



## Exploration of the Relationship Between First Year Students and Alcohol At Huddersfield University

**October 2008**

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## **Executive Summary**

In March 2008 a scoping project, to evaluate the attitudes and behaviours of a selection of demographic groups towards alcohol, identified students as an 'at risk' group.

The report found that students are particularly likely to engage in sustained periods of above recommended limits of alcohol consumption. First year students, Freshers, were felt to be particularly at risk as they were heavily targeted by bars and clubs and least likely to have been exposed to heavy alcohol consumption prior to attending university.

In September/October 2008 further research was undertaken to more precisely understand the motivations and behaviour of first year students with regard to alcohol consumption. The findings of the study are to underpin a social marketing campaign directed at students.

The study is based upon a series of pre and post-Freshers' Fortnight focus groups with a sample of male and female students attending Huddersfield University. In addition to exploration of student attitudes, an environmental audit was conducted in order to establish and benchmark the external pressures and stimuli that may influence behaviour patterns.

### **Expectations and Behaviour**

The majority of students who took part in the research attended Freshers' Fortnight with the expectation that they would indulge in a high level of alcohol consumption. These expectations were set by a number of key factors:

- Experience of friends/siblings
- Press and media
- Social networking groups
- Intense marketing by clubs and bars, via a variety of methods depicting Freshers' Fortnight as a 'party', or akin to a festival

Freshers also felt under pressure from older students to live up to these expectations and deliver a 'Freshers' which was as good, if not better, than the previous year.

Student drinking patterns were relatively tightly regulated while living at home. All of those interviewed had been exposed to alcohol consumption and this was typically with consent of their parents. Most had also had at least one bad alcohol experience, usually around the age of 18.

Lack of money, parental control and the relative absence of free time were key controls in terms of alcohol consumption pre-University, meaning that high levels of drinking were typically limited to holidays or music festivals.

Student life has been frequently described as a period of non-normative behaviour. The students feel they can legitimately act in a certain way simply because they are students, and because this is only for a short time. As in the scoping study, there was no recognition that heavy consumption of alcohol would have any long-term health effects and that short-term sickness and hangovers were the most that they would have to deal with.

Overwhelmingly the focus of the students during the first few weeks at University is fitting in and making friends. Alcohol was felt to, firstly, always be present at places where groups met, and secondly, assist in the process of meeting people and having a good time.

Typical drinking patterns involved consuming a range of alcoholic drinks in self-catering accommodation over the course of an evening, going out at about 11pm-11.30pm to a club or bar promoting cheap alcohol (typically £1 or £1.50 a drink), drinking the cheapest alcohol available and staying up for most of the night.

Mixing drinks is inherent in this pattern, as consumption is guided by price and availability. In addition, drinking games were commonly played, enjoyed and accepted as routine past times. These frequently involved consumption of mixed drinks.

Attention given to health during the Freshers' Fortnight was low. Most respondents had attended the University Health Centre for screening by the end of the research period, but there was no feeling that the advice pertaining to alcohol was of practical value to them. This was a result of the advice being primarily focused on units.

### **Alcohol Awareness**

Student recall of Alcohol Awareness campaigns such as Know Your Limits 'Hero to Zero' and 'Would You Start Your Night Like This?' was high. They were dismissive of the impact of the 'Hero To Zero' campaign and the KYL posters asking, for example, 'Would you squat down and pee in the gutter?' feeling that the images were too extreme.

For students, the reality of drinking too much was more mundane – being sick, being refused transport home because they were too drunk, being alone and, as studies began, missing lectures or having to conceal their hangover in a lecture.

They were much more able to relate to the 'Would You Start Your Night Like This?' images and the 'hangover' poster produced jointly by the University and NHS than any other images. The latter is more likely to have impact at the end of Freshers' Fortnight when 'Freshers' Flu' and the general reality of cooking, shopping etc has begun to set in.

The fact sheets detailing units were felt to have low appeal, being boring and too 'maths-like'. In addition the concept of units of alcohol was, as shown in the scoping project, largely irrelevant in terms of understanding what a unit was, why it was important to drink within recommended unit levels and being a practical measure to use when out drinking.

Being 'cute', pinning 'cute' or attractive images/photos in their rooms was important to the students – both males and females. The Jelly Baby flyers and 'I love Hudd' images were both regarded as appealing.

Awareness of the Radio One Alcohol Experiment was low but when the images used in the calorie counter were shown they regarded them as highly appealing/cute and fun. The interactivity appealed to males and females alike, as did the interactive unit counter wheels distributed by the NHS.

Photos, beer mats, wristbands and stickers were also felt to have appeal as different types of potentially collectable medium.

### **Potential Moderators**

During the course of the Freshers' Fortnight there is an overall shift in student attitudes in two key areas. At the first meeting there was a greater tendency to think in terms of 'the family' – not wanting to let their parents down, wasting their parent's money etc.

By the second meeting, focus had definitely turned to 'Me' – ***'the responsibility to make this work is down to me', 'it will cost me money', 'I'm paying for it'*** and so on. The control of the family had diminished. Comments such as ***'My parents just said enjoy yourself while you can'*** are taken to endorse social activities including drinking (***'They're not stupid, they know what we get up to'***).

In addition, tolerance to extreme drunkenness increased over the Freshers' period. While looking after a drunken friend was an accepted duty at the initial discussions, it was not something to be tolerated over a long period of time. However, by the second meeting there was much greater acceptance of the drunken antics of friends – ***'We are all the same', 'We all do stupid things'***.

These changes in attitude suggest that different messages will work to different effect during the Freshers' period.

### **Communication**

#### **Pre and start of Freshers' Fortnight**

- Dangers of being the 'liability friend' – alcohol can ruin your social life/lose you friends
- Practical messages about how to drink, with particular references to the dangers of drinking games, mixing drinks, taking unknown shots from bottles at events – aimed at altering drinking behaviour
- Reminders that heavy alcohol consumption is not 'normal' – talking about behaviour led some of the students in the groups to be quite shocked by their own behaviour, 'It is bad when you think about it'.
- Deliver the message in a potentially interactive, keepsake format

## **End of Freshers' Fortnight**

- Focus on failure – the cost of failing in monetary terms and the humiliation of failing, the impact on a C.V. etc
- Increase perceived expectations in terms of student performance and achievement. Combat rumours that drive down impressions about University expectations (*'You only need to get 40% to pass'*)

## **General**

- Root messages in the reality of the students – the loneliness of being sick, humiliation via photographs on social networking sites, paying to have a taxi cleaned, being refused transport, being tired and run down – the focus being on encouraging students to moderate drinking to limit the damage the morning after
- Review the use of units as a measure - make this meaningful and practical. Or look at other measures, such as calories, where the implications of overdoing it are widely understood.
- Look at campaigns related to drink spiking, which it is suggested have had a strong influence on drinking behaviour – high awareness, altered drinking patterns to combat risk – are there learnings from these campaigns?

## **Controls**

- Encourage students into regulated bars earlier to discourage high quantities of unregulated drinking
- Assess the logistics of the Freshers' period from the move into accommodation to the start of formal studies – offer structured, attractive daytime activities to shift emphasis away from the evening
- Evaluate the way in which stealth promoting (clubs' recruitment of students to distribute flyers/sell tickets/promote alcohol) is controlled
- Visibly measure attendance of students at lectures/seminars and follow up absences in the early weeks to increase expectations in terms of attendance
- Raise the profile of societies and clubs and increase frequency and quality of communication about alternative activities/experiences. Consider societies and clubs' fayres not only in September and January but also mid-term. Perhaps also use the Freshers' Fortnight as a period to showcase activities and encourage participation.
- Consider the calibre of student entertainment – students suggested that they would be willing to pay higher prices to see top rate entertainment/DJs and would limit alcohol consumption in order not to miss or waste the experience

## **Rewards**

- Free soft drinks/water in clubs
- Free early morning enticements such as a free breakfast before 9.30am (impact greatest at the end of Freshers' Fortnight) or free vouchers for food/books etc
- Free transport if you are under a certain limit (mobile breathalyser unit usage)

## 1. Background

Alcohol has been identified as a significant factor affecting health of individuals within Kirklees. As a result the Kirklees Alcohol Strategy was developed in November 2007 and this strategy, along with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2007, has formed the driving force for raising the profile of local alcohol related issues.

In March 2008 a scoping exercise was conducted to explore the motivations and needs of population groups across Kirklees. Students, particularly first-years, were identified as a group at risk from high levels of alcohol consumption.

Key findings from the initial research suggested that:

- Students are a 'captive audience', heavily and relentlessly targeted by bars and for activities where high alcohol consumption is assumed
- Activities promoted to students frequently involve alcohol consumption – and, importantly, assume a level of tolerance that may not exist, particularly among Freshers.
- Given the strength of peer group pressure there may be inflated assumptions among students themselves of acceptable norms of alcohol consumption
- There are definite set routines and patterns to student drinking – certain nights, certain places. Students are also likely to have a wide repertoire of types of drink on each occasion.
- The smoking ban appears to have had less impact on young people (inc students) for whom going out and being part of the group is vitally important.
- None of the students talked to have ever sought out or been knowingly influenced by Government messages about alcohol consumption to date (bar drink driving), and given their assumption that their levels of consumption are 'normal', there is little likelihood that they would actively seek out information in the future

## 2. Research Objectives

This research aims to give further insight into the motivations and values of first year students at Huddersfield University with regard to alcohol consumption.

The Joint Alcohol Initiative wish to understand:

- **The process of the student journey – from leaving home to the end of the Freshers' period**
- **Key influences/expectations**
- **Behavioural motivators**
- **What matters to the students and potential exchanges for alcohol**
- **Decision making around alcohol consumption**
- **Awareness and effectiveness of Alcohol Awareness campaigns**

This information will form the basis of a social marketing initiative directed at the student population.

### 3. Methodology

Twenty-four first year students at Huddersfield University, aged 18-19 years, were recruited to attend focus groups at the beginning of the Freshers' period and then again when University courses had started.

**The Freshers' period is defined as from the weekend 13/14<sup>th</sup> September to the weekend 4/5<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.**

**Freshers' Fortnight relates to the official University Freshers' Fortnight, 20/21<sup>st</sup> September to 4/5<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.**

Groups were held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of September and on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of October.

#### **The groups were structured as follows:**

- 1. Males and Females who reside in the Huddersfield area**
- 2. Females new to Huddersfield**
- 3. Males new to Huddersfield**

The students were asked to define their alcohol consumption patterns pre-university and during the Freshers' period. These were contrasted with behaviour at the end of the Freshers' period, when formal studies began.

The students also completed blogs, via the 20/20 Research website, to enable understanding of the types and appeal of alcohol related activities engaged in. They also collected alcohol related leaflets and flyers distributed during Freshers' Fortnight to act as a record of types of events and how these were marketed. In the focus groups students were asked to comment on the appeal of the marketing and the event.

An Environmental Audit was conducted. Representatives from 20/20 Research visited Aspley Hall, the University Campus, Storthes Hall, Student Union and the Freshers' Fayre to gain an understanding and benchmark the level of alcohol related promotions directed at students.

In addition a sample of student related web sites and social network groups were explored to understand alcohol related messages on the internet.

The focus groups were recorded in both audio and visual format and video excerpts are available to stakeholders within the project with the permission of the students.

#### **4. Patterns Of Pre-University Alcohol Consumption**

All of the students taking part in the research routinely consumed alcohol prior to coming to University and, in all cases, alcohol was a standard (but not necessarily major) part of their social life.

Initial experiences of alcohol were in line with the findings in scoping project - either in pubs/clubs as an underage drinker, at house parties, at home with parents or, in a few cases, in the local park with friends.

Experiences of alcohol consumption had not all been positive with most respondents having been sick or ill due to excessive consumption at some point. A small number of the students had been badly affected by alcohol when they were under 18.

***“When I was 15 I got stupidly drunk and now I know when to stop”  
female***

But generally the first memorably bad alcohol-related experience happened around the age of 18 years old when they were beginning to routinely go to bars and clubs.

***“When I was 18 I got really, really drunk and I don’t want to do that again” female***

In many cases the bad experience did have some bearing on the future drinking behaviour of the individual. Typically they did not stop getting drunk but felt that they kept their drinking to within certain limits. These limits were self-regulated by feelings of light-headedness or sickness rather than by a more formal measurement of units.

Coming of age, and being able to legitimately gain access to bars and clubs, was a significant factor in the students’ lives.

***“I wanted to get ID’d to prove I was 18” male***

The celebration of being able to show ID and legitimately consume alcohol was evident among the Freshers interviewed. This, combined with the lack of the key moderators from home (parents, lack of money, absence of free time and a need to deal with meeting/transport arrangements), and the party atmosphere of Freshers’ Fortnight, are key contributory factors to the behaviour noted in first year students.

***“..because you can...you’re here and nobody says you can’t go out” female***

In most cases, prior to University, post-18 consumption of alcohol was confined to outside the home and took place in bars or clubs on a once or twice weekly basis, according to a regular pattern (i.e. Thursday and Friday nights or specifically ‘Student Nights’). Males admitted to more regular drinking occasions in a weekly period than females.

When not out with friends respondents were engaged in a series of other activities, working, going to the cinema, having a meal, watching TV or studying.

***“At home there are not a lot of people who go out all the time, but here...” female***

Key periods of alcohol consumption pre-University were holidays, house parties and music festivals, where parental control and ID restrictions were relaxed or absent.

***“I never used to go out every night at home ...I’d only drink at parties or gigs” female***

Festivals were a particularly popular activity among the students and were seen as opportunities for excessive and sustained alcohol consumption.

***“Music festivals are just one big piss up” male***

There were a number of identifiable moderating factors that inhibited sustained excessive alcohol consumption within the home environment.

- Parental presence – the need to moderate drinking out of respect to parents was key for the majority of respondents. Parents were aware of their children’s alcohol consumption. However, while it may have been acceptable to get ***‘giggly drunk’*** being extremely drunk, ***‘breaking things’*** and ***‘being sick’*** were not regarded as acceptable behaviour.
- ***“I hardly ever drink at home, it’s not really encouraged” female***
- Lack of money
- Lack of ID – prior to being 18 years old the lack of ID inhibited the students’ ability to drink openly in pubs and bars. While it was acknowledged that you could get alcohol if you were under 18 years old this does not appear to have played a major part in the lives of the students interviewed (this is in marked contrast to the attitudes of the groups of Cleckheaton-based young people (non-students) interviewed in the scoping project).
- Part time work/School or College
- Hobbies – past times such as an interest in flying, playing club football or singing were prioritised ahead of drinking. This was either because rules prohibited participation if alcohol had been consumed or, in the case of the singer, a definite choice with regard to impact on performance and earning capacity had been made.

All students, bar two, expected that their alcohol consumption would increase while they were students.

## 5. Exploration Of The Concept Of The Fresher Period

### i. The Fresher Brand

Freshers' Week, or Fortnight, is a nationally recognised period akin to a festival or Ibiza-type holiday and is readily promoted as such by the clubs and bars who stand to profit from packaging the 'Fresher Experience'. This plays a key part in setting expectations of students.

Enthusiastic support of the 'Fresher Experience' is almost overwhelming in Huddersfield town centre among the bars and clubs located mainly in and around King Street. On the Internet there are also many websites aimed at students and other young people promoting Fresher events at clubs. The BBC Radio 1Xtra also hosts Freshers' special webpages and broadcasts from a variety of Freshers' events.



Photo sites such as titillate.com package **Freshers' 2008** in a similar way to the Ibiza experience.



Images, events and branding all inherently link the concept of 'Freshers' to a social period of sustained partying.

## ii. Student Expectations

The students interviewed whole heartedly bought into the concept that Freshers' was a party time where they could behave in ways similar to those learnt on holiday or at festivals. Freshers', it was claimed, is about having a party, making new friends and, as a by product of that, a time when they stay out late and consume larger than average quantities of alcohol.



***“You have to party this week and then everything calms down” female***



***“It’s what Freshers’ week is about”***

Freshers are particularly vulnerable to the idea of living up to expectations by virtue of the fact that, on the whole, their entire focus during Freshers' Fortnight is to fit in and make friends. Even those who rarely socialised at home quickly learn what is expected of them and adopt routines to accommodate this.

There is also a sense among new students that they should not let the side down and tales, or legends, of extreme activities from previous years are passed down.

***“People who were here last year ... they were just pie-ing all the time and you feel a bit pressured to do the same thing” female***

Expectations are also driven by older friends and siblings and portrayal of students in the media.

***“Everything you see on telly or in the news about students relates to drinking” male***

***“Students and alcohol...go together like that!” male***

Furthemore these expectations are now disseminated more quickly than ever before through the student population via social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

All of the students who took part in the research were heavy users of such tools and many had joined student and/or club and bar groups before, and in the early days, of the Freshers' Period.

as for storthes itself, it's wicked in sunny weather, everyone is outside in the grassy areas having bbq's getting drunk, and having a good time! it's wicked!

yougofurther.com 2007

Research conducted by **Durham University's Institute of Advanced Study\*** suggested that social networking is a key factor in the spread of binge-drinking behaviour, largely because it enables 'normative' patterns of excess to be spread so quickly.

The research also contains the notion that binge-drinking behaviour is fashionable and thus encourages copying behaviour. This in turn is further underpinned or justified by an even greater spread of accounts of such behaviour via the social networking sites.

The reseach for this study supports these findings in that 'binge-drinking' was an acceptable form of behaviour among Freshers. There was no sense of judgement about the amount drunk or the types of drink that were consumed in one session. Students were keen to join in the drinking activities which were seen as fun, 'cool' and what everybody else is doing – that is to say 'fashionable'.

**\*Source: Science Daily June 28, 2008**

## 6. Behavioural Motivators And Drinking Patterns During The Fresher Period

### I Fitting In And Making Friends

Students, particularly at the initial meetings, expressed an overwhelming desire to fit in with fellow students and make friends. Even as the groups convened the females, particularly, were keen to make contact with other members of their group and exchanged telephone numbers.

The desire to fit in and not miss out on anything explains why students typically moved into their accommodation a week before the start of the official Huddersfield University Freshers' Fortnight.

***“Last week was really ‘what’s the point?’ but you don’t want to miss it or nobody will know you” female***

hey is evry1 planin to go on the 15th??im really confused coz dnt want to be on my own if every1 else goes a week after ha!! xx

yougofurther.com 2007

For most of the students interviewed this meant that they had already been away from home since at least 15<sup>th</sup> September and by the time of meeting had already indulged in a period of heavy alcohol consumption.

***“We went out more last week – the first week we went out a lot and drank every night” female***

***“In every flat there’s a list of what’s on at night – but we just want to sleep in the day and mong – it’s all about drinking and dancing” female***

With an absence of, or lack of desire to engage in, alternative social activities alcohol quickly becomes entrenched in routines.

***“D-bar did put on activities ...movies and sports days...we would have been interested if we hadn’t been out the night before” female***

Alcohol is seen as a social lubricant and a fairly sure guarantee of a good time. It is also very easy to access given the absence of formal moderating factors.

***“You’ve got a student loan, cheap drinks and no work” male***

There is also evidence that, in general, Freshers are inclined to act as a group at the expense of the desires of the individual. This adds to the pressure to drink and go out as the norms are set by the group rather than by individual participants.

***“You feel rude if you don’t go out” male***

***“If everyone else is going out, you go out” male***

Typically, therefore, drinking patterns were similar across all groups interviewed.

## II Drinking Patterns

Alcohol is generally purchased in local shops and drunk in the flats prior to going out. This concept of pre-loading prior to going out is commonplace among young people and a cheap alternative to buying drinks in bars or clubs. In this instance it also helps pass the time before going out.

During this period of 'at home consumption' drinking games may be played. They are seen as 'fun', and an enjoyable way to spend time by males and females. The 'Ring of Fire' was a particularly popular game among students. Alcohol is consumed according to the fall of a pack of playing cards. For example:

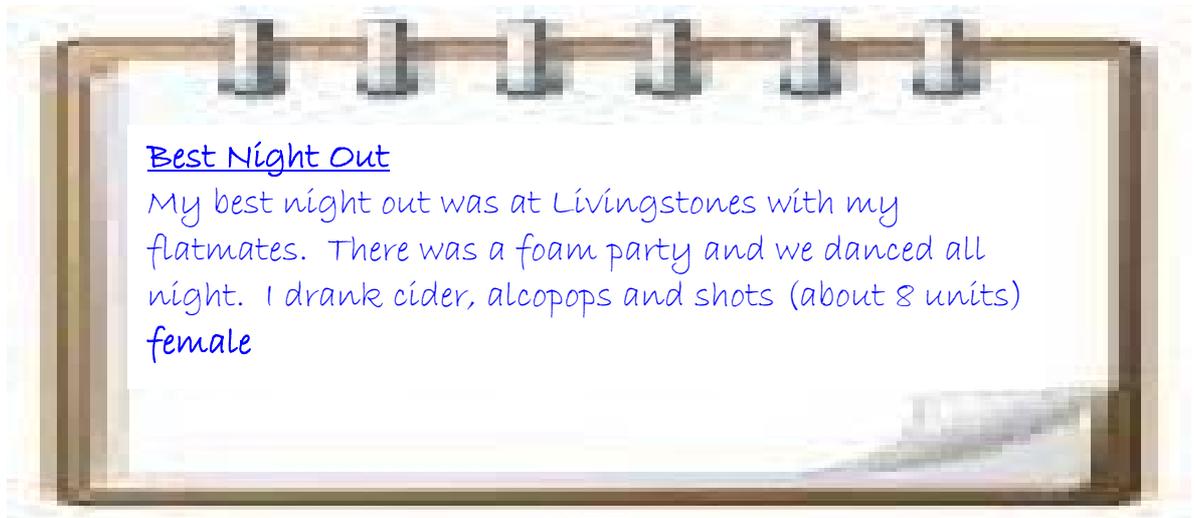
	<p><b>"King's Cup"</b> - The player may pour a decent amount of whatever he/she is drinking into the "king cup" located in the centre of the table. When the last (4th) king is chosen, the chooser has to chug the king cup. The king cup may contain anything from beer, liquor, or wine, to Jaeger bombs or animal crackers.<sup>[2]</sup></p>
	<p><b>"Waterfall"</b> - All players begin to drink at the same time. It goes clockwise around the circle where the player next to the card-chooser cannot stop until the chooser does, and the 3rd player cannot stop until the 2nd one does, and so it goes around the circle until everyone is done.</p>

**Source: Wikipedia**

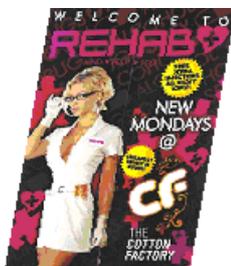
Students talked about tending to go out to bars/clubs very late in the evening and, while routines varied, tend to visit a range of bars offering drink promotions. This is then followed by ending the evening at a student-focused club which is, again, typically offering some type of promotion (either cheap alcohol or free admission).



Inherent within these drinking patterns is the tendency to mix drinks. This comes not only from the drinking games, but also results from students drinking whatever contributions are available prior to going out and then choosing the cheapest drinks on offer at the bars and clubs. Drinks are selected according to availability and price, rather than type or brand.



Rehab is a regular Monday night event at the Cotton Factory and was popular among the students interviewed. Attractions on offer include:



- **Sexy doctors and nurses plying you with vodka syringes all night long**
- **The infamous vodka challenge!!**
- **Intravenous vodka drip**
- **The crazy rehab chair**

**The 'cheapest drinks in Hudds!'**

- **£1 shots**
- **£1.50 bottles (beer and alcopops)**
- **£1.75 pints**
- **£5.50 bottles of wine**
- **£5.95 cocktail pitcher**
- **£1.75 vodka and mixer/redbull**

This example is not atypical of the types of events aimed at and promoted heavily to students. Other examples, include the UV foam party, which was enjoyed by many of the students.



The presentation of the event is highly professional and was appealing to the students. The flyer contains key information for the students

- That the event is for students only
- That cheap alcohol is on offer
- There is a unique feature of the event to make it exciting – UV foam and body painting

In addition to the quantity and varied types of alcohol, the number of drinking occasions rises significantly during the Freshers' period. The students did not, however, think that this frequency of going out would last - lack of money, the cost of going out and the need to concentrate on their studies were felt to be key moderators here.

**Estimated drinking occasions and average consumption before attending University**

	MALE	FEMALE
<b>DKG OCCS PER WEEK</b>		
1-2	5	9
3-4	7	2
Every day	1	
<b>AV NUMBER OF UNITS</b>		
5-10	3	8
11-20	5	2
20+	5	1

Data collected on 22/23<sup>rd</sup> September – initial meeting

Data collected at the second meetings on 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> October (after Freshers' Fortnight was over) suggests that in the previous fortnight the males had, on average, drunk alcohol every day and were drinking on average 18 units per session (6 times the recommended daily limit) and the females were drinking on average every other day and consuming an average of 9 units on each occasion (3 times the recommended daily limit).

Best Night Out

The vodka Bunker at Livingstones was good. I went with all of my flatmates and 10 others who I've met since being at Storthes. I drank roughly 25 units of alcohol. It was good because there were cheap drinks, a lively venue and I was with all my friends and enjoying the night with them. *Male*

Best Night Out

Great night in the vodka Bunker with a group of friends (10-15). I consumed a lot of alcohol - about 20-25 units. Best bits were the music, the people and the atmosphere. *Male*

One of the groups recruited for the research looked at the behaviour of students who were not new to the Huddersfield area, but had lived in the locale for a period of years. While some of these respondents lived at home, others had moved into student accommodation.

Actual location of dwelling did not appear to make a huge difference in the participation of events during the Freshers' period. The most likely patterns of behaviour were that the local students adopted the first year student pattern of activity during the week and at weekends, traditional nights for staying in for non-local students, they resorted to previous behaviour patterns, going out with non-University friends.

## 7. Alcohol

### i. Positive Associations

At the first meeting the students presented a very positive attitude towards alcohol. It is typically regarded as a social facilitator.

***“It gets everyone talking to each other...it’s a bit stiff talking without alcohol” male***

***“People tell you secrets when they are drunk” female***



In line with the findings of the scoping project alcohol is regarded as a bonding tool, which enables positive social and sexual interaction, and gives confidence.

***“Drink means that you can dance, don’t judge yourself as harshly - sober is a crap night” male***

***“In a club you have a drink to have a good time” male***

***“I have to be a bit drunk to dance” female***



***“If you don’t drink ...you can see how they’re cut loose, not bothered about the way they’re dancing...and you can’t really get into the night”***

At the first meeting respondents were very keen to stress that they did not necessarily seek out alcohol, or alcohol promotions, the overriding priority was to meet new people and make friends.

However, with it providing confidence and social opportunities, it is clear that alcohol and the notion having a good time have a strongly symbiotic relationship.

Alcohol-free events had very little appeal, particularly to the males. They were felt to automatically suggest a duller event. Females were more likely to endorse the idea of going to the cinema, film nights in halls etc, (particularly at the second meeting) but, for them too, alcohol was a critical part of going out and having a good time.

Males were more likely to support the idea of sport/fitness as being a possible exchange, but they also acknowledged that drinking is often associated with sporting occasions/clubs (club nights/matches etc).

While possibilities for exchanges for alcohol become apparent after the Freshers' Fortnight (driven by tiredness, the need to study and awareness of the implication of student loans/cost) at the beginning of the period there is very little that would be considered as a fair exchange for alcohol consumption. The behaviour adopted is regarded as legitimate 'student behaviour'.

## **ii. Negative Associations**

Half the student sample had had very bad alcohol-related experiences prior to attending University – usually on holiday or just as the individual turned eighteen years of age. These worst experiences, those that had frightened or significantly inconvenienced the individual, did have a bearing on current behaviour. Typically, while the student was still prepared to get drunk, they felt that they never wanted to get to that 'level' again.

***"I had a £180 taxi cleaning bill when I was so drunk I was sick"  
female***

***"I woke up in hospital on holiday once" male***

It was acknowledged that drinking alcohol did have a downside but all felt at the beginning of Freshers' Fortnight that their drinking was sufficiently under control to make the bad days worth it. In addition, in the week when they moved into the accommodation there were no demands on them during the day to make the hangovers seem particularly inconvenient or debilitating.

Negative associations in practical everyday terms tended to be confined to short-term hangovers – sickness and a headache. Hangovers were generally dealt with by sleeping the effects of the alcohol off. This became more problematic once University courses had started.

***"I fell asleep in the lecture" male***

Bad experiences included waking up in the wrong place -

***“I fell asleep on the steps of the bar and didn’t wake up until 10 in the morning” male***

Or having photographs of drunken antics or inappropriate friendships (with a friend’s partner) posted on the Internet.

***“My friend, on the first night, stripped off to her underwear on stage...the next day she was mortified” female***

Generally students felt that they did take precautions to ensure safety of themselves and peers by looking after drunken friends, saving taxi money for the journey home and only going out to ‘student only’ events in town.

However, two students had ended up drunk and alone on an evening out and this had proved to be a frightening, and not to be repeated, experience.

***“I got drunk really quickly and I was sick...I had to go and find a taxi by myself, I just cried” female***

***“I missed the bus and walked back to Storthes. It took a long time. It seemed a good idea at the time” male***

Students were also aware that alcohol could cause aggression - this was something that they avoided by sticking to known student bars and not going to ‘Townie’ or ‘Chav’ clubs. They felt that they were pretty well protected by the bars and clubs in Huddersfield, who operate a strict dress code/student door policy on weeknights.

Males and females understood that being thrown out of a club due to drunken behaviour was a real threat and had seen evidence of this happening. It was felt that behaviour, rather than the level of drunkenness, drove this and that bar staff did not stop serving those who were obviously drunk.

### **iii. Understanding Alcohol Labelling**

#### **%ABV**

%ABV was understood in terms of indicating the strength of the alcoholic drink. It was typically used to assess the monetary value of the drink.

***“He said, ‘Why are you getting that one [lager] when that’s 5% so it’s stronger and the same price?’” male***

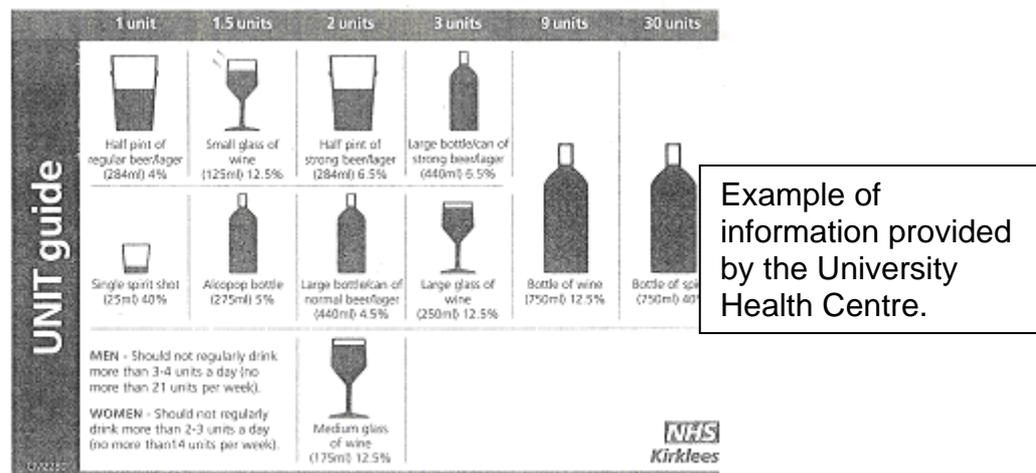
Drinks known to be high in alcohol content, such as shots, are seen as good value because they provide a quick hit. They are also key in terms of providing group bonding experiences via games ‘**who can take the best shot, most shots etc**’, as well as being appealing, as previous research has shown, in terms of delivery (colour and taste).

## Units Of Alcohol

In the scoping exercise, 'units of alcohol' were not a widely used or understood measure. They were not considered particularly relevant by students (or any of the demographic groups tested).

The students interviewed in Huddersfield were not atypical in not knowing, or caring, about the number of units per type of drink. There were some hazily recalled facts about units from school science lessons and all of those who had attended the Health Centre screening had been prompted to think about units of alcohol. However, only facts that had practical relevance were recalled with any degree of certainty.

***"I know that it takes one hour for a unit of alcohol to pass through your body...I learnt it in science at school" male***



Certainly in the short term, units were felt to be irrelevant. Each individual claimed that they alone controlled how much they could or would drink. The prevailing view was that they knew when they had had enough to drink – 'enough' being differently defined on different occasions - but on a heavy night, meaning that they usually stopped drinking when their head started 'swimming' or they began to feel bad (i.e. sick).

***"I just drink until I've had enough – sometimes it's less and sometimes it's more" male***

***"They told me at the health centre not to drink more than three units a night...she said that's one and a half pints...but I don't count units when I go out, as soon as I feel bad I usually stop" female***

None of the students felt a need to understand units. All had strategies in place to cope with the effects of alcohol while out – for some this was going home, for others this was having an hour off drinking, 'dancing to sweat it out', drinking water etc. Focus was entirely on the short term, the emphasis was to have fun and 'make the most of it' – this meant not missing out, joining in and having a laugh, letting the future take care of itself.

## 8. Attitudes Towards Health

### i. General Health

Over the period of research the majority of students had registered with the University Health Centre and those who had not done this by the second meeting acknowledged the need to do so.

Those who had attended had been asked to fill in a short questionnaire about the amount of alcohol that they drank and there was anecdotal evidence that females, particularly, were likely to down play the amount that they drank.

No students had worries about their health with relation to alcohol and all felt in control of the amount that they were drinking. The view was very much that Freshers' Fortnight, and University life more generally, was a special time when they could 'get away' with non-normative behaviour patterns.

***“We’re not going to do this forever, it’s just a short time”  
female***

***“I’ve drunk more this week than I usually do but I’m not  
planning to keep it up” female***

There was no concept that their actions would have any long-term effects in terms of physical, mental or sexual health. This is in line with the scoping research, where the majority of respondents felt that there would be time to repair damage done, if any, and that they would be warned by a health professional if they needed to moderate their behaviour.

In addition to drinking more than usual, normal sleeping patterns were also disrupted. The majority talked about usually going out late at night and being awake and out at 3-4am was not unusual.

***“We usually go out about 11 or 11.30pm” female***

This behaviour was encouraged by 'After Party' events going on until ten in the morning – though this was considered extreme by the students.



As a result of this pattern of going out late and repeatedly staying up all night, tiredness was a key feature of Freshers' health and this led to a more general sense of being run-down. This feeling was commonly termed 'Freshers' Flu' and symptoms were sore throat, spots, tiredness and general lethargy.

***"It does grate on you...you have a sore throat and you're very tired" female***

## **ii. Diet**

Feelings about food were predictably mixed among the student sample. At the first meetings, when the majority had been in Huddersfield only a week, cooking and shopping were not seen as a problem. Sharing food with their flatmates and cooking a meal (often pasta based) was something to be proud of. Takeaways were an option and were taken advantage of by some but cost was felt to be an issue.

Some students mentioned the provision of Sainsbury's vouchers which were given out on campus. These were felt to be useful and were welcomed.

By the second meeting, ennui had set in among some students and those who lived locally, but were staying in halls, began to go home to eat a 'Sunday dinner' or complete other chores. This step back into normality was relished. Others recognised that their diet was becoming repetitive and unhealthy and, typically, this was associated with weight gain/loss rather than felt to be detrimental to their long-term health.

***"I'm living off Nuttella" female***

***"I'm not bothered about what I eat, whatever I eat I always look the same" female***

The students claimed that they did not go out to eat – something they did claim to do pre-University. Eating generally took place before going out for a night and all acknowledged advice about eating before they went out to drink.

There was some discussion around the term '***Eatings Cheating***' and while this was considered amusing there was no evidence of avoiding eating in order to get drunk more quickly or cheaply. This was in contrast to the views of some of the non-student young people interviewed in the scoping exercise and may, in part, be due to the very cheap alcohol available to, and relative prosperity of, the students.

Food consumed on the go, at clubs or at the end of a night, tended to be comfort food, with low nutritional value – kebabs, pop tarts, pot noodles and burgers. They were viewed as expensive treats rather than a key part of the diet.

***"Camel sells pot noodles and pop tarts" female***

### **iii. Sexual Health**

The Chlamydia testing, conducted at the University Health Centre, was raised by the male group, who all had been asked to provide urine samples.

Typically the students felt that they were sensible enough to take precautions to prevent STIs.

Those who praised the NHS stand at the Freshers' Fayre were males, who had been given free condoms. Again, in line with other findings, the practical / free products generated positive feelings among students.

## 9. Environmental Audit

### i Marketing

The pubs and clubs in Huddersfield operate highly targeted campaigns to encourage students to spend time and money in their premises. Promotion of events is intense and seems to have no boundaries.

Examples of marketing techniques include:

- Using megaphones to advertise student nights & events
- Billboards, trailer hoardings, placards and camel costumes – complete with megaphone and silly string
- Liveried promotions teams, handing out stickers and flyers
- Recruitment of students to ensure that flyers and posters are delivered into the student community
- Encourage joining groups on social networking sites so that advertising can be precisely targeted
- Offering free gifts such as bags, CD's, glow sticks, face paints
- Heavily advertised drinks promotions – from £1 per drink
- Free admission
- Themed high profile events such as the UV foam party and Dirty Porn Star party
- Literally hi-jacking students with wristbands and flyers
- Extensive bill posting
- Establishing club/bar communities via forming MySpace and Facebook personas for the club and publishing photographs of events
- Hosting stands at the Freshers' Fayre
- Highly visible presence outside the Freshers' Fayre

In comparison, information from the University in the first few weeks seems very low key. All of the students had received timetables regarding their induction programme and there were no specific complaints about course information.

Marketing Undergraduate Induction Programme 2008

**INDUCTION PROGRAMME  
SEPT 2008**

**MONDAY 22 September 08 - Compulsory Attendance**

TIME	PLACE	ACTIVITY	STAFF	NOTES
11:15	LA1/01	Welcome	Lisa Du-Lieu	
11:25-12:15	LA/01	Department Registration	Lisa Du-Lieu Glynis Jones	Bring 2 passport photos with your name on the back.
12:15-13:15	WORKSHOP BUILDINGS	University enrolment. Collection of registration cards followed by registration	Lisa Du-Lieu Glynis Jones	
	Social Afternoon	Visit to Varsity	Lisa and Glynis	

**TUESDAY 23 September 08 - Compulsory Attendance**

TIME	PLACE	ACTIVITY	STAFF
11:15		Option Talks Marketing Society	Lisa and Glynis Nadio
12:15		Complete option form and return to enable timetabling	Lisa and Glynis
13:00-14:00		Lunch	
14:15-16:15		The Great Egg Race	Lisa, Glynis, Debbie and Denis

**WEDNESDAY 24 September 08 - Compulsory Attendance**

TIME	PLACE	ACTIVITY	STAFF
9:15	FS2/01	HOD	Head of Dept - Mr John Anchor
9:30-11:15	FS2/01	Student information talks	
		9:30	Chris Ireland - ASU
		10:00	Stephen Boyd - Support Services
		10:30	Jonathan Croall - Student Finance
12:30-17:00	Huddersfield Sports Centre	Freshers' Fayre	

Example of Induction Week Timetable

Page 1 of 2

However, the information distributed by the University is being overwhelmed by both the quality and quantity of information from the various commercial enterprises targeting students. In addition, lack of mobile signal and intermittent Internet service in student accommodation mean that information is potentially not getting through to the students.

***“I get more information from them [clubs] than I do the University” female***

***“You hardly ever get anything from the University at all” female***

***“The Internet is always down in hall and there is no [mobile] signal so you miss out” female***

The issues surrounding the 2008 Freshers' Fayre illustrate this well. The induction timetables clearly showed times and dates of the Student Union Freshers' Fayre, however, at the groups there was a lot of evidence of confusion about whether the Freshers' Fayre was going to be held at the Sports Centre or at Livingstone's Nightclub.



*“I haven’t heard anyone talk about University, when you walk into town you are constantly bombarded with these [Livingstone’s Freshers’ Fayre] leaflets” female*

There is, however, no evidence in this research that any students missed the official Freshers’ Fayre or that the alternative commercial Fayre impacted attendance. Students tended to attend the official Fayre, with roughly half of the group also visiting Livingstone’s.

Flyer distribution is clearly a big issue during the Fresher Period. Recruitment of students as promoters ensures that flyers, guest lists, tickets and wristbands can be distributed, despite official bans in accommodation and the Student Union.



Club promoters are recruited via Facebook and rumoured to be paid £5 per hour and 50p per name on the guest list. It is therefore in their interest to promote events as heavily as possible.

TOKYO IS LOOKING FOR ENTHUSIASTIC PROMOTIONAL STAFF FOR OUR NEW CLUB OPENING IN BRADFORD. ANYONE INTERESTED IN JOB VACENCIES PLEASE CONTACT [john@tokyobradford.com](mailto:john@tokyobradford.com) TO ARRANGE AN INTERVIEW.

Example of Facebook recruitment advertisement and flyers distributed in Freshers’ Week.





The stickers and wristbands, most particularly, were worn long after the events had taken place and were seen as 'badges of honour'. They demonstrated a sense of belonging, evidence that the wearer was part of 'the group'.

## ii Cheap Alcohol

The one thing that the flyers distributed to students have in common is the promotion of cheap alcohol.

Alcohol promotions are important to the students and are key determinants of drinking behaviour. Getting drunk was now cheaper than ever before.

***"There's cheaper alcohol so you save money. I went to Tokyo and spent £12, that included my entrance, sharing 2 taxis and I got quite drunk" male***

***"I like the ones that say £1 drinks – you know that you can go out and you'll spend a fiver" male***



Flyers promoting cheap alcohol.

***"Cheap drink – that's the sort of thing you're looking for as soon as you see something advertised – that or cheap admission" male***

***"There are so many promotions. It's only £1 for a drink so you go to that" female***



In addition to using flyers to promote events, bars and clubs in the town centre were heavily adorned with promotional banners - most were directed at students and advertised mid-week drinking.



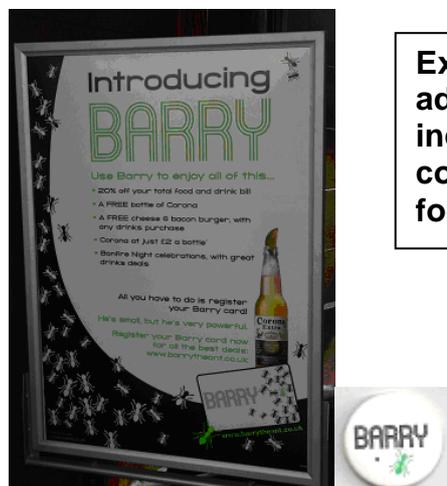
At the second meeting, students were asked to rank a series of elements previously identified as part of a 'good night out'.

The all male group rated cheap alcohol and free admission as the key factors in deciding where they would go for a night out, ahead of the more social aspects of the evening - a good social crowd and good music.

The mixed group, however, put 'good social crowd' at the top of the list, but also highly prioritised the cost related elements of the event – cheap alcohol and free admission. This was also true of the all female group.

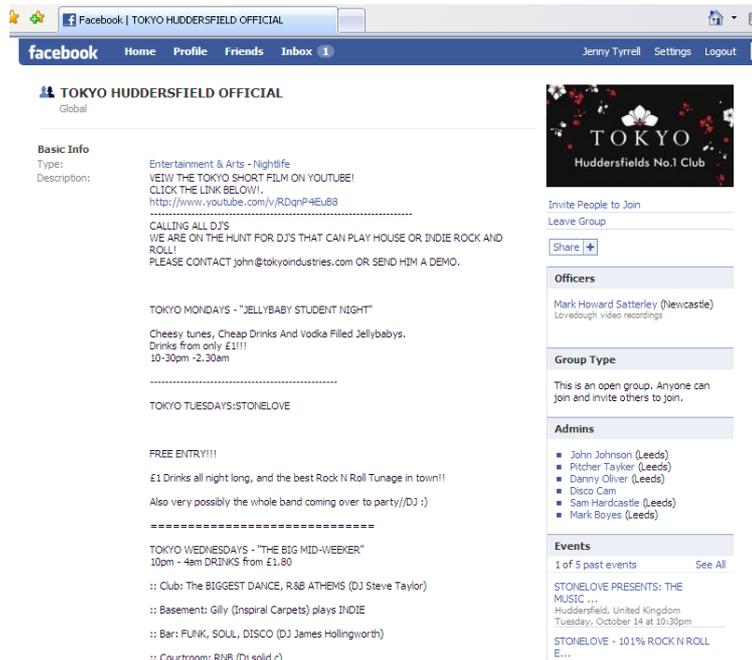


As well as frequenting bars which promoted cheap alcohol, students adopted a number of other strategies to save money and access cheaper alcohol. One of these was purchasing drink from the shop or supermarket to consume before they went out. Secondly, a number of them had subscribed to bar loyalty cards which gave discounts on food and alcohol.



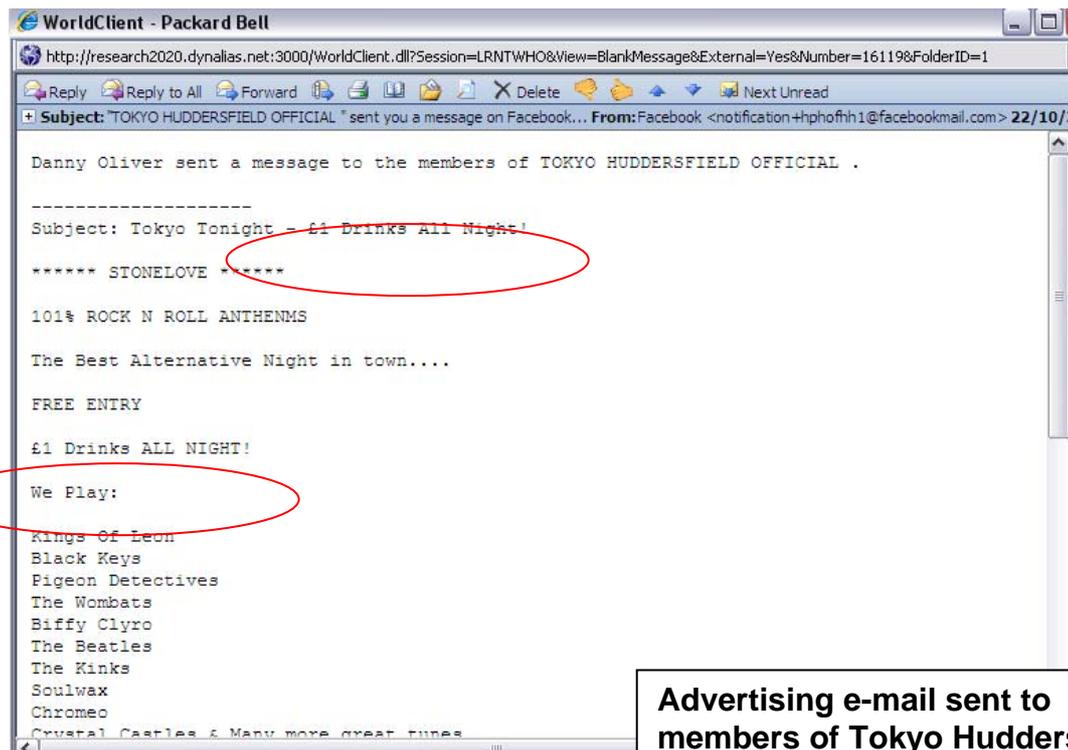
**Example of a loyalty card advertisement. Other examples include The Varsity Card, which costs £2 and offers 25% off all food and drink.**

Others had joined Club Facebook Groups so that they could be aware of special events, but also to receive other benefits, such as reduced price admission.



The Facebook pages provide another promotional dimension for the clubs and means that they can precisely target members with information about events and alcohol promotions. Members of groups are contacted by this method, on average three or four times a week.

***“I get more info from there [D-Bar Facebook Group] than I do from Freshers” male***



**Advertising e-mail sent to members of Tokyo Huddersfield.**

## 10. Awareness And Impact Of Media Campaigns

### i. Know Your Limits

The students were all able to recall the images from the 'Hero to Zero' campaign (male images) and these were generally felt to be shocking. However, it was acknowledged, particularly by the males, that the impact of this campaign was greatest while they were sober, during the day or at home, but that they wouldn't give the advertisements a second thought when they were out drinking, even if they had best intentions.

***"When you're handing your money over you don't care" male***

***"Students think in the here and now when they are drinking" male***

The females could also recall the male images in the campaign but felt that the behaviour was so far removed from what they would do, they could not relate to the warning/advice.

The 'End of the Night' campaign again had high detailed recall across the sexes, with both males and females able to recall the male and female images. This campaign appeared to resonate more with the students and made them think. They could relate to the 'everyday' images more than the action-based campaigns.

***"I know my limits and I don't enjoy getting that way" male***



***"I can relate to it...but it's shocking" female***



***"They are really effective. There's a girl whose wet all her skirt...but it's true and it makes you think I'm never going to get like that" female***



The University/NHS poster depicting a hungover student was also well received and provided an image that both sexes felt they could relate to.

The effectiveness of this poster was more pronounced among the more experienced drinkers when tested at the beginning of Freshers' Fortnight. However, comments at the second meeting about health, tiredness and missing induction lectures, suggest that the posters would become more effective towards the end of the Freshers' period, when courses begin in earnest.

Both sets of images which struck a chord dealt with the after effects of a drunken night. This approach was felt to be much more effective than the Know Your Limits posters, which talked about behaviour and actions while out drinking.





Overall, the students were dismissive of these poster images – they did not feel that the messages were talking to them, or people like them.

In addition, most of the males felt that such messages would not occur to them when they were on a night out. They interpreted the posters as asking them to make decisions about behaviour when they are actually drinking.

***“When you’re out you might push a mate – and you might not know your own strength when you’re drunk” male***

## **ii. Radio One Alcohol Experiment**

Awareness of Radio One was predictably high, although it was not necessarily the radio station of choice. Stations frequently listened to included Galaxy and Kerrang! Radio (Kerrang! Radio was identified by the Dept of Health and the Home Office as particularly likely to encourage excessive drinking. This was denied by a spokesman for the station).

Awareness of the Radio One Alcohol Experiment was low, limited to one or two students. One female student had visited the web site to check out the issues investigated and look at the calorie counter.

When messages contained in the campaign were discussed, the interactive calorie counter was felt to be of interest, particularly among the female group. Awareness of the link between alcohol and calories was low but when raised did provoke discussion and some concern.

***“I’m going straight on that [website] when I get back” female***



Radio 1 Alcohol Experiment – the Calorie Counter.

The 'cute' image of doughnut and interactive graphics make the site appealing. The message did generate some interest among males and females who could understand the practical value of being aware of the number of calories in different types of drink.

***“I’ve put on 6lb over the last two weeks and that’s due to drinking” male***

***“I don’t have any worries about drinking – just about my beer belly” male***

***“You don’t really realise how much you are having calorie-wise, it’s quite scary” female***

### iii. NHS Information

Aside from TV and Radio advertising, spontaneous awareness of NHS information relating to alcohol consumption was low. A few of the female students were aware of leaflets in hall but only one respondent had actively sought information out – prompted by this research. The general consensus was that students had not seen or been given information relating to the consumption of alcohol.

***“You never see that sort of stuff in University” male***

The presence of the NHS stand at the Freshers’ Fayre was acknowledged by most of the respondents. The stand was extremely busy when visited by 20/20 Research representatives, with significant amounts of condoms, leaflets and other materials being handed out to the queue of students.

Those who were most vociferous in their praise for the stand had typically benefited in a practical way from its presence.

***“I was happy because I got some free condoms” male***

Others were apathetic towards the presence of the NHS at the Freshers’ Fayre.

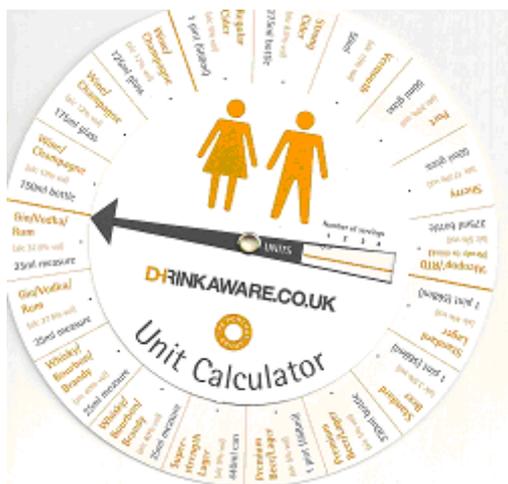
***“I didn’t see the stand and I didn’t care” male***

***“I don’t tend to listen to the NHS” male***

Of all the types of Alcohol Awareness literature tested, the Unit Calculator Wheel was the most spontaneously recalled ‘information vehicle’ relating to alcohol consumption. This is despite all of the issues associated with the concept of units overall.

Those who remembered the wheel had not used it to moderate drinking behaviour but had been interested enough to look at how many units of alcohol were in certain drinks. Like the Radio 1 calorie counter, the wheel had a level of interactivity that engaged the students

***“It’s something to do” female***



In addition the wheel was something a little bit different and was ‘cute’ or ‘cool’ enough for them to pin on the wall.

***“It’s on my pin board” female***

***“I’ve pinned it on my wall because it’s cool” male***

The students were unanimous in their rejection of the NHS pink fact sheets. These were felt to be dull and ‘maths orientated’ with the graph visual being a real turn-off for some of the students.

### ScreeningPLUS Simple Structured Advice

**UNITS**

Remember, drinks poured at home are usually bigger

#### Are you at risk from drinking alcohol?

Risk	ADULT females	Males	Women	Common Effects
<b>LOW RISK</b>	0-7	21 units or fewer per week or up to 4 units per day	14 units or fewer per week or up to 3 units per day	-Increased relaxation -Reduced risk of heart disease -Tolerability
<b>HAZARDOUS (high drinking)</b>	8-19	22-49 units per week or regular drinking of more than 4 units per day	15-19 units per week or regular drinking of more than 3 units per day	-Less energy -Depression/Anxiety -Insomnia -Risk of injury -High blood pressure -Relationship problems -Increased risk learning with medication
<b>CRITICAL (over 19 units drinking)</b>	19-19	50+ units per week	20+ units per week	-All of the above and... -Memory loss -Increased risk of liver disease -Increased risk of cancer -Possible alcohol dependence

\* Binge drinking is considered to be drinking twice the daily limit in one sitting (8+ units for men, 6+ units for women).  
There are times when you will be at risk even after two or three drinks. For example, when exercising, operating heavy machinery, driving or if you are on certain medication.  
If you are pregnant it is recommended that you completely abstain from drinking alcohol.  
As well as keeping to weekly and daily limits, it is recommended that two days of the week should be alcohol free.

Your screening outcome is  How do you feel?

Support planning and brief interventions toolkit

#### What is everyone else like?

Most people are sensible drinkers

#### What are the benefits of cutting down?

**Physical**

- Reduced risk of injury
- Reduced risk of high blood pressure
- Reduced risk of cancer
- Reduced risk of liver disease
- Reduced risk of brain damage
- Sleep better
- More energy
- Less weight / better physical shape
- No hangovers
- Improved memory

**Psychological/Social/Financial**

- Improved mood
- Less hassle from family
- Reduced risk of drink driving
- Save money
- Better relationships

#### Making your plan

- Have your first alcoholic drink after starting to eat
- Quench your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks before alcohol
- Avoid salty snacks when drinking
- Avoid drinking in rounds or in large groups
- Switch to low alcohol beer/wine
- Take smaller sips
- Plan activities and tasks at those times you usually drink
- When bored or stressed have a workout instead of drinking
- Explore interests - cinema, exercise, etc
- Avoid going to the pub after work
- Avoid or limit the time spent with 'heavy' drinking friends
- Any ideas? Things you have tried?

#### What targets you should aim for?

**How to do it? - The ideal**

**Men**  
4 or less standard drinks daily  
21 or less standard drinks weekly

**Women**  
3 or less standard drinks daily  
14 or less standard drinks weekly  
No drinks advised during pregnancy

**Dependent drinkers**  
No drinks are safe

**Your first achievable step**  
What is your target?

**Remember, nobody's perfect!  
If at first you don't succeed, try again.**

Support planning and brief interventions toolkit

Support screening and brief interventions toolkit

***"It's boring, very, very boring...the colour" female***

***"It looks clinical, not exciting" female***

***"It's like high school maths" female***

***"I wouldn't even stop to read that, it's just facts and figures" male***

***"I think, with a lot of that information...I don't think people care" male***

## 11. Recommendations For Communication and Encouraging Moderation

During the course of the Fresher Period there is an overall shift in student attitudes in two key areas.

At the first meeting there was a greater tendency to think in terms of 'the family' – not wanting to let their parents down, wasting their parent's money etc.

By the second meeting, focus had definitely turned to 'Me' – ***'the responsibility to make this work is down to me', 'it will cost me money', 'I'm paying for it'*** and so on. The control of the family had appeared to diminish.

Secondly, tolerance of extreme drunkenness increased over the Fresher period. While looking after a drunken friend was an accepted duty at the initial discussions, it was not something to be tolerated repeatedly. At the second meeting, however, there was much greater acceptance of the drunken antics of friends – ***'We are all the same', 'We all do stupid things'***.

These changes in attitude suggest that messages will work to different effect during the Fresher period.

Areas for consideration are as follows

1. Communication pre-University
2. 'Fresh' Freshers
3. Appropriate messages as Freshers' ends and studies begin
4. Controls
5. Rewards
6. Delivering the message

### 1. Communication pre-University

- Evidence suggests that a certain level of information given at school, about alcohol and the practical implications of consumption, (impact on memory when revising, amount of time needed to pass through the body) was retained. It was considered useful information with practical value.

Review the type of information given at pre-18yrs and consider advice that would be useful to under-18's attending festivals or going on holiday with limited supervision. Key messages should include practical advice about the effects of mixing alcohol and drinking over long periods, explanation of the dangers of drinking unspecified and possibly unmeasured shots

## 2. 'Fresh' Freshers

### Practical information rooted in student reality

- Freshers' is viewed as a holiday period – akin to a festival/Ibiza type experience. Key messages should be based in everyday reality (being sick and alone, being refused a taxi ride, paying a taxi clear up bill, being really run down with an impact on appearance)

***“I went to see Eric P..., I got drunk really quickly and I was sick and I had to go and get a taxi by myself and I just cried...I couldn't find my friends and so I went home” female***

Practical messages which students can see 'the point of' are most likely to be taken to heart. Messages about long-term health, for example are felt to be highly irrelevant and extreme messages, for example, getting into a stranger's car, or being violent are not felt to be relevant.

Evaluate messages and the types of message and advice given out with regard to drink spiking. All students were keen to take practical measures to avoid drink spiking (keeping hold of bottles, drinking shots to get a quick fix rather than risk a longer drink), however actual experience/awareness of anyone having their drink spiked was very low.

### What sort of drinker are you?

- At the start of the Freshers' period the students place extremely high value on making friends and fitting in.

'Are you a liability friend?' message would have greatest impact just prior and during the first part of Freshers'.

All of the respondents talked about occasionally having to look after a friend who had drunk too much. While this was considered the 'right thing to do', it was also felt that they would start to reconsider friendships or drinking patterns if this happened consistently.

The effectiveness of this message potentially weakens over the course of the Fresher period. By the second meeting respondents, who had by then been exposed to many more instances of alcohol consumption, were much more tolerant and forgiving of drunken behaviour.

***“Everybody is the same” female***

***“All my friends are the same as me so it doesn't really matter” male***

The 2002 Australian campaign 'Is getting pissed getting pathetic? (Just Ask your friends)' may be worth considering in terms of impact and effectiveness.

An extract taken from Sciencedirect.com suggests that views were mixed, with some students feeling that the campaign made them think more deeply about their behaviour while others, the much harder to reach group, seen to some extent too in this research, were unlikely to consider or care about the messages given.

#### **Abstract**

The present study examined students' understanding and perceived effectiveness of a recent Australian alcohol campaign designed to increase students' awareness of excessive and harmful drinking. Six hundred and seventy one university students (51% females), who had seen the campaign posters, with the tagline "Is Getting Pissed Getting Pathetic? (Just Ask Your Friends)", were asked to comment on the messages that the campaign was communicating and how informative, relevant, and effective they perceived the campaign. Many students were positive in their evaluations and described the messages as "truth and realistic", "clear and to the point", and that the campaign made them think about their own drinking. However, other views were more negative and indicative of psychological reactance. These included concerns that students "won't listen" or "don't care" about media campaigns, and that "they don't want to be told what to do". The findings highlight how media campaigns can help an audience contemplate behavioral change, however, they can also alienate students and promote counterproductive attitudes.

Sciencedirect.com Volume 33 Issue 2 Feb 2008

Other potential elements of communication related to this are introducing ideas that being drunk impacts looks, personality and sexual attractiveness. All of these factors are areas where new Freshers feel particularly vulnerable.

#### Would you do this at home?

- At the beginning of the Freshers' period the sense of family or parental control is still in evidence. Students talked about not wanting to let their parents down by failing at their studies due to excessive alcohol consumption. They were also very conscious of the parental control over their drinking, not being out of control, breaking things or getting sick. There is possible potential for a 'would you do this at home' type message.

The reduced proximity of the family and the weakening of parental influence means that this message is also much more likely to have a stronger impact at the very start of Freshers'. By the second meetings, in October, respondents were much more conscious that the family would not find out how they had been behaving.

***"You will let your family down" male (meeting one)***

***"You can't let your family down, they are not there. The only way to let them down is if you are in hospital" male (meeting two)***

At the second meeting the students talked about parental encouragement for them to fit in and have a good time. This is typically interpreted as endorsement of their actions.

***“My parents said go and have a good time – while you’re there have a good time” female***

This again ties back into the scoping project, where it was suggested there was a community wide need for education about the impact of alcohol, possibly materials that can be shared between parents and children in post-seventeen education.

#### Addressing the norms

- Freshers’ is a non-normative time for students and visual reminders of this fact could potentially impact behaviour. Elements of their behaviour that members of the group found shocking were the amount they were drinking each night and the money that they had spent on going out, in one case, £300 in the first week.

***“It is really bad when you think about it isn’t it. I just hadn’t thought’ female***

***“You don’t realize what you are doing until you talk about it like this” male***

### **3. Appropriate Messages As The Fresher Period Ends**

#### Physical and Mental Discomfort

- The adjustment from ‘party time’ to normality was a gradual process. It was easy for the students to list a week’s worth of drinking activities which form the backdrop for their University life.
  - Monday – Tokyo and Camel
  - Tuesday – Vodka Bunker
  - Wednesday - Student Night
  - Thursday – Union Pub Quiz
  - Friday – Saturday – staying in nights
  - Sunday – D-bar

Given all of the opportunities to drink and socialise it is not surprising that some students found it easier to adjust than others. Having to attend classes/seminars/lectures was however a key moderator (although it did not totally preclude alcohol consumption).

***“I cut it [drinking] down a bit depending on what time I am due in University the next day” male***

Some respondents reported having missed lectures or feeling ill during lectures due to heavy consumption of alcohol and this was overwhelmingly a very bad experience for males and females on an emotional and physical level.

***“I am not going out on a Monday ever again...I nearly died...physically I made it to lectures...it was horrible” male***

***“I felt really bad, I felt guilty missing lectures” female***

***“Going to lectures with a bad hangover made me think about how much I’d drunk and what I’d drunk” female***

The issue with basing a campaign on this premise is that bad memories fade with time and so, even those who suffered a very bad day, were honest enough to admit that they will probably find themselves in that situation again.

***“I was drunk up to about 3pm and I sobered up at about 10pm, I don’t know how I did it but I would probably do it again” female***

***“It’s a bad time but it doesn’t put you off drinking because it’s quite fun to get drunk” female***

It is key therefore to provide reminders to students of how bad they felt – realistic images of someone suffering from the effects of drinking (tiredness, nausea, lack of concentration, headache) in a lecture. Also tied into this is the idea of coming under scrutiny - having the discomfort of having to hide how bad they feel from peers and tutors.

In relation to this, follow up by the University with regard to absences may well be particularly effective in early days.

Among the students there was a feeling that nobody was bothered whether he or she attended lectures. However, communication during the early days, even informally, which expresses awareness of absence, might be enough to impact the behaviour of some students.

### Wasting Your Time And Money

- There was an overwhelming feeling that having to leave University for alcohol related reasons would be ***‘a waste’, ‘really bad’***.

Students were particularly conscious of the fact that to be ‘kicked out’ of University, or have to re-sit a year, would be tantamount to failure.

At the second meeting, the majority of students claimed that they had moderated their weekday drinking in order to attend their studies and get the most from their course.

### ***“I only drink at weekends now” female***

Fear of failure was talked about on two levels.

- Letting their parents and themselves down
- Being a waste of money

Interestingly, at the first meeting the sense was very much that failing would let their parents down and waste their parents' money.

At the second meeting there was a much stronger sense of self and the practical disadvantages that failing at university would have on them.

### ***“It will look bad on my CV” female***

### ***“I’m paying for it by my student loan” male***

This possibly warrants a different approach at the beginning of Freshers' and at the end. The sense of 'I' or 'cost to me' is much more present at the end of the period than at the beginning.

The reality of the student loan, and its implications, appear to be much more real by the end of the period.

However, there was also a sense, by the second meeting, that students had begun to feel that the academic pressure on them had lessened according to their initial expectations.

There was a feeling among some that failing was considerably harder to do than initially thought.

### ***“You only need to get about 40% to pass, so it’s OK” female***

While this research only evaluated thoughts of a sample of students, consideration should possibly be given to the achievement and performance messages that students receive and the consequent impact on behaviour.

## **4. Controls**

### Logistics

- Consideration should be given to the logistics of the start of University life, in particular 'moving-in' week.
  - Ways in which drinking can be more contained in the regulated bar area, rather than in the unregulated environment of the flats – perhaps encouragement of earlier attendance at bar events or themed nights with activities to reduce focus on alcohol consumption

- Consider the feasibility of reducing or abolishing admission charges for club nights in D-bar to encourage drinking in a regulated environment
- High consumption of alcohol prior to going out and drinking the cheapest alcohol on offer means that mixing types of alcohol is a common occurrence. Consider communication messages specifically to Freshers warning of the effects of mixing alcohol and drinking games.
- Offer credible daytime alternatives to take emphasis away from evening drinking. Awareness of events and facilities was low, coupled with an apparent unwillingness to take part.
- Evaluate the way in which ‘stealth’ promotion is operating within accommodation – clear up flyers to reduce their omnipresence, or find a more formal way for promoters to operate.

Provision of non-drinking related activities

- The contrast between the University Societies and commercial enterprises presence at the Freshers’ Fayre was marked. This is in terms of presentation, promotional materials and noise. While the commercial companies provided an overwhelming sensory experience the clubs and societies did not.

***“It was busy one end and a lot quieter at the other” female***

No University societies particularly widely advertised drinking alcohol as part of the offering, although meeting places were frequently pubs/bars. Only the Motorcycle Club openly advertised a Pub Crawl on its literature.



However, on further investigation, initiation ceremonies do exist within the societies and these appear to be largely alcohol based.

***“I’ve joined American Football and we have a 5-legged race tonight. Four guys are tied together and we go wherever we are told to [by coach or chairman]. It’s sponsored by Warehouse, so we start there. It sounds like a laugh, a way of making friends, it’s the whole team” male***

***“The Football team are going out in Manchester. We go round bars and apparently someone gets left behind at every bar, handcuffed to a pump. It is stupid...but funny until the police get involved, which they usually do.”***

For the main part, these events are considered ‘a laugh’ by the males in the group, but did not have strong appeal to the females taking part in this research.

Prior to the Freshers’ Fayre, the majority were excited about signing up for clubs and societies and looking to this as a way of meeting different people, sharing common interests and having something to do.

At the second meeting, all of the students stated that they had visited the Freshers’ Fayre and half had signed up for clubs and societies. Among this small sample the females had typically chosen volunteering rather than sporting clubs, although two had chosen the Juggling Club and the males had focused on sports clubs ranging from archery to American football.

Reasons for non-participation were:

Logistics - the students talked about the difficulties involved in joining the societies – this included making a choice between clubs.

***“All the clubs are on the same night so you have to choose” male***

Lack of communication from the societies, despite provision of contact details.

***“I put my name down for loads and have heard nothing” male***

Also, potentially, a lack of motivation and direction among the students during Freshers’ Fortnight.

***“It’s all gone by in a bit of a blur really” female***

There were indications that students were more ready to look for alternative activities at the end of Freshers’ Fortnight. The relative isolation of Storthes Hall was becoming apparent to some and there was a general lack of awareness of Huddersfield’s facilities, such as bowling, among the females.

***“The cinema’s ages away – you’ve got to get a taxi” female***

***“I would go if it was in halls [general entertainment] but the Student’s Union is a long way away” female***

There may therefore be potential in evaluating the current profile of extra curricular societies and clubs – showcasing, location and communication in order to provide further structure to the students’ week and direct attention away from alcohol consumption.

#### Alcohol Free Events

- The appeal, and practicality, of alcohol free events was low. Either respondents felt that they wouldn’t go because it would be a dull event, or they would drink before going out to achieve the same ‘buzz’ or ‘high’.

***“I just wouldn’t go if it was alcohol free” male***

***“I would just drink more before I go out if there was no alcohol” male***

In some ways this was mirroring existing behaviour, where high amounts of alcohol are consumed before going out to minimise expense of drinking when out.

***“I don’t need to drink when I am out because I drink all I need before I go” female***

***“If drinks are expensive I just drink before I go in” female***

Alcohol consumption could, however, be moderated by providing a strong attractive theme which reduce the emphasis on continual heavy drinking – for example the UV foam party and the Dirty Porn Star party both offered activities which meant that the focus was less on drink.

Students still felt that they had to be a ‘little bit drunk’ to get into the mood but claimed that they had drunk less than they normally would.

#### Entertainment Provision

- Top class ‘not to be missed’ DJs, comedians or live bands were felt to be effective moderators. There was a feeling that the students did not want to waste money by getting drunk and missing out on a desirable experience.

***“Don’t want to drink heavily if you’re paying £25 a go, you want to be able to remember it” male***

***“If they got a top DJ there [at the student union] like Colin Murray I’d go and I wouldn’t get too drunk because I’d want to remember it” female***

***“If they got Pendulum to play I’d pay £££’s to get in” male***

General feelings about the calibre of bands and DJs in Huddersfield were that they were mediocre. There was a sense that the real action was happening in Leeds and Sheffield.

***“All we get is someone from the Ministry of Sound in D-bar...the Arctic Monkeys played in Sheffield” male***

#### Learning By Example

- Students were quick to buy into stories (true and false) of excess or extreme behaviour. This encouraged behavioural changes in some, but not in all. For example, one group discussed the appeal of the Freshers’ Fayre, where they had heard that free i-pods were given out the previous year. This was greeted with enthusiasm by some, but others felt that it was a false rumour to encourage early attendance at the Fayre.

Many of the students shared stories of bad drinking/clubbing experiences of friends.

***“ I did have a friend who fell down some nightclub steps and died. She was sober, so it does make you think, if that can happen to you while you are sober...” male***

***“Someone died from Ring of Fire a few years back” female***

But it was acknowledged that this information did not always translate into altered behaviour.

***“Even hearing about other people makes me think” female***

***“It doesn’t me” female***

Potentially, messages regarding alcohol awareness based on true experiences of ‘ordinary’ Huddersfield students could have a positive effect on moderating behaviour on a proportion of Freshers.

Suggestions for messages are:

- Dangers of drinking games
- Inconvenience and shame of re-sitting exams
- ‘Wasting’ money

## Controls On Drinks Promotions

- The ability of local authorities and other Government bodies to control the amount of alcohol promotions in the UK was considerably weakened in June 2008 when the British Beer and Pub Association withdrew its guidance on responsible 'happy hours' after fears that administering rules could amount to collusion.

Further work on the effect of alcohol promotions has been undertaken by Sheffield University and this may warrant further study by stakeholders in this research.

## 5. Rewards

Rewards are greeted with enthusiasm by Freshers. Attendance at the Freshers' Fayre was imperative, because they understood that they would be rewarded with free gifts.

***"Lots of free stuff" female***

***"I got loads of free stuff...Jack Daniels stuff, t-shirts, keyrings and that" female***

Rewarding moderated alcohol related behaviour is unlikely to have a huge impact at the beginning of the Fresher period. This is because the emphasis is on fitting in and making friends and being part of the group above the needs of the individual.

However, as Freshers' comes to an end there is a heightened awareness of costs, the need to save money and the general drudgery of cooking, shopping etc and therefore there may be opportunities to directly or indirectly reward lower levels of alcohol consumption via

- Free soft drinks offered in clubs, either at the bar or on admission to the club

***"They should make you drink ½ pint of water before they admit you" male***

***"They could give you free water when you buy a round" male***

- Free taxi rides if you breathalyse below a certain limit
- Early morning enticements such as
  - Provision of free breakfasts at the University between 8 and 9.30am, to encourage attendance and moderate drinking the previous night.

- Offering free food vouchers, again relatively early in the morning. (In addition vouchers for books, stationery and travel were also felt to be appealing)

## 6. Delivering the Message

### Content

Taking all of the above into account, it is clear from this research that the most effective messages are those rooted in reality and the reality of drinking too much for the students is:

- Being without transport (missing the bus, not being allowed in a taxi)
- Being alone (losing contact with friends at a club, being sick alone in their flat, missing lectures and feeling ill alone, falling asleep somewhere and waking up alone)
- Being sick
- Losing their phone, bag, wallet, jacket or ruining possessions by dropping them or breaking them

***“The first thing I check when I get home is my wallet, phone...”***

- Being under the weather – spotty, tired, bad skin
- Putting on weight – beer belly for males, general weight gain for females



**“I’ve put on 6lb in two weeks”**

- Missing lectures/seminars and missing out on some vital information (either an induction or key piece of coursework)
- Attending lectures/seminars/work feeling very ill and unable to cope with the activity and scrutiny of others
- Being embarrassed by photos on social networking sites (stripping, leering, being with someone else’s partner)

***“I knew there were photos going round and I didn’t want to get plastered” female***

- Units are not felt to be a very relevant message – the concept as a whole is not understood or felt to have any practical bearing. In addition, the calculations and breath of

knowledge of units per drink is felt to be too complicated to consider.

### Effective Images

Students discussed a variety of images and formats from a number of sources - the NHS, clubs and bars, student union, radio and media.

- Awareness of messages on television was very high but students were unlikely to seek out information unprompted either in leaflet format or on the Internet.
- Messages were most likely to have influence on behaviour when the students could relate to the message/image. Extreme images were easy to recall but the more everyday images from the currently aired 'Know Your Limits' campaign ('Would you start your night like this') was high. The images for this campaign were felt to be as visually shocking as the Hero to Zero campaign but were easier to relate to.

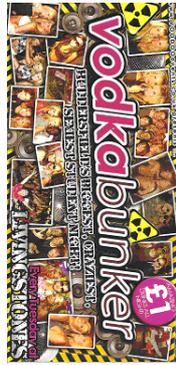
The key problem with all of the campaigns were that students felt that they did not ever start a night thinking that they were going to get extremely drunk and, therefore, while the images made them think when sober, impact was virtually lost when they were out drinking.



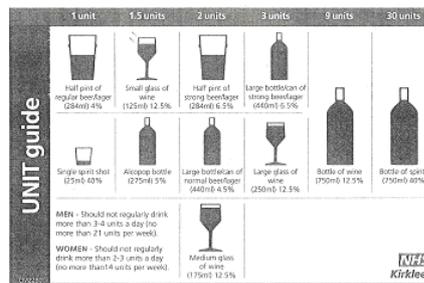
**“I’m not going out to get completely trolled, but I’m not going out to stay sober”**

- Both male and female students were keen to decorate their rooms with 'cute' or appealing images and there were a number of references to pinning items up on to their pin board.

The Jelly Baby image was one such image, and the Vodka Bunka flyer, which shows a montage of photographs, was another that was appealing.



In contrast the information that students receive from the University did not rate highly.



- Interactive information sources had highest appeal among all of the types of media researched. The conversion of units to calories on the Radio 1 web site was seen as provision of practical information, but initial awareness and consequent unprompted usage was low.

The wheel-type unit counters also had some appeal and engaged the students much more than bald presentation of the facts. In addition, these were considered 'cool' enough to pin on their wall.

- Consideration should also be given to the potential of Facebook to deliver messages about alcohol consumption. Facebook and MySpace are used on a daily basis by all of the students interviewed and form a fundamental bedrock to their social lives.

The clubs and bars are using Facebook very effectively to contact Huddersfield students and the University faculties, bars and Student Union all have established Facebook pages, which could be utilized as portals for communication.

## 12. Conclusions

The students had begun a significant mental and physical journey in leaving home and beginning University. Their enthusiasm for University life was heartening and all appeared to have fully embraced the party that was Freshers' 2008.

There were huge similarities in the way in which they behaved with regard to alcohol and this, supported by other studies, it is suggested is a result of learned behaviour, from older students, siblings, expectations set in the media and from each other.

The clubs and bars in Huddersfield clearly view the Freshers as a critical market and an overwhelming amount of hugely professional effort goes into recruiting students to patronise their premises. Fellow students are inveigled into forming part of their advertising teams and consequently promotions are directly targeted at fellow students, even in areas where this is strictly prohibited. This results in a level of overwhelming promotion and sets the scene for behavioural patterns of the students.

To talk to the students in the first part of Freshers' and influence behaviour is an enormous task. It is suggested that education needs to begin during pre-student days, when individuals are learning about unrestricted alcohol consumption on holiday and at summer music festivals. In addition, materials that parents can share with pre-18's would assist in keeping parents in touch with influences that might come to bear on their children.

Students and other young people are most likely to be influenced by information that they can see the point of. For a case in point, see behaviours relating to drink spiking.

A campaign based on Units of Alcohol is unlikely to be successful. The concept of units is at once too complicated, too vague and too meaningless to have any practical impact on behaviour, particularly in the Fresher period.

More meaningful measures, such as calories or messages about sexual unattractiveness or social 'death' are more likely to have an impact among Freshers.

Wasting time and money, failing exams, letting themselves down are all messages that could be communicated at various points during the early weeks of University life.

These, in addition to stricter controls on absence, raising academic expectations of the individuals, consideration of a more structured programme of events during the Fresher period and rethinking the profile and communication strategies of University societies may well help to combat the accepted behavioural norms.