

ALCOHOL EDUCATION

IS IT MEETING THE
NEEDS OF JUNIOR
CERTIFICATE STUDENTS?

A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY

DRINKAWARE

ABOUT DRINKAWARE

Drinkaware is the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol misuse in Ireland, governed by an independent board and regulated by the Charities Regulator.

RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

Drinkaware's public health remit includes tackling underage drinking. We do this by empowering teachers and parents to support their students and children to have a better awareness and understanding of the facts regarding alcohol and its related harms.

Primary prevention, stopping early alcohol use before it starts, requires significant changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. All of these can be supported by evidence-informed and effective alcohol education.

There is no place for alcohol in childhood. Through the collective efforts of Irish society, from educators and parents to charities and government, we firmly believe we can make a lasting difference to the next generation's relationship with alcohol.

Ireland's complex relationship with alcohol is well documented with both national¹ and international² research showing that the way Irish people consume alcohol is harmful to short and long-term health and well-being. The same is true for underage drinking, with Irish young people more likely to binge drink than their European counterparts.³

Through its alcohol education programme, Drinkaware will provide resources for teachers to support their delivery of effective, impactful and informed lessons to align with the new Framework for Junior Cycle focus on Wellbeing.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

< To establish the attitudes of Junior Cert students towards alcohol education they receive in post primary school

< To determine students' level of knowledge of alcohol and its effects on young people

< To assess what supports or resources students would like to see in future alcohol education programmes



RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The research delivered a nationally representative sample of third year Junior Cert students. This study was carried out by Behaviour & Attitudes, Ireland's largest independent market research company. The survey was conducted, with parental consent, via face-to-face interviewing in the homes of the students. In total 200 interviews were conducted and all interviewing took place in March and April 2016.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

KEY HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONCERNS FOR STUDENTS



The research found that students are much less concerned about alcohol use than they are about doing well in school and road safety. This ranking of health and social concerns is consistent across demographics. This suggests that concerns around alcohol are currently somewhat dormant for young people of this age.

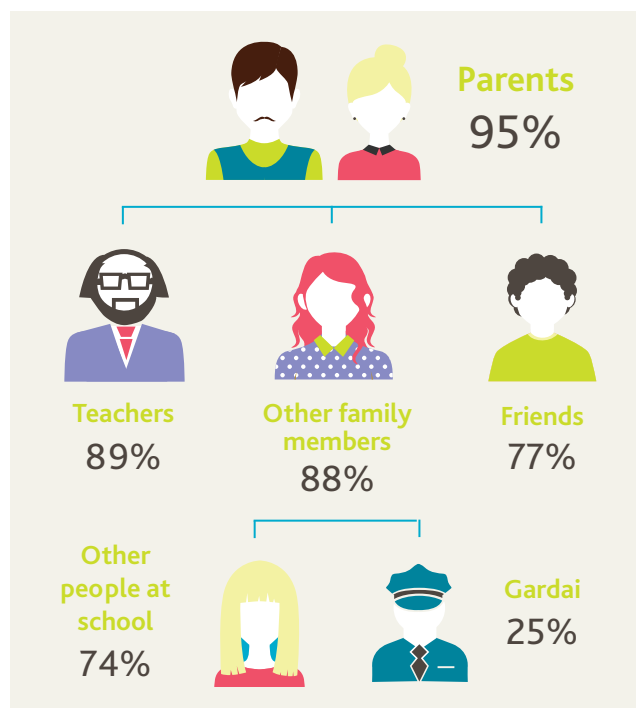
Both national and international research indicates direct links between early alcohol use and illegal drug use⁴, poor school performance and attendance.⁵ The findings show these students are not making a connection between underage alcohol use and the potential impact this can have on other health and social concerns.

SOURCES OF LEARNING ABOUT ALCOHOL

It was important for Drinkaware to establish where students learn about alcohol. Perhaps unsurprisingly, parents were identified as the main source of this learning while 88% of students surveyed cited other family members as this source.

Teachers ranked second in terms of where students learn about alcohol, indicating the prevalence of alcohol education being taught at junior cycle.

This would strengthen the recommendation that alcohol education should take a multi-faceted approach with different stakeholders working together including schools, parents and the wider community.



These findings support evidence which shows that family, and in particular parents, are key influences on a child's attitudes towards alcohol.

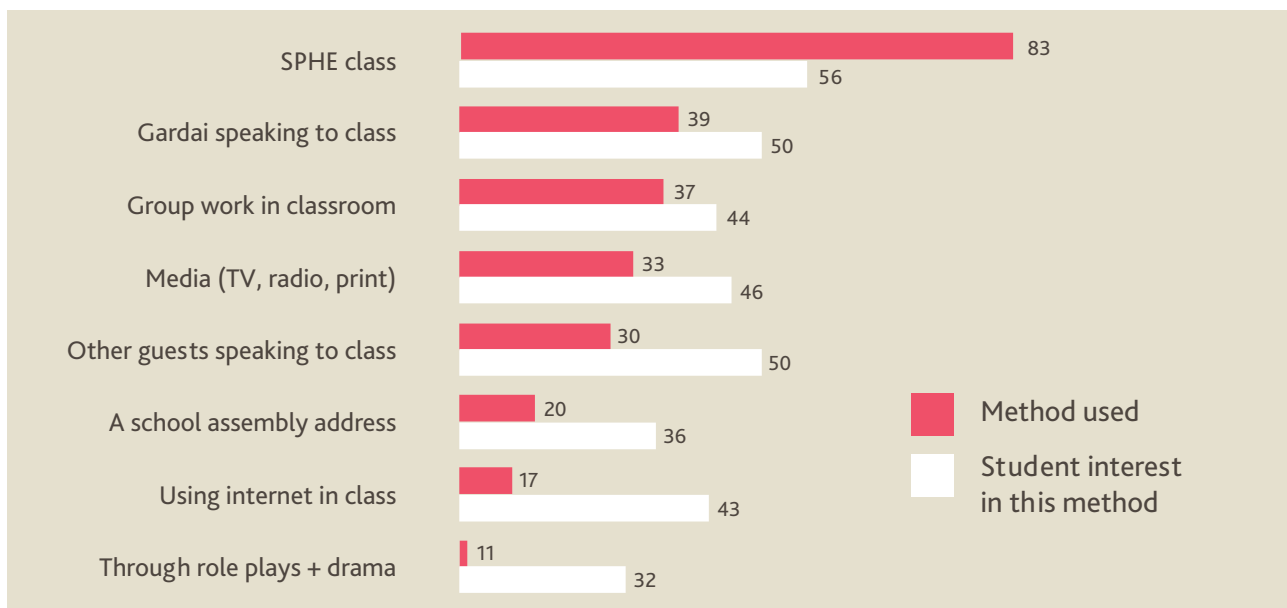
METHODS USED TO TEACH ABOUT ALCOHOL IN SCHOOL

Research shows that alcohol education programmes in schools can impact students' attitudes and behaviours relating to alcohol and can play an important part in delaying the age of first drink.⁶

The findings from this research show that the students surveyed overwhelmingly identify SPHE class as the main source of teaching about alcohol in post-primary school (83%). This reflects the emphasis placed on alcohol within the curriculum

nationally. However, interestingly, the methods used to teach about alcohol vary more in Dublin.

The table below highlights students' interest levels in a range of teaching methods for alcohol education. When compared to the methods currently used to teach about alcohol in school, it is clear that students would welcome a more diverse approach to alcohol education.



KNOWLEDGE OF ALCOHOL

Students were asked to rate their level of knowledge of alcohol and how it relates to Irish society. Over half of students (56%) feel they are limited in their knowledge relating to alcohol use.

Of particular concern is the high number of students who were not aware that almost a quarter of adults in Ireland do not drink alcohol. This finding reflects the long-associated generalisation that 'all Irish people drink' which is misleading and is similarly not true for those under 18 years of age.

1 in 4 students did not know that roughly 500 cancer deaths are linked to alcohol each year in Ireland.

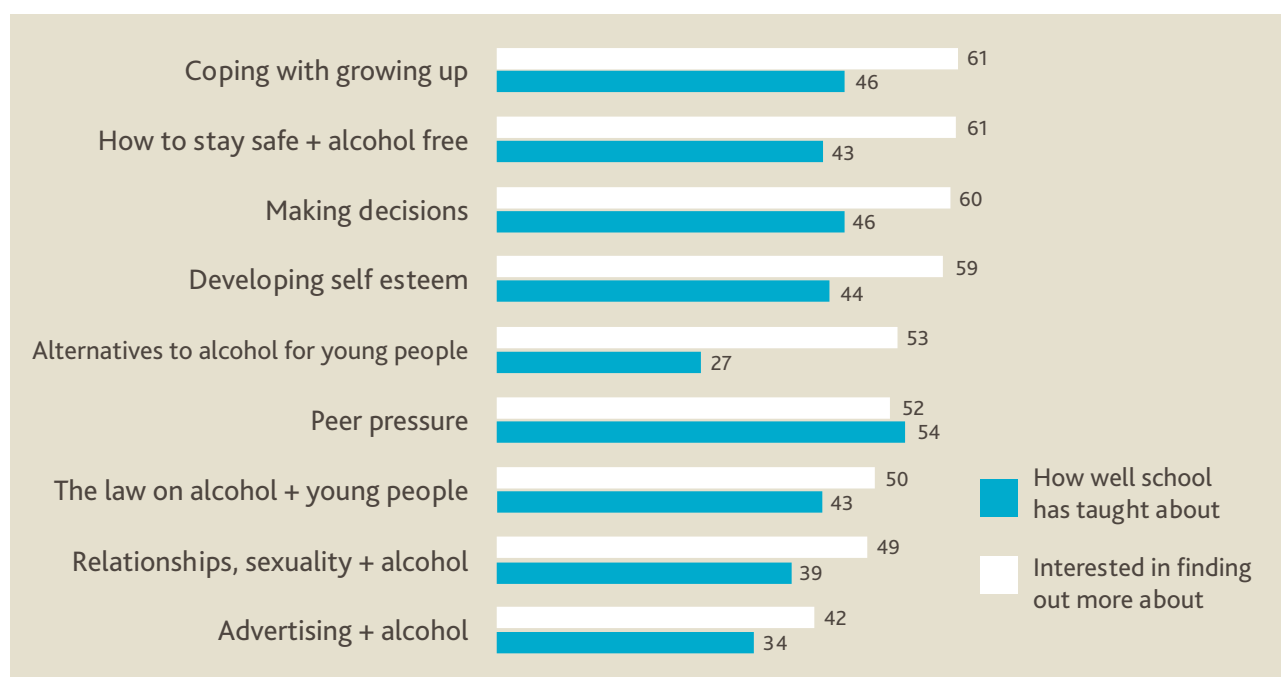
Less than half of students were not aware that people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who start at 20 or over.



Just 2 in 5 students were aware that binge drinking is defined as drinking at least six standard drinks on one drinking occasion.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL-BASED ALCOHOL EDUCATION

Students' review of school teaching on alcohol is only modestly positive with 36% ranking secondary school as having taught them very well about alcohol. Of the social topics in the curriculum, 'alternatives to alcohol' receives the lowest national ratings in terms of how well students feel this area is currently being covered. For an alcohol education programme to be successful, it must include a variety of topics that are of relevance to the lives of the young people.



CONCLUSION

It is evident from the research that Junior Cert students have an active interest in alcohol education. This interest is based on skills they can use if confronted with issues involving alcohol. It is the intention of Drinkaware to draw on key findings from this and other research to devise a new alcohol education programme to align with the new Framework for Junior Cycle focus on Wellbeing.⁷

The focus of this programme will be on supporting teachers to deliver lessons about alcohol and its effects, with an emphasis on the importance of self-awareness, confidence and decision-making skills. On completion of this programme young people will be empowered to develop strategies to resist peer pressure, change behaviours and engage in alternatives to alcohol use.

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- ⁶ Foxcroft, D.R. & Tsertsvadze, A. (2012). Universal school-based prevention programs for alcohol misuse in young people. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Issue 5*.
- ⁷ Department of Education and Skills (2015) *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* [online], Available at: http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/documents [Accessed 28/09/2016]

< KEY FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS FOR DRINKAWARE:

Students are not as concerned about alcohol as they are about other social and health concerns such as school performance and road safety. **Drinkaware aim to build on the established need for up-to-date, evidence-led and age-appropriate lesson plans to align with the new Framework for Junior Cycle focus on Wellbeing. Drinkaware will provide guidance and materials to teachers to support the delivery of clear and concise lessons based on best practice.**

The majority of students state that school-based alcohol education is currently delivered through SPHE class. However, students identify a clear interest in a more varied approach to learning about alcohol. **Drinkaware will promote a whole-school approach to alcohol education and within this, there is a clear role for parents.**

Students display a low level of awareness about alcohol and its place in Irish society, with just over half stating that they feel they are limited in their knowledge relating to alcohol use. **Drinkaware will communicate key facts about alcohol, risks associated with underage drinking – particularly binge drinking and drinking below the age of 15 – and the effects of alcohol-related harm in Ireland.**

A significant proportion of students feel they have not been taught very well about alcohol in school. This is also the case in terms of more general social topics such as coping with growing up and healthy alternatives to alcohol for young people. **Drinkaware's educational resource aims to help students develop the skills that can assist them in meeting the challenges of life beyond school. It will achieve this using experiential methodologies with an emphasis on communication skills, decision-making and resilience in line with key skills outlined for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at Junior Cert.**

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