



How can we collect data, and use it to shape our work?

Molly Russell, SOS UK

Felicity Bath, Bath Spa University

Rosie Harvey, Northampton Students' Union

Session Overview



- **SOS UK**
 - Students Alcohol and Drugs Survey
 - Why is it important to use data?
 - How to get involved in the survey
- **Bath Spa**
- **Northampton Students' Union**
- **Discussion and Q&A**

Speakers



Molly Rusell
SOS UK



Rosie Harvey
Northampton
Students' Union



Felicity Bath
Bath Spa
University

Students, Alcohol and Drugs Survey

- Running since **2021**, and conducted as part of SOS UK's **Drug and Alcohol Impact** programme
- Identifying **students' relationship** with alcohol and drugs, and **develop responses** to support students and staff in higher education
- Report focuses on respondents studying in **higher education in the UK**

In 2025-26, the data represents...

10,561

respondents studying
in **higher education**
in the UK

78%

Of respondents are
undergraduates

36%

Of respondents are
aged between **19-20**
years old

Students' alcohol consumption

Drink alcohol at any frequency

73%

Do not currently drink alcohol

27%

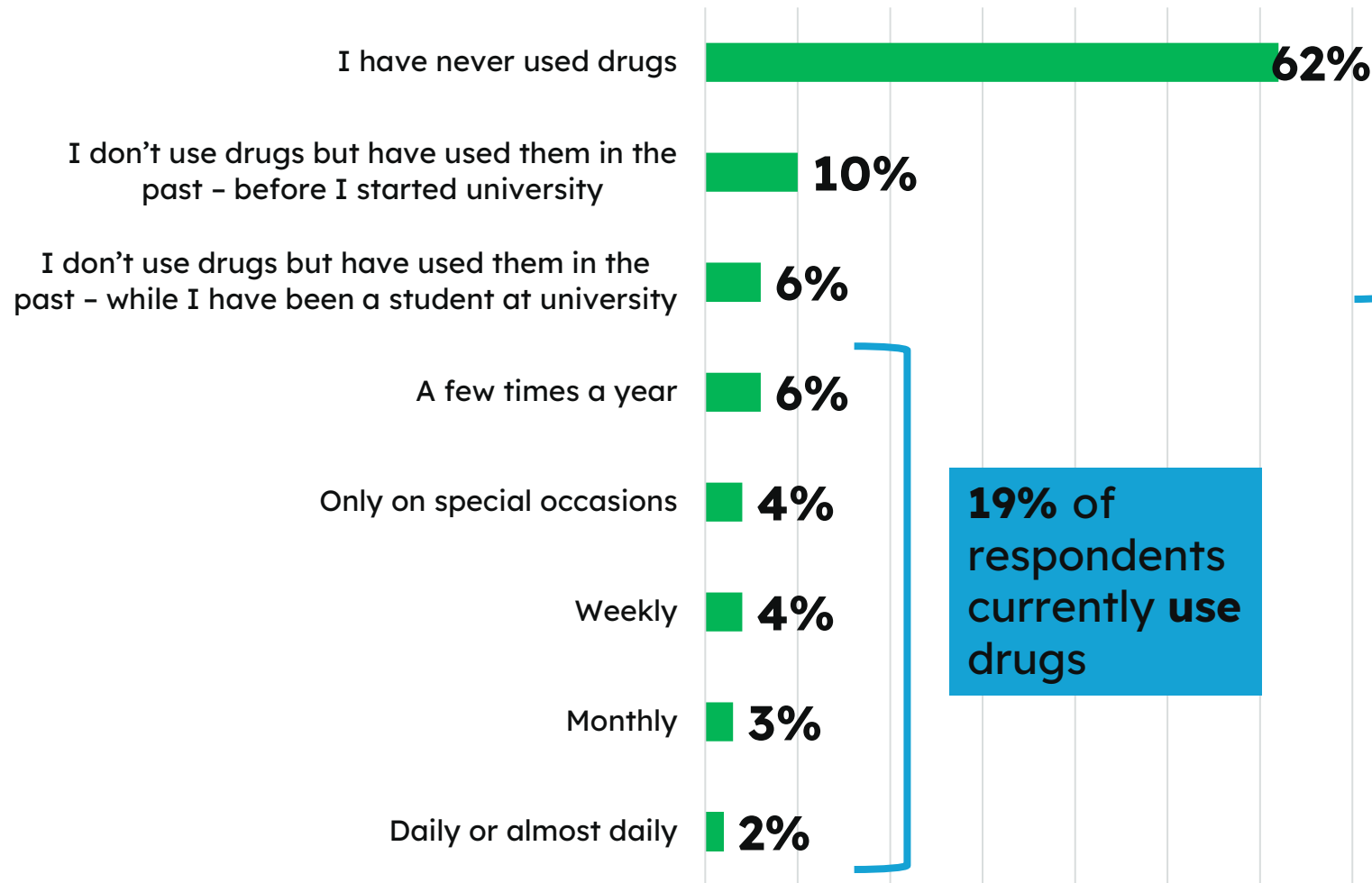
Why do some students drink alcohol?

1. For recreation/fun (78%)
2. To enhance my social interactions (50%)
3. To improve my confidence (25%)

Why do some students' not drink alcohol?

1. Religious or cultural reasons (27%)
2. Don't like the taste (20%)
3. The long term effects of alcohol on my health (13%)
4. Don't like the effect it has on me (13%)

Students' drugs use



78%
currently **do not use**
drugs

19% of
respondents
currently **use**
drugs

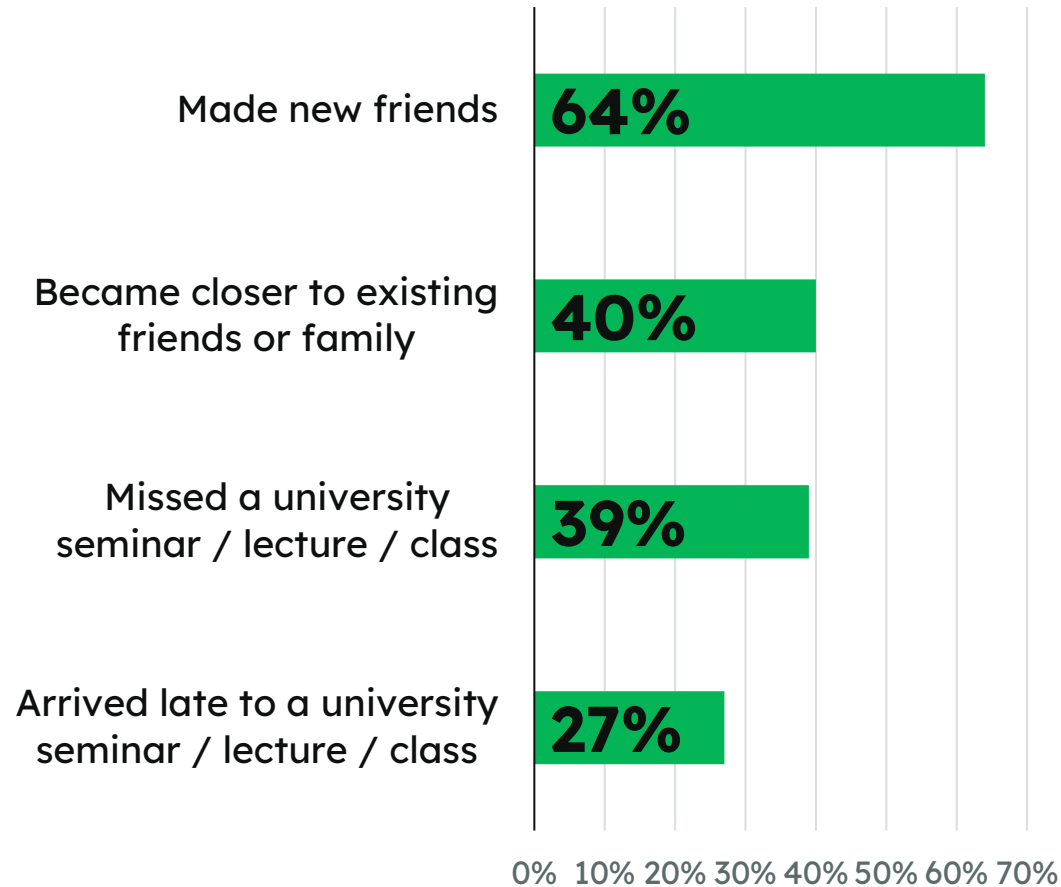
Why do some students use drugs?

1. For recreation/fun (**71%**)
2. To enhance my social interactions (**21%**)
3. For something to do/boredom (**18%**)

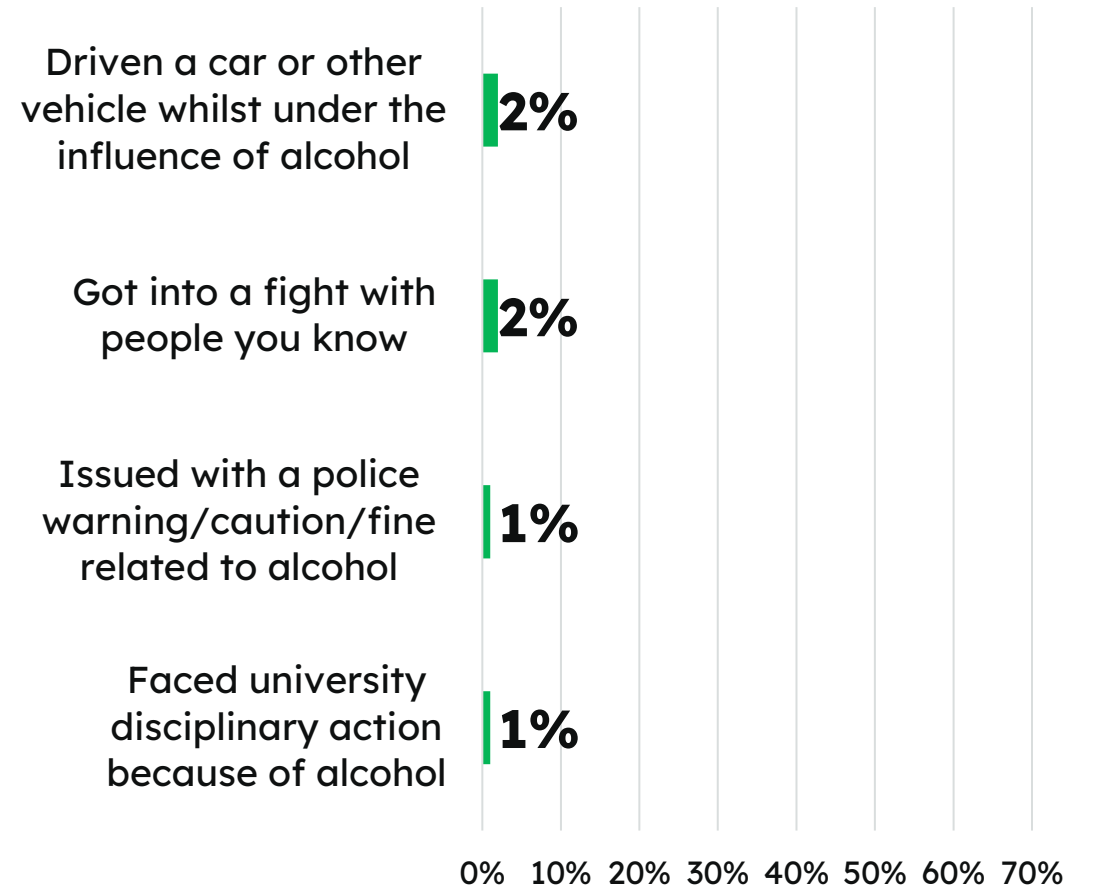
39% received without payment from friends and/or family

Experiences during/following alcohol consumption

Top 4 most common experiences

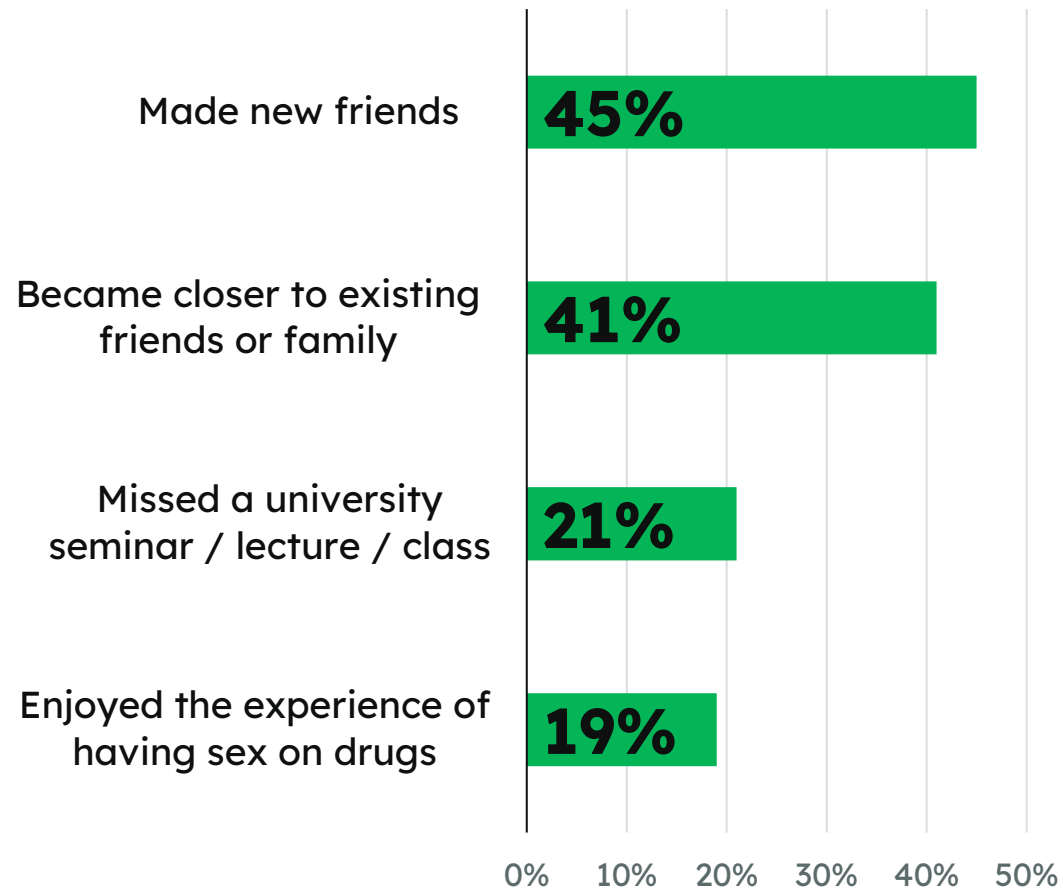


Top 4 least common experiences

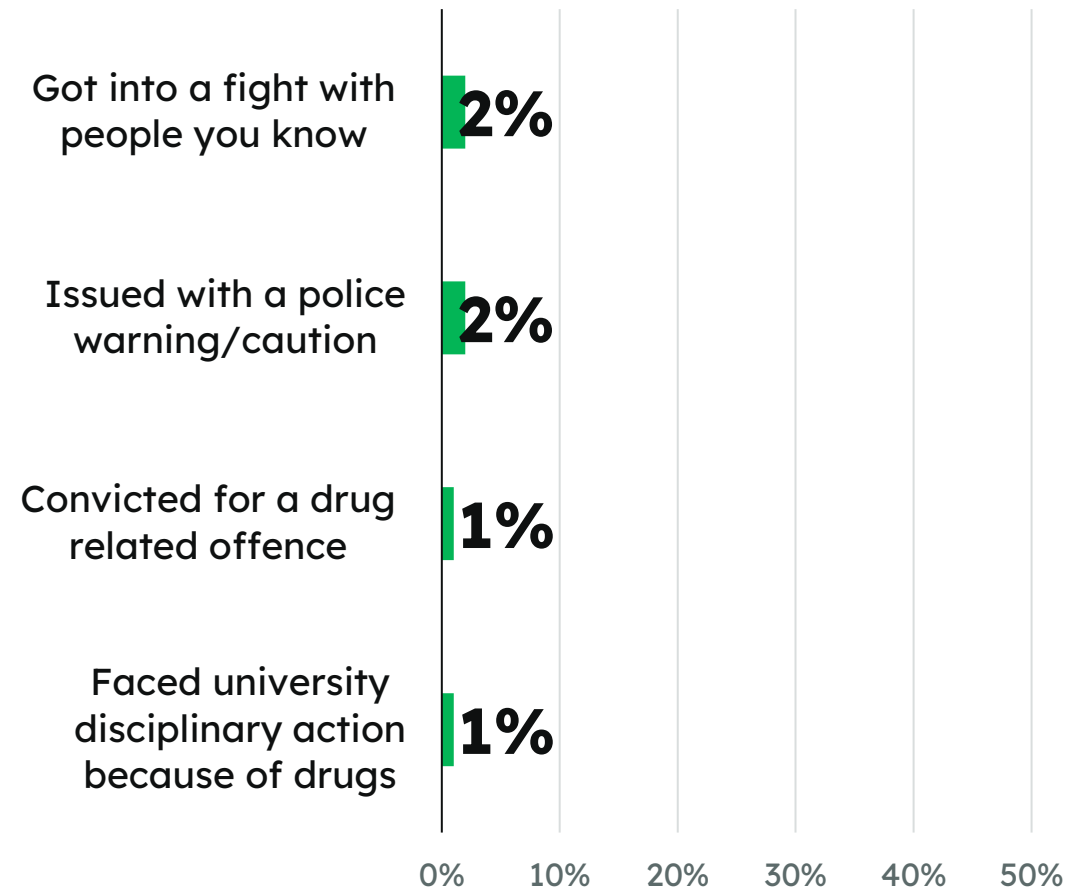


Experiences during/following students' drugs use

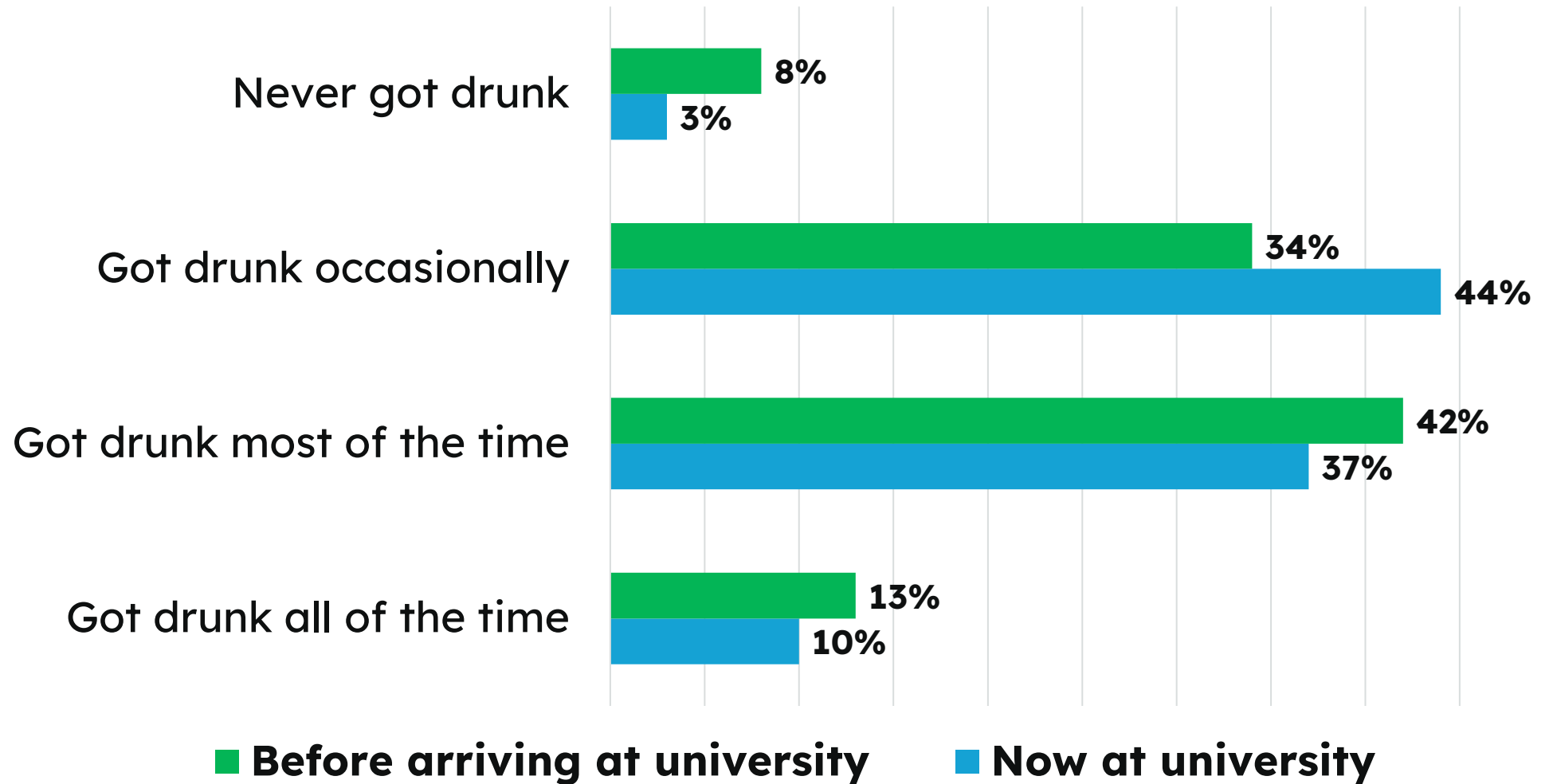
Top 4 most common experiences



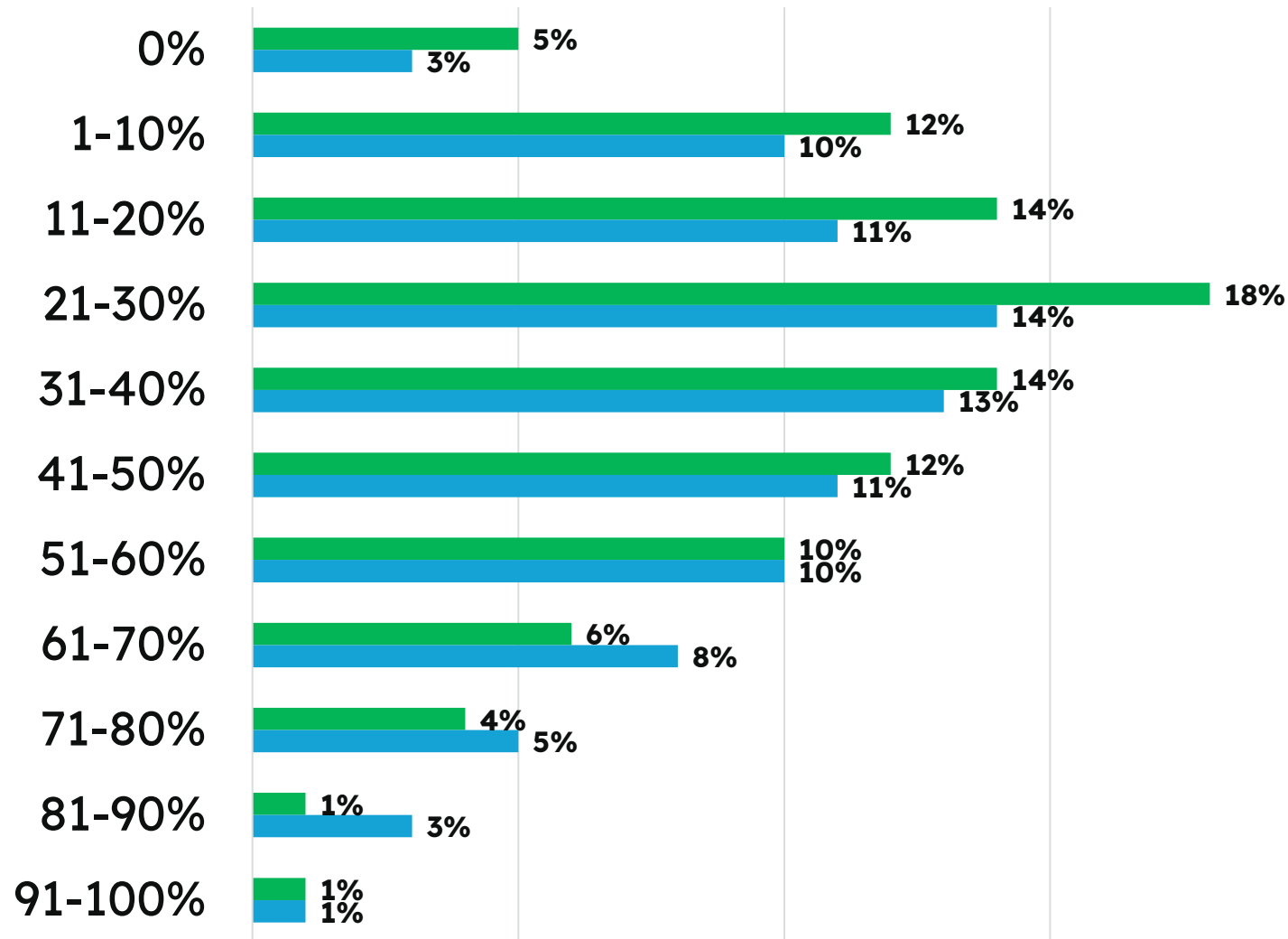
Top 4 least common experiences



Perceptions of alcohol consumption



Perceptions of drug use



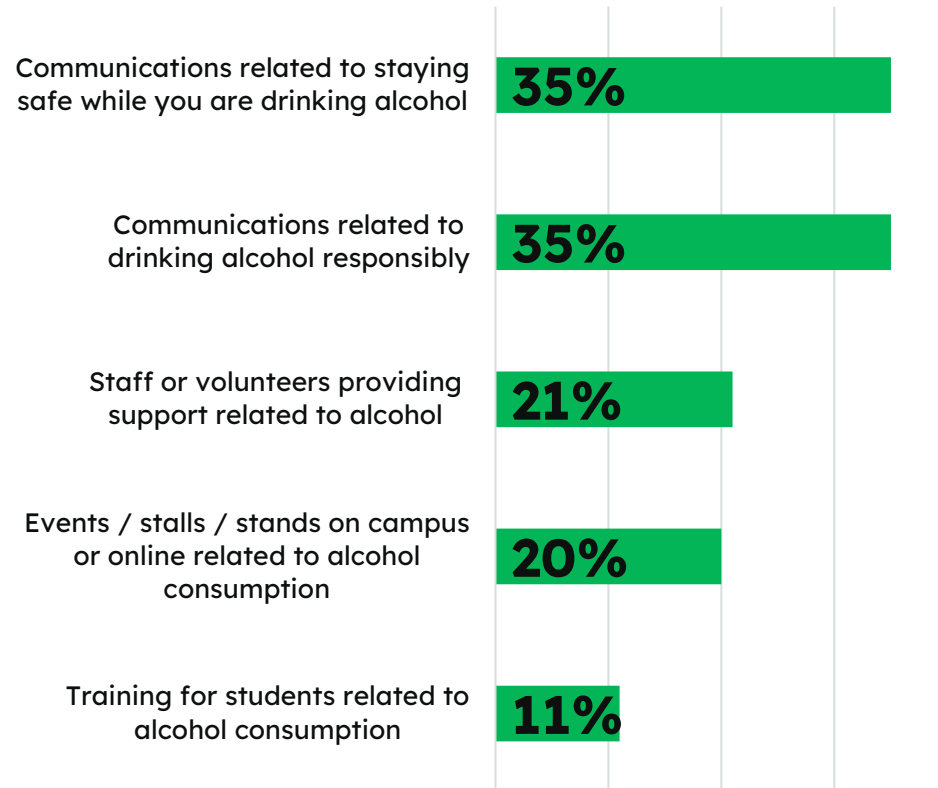
92% thought that students used drugs (at any frequency) **before starting university**

86% thought that students used drugs (at any frequency) **after starting university**

■ Before starting university
■ After starting university

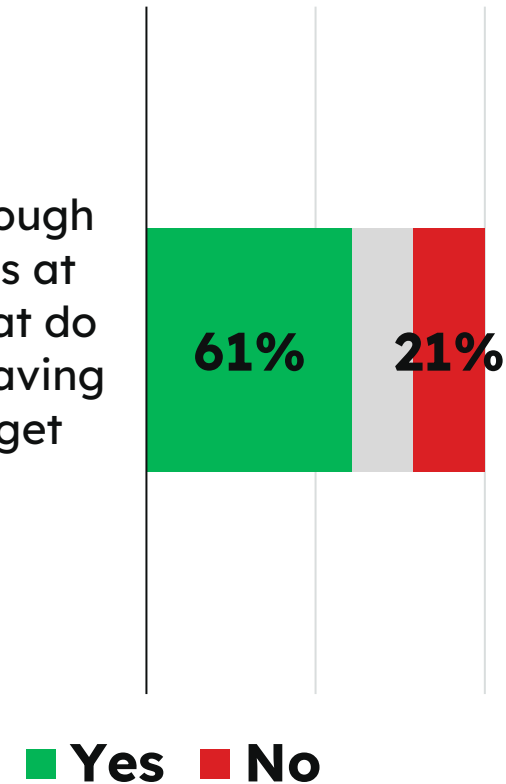
Responsible consumption

Awareness of safe and responsible drinking campaigns



Alcohol-free social events at university

Are there enough social events at university that do not involve having to drink or get drunk?



University drug policy, and advice and support

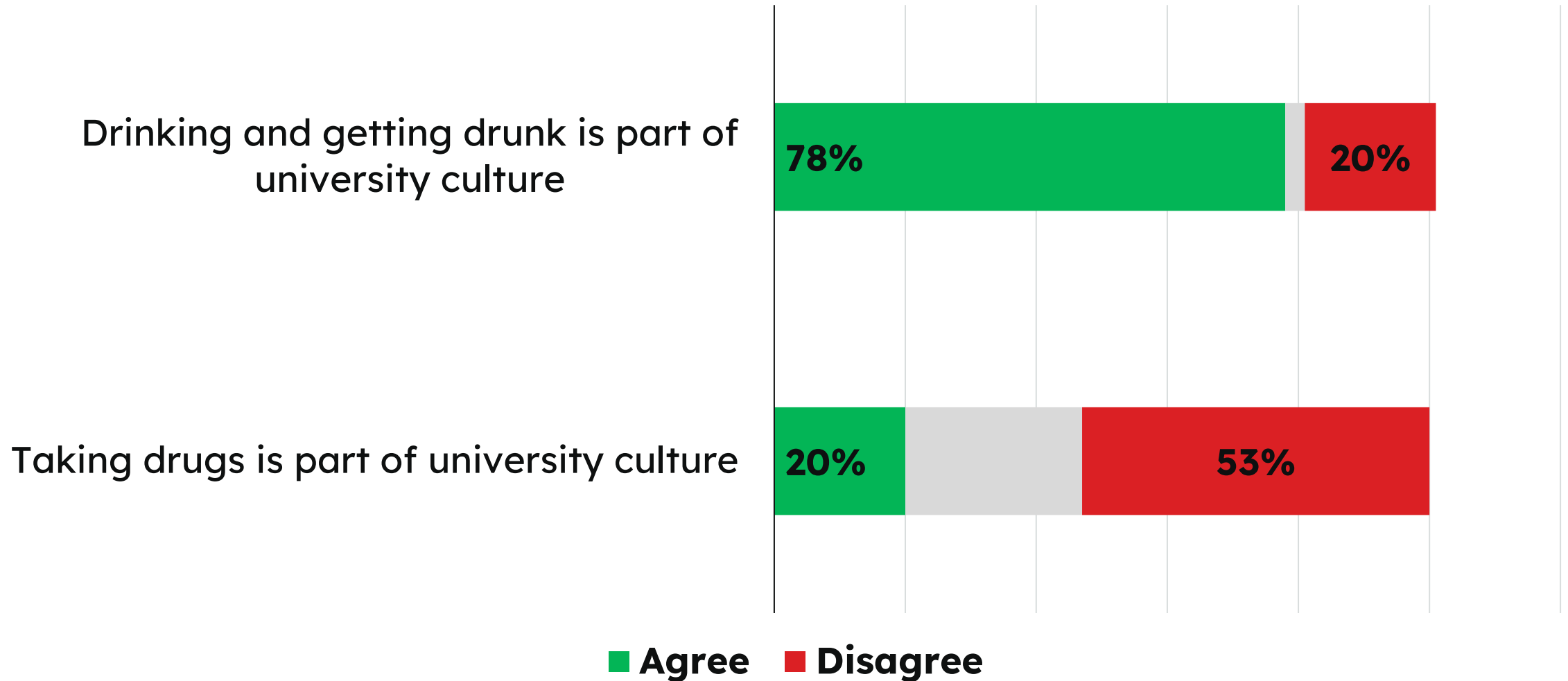
“How much, if anything, do you know about the policy/policies your university has on drugs?”

- ‘I know my university has a drugs policy but I don’t know what it says’: **32%**
- ‘I know my university has a drugs policy and know all of/a lot of what it says’: **7%**

“Which of the following statements best describes your awareness of advice, information and support on drugs at your university?”

- ‘I know a little about the advice and support available’: **31%**
- ‘I know about all of the advice and support available’: **20%**

University culture and substance use





Join us to launch the 2025-26 report!

Online

Tuesday 26 May

2.00-3.00pm



Why is it important we use data?

- Data can be a useful tool to **build a case for further resource or work** and **share a more accurate picture of student substance use**
- Taking part year-on-year means we can map **national- and institutional-level trends**
- With limited resource, it can be helpful to focus on behaviours **which we know are present in student populations**
- Institution-specific data can be used to inform **local and specific harm reduction information** e.g. which substances students are using locally



**Sign up to take part in the
Students, Alcohol and
Drugs Survey!**

**Monday 16 November –
Sunday 6 December 2026**

**If you secure 100 responses, you will
receive your institution's data**



Collecting Campus-Wide Drug & Alcohol Data to Drive Harm Reduction

Bath Spa University

Felicity Bath
Student Wellbeing Service Manager
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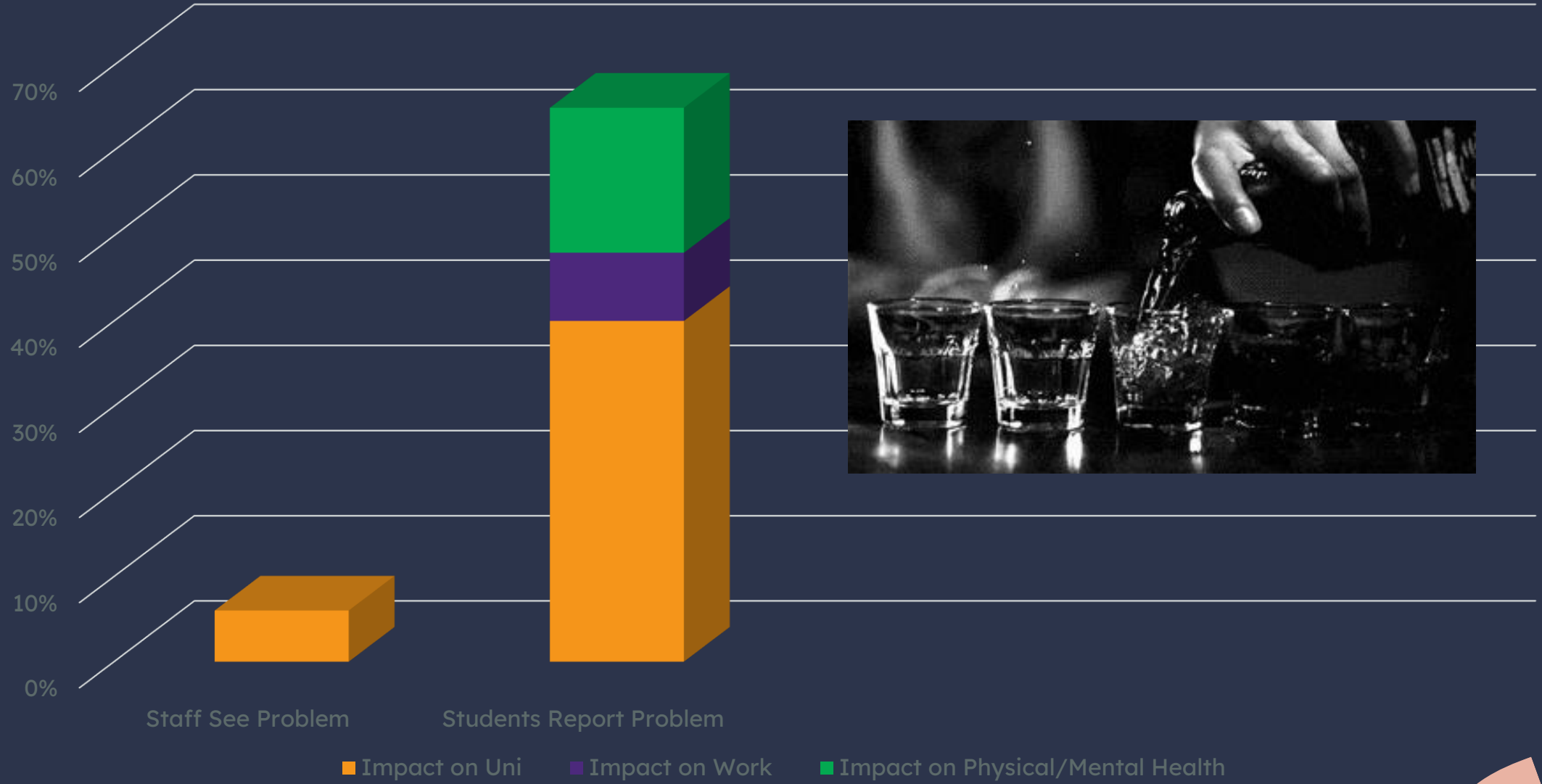


Method: The Staff Harm Reduction Attitude Survey

- Demographics – target teams of staff, including University Leadership Group. 144 responses: 96% Professional Services and 4% Academic Staff
- Understand staff perception of irresponsible drug and alcohol use in student population
- Problem framing (disciplinary Vs safeguarding)
- Knowledge of support services
- Staff confidence in responding to cases
- Use of quantitative and qualitative data to inform “harm mapping”.

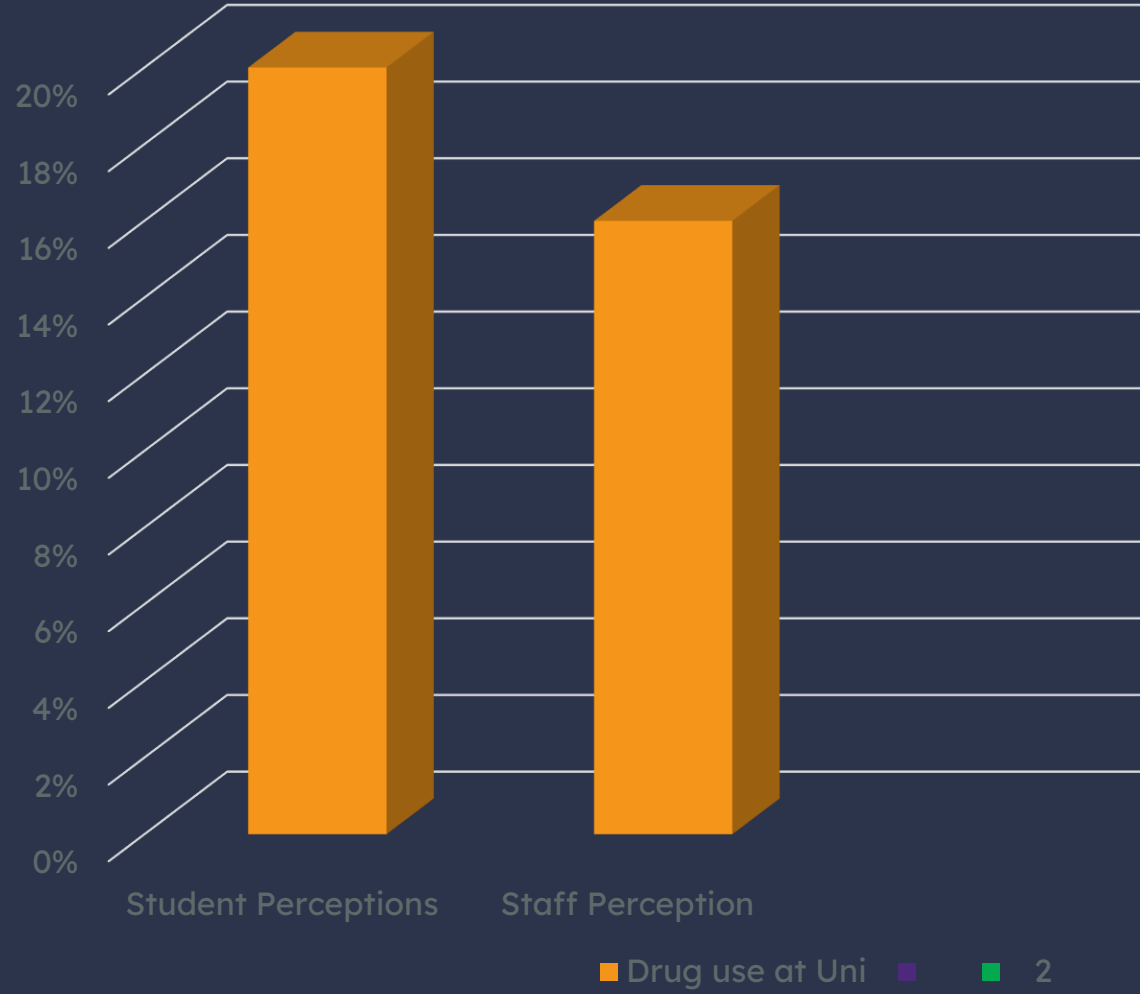


Key Findings: Alcohol (Staff VS Students)



Key Findings: Drug Use (Staff VS Students)

Chart Title



What the Data Revealed About Vulnerable Groups

From combined SDAS, HRAS and literature:

Drug vulnerabilities:

Students in accommodation
Neurodivergent students (self-medicating for anxiety, depression)
Students experiencing loneliness or social disconnection
Hidden harms due to covert drug use

Alcohol vulnerabilities:

Sports societies (perceived by staff, NOT supported by student data)
First-year and younger students
Neurodivergent students
Students under stress (major theme)

Using the Data to Shape Our Work

Reframing Problems as Safeguarding, Not Discipline

64% of staff agree that alcohol misuse should NOT result in disciplinary process
Students prefer confidential, supportive pathways
Shift toward harm reduction conversations and safety planning



Improving Staff Confidence and Knowledge

Data shows low confidence → targeted training for: Residence Life, front line staff, Personal tutors, Security



Targeted Communication Campaigns

Examples:
Myth-busting around sports-club drinking,
Consent training linked to alcohol-related risk
Visibility of support without stigma



Policy and Process Review

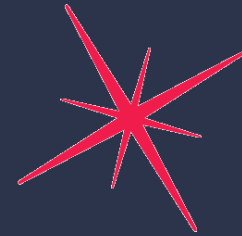
Need for clearer documentation on drug-misuse procedures
Clearer info on confidentiality and academic impact





Lessons Learned About Data Collection

1. People seemed to answer honestly when the survey is anonymous, particularly around drugs.
2. Staff and student experiences differ – and both matter, you need perspective data AND experiential data.
3. Qualitative comments are often more revealing than numbers
4. Repeat surveys are crucial for tracking cultural change (we plan to do ours again for comparative data)
5. Small datasets can still drive strategic decisions, especially when triangulated across multiple sources.
6. We didn't need to navigate ethics!





DELVING DEEPER INTO DATA AND FILLING THE GAPS

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ROSIE HARVEY
DEPUTY CEO, NORTHAMPTON STUDENT' UNION

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STUDENT LIFE**

STOP!

What do we already know?

What is our data already telling us?



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WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?



- Our SOS survey data showed 2 drugs reported clearly as most used by our students.
- A number of students also reported using poppers in written responses.
- Alcohol use by students reports incredibly low with many not drinking at all.
- Responses showed statistical significance but did not meet a representative demographic split.
- A real interest locally where our data deviates from national data e.g. ketamine use not reported

STAFF ROADSHOW

Aim:

- To understand staff culture and beliefs around drug and alcohol use
- To validate or challenge with survey data
- To understand our 'start point'



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POPPERS CAMPAIGN

Why:

- The number of responses by students identifying popper use
- Qualitative feedback regarding wider popper use.

Aim:

- To educate on the harms of popper use
- To highlight popper use across sexualities



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LISTENING ROOMS

Aim:

- To understand student experiences more deeply
- To gain qualitative data to be used alongside the existing quantitative data
- Seek data on issues specific to Northampton

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Where do we go from here

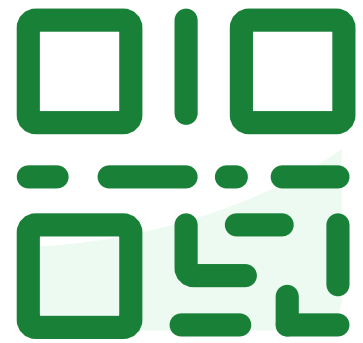
- Continue to understand our data gaps
- Ensure qualitative impact recording is consistent and centralised
- Ongoing annual comparison of institutional SOS data
- Annual comparison of institutional data with national data

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Do not edit
How to change the design



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What do you want and/or need to know about student substance use?



What data already exists that may answer your questions?

 The Slido app must be installed on every computer you're presenting from




Where are the gaps in the data?



How could you evidence change moving forward?

Any questions?





Thank you

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