

# University of Limerick Alcohol Policy

Approved by Governing Authority - 25 June 2002

## UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK ALCOHOL POLICY

### 1. RATIONALE FOR UNIVERSITY ALCOHOL POLICY

#### 1.1 Public health alcohol policy

The public health or health promotional perspective on alcohol problems, which provides the theoretical rationale for the alcohol policies proposed in this document, is perhaps best understood through comparison with the disease concept of alcoholism. The disease concept, prevalent in the 1950's and 1960's, viewed alcoholism as a specific or discrete disease, which was primarily explained in terms of individual vulnerabilities or predispositions, rather than to any negative properties of alcohol per se.

Over the last three decades the public health approach, endorsed by the World Health Organisation, has emerged with the weight of evidence-based scientific research. This approach recognises alcohol as contributing to a spectrum of health, behavioural and social problems - in terms of its toxicity, its potential to create dependency, and its negative impact on human behaviour. It sees consumption levels and drinking patterns as being highly predictive of the incidence and prevalence of problems in any given society or social group.

Acute alcohol-related problems, such as accidents, violence, injuries and deaths, are linked to excessive drinking on any one occasion. *In many cases these problems occur among light and moderate drinkers who engage in heavy drinking on some occasions.*

#### 1.2 University Environment

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

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

The ethos of the University of Limerick not only promotes positive learning experiences and academic excellence but also provides a caring and supportive community where students and staff in need of assistance are given the necessary supports. The University is also obliged to provide a safe working environment for all students and staff. Any activity or practice that constitutes a hazard must be eliminated or minimised to reduce injury or loss. When people engage in high-risk drinking, academic performance, health, personal relationships and safety suffer. However, alcohol issues cannot and should not be tackled in isolation and must be seen within a broader context of lifestyle issues and a supportive college environment.



### 1.3 Student Life

The period of late adolescence and early adult life is a transitional phase for students where new freedoms, new relationships and adapting to a different environment provides daily challenges, in addition to the academic challenges of new courses. An important aspect of college life is the opportunity to make new friends. Students make friends in the context of Clubs and Societies activities, and also in the context of the college bar. However, the cost of socialisation can over-stretch students both financially and academically which can contribute to exam failure and student drop-out. First year students are particularly vulnerable with poor coping skills to manage the stresses of the new college environment. This can lead to a range of negative reactions such as an over-reliance on alcohol.

While exam stress and difficulties adjusting to college are common problems for students, there is also a clustering of problems for a minority of students. This stage of life is also characterised by vulnerability to many mental health problems, all of which may be exacerbated by heavy alcohol consumption. Problems with alcohol can also be linked to problems in other areas such as problems with relationships, depression, difficulties with exams and financial problems.

The national lifestyle survey (SLÁN, 1999) shows the vast majority of young adults consume alcohol, half of young people engage in high-risk drinking when they typically drink and about one-third drink over the recommended sensible weekly limits. There is also a higher prevalence of serious injuries among young male adults relating to sport, work, and car / bike. The high-risk drinking pattern has also been found in local student surveys.

## 2 AIMS OF THE UNIVERSITY'S ALCOHOL POLICY

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

- 1) Ensure that the social and academic life on campus is conducive to the health and well being of students and staff.
- 2) Ensure that the University environment is safe for students and staff and complies with health and safety regulations.
- 3) Promote the University as a supportive environment, which enables students and staff to make healthy choices that promote health and well-being.
- 4) Provide supportive services for those who may require assistance during their time at the University.

The specific objectives include:

- Promoting the health and well being of students and staff.
- Promoting personal responsibility and social obligation to the campus community, and to the local community
- Enhancing a campus environment where low-risk drinking is the "social norm".

- Promoting low-risk drinking and discouraging high-risk drinking (Appendix 1).
- Providing an atmosphere free from pressure to drink for those who choose not to drink.
- Providing alcohol-related information and education for all students and staff.
- Supporting and promoting alternatives to drinking thus creating choice and a balanced social programme.
- Promoting opportunities for brief interventions to reduce high risk drinking.
- Promoting a caring environment for those who experience difficulties related to alcohol.
- Providing confidential and effective supports for those who seek assistance as a result of problem drinking.
- Reducing the incidence of alcohol-related problems among the University's students and staff.

### 3. INTEGRATED POLICY

For an integrated approach the policy measures adopted should, on the one hand, encourage those who drink alcohol to do so responsibly thus moderating the demand for alcohol, and on the supply side prevent commercial interests from excessive alcohol promotion. The following five policy areas are, therefore incorporated into the University's policy:

- Increasing awareness and education
- Encouraging alternatives and choice
- Limiting harm in the drinking environment
- Controlling marketing, promotions and sponsorship
- Providing campus support services

#### 2.1 Increasing Awareness and Education

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

- In cooperation with the relevant University groups, the University community will promote 'low risk drinking' behaviour and increase awareness of the potential harmful or negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption.
- The student orientation and related weeks at the start of the academic year will incorporate initiatives to raise awareness of available programmes and services for all students and to promote a message of low risk drinking.
- The student body will be actively involved in the development, promotion and delivery of alcohol education as part of a health, well being and life skills course or workshops involving innovative methodology.

## 2.2 Encouraging Alternatives and Choice

- The University will support, in terms of resources, the development of attractive, alcohol-free environments on campus for those who wish to enjoy an alcohol-free evening with friends.
- The Students Union will also, with the cooperation of relevant University Offices, develop and promote alcohol-free programmes involving cultural, social and entertainment activities for students.

## 2.3 Limiting Harm in the drinking environment

- Training in Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) will be provided for all those serving alcohol in campus bars.
- Alcohol may not be served to intoxicated persons, it is a criminal offence.
- Campus bars to promote practices to prevent drunkenness such as serving food and low cost non-alcoholic drinks.
- High-risk sale promotions will be avoided, such as 'drink until you drop', pub crawls and drinking competitions.
- Alcohol consumption will be confined to designated areas on campus.
- Only alcohol served at registered University events will be consumed at the event.
- Non-alcoholic drinks and food will also be available at functions and social events, will be given equal prominence and be actively offered as alternatives.
- Awareness of coercion and the attributes of coercive behaviour in relation to alcohol will be disseminated to students and staff.

## 3.4 Controlling Marketing, Promotions and Sponsorship

The University has an obligation to provide a positive educational experience for all students as well as a safe working environment for students and staff. The University affirms its role in providing a supportive environment for the campus community, by identifying a clear set of guidelines on alcohol promotions and sponsorship, as follows:

### 2.3.1 Sponsorship

- A proactive approach by the University is to be pursued as a top priority, to help student clubs and societies find an alternative to drinks companies sponsorship.
- Sponsorship by the drinks industry of University events is permissible provided the sponsorship is primarily in monetary form and not material form, thus allowing groups, clubs and societies to determine their own needs.
- The appointment of on-campus representatives by the drinks companies will be subject to the approval of the University Authority.

### 3.4.2 Alcohol Promotions

- Alcohol promotions that encourage the rapid and/or excessive consumption of alcohol are prohibited.
- Alcohol promoters to provide free food as part of the promotion event
- Alcohol in bulk, such as kegs, cases of beer etc, will not be provided as free awards, prizes or rewards to individuals or groups.
- The University will request off-campus drinks industry suppliers (bars, clubs and drinks representatives) not to engage in alcohol promotions, which result in high risk drinking among students.
- Off-campus drinks industry suppliers are prohibited from advertising on campus.

### 3.4.3 Advertising Code

- Alcohol advertising on campus will
  - a) not portray drinking as a solution to personal or academic problems or
  - b) not portray drinking as necessary to social, sexual or academic success,
  - c) avoid demeaning sexual and discriminatory portrayals of individuals,
  - d) not associate drinking with using machinery, driving, activities in water or heights or other activities where safety could be compromised.
- Alcohol advertising posters will be confined to the campus bars.
- Advertising of social and entertainment events will not use alcohol as the inducement to attend.
- Advertising posters or flyers will not encourage excessive use of alcohol or high-risk drinking nor place emphasis on quantity and frequency of alcohol use.
- Posters or flyers to be stamped and limited to designated areas to ensure compliance with the advertising code.

### 2.4 Providing Campus Support Services

- Student support services (health, counselling, etc) will develop ways to increase awareness of high-risk drinking among students availing of University services.
- Individuals with concerns about their own use or another person's use of alcohol will be encouraged to seek confidential assistance on or off campus.
- The University will be supportive by assisting individuals or groups who wish to establish self-help groups.

Breaches of the policy will be addressed using the University's Disciplinary Code in the case of employees, and the Code of Conduct in the case of students.

## Appendix 1

### Low Risk Drinking Behaviour

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

### High Risk Drinking Behaviour

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