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Engaging Vice Chancellors and Senior Leaders in harm reduction

National Student Drug and Alcohol Conference 2023
Leeds University Union

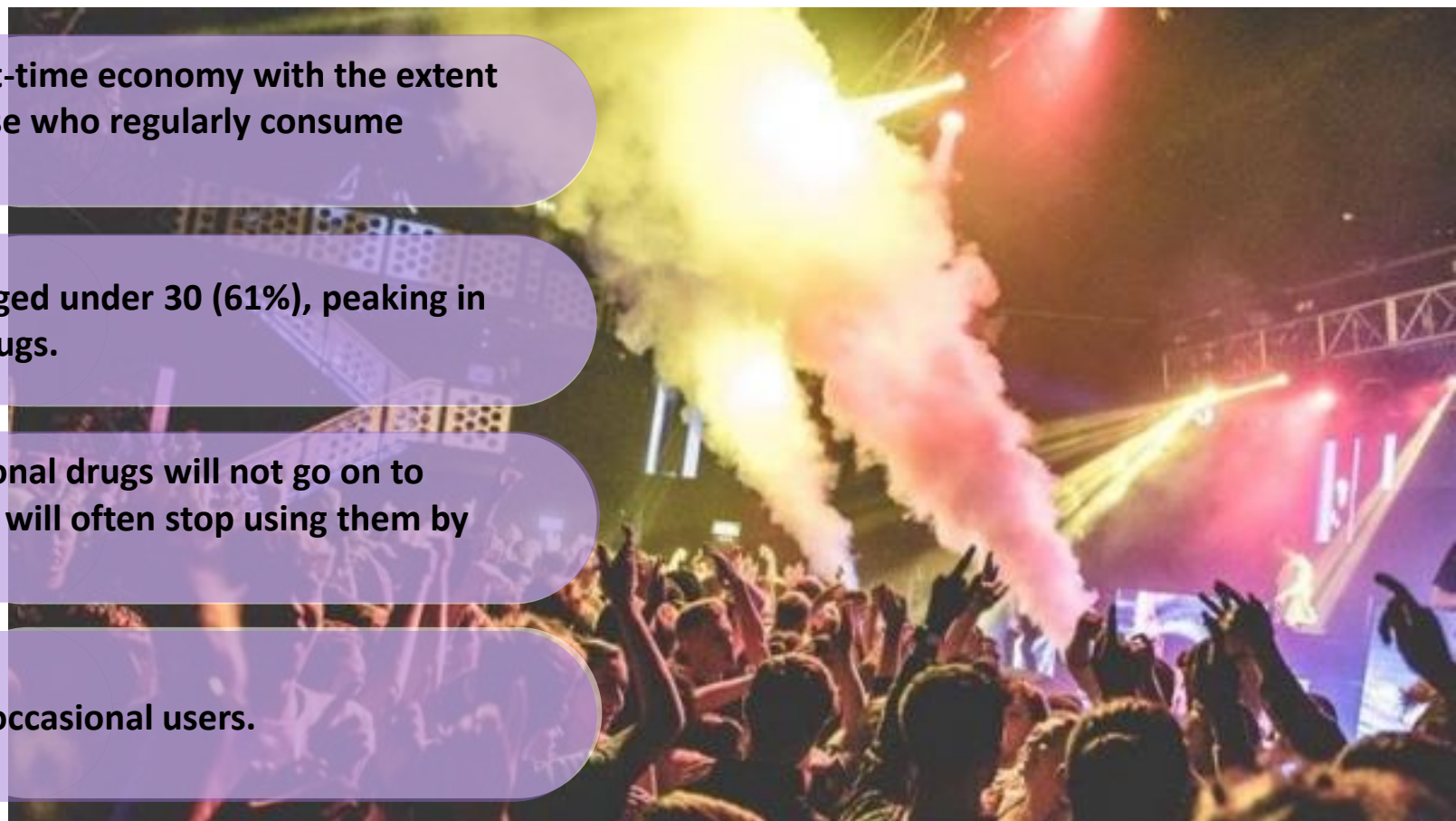
Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs...

There is a close association with the night-time economy with the extent of drug use considerable higher with those who regularly consume alcohol and visit pubs/clubs.

Drug use is far more prevalent in those aged under 30 (61%), peaking in the 20-24 age group for class A and all drugs.

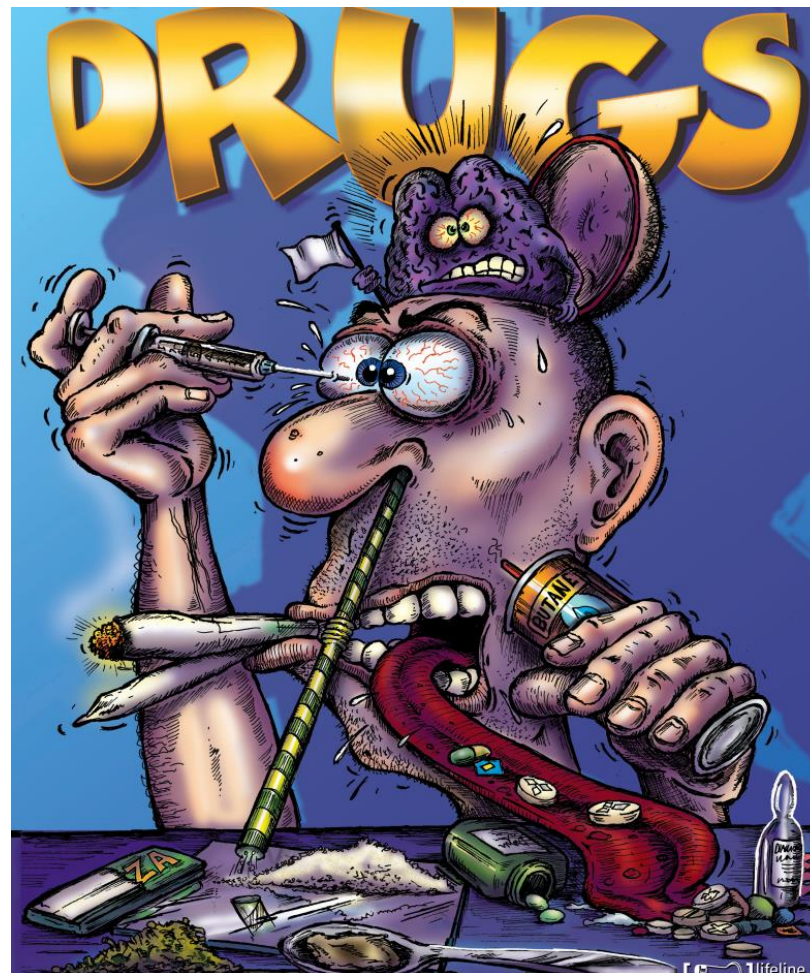
The majority of people who use recreational drugs will not go on to develop issues with problematic use and will often stop using them by their 30s.

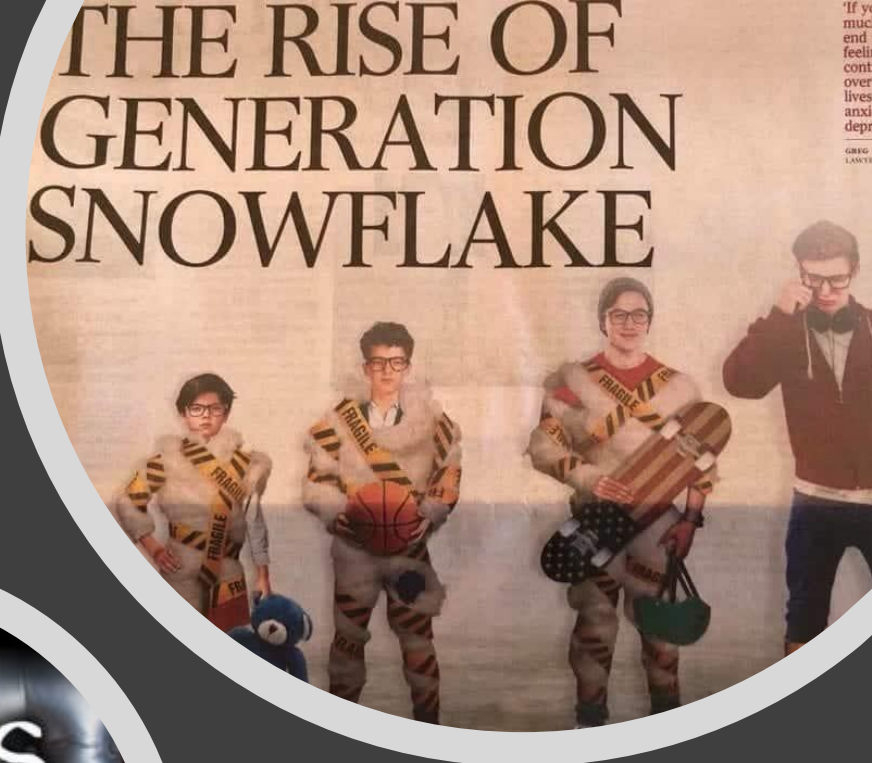
The majority of people taking drugs are occasional users.



“Top” substances in HEP.....

- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Nitrous Oxide
- Ketamine
- Ecstasy
- Powdered Cocaine





Binary perception of...

- Students are snowflakes...
- ...OR.....
- ... Students are party animals

is too simplistic...



What do you want from senior leadership engagement?

- Understand what you are actually asking for – what do you want them to do?
- Understand the need for policy coherence across all areas
- Need to work together to build a coherent approach across the university to drive change
- Who are the people you want to engage in the Senior Team? – do your research
- Consider how will you reach out to the Executive?

Five ways to make the argument....

1. **What are the risks in this area?** – if “we” don’t do this, what might happen?
2. **Positive reasons why a senior leader should adopt this** – “Our university could be the first to do this”, “one of the first to have a public health harm reduction approach to substance use” etc
3. **Personal** – they or those close to them may have experienced harms associated with substance use
4. **Never** underestimate personal and professional commitment
5. **Harm reduction** framework published by Universities UK in March 2023
 - It will accelerate the process of engagement
 - Provides cover and support from Universities UK
 - The framework takes the sector leaders past some of those difficult, but reputational questions



- Find common ground and ways to go forward
- Shared leadership, shared and honest engagement
 - Shared conversations, even if difficult
- If you talk about drugs in isolation, you miss the challenge – recognise intersectionality

Remember that....

- 20-24 age group is the biggest using group (more likely between 17-25)
- 35-40% of those between 16-25 had tried illegal substance in past 12 months
- Getting senior teams to understand that drugs are freely and readily available
- Harm reduction and public health model – challenge about harm-reduction – some think it is encouraging drug use – it is not – there’s a real push and education around that
- Look at “risk appetite” – Boards of Governors are experienced in exploring his concept: what do we mean about risk around alcohol and drugs

- Recognise the impact of the whole university approach
- Real benefits when we focus on people, environments, relationships and policies
- We cannot ignore the challenge of drugs in our communities – universities do not exist in isolation
- The starting point is often on mission, vision and values – but really important to consider the lived experience – and understand what is really happening, find a way of saying – don't be an ostrich.

Intersectionality....

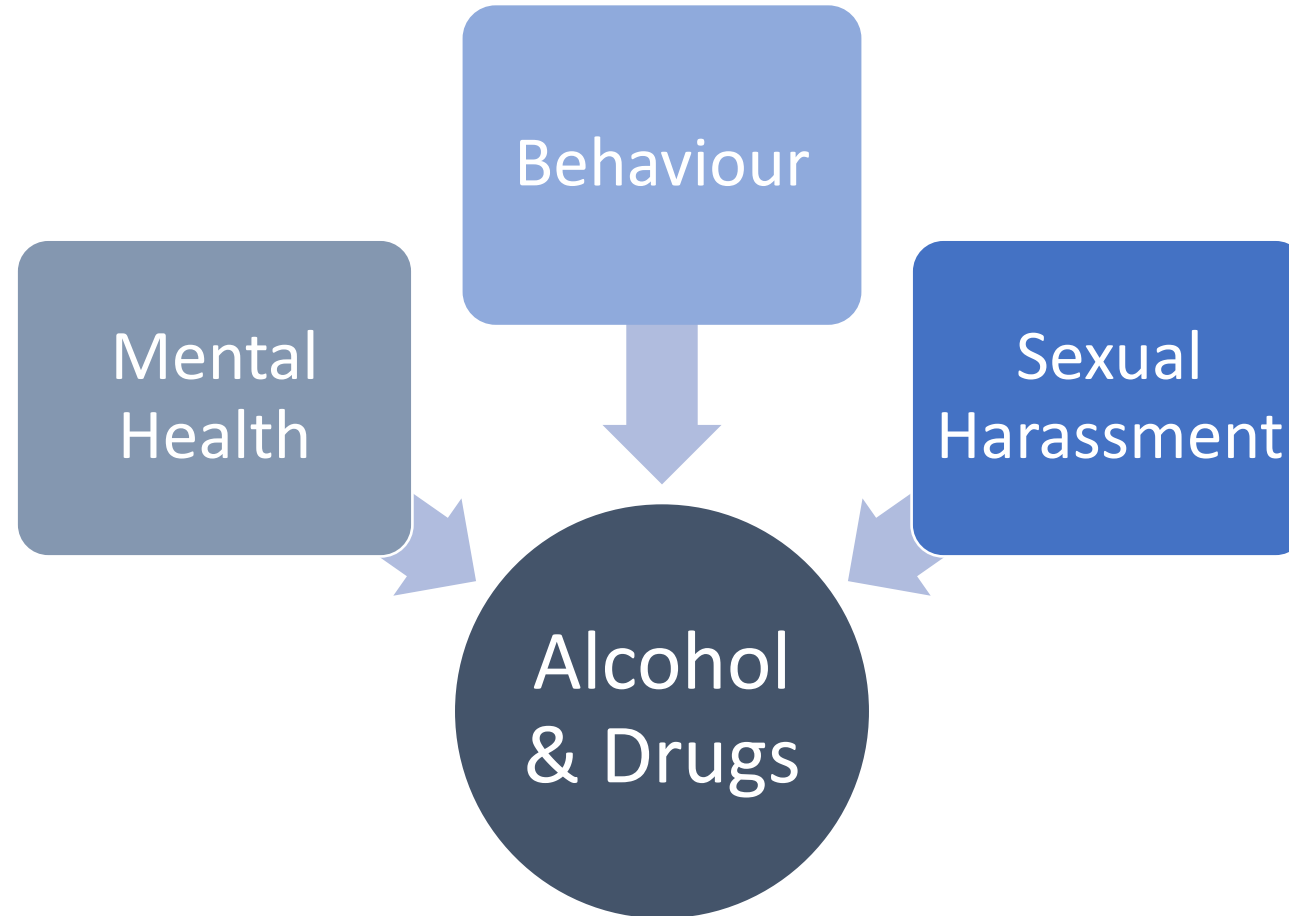
Impact on:

Value Proposition

Academic Regulations

Accommodation Policies

Campus & Community



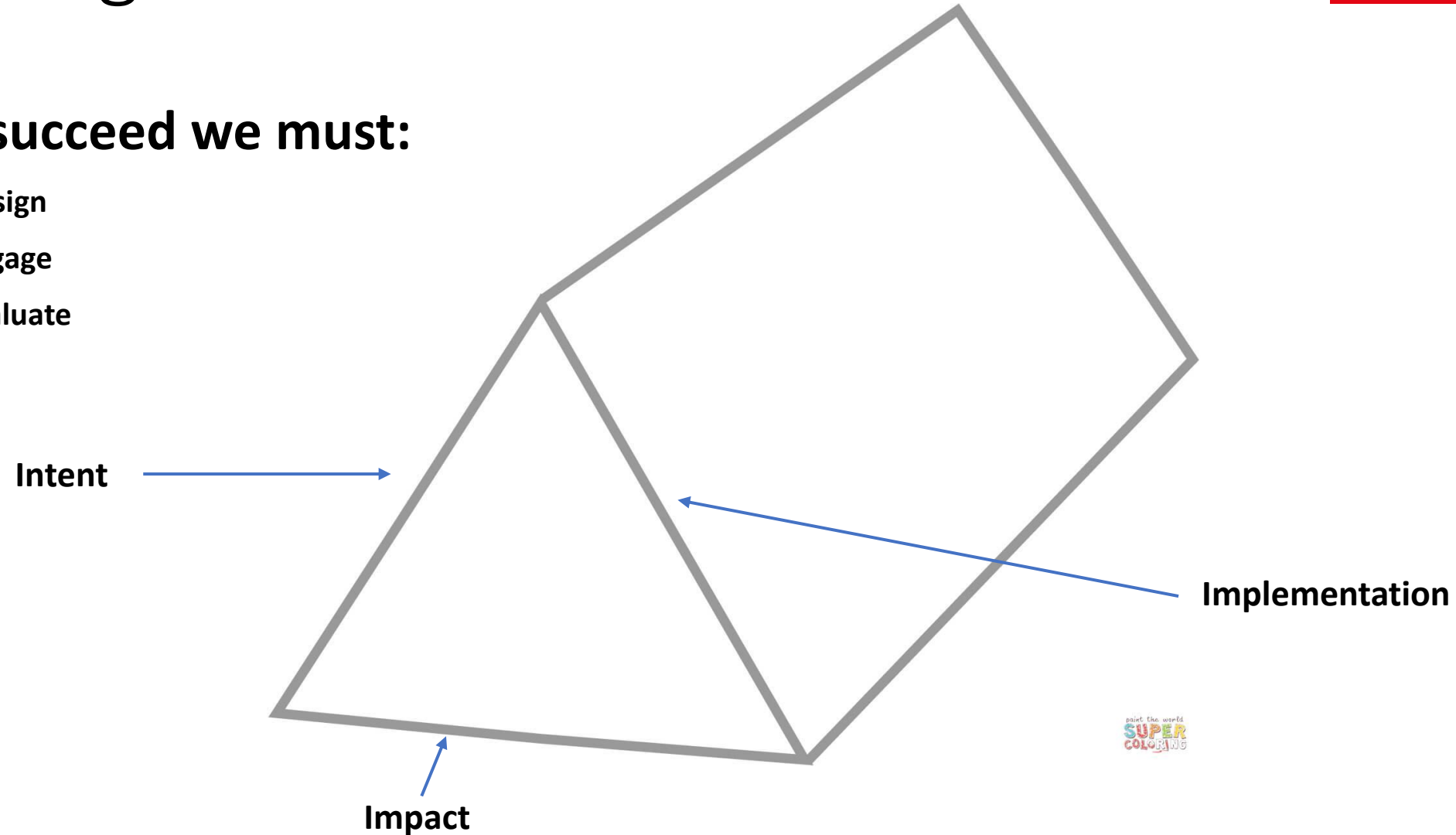
Duty of Care?

External monitoring & reporting?

Triangular Prism....

To succeed we must:

- Design
- Engage
- Evaluate



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