

Case Study: Alcohol Awareness Campaign at Buckinghamshire New University (BNU)

Background

At Buckinghamshire New University, student welfare is a key focus area. In response to rising concerns around excessive pre-drinking, spiking incidents, and a general lack of awareness about alcohol and drug-related risks, the Students' Union launched an impactful **Alcohol Awareness Campaign**. Running from **7th to 11th April 2025**, the initiative aimed to cultivate a safer, more informed, and inclusive campus culture.

Objectives

The campaign set out to:

- Raise awareness about both short- and long-term effects of alcohol use.
 - Promote safer nights out, including recognizing risks such as impaired senses, walking alone while intoxicated, and the threat of drink spiking.
 - Encourage informed decision-making and the use of non-alcoholic alternatives.
 - Integrate drug education, particularly highlighting the risks of mixing substances.
 - Equip students with practical resources like drink covers, spiking kits, and guidance for seeking help.
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Target Audience

The campaign primarily engaged students, especially those attending events at *The Venue*. Reports of over-intoxication and spiking—both on and off campus—underscored the importance of targeting this group. The initiative also made a conscious effort to include students who abstain from alcohol due to cultural, religious, or medical reasons, ensuring all students felt welcome and supported.

Key Campaign Components

1. Informative Content

- Posters and digital content shared facts, tips for responsible drinking, and links to support services (e.g., NHS, One Recovery Bucks).
- Educational materials highlighted the signs of spiking and steps to take in response.

2. Interactive Experiences

- **Drunk Goggles Challenge:** Students attempted basic tasks wearing goggles simulating intoxication, helping them understand alcohol's impact on coordination and decision-making.
- **Poll Station:** Students voted on reasons influencing their drinking—options included “Committee pressure,” “Numbing feeling,” “Don’t know my limit,” and more. Participants received small incentives such as drink covers or sweets.
- **Alcohol Awareness Quiz:** An online self-assessment tool allowed students to reflect on their relationship with alcohol.

3. Night Events

- **0% Taster Night (April 22nd):** A mocktail night featuring games and socializing in an alcohol-free setting.
- **‘Watch Out for the Fish in Your Drink’ Night:** A playful simulation inspired by the Swedish Fish TikTok trend. Designated "spikers" secretly dropped candy into drinks to simulate spiking. Participants were encouraged to identify and report the act, fostering vigilance. Sobriety tests were also conducted throughout the evening.

4. Safety Resources

- Reusable drink covers, silicone bottle caps, metal straws, and spiking test kits were distributed both at events and at the bar, helping students protect themselves and each other.

Impact & Outcomes

Engagement Metrics

- **Poll Participation:** 94 students cast votes, offering insight into the motivations behind drinking.
- **Comments Included:**
 - “I sometimes drink because everyone around me does, and it makes me feel less of an adult when I don’t.”
 - “It makes me more outgoing.”
 - “My friends’ mood.”
 - “Only drink on special occasions, don’t need to drink to have a good time.”
 - “Having fun.”

‘Fish in Your Drink’ Results

- The event featured participation from men’s football, netball, and rugby teams.
- **Spiked:** 31 students
- **Aware of spiking:** 1 student
- **Unaware:** 24 students
- **Questioned/reporting behaviour observed:** 6 students.

Qualitative Feedback

- Informal feedback from both staff and students highlighted appreciation for the inclusive and engaging approach.
 - High uptake of resources and strong event attendance indicated campaign relevance and effectiveness.
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Inclusivity & Accessibility

The campaign placed strong emphasis on inclusivity:

- The alcohol-free 0% Taster Night ensured accessibility for non-drinking students.
 - Campaign messaging worked to reduce stigma around sobriety.
 - Resources were distributed across all BNU campuses, including Uxbridge and Aylesbury, to maximize reach.
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Challenges

- Events involving alcohol (even simulations) posed limitations for individuals who must avoid alcohol entirely.
 - Balancing educational messaging with a fun and engaging tone required careful execution to maintain respect for the campaign's serious subject matter.
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Conclusion

The Alcohol Awareness Campaign at BNU exemplifies a thoughtful and creative approach to student well-being. By integrating educational content with interactive experiences and inclusive messaging, the initiative successfully fostered reflection, encouraged safer behaviours, and built a foundation for ongoing conversations about alcohol and drug use in student life.