double shots.
- Knowing the signs of intoxication and avoid becoming intoxicated.
- Pacing your drinking - about one drink per hour.
- Sipping your drink.
- Alternating with non-alcoholic drinks throughout the evening.
- Not allowing others talk you into drinking more than you had planned or to intoxication.

Higher Risk Drinking Behaviour

- Assuming that everyone drinks and that being drunk is socially acceptable.
- Drinking to relieve stress, anxiety or deal with uncomfortable feelings.
- Drinking to get drunk.
- Participating in drinking games.
- Drinking from an unknown source (punch bowl, mug someone just hands you)
- Not knowing what you are drinking or leaving your drink unattended.

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