



## Junior Cycle Alcohol Education Programme



#Raising #Teachers #Schools

### Objective

To inform and educate young people about alcohol.

To highlight the risks of drinking alcohol and in particular drinking to excess.

To support the development of personal and social skills, independent decision-making about alcohol, resist peer pressure, explore attitudes and behaviours and engage in alternatives to alcohol use.

To promote communication between parents, adolescents and teachers about alcohol. To delay the age at which young people take their first drink.

### Description

The Drinkaware Alcohol Education Programme (AEP) was an evidence-informed eight-week manualised resource for junior cycle students. Developed within the context of the **Framework for Junior Cycle** and **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)**, the programme had a strong focus on wellbeing. The AEP related specifically to four of the statements of learning. Key skills were promoted in each lesson and indicators of wellbeing were a central aspect of the at home tasks. The programme involved a whole-school approach to alcohol education in the context of health and wellbeing. It supported and aligned with the **Department of Education's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023**. It also aligned with the strategic aims of **Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - A health-led response to alcohol and drug use in Ireland 2017-2025** (Department of Health). This strategy aims to prevent the early use of alcohol and other drugs among young people by influencing behaviour and challenging social norms and attitudes, and providing targeted interventions aimed at minimising harm for those who have already started to use substances. Education has a crucial role in any multi-faceted

approach to achieve positive outcomes relating to health and wellbeing. In addition, the resource was developed in line with the following national strategies and frameworks:

**A Healthy Ireland; A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025; Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention;** and **Guidelines on Wellbeing for Junior Cycle.**

This programme aimed to promote awareness among students at post-primary level of the harms of alcohol and to support the development of personal and social skills, which promote independent decision-making about alcohol in the future. It sought to empower young people to develop strategies to resist peer pressure, change behaviours and engage in alternatives to alcohol use to protect health and wellbeing. The overall objectives of the programme were:

- To provide a holistic approach to alcohol education using up-to-date information on alcohol, its effects and influence.
- To educate about alcohol, Irish law and the possible consequences of underage purchase, possession and/or consumption of alcohol.
- To engage experiential learning activities involving group work.
- To create an awareness of influences, including peer approval, and to develop and enhance the students' skills to resist pressures to drink.
- To highlight the relationship between alcohol and health and wellbeing and to discuss healthy alternatives to alcohol consumption.

The AEP was developed in a spiral manner, where the concepts introduced in Year One were revisited in increasing detail in Year Two and Year Three. Based on 40-minute classes, each year contained nine lessons and two additional optional lessons to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their learnings. Throughout the programme students were involved in active, reflective, collaborative and inquiry-based learning activities based on Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Importantly, students also had the opportunity to express and test their own ideas, draw conclusions and share their knowledge. Attentive and respectful listening was encouraged throughout these activities. Areas Covered in the programme were:

- Alcohol Facts
- Friendship
- Self esteem
- Communication skills
- Influences including social media, marketing and advertising, staying safe and consent.
- Health and wellbeing
- Coping
- Alternatives to alcohol use

Best practice indicates that the effective delivery of alcohol education requires teachers to be trained to do so. This is why Drinkaware provided training to support teachers to deliver the programme to students as intended. A comprehensive manual with structured lesson plans for each of the 3 years of Junior Cycle and student worksheets (available in both English and Irish) were available only to teachers who attended the training day. **This training day consisted of:**

- One-day AEP Teacher Training with focus on experiential learning and interactive teaching methodologies
- One copy of AEP manual per registered teacher. To inform the development of the AEP teacher manual, Drinkaware commissioned Mark Morgan (2015) Cregan Professor of Education and Psychology at St. Patrick's College, to undertake a comprehensive research literature review to identify the most effective practices in delivering alcohol education in schools. **Read the report recommendations**
- USB stick containing all student worksheets
- Input from academic field on alcohol education, research and evaluation.

After due consideration, the Board of Directors of Drinkaware has reluctantly made the very difficult decision to cease roll-out of the Junior Cycle Alcohol Education Programme in 2023.

## Results

Almost 340 teachers were trained to raise awareness among 15,000 1st to 3rd year students about the dangers of alcohol consumption during the course of the programme.

## Measurement & evaluation

### PROGRAMME EVIDENCE & EVALUATION

In 2018, Maynooth University was commissioned to undertake a 3-year independent study to examine the effectiveness, acceptability, and implementation of the programme over a three-year delivery period (2018-2020). This study was led by Professor Sinéad McGilloway, Founder and Director of the **Centre for Mental Health and Community Research at Maynooth University Department of Psychology**, in collaboration with Dr John Weafer of Weafer and Associates. 351 Junior Cycle students from 19 schools participated in the evaluation and 132 teachers who were involved in delivering the programme contributed to the study. The evaluation took place by tracking changes in 'real time', in the use of, and attitudes toward, alcohol amongst teenagers as they grew and matured during the first three years of post-primary school. This involved a combination of numerical data (questionnaires) and listening to peoples' experiences (teacher and student focus group discussions) and the various methodologies used provided important triangulation in terms of validity.

**KEY FINDINGS AMONG STUDENTS :** Three key indicators on attitudes, behaviour and future intent were found among students:

## **Increased knowledge of alcohol harms and consequences**

- Increase in the number of those with 'Knowledge of the impact of alcohol on overall health and wellbeing': From 22% pre-programme to 50% after year 3 delivery.
- Students' knowledge of alcohol consequences and harms increased, specifically knowledge of its impact on mental health, 46% year 3 (vs 23% pre-programme), physical health, 49% year 3 (vs 29% pre-programme), and the consequences of underage drinking, 52% year 3 (vs 38% pre-programme).

## **Positive behaviour and behavioural intent regarding abstinence**

- 89% of students thought the programme had helped them to make informed choices and decisions in relation to consuming alcohol.
- Those who said they had no "intention or interest in drinking", rose from 30% in pre-programme to 54% in year 3.
- 15% of year 3 students stated that they intended "never" to drink and 18% of students stated that they intended to start "when they feel like it".
- Students intending to delay drinking for as long as possible was 22% in year 3 (vs 25% pre-programme).
- The proportion of students who indicated that they had never drunk alcohol remained stable from pre-delivery (60%) to year 2 (59%) of the programme. However, there was a sharp decrease of 17% from year 2 to year 3, whereby the largest proportion of students reported having at some stage consumed alcohol, albeit mainly on special occasions, or rarely (42%). These findings indicate a significant 'tipping point' at the age of 14 going on 15 in terms of the likelihood of most young teenagers taking their first drink.

## **TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE PROGRAMME**

- 94% of teachers felt there is a strong need in schools for a programme such as the AEP (compared to 81% in year 1).
- 94% of teachers believed the programme to be "excellent", "very good" or "good" (compared to 98% in year 1 and 96% in year 2).
- 94% of teachers enjoyed delivering the programme to students (vs 86% in year 1).
- 77% of teachers would recommend the programme to other schools without hesitation (57% in year 1 and 73% in year 2).
- 93% of teachers in year 3 thought the training provided by Drinkaware was "excellent", "very good" or "good" (vs 84% in year 1).

## **STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF THE PROGRAMME**

- 63% of students in year 3 rated the AEP as "excellent" (10%), "very good" (22%), or "good" (31%).
- 60% said that they would recommend the AEP to other students/schools.
- Students in 3 rated the presentation (80%), delivery (82%), materials (78%) and content (77%) of the programme as "good", "very good", or "excellent".

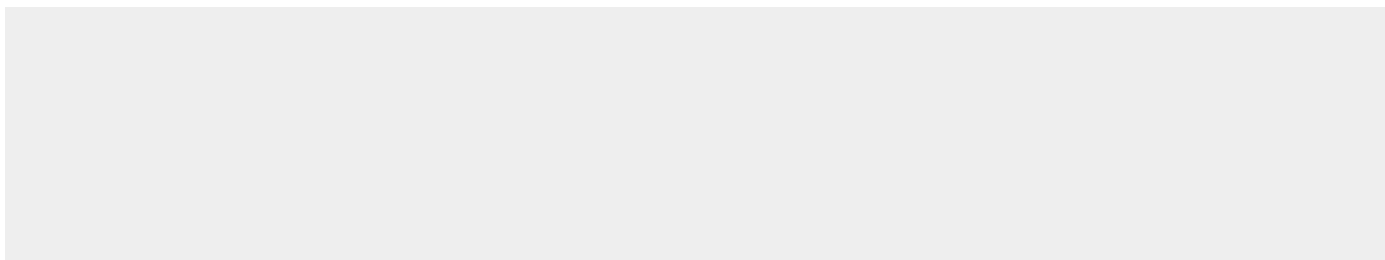
- Y2 student evaluation “I am more aware of the long-term and short-term effects of drinking alcohol and what can happen e.g. liver damage, mental health issues, damage to relationships, academic achievements where you can’t concentrate fully”.

### **PARENTS CAN BE PROTECTIVE AND/OR ENABLING OF UNDERAGE DRINKING**

- 49% of year 3 students first consumed alcohol either in their own or someone else’s home
- 44% in year 3 considered their parents to have relatively tolerant views of their drinking behaviour if they “don’t drink too much”.
- 26% of year 3 students said their parents were unaware of their drinking.
- 19% of year 3 students indicated that their parents do not like to see them drinking at all and 17% of year 3 students who had not started drinking indicated parents’ reaction was a factor in their decision of not doing so.

## Downloads

## Photo gallery



## Documents

**Evaluation of Drinkaware’s Junior Cycle Alcohol Education Programme (JC AEP) 2018-2020 Summary Report** (pdf - 0.44 Mo)