

Conference of Colleges

Guidance for Colleges on Students and Alcohol

Purpose

This guidance offers suggestions to assist Colleges in addressing the use of alcohol by students. It seeks to foster a culture of safe and responsible drinking, and sets out actions that may be taken to tackle misuse, dependency, and antisocial behaviour. The guidance has been developed following an informal review of existing alcohol policies at other UK universities, discussion with student, university and College representatives, and consideration of examples of good practice. Colleges may choose to adopt or adapt the guidance to suit their existing policies and culture. Colleges may also wish to specify what alcohol-related conduct is prohibited on College grounds in their Handbook and/or Disciplinary Policy.

The intended audience for this guidance includes, but is not limited to: College Welfare Practitioners, Senior Tutors, College Deans, Sub Deans, Domestic Bursars (alcohol licence holder and designated premises manager), Bar Staff, JCR and MCR committees, and the committees of student clubs and societies.

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Introduction

Many people enjoy drinking alcohol as part of their social life. Alcohol is embedded in the UK university social experience for many students. Taken to excess, alcohol can be harmful to mental and physical health, and may lead to harmful, risky or antisocial behaviour. Facilitating safe environments and communicating the importance of responsible drinking is therefore a priority for supporting student wellbeing across the Collegiate University. A harm reduction approach to alcohol offers a framework which centres on student welfare. It supports students and helps them to make informed choices, whilst recognising the interrelationship between rights, responsibilities, acceptable behaviour, and risk. It also offers a holistic approach which recognises that many students choose not to drink at all, or are working towards reducing their alcohol consumption.¹ At the core of this guidance is commitment to promoting a supportive environment in which students can safely live, study, and work. It promotes a community of mutual respect and one that recognises and respects differing attitudes towards alcohol use.

Student Events involving Alcohol

The College is responsible for the serving of alcohol at any student event held in public rooms (but not for the purchase and consumption of alcohol in private accommodation). It is expected that the College be responsible for ensuring that the quantity and type of alcohol served is reasonable, and that minors or obviously intoxicated individuals are not served.

The Law

The provision and consumption of alcohol on licensed premises is governed by the Licensing Act 2003. Colleges each have a Premises Licence, which will state the licensed areas (Hall, Bar, Dining Rooms etc.) and a Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS), who is the member of the Governing Body (typically the Home or Domestic Bursar) who holds a Personal Licence and is the person responsible for ensuring the Act is adhered to.

The Licensing Act has Four main Objectives which frame the provision (whether, or not, a sale takes place) and consumption within the licensed parts of the College premises. These are:

- the prevention of crime and disorder;
- public safety;
- the prevention of public nuisance;
- the protection of children from harm.

Further information on the relevant provisions of the Mandatory Conditions Order 2014 can be found in [Appendix I](#).

Culture of Responsible Alcohol Consumption

The College should seek to provide a supportive environment, which encourages a culture of self-regulation and a respect and care for others. Encouraging students not to consume alcohol irresponsibly is an important part of this culture. Below are some suggested ways that Colleges can mitigate the opportunity for unsafe or excessive drinking.

¹ A recent [survey on the National Union of Students \(2020-21\)](#) provides further information on the differing student perceptions of alcohol and patterns of consumption.

General

- At the College bar, or event bars, have “menu only” ordering, with units of alcohol listed.
- Review the “opening hours” of the College bar.
- College bars could offer subsidies on non-alcoholic options and trial “specialty” low-alcohol options.
- Standardise small glass sizes.
- Have a policy for the maximum strength of drink to be served. Evidence suggests a history of student social events selling strong cocktails (drinks with high alcohol units sometimes colloquially called “bop juice”), and the availability of such cocktails could encourage binge drinking.²
- It is recommended that there should be a process of scrutinising any student-run events where alcohol is being served in public rooms. For example, the College Dean could evaluate the reasonableness of the booking request, and the College’s DPS must ensure that the alcohol is served by trained individuals and that the quantity and type of alcohol is reasonable.

Dinners and Formals

- Have diners opt-in to wine (or other alcohol) with their meal, rather than having wine as default.
- Consider seating areas designated as “alcohol free” for those who do not drink and are not comfortable seated with people consuming alcohol (for reasons of faith, being in recovery from alcohol misuse etc.).
- Provide more choice of interesting and tasty alcohol-free options.
- Encourage Tutors to support an environment where there is no pressure to drink at a formal dinner/guest night if they are hosting their student.

Bops and Events

- Consider making food mandatory at large student events, and included in the ticket price.
- Provide a welfare space with first aid, water, food, and blankets, which is monitored.
- Mandate that there be sober “bop angels” (student welfare reps) on duty for the duration of the event.
- Consider the types of alcohol served. Pre-mixed cocktails in set quantities are used by some Colleges at their large student events.
- Make free water available at all events.
- Offer low or alcohol-free drinks at a lower price.
- Offer a variety of non-alcohol “specials”/mocktails.
- Avoid encouraging binge drinking, including discounted alcohol. Colleges should give careful consideration to the pricing of alcoholic drinks.
- Advertising for social events should not contain photos, logos or the price of alcoholic beverages.
- Promote (and consider subsidising) events which do not include alcohol.
- Do not include alcohol in the ticket price.
- Adopt and communicate a policy that any student who is visibly intoxicated will be refused entry or removed.

² Binge drinking is defined as having at least 6 units in one session for women and 8 units in one session for men. Binge drinking all 14 units (weekly allowance) at once is not advised by the [NHS](#).

Freshers' Week

- Focus on alcohol-free events in freshers' week, being mindful that some younger people are choosing not to drink at all.
- Freshers can have pre-conceptions of alcohol being necessary to facilitate social connections, leading to pressure to drink or feeling excluded for not drinking.³ Colleges are encouraged to think carefully about messaging to offer holders on this.
- Include mandatory consent training in freshers' week that includes discussion of alcohol use.
- Limit "official" club nights on the freshers' timetable
- Discourage pub crawls in freshers' week, which may contribute to the establishment of a culture of student binge drinking
- Have activities at the end of the evening which are alcohol free (e.g. host a pizza supper in the JCR after the nightclub), which may also encourage students to return to College together safely.
- Consider changing the timetable for freshers' week. For example, students could arrive on a Sunday for a pizza night. Avoid immediate trips to clubs where there may be over consumption due to social anxiety.
- Increase awareness amongst students about what the risks of alcohol are. For example, invite Turning Point to speak at freshers' week on alcohol and drug misuse. Health promotion unit https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/oxfordshire-public-health-promotion-resource-unit/ is also a good resource.

The Welfare of Students and Alcohol

Welfare Support

It is important for Welfare Staff to have in place appropriate measures so that students can get support in the event they become unwell from alcohol consumption. This could include:

- Junior Deans being trained to support drunk students within reasonable limits, including being first aid trained to recognise alcohol poisoning, other presentations, and what to do. Unresponsive students require an ambulance. If the student is responsive, Junior Deans can arrange for a sober peer to monitor their friend and do a welfare check if required.
- Lodge Staff being trained to recognise welfare issues and take appropriate action, such as calling the Junior Dean or emergency services, and administering first aid (if trained).

³ Rachel Brown & Simon Murphy (2020) Alcohol and social connectedness for new residential university students: implications for alcohol harm reduction, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44:2, 216-230, DOI: [10.1080/0309877X.2018.1527024](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1527024); Nichola Gambles, Lorna Porcellato, Kate M. Fleming & Zara Quigg (2022) "If You Don't Drink at University, You're Going to Struggle to Make Friends" Prospective Students' Perceptions around Alcohol Use at Universities in the United Kingdom, *Substance Use & Misuse*, 57:2, 249-255, DOI: [10.1080/10826084.2021.2002902](https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2021.2002902).

- Welfare spaces in College. For example, a welfare room could be made available for a student to use (getting access via the Lodge) if they are too unwell, or feel unsafe to go back to their accommodation.
- Colleges should be mindful of “pre-loading”, where students drink in their rooms in advance of attending a bop/College event, sometimes because this is a more economical option than buying alcohol at the College bar.
- Clear guidance being put in place for issues surrounding allegations of sexual harassment or assault, where alcohol has been consumed.
- Welfare support in relation to alcohol being clearly signposted to students. For example: on the College website, student handbook, notice boards, newsletters.
- College Nurses and other welfare staff are encouraged to attend Alcohol Brief Intervention training, run via Public Health at the Oxfordshire County Council.

Health Implications of Alcohol

Advocating responsible alcohol use and improving awareness of the impact of alcohol and associated health risks is part of supporting student wellbeing. Circulated printed or electronic material aimed at raising student awareness on safe alcohol limits and unit measurements is encouraged.

- [Drinkaware](#) is a useful resource.
- [NHS guidelines](#) advise that men and women do not drink more than 14 units a week. For example, a single shot of spirits (25ml, ABC 40%) is 1 unit. A pint of beer or cider is between 2-3 units.

Some of the common milder consequences of drinking too much include:

- Too tired to study/ missed lectures or tutorials, and the consequent added stress
- Hangover, dehydration, indigestion
- Minor accidental injury
- Adverse effect on mental health

More serious consequences include:

- Alcohol poisoning
- A wide range of health conditions (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/risks/>)
- Unprotected sex (unplanned pregnancy, STI)
- Relationship problems
- Academic difficulties
- Anti-social behaviour
- Major accidental injury
- Life-threatening illness (e.g. sepsis can be mistaken for hangover symptoms)
- Accidental death
- Self-harm
- Financial difficulties from excessive spending on alcohol
- Assaults (being assaulted or assaulting others)

Accountability and Community

- College could host an alcohol awareness event, which could include a presentation (e.g. an academic talk on alcohol and brain chemistry), demonstrations with “drunk goggles” and other interactive displays.

- The National Union of Students runs an [alcohol awareness campaign](#) which provides useful advice.
- College could specify in the College's Student Handbook what conduct is not permitted, and could constitute a disciplinary matter. For example, drinking games could be prohibited on College grounds.
- College could take part in the [Safe Lodge Scheme](#), where students can seek help from any participating College to arrange a taxi home, or contact their College's welfare team.
- Colleges can advertise the [Oxford City Angels](#) scheme to students (supports safety & security of women during a night out).
- Bar servers could be trained in [bystander intervention](#), which teaches skills to challenge unacceptable behaviour like harassment.

Alcohol Misuse and Dependency

Excessive drinking may be the first outward sign that a student is under stress and needs help. In some instances, misuse such as habitual binge drinking, is connected to mental health difficulties. In such cases, a College's alcohol guidance should be consistent with existing policies and frameworks on student mental health and welfare. These include: [A Common Approach to Supporting Student Mental Health](#), [Guidance for Fitness to Study Procedures \(For Undergraduates\)](#), [Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare](#). Staff should be alert to indicators of student alcohol misuse and/or dependency and to take appropriate action when necessary. The following resources may help:

- o Visit a General Practitioner
- o [University Counselling Service](#)
- o [Turning Point](#)
- o Drinkline is the free national alcohol helpline. 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am – 8pm, weekends 11am – 4pm)
- o Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk>
- o Drinkaware <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>
- o NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/alcohol-support/>
- o Alcohol Concern <https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>
- o Addaction <https://www.addaction.org.uk/>

Peer Support

Students add an extra layer of support for their peers. The JCR/MCR committees are valuable in this regard in identifying what student support is needed at your College from a student-to-student perspective. Student-led workshops may be an effective way of communicating safe alcohol consumption because students may be more forthcoming with sharing their concerns in a peer environment.

Taking student voices into account via student-facilitated conversations can help identify the issues and concerns students have. For example, drink spiking in the night time economy remains a prevalent concern of students: see the University's [Nights Out guidance](#) and [Talk to Frank](#). Colleges are encouraged to be mindful of not-overpromising in regards to spiking testing. Testing is complicated in terms of sourcing the correct test, applied in the correct way, and in a valid timeframe. If someone has been spiked, this should be reported to the police and the individual

should call NHS 111 if they are worried about symptoms. The NHS attend to medical symptoms in the first instance, and do not necessarily test for spiking when an individual presents at hospital.

Sport Clubs and Societies

All official University clubs and societies should be registered with the Proctors' Office, and to do so need to have agreed a standard constitution and framework for complaints. This currently includes all official Sport Clubs. Any deviation from the standard constitution needs to be agreed by a Proctor.

- Consider requiring Captains of College teams to undergo training for responsible behaviour during events (such as crew dates).
- Colleges could consider running the Good Lad training, now run by [Beyond Equality](#), for appropriate social behaviour, or a similar non-gendered version, which could be offered to either the whole team, or Captain and Social Secretary.
- Issue guidelines to sport teams and societies regarding acceptable behaviour, including prohibiting drinking games, and be clear about consequences of antisocial behaviour.
- Consider providing bystander training (e.g. <https://www.activebystander.co.uk/>)

Antisocial Behaviour

Violence and antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated in the Collegiate University and may be subject to the College's or University's disciplinary procedures. Being under the influence of alcohol or otherwise intoxicated is not an excuse for offensive, abusive or illegal behaviour, and this should be clearly communicated to students.

Peer Pressure and Initiations

It is irresponsible and dangerous to encourage or pressure others to drink any more alcohol than they ought or wish to. It is recommended that Colleges prohibit student participation in competitive drinking games including: "pennyng", "funneling", the Oxford-specific tradition of "sconcing" [ridiculing someone and demanding that the person drink as penalty for breach of etiquette], the spiking of drinks with any/extra alcohol, and any form of "initiation" to student societies on College grounds. It should also be noted that spiking is a criminal offence.

Alcohol, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct

Alcohol often plays a significant role in cases of sexual misconduct (for both subject and complainant) and sometimes harassment. Colleges should also be mindful of the role of alcohol can play in harmful activities prevalent in Oxford including "sharking" [when an older student pursues a younger student/fresher specifically because they are vulnerable], and crew dates. Students should be made aware of the [University's Harassment Policy](#) and your relevant policy. Further resources are available here from the [Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service](#).

Colleges may wish to incorporate any of the above in their disciplinary policy.

Penalties for alcohol-related infractions could include:

- Fine
- Barring from social events/venues, or other loss of privileges
- Having the student clean up the sick/mess

Appendix I: Further Resources

[Existing HEI Alcohol guidance](#)

The Mandatory Conditions Order 2014 contains various provisions, the most pertinent in this context being:

1.—(1) The responsible person must ensure that staff on relevant premises do not carry out, arrange or participate in any irresponsible promotions in relation to the premises.

(2) In this paragraph, an irresponsible promotion means any one or more of the following activities, or substantially similar activities, carried on for the purpose of encouraging the sale or supply of alcohol for consumption on the premises—

(a) games or other activities which require or encourage, or are designed to require or encourage, individuals to—

(i) drink a quantity of alcohol within a time limit (other than to drink alcohol sold or supplied on the premises before the cessation of the period in which the responsible person is authorised to sell or supply alcohol), or

(ii) drink as much alcohol as possible (whether within a time limit or otherwise);

(b) provision of unlimited or unspecified quantities of alcohol free or for a fixed or discounted fee to the public or to a group defined by a particular characteristic in a manner which carries a significant risk of undermining a licensing objective;

(c) provision of free or discounted alcohol or any other thing as a prize to encourage or reward the purchase and consumption of alcohol over a period of 24 hours or less in a manner which carries a significant risk of undermining a licensing objective;

(d) selling or supplying alcohol in association with promotional posters or flyers on, or in the vicinity of, the premises which can reasonably be considered to condone, encourage or glamorise anti-social behaviour or to refer to the effects of drunkenness in any favourable manner;

(e) dispensing alcohol directly by one person into the mouth of another (other than where that other person is unable to drink without assistance by reason of disability).

2. The responsible person must ensure that free potable water is provided on request to customers where it is reasonably available.