
GSA & YUSU Drinking and Drugs Safety Survey 2019

Summary of main findings
and recommendations

A collaboration between the University of York
Students' Union (YUSU) Advice and Support Centre,
The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) and
Changing Lives (York drug and alcohol service)

Acknowledgments:

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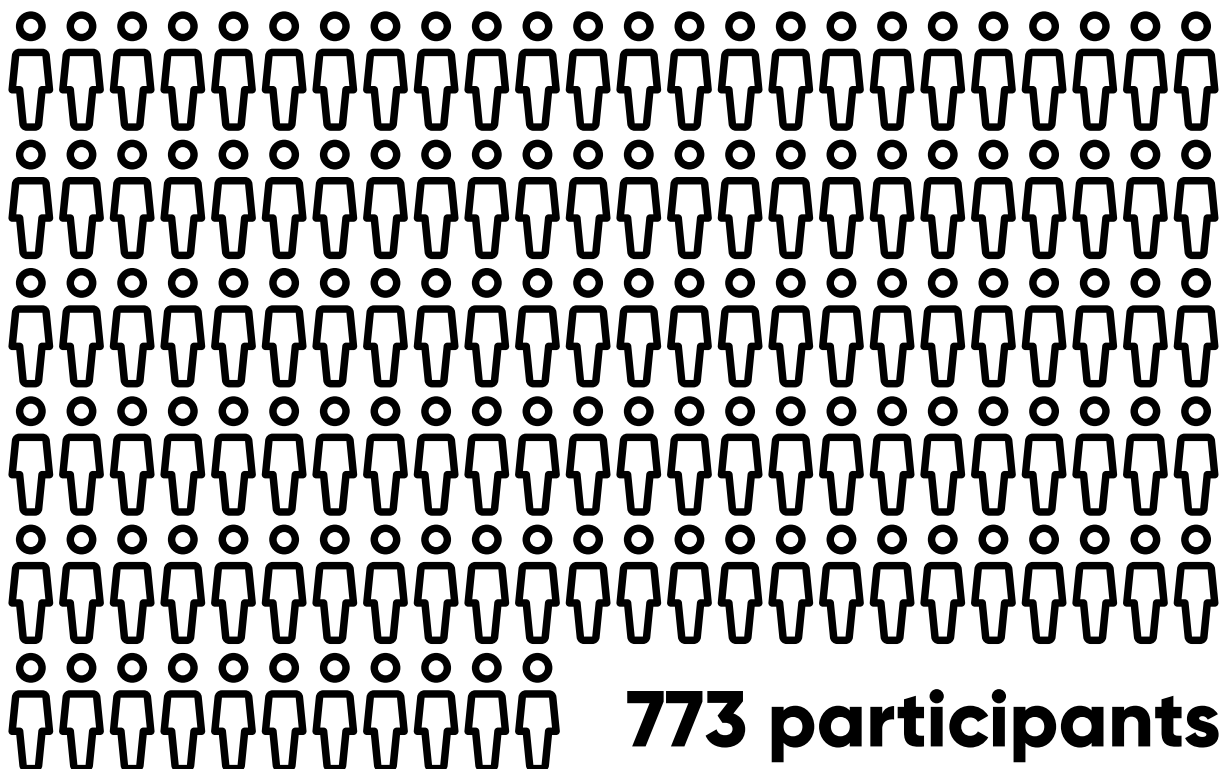


**CHANGING
LIVES**

1) Overview

With a view to promoting wellbeing and safer student practices, the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) and YUSU's Advice and Support Centre worked collaboratively with staff from Changing Lives (York drug and alcohol service) to create the Drinking & Drugs Safety Survey. The aim of the anonymous survey was to identify current trends of drug and alcohol use amongst University of York students and for the results to determine the content and dissemination of a future drug and alcohol awareness campaign from the Students' Unions. The campaign will seek to adopt a harm minimisation approach to drug and alcohol use.

The questionnaire was sent out in summer term of 2019 and was open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of York. The survey asked several questions relating to drug and alcohol use, awareness of drug and alcohol use amongst other students and how the GSA and YUSU should raise awareness of drug and alcohol related issues. A total of 773 participants responded, providing an indication of the experiences and support needs of University of York students.



2) Key Findings

2.1) Findings relating to drug use

Just over half of the respondents have used drugs at some point in their lives, with just under a quarter having used drugs within the last 12 months. The most frequently used drugs amongst students at the University of York who had used drugs in the last 12 months were cannabis, MDMA/ecstasy, ketamine and cocaine.

The main reasons given for taking drugs were attributed to liking the feeling, for a night out, for a particular music/dance event and to reduce stress. Other reasons noted less frequently were to reduce boredom, increase confidence, to self-medicate an existing mental health condition, to improve sexual experiences, and improve academic performance.



68%



↳ of respondents who reported to use substances indicated that they implement some form of harm reduction strategies when using drugs. The three most common strategies mentioned were moderating the amount of drug taken, using drugs with others/in a group setting and staying hydrated. However, a significant proportion have combined drugs with alcohol at some point. Given the increased dangers associated with combining certain drugs with alcohol, this is particularly significant.

The majority of respondents who have used drugs in the last 12 months report to feel confident that they know the content of the drug they are taking. Given that certain drugs such as cocaine, MDMA/ecstasy and ketamine are frequently cut with adulterants, and home DIY drug testing kits are unable to detect these or purity levels, this finding suggests that the sense of confidence is based on perception rather than reality.

¹ [Changing Lives](#) and Spectrum Community Health CIC work in partnership to provide the York Drug and Alcohol Service. They offer specialist interventions for individuals experiencing problematic drug and/or alcohol use and also provide advice and support to individuals, families and local communities with issues involving substance misuse.

Over 60% of the participants who completed the survey were aware of student drug use or had heard students talk about their drug use. Participants were most likely to have heard of drug use in areas such as York clubs/bars, University accommodation, off-campus house parties, on university campus in general, and in private accommodation.



2.2) Findings relating to alcohol use

90% of respondents indicated that they consume alcohol to some extent. 61% of participants reported to drink within the recommended low risk drinking guidelines of 14 units of alcohol per week. 20% reported to consume between 15-24 units per week and 19% reported to drink 35 units or above each week.

The main reasons given for drinking alcohol were for a night out, to enhance social situations, and enjoying the taste. Other reasons noted, though cited less commonly, were liking the feeling, to increase confidence, for a particular music/dance event, and to reduce stress.

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements, "There is an issue with alcohol at the University of York" and "There is an issue with drugs at the University of York". Forty two percent agreed that there was an issue with alcohol compared to 21.5% who agreed there was an issue with drugs. The results suggest that more students felt there was an issue with alcohol at the university rather than with drugs.



2.3) How should YUSU and the GSA raise awareness

Students indicated they would prefer YUSU and the GSA to raise awareness of drug and alcohol related issues through their websites and through talks, information in campus bars and posters around campus. They also noted interest in receiving peer-to-peer support.

In terms of supporting non-drinking students, respondents who did not drink alcohol indicated that they would like the GSA and YUSU to de-emphasise alcohol events by introducing non-alcoholic events, and/or emphasising aspects of events that can appeal to all.

3) Recommendations

The following recommendations, developed in collaboration with Changing Lives, have emerged from the survey in response to the findings. The recommendations relate to key areas including campaign development, training opportunities, web page creation, University drug policy and supporting non-drinking students.

YUSU/GSA Joint Wellbeing Campaign

Working in collaboration with key stakeholders specialising in the field of harm reduction, YUSU and the GSA will develop a campaign that aims to increase knowledge about the potential risks associated with substance use and increase awareness and understanding of harm reduction strategies. In addition, any campaigning will seek to raise awareness amongst the University population of the provision of information, guidance and support.

It is hoped that by creating a visible campaign, key messages will become familiar and recognisable and will prompt and encourage students to consider the message, access sources of information and subsequently make an informed decision regarding drug and alcohol use.

It had been envisaged that online campaign messages would be integrated into existing GSA/YUSU communications (newsletters, social media, digital screens) during Welcome Week, and repeated prior to major student events throughout the academic year, in collaboration with college and University partners. Given the current context related to Covid 19, YUSU and GSA will work proactively with the University and other partners to identify the most appropriate formats for our campaign activity, within the framework of wider government information and risk assessments.

YUSU/GSA Drug & Alcohol Awareness Training and Approach

YUSU and the GSA to facilitate training opportunities for frontline, student-facing staff and relevant student groups, staff and volunteers. Training will focus on drug and alcohol awareness and signposting to support and information, with the overall aim of improving and extending the knowledge base across the University and campus, as well as increasing the approachability of services to students interested in accessing support.

Alongside this YUSU will review commercial operating procedures including event profiling, booking and risk management.

YUSU/GSA Web Pages

YUSU and the GSA to develop dedicated web pages that provide students with access to factual drug and alcohol related information. The aim of the web pages is to ensure that students are informed of the potential risks and effects associated with drug and alcohol use and raise awareness of harm reduction strategies, enabling students to make an informed decision. In line with the main findings from the survey, the web pages will include:

- Harm reduction advice and/or links to harm reduction sites.
- Information relating to contaminants commonly found in drugs and risks of high strength substances.
- A link to The Loop's (charity providing drug testing and harm-

reduction services) social media drug alerts. The alerts relate to substances that have been tested and are of concern due to their content, adulterant or high strength.

- A link to a drug and alcohol interaction checker/tool chart that enables students to consider the risks of mixing these substances.
- Information relating to the potential harm of drinking at levels above recommended guidelines.
- Safer drinking strategies
- What to do in an emergency/suspected overdose/alcohol poisoning
- Sources of support, including how local drug and alcohol services can support and how to access these services.

University Drug & Alcohol Policy

Encourage the University to review/develop their drug and alcohol policies and adopt a harm minimisation/health promotion approach to student drug and alcohol use. Punitive University policies stances are likely to deter students from coming forward for advice and support. It is hoped that the University will consider the findings from this survey when developing such policies, enabling them to draw upon the current student experience. In addition, we hope the University will work in collaboration with the GSA, YUSU and key stakeholders through this process, drawing upon good practice within higher education and the drug and alcohol field in order to prioritise student wellbeing.

Encourage the University to consider working with Neurosight (previously ADEC), a consultancy agency specialising in drug education and policy. Neurosight work with Universities to ensure that institutions are equipped with the knowledge, resources and policies to reduce drug and alcohol related harm.

Supporting non-drinking students

GSA and YUSU to work with students groups and partners in the University and local community to explore the possibility of improving the availability, frequency and promotion of non-alcoholic events and explore how alcohol can be de-emphasised at future events.

Further information and links

[Graduate Students' Association \(GSA\)](#)

[University of York Students' Union \(YUSU\)](#)

[Changing Lives and Spectrum Community Health CIC](#)

[Neurosight](#)

For drug information and support please visit the support section of YUSU's drug information webpage [here](#)

For alcohol information and support please visit the support section of YUSU's alcohol webpage [here](#)