



College Alcohol Policy

Summary

The aim of this policy is to provide a framework within which members of College are able:

- to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- to achieve high academic standards
- to maintain high standards of personal behaviour
- to maintain high standards of respect for others within the community

The College is a community with a large number of resident members supported by many staff. Some people choose not to drink alcohol, but the policy recognises that many people do. The College expects that the lives of those who choose not to drink, or choose to drink responsibly, should not be adversely affected by the behaviour and attitudes of others. The policy primarily points out the risks associated with excessive drinking, offering information on health and safety issues concerning alcohol consumption and advice about where help can be sought.

The College

Alcohol plays a significant part in the social life of many students and contributes to the enjoyability of many occasions. However, a strong social emphasis on alcohol can be insensitive to others, have a corrosive effect on the academic culture of the College, or lead to anti-social behaviour that damages its character as a residential academic community.

The College encourages everyone who chooses to drink alcohol to do so responsibly, and not to abuse it. It is both wrong and dangerous to encourage others to drink more than they ought or wish to by pressing them to participate in competitive drinking games, or in forms of initiation to student societies. Organisers of student events should always make sure that there are plenty of good quality, alcohol-free drinks available. The same is true for private student gatherings.

Those responsible for organising College functions - such as the JCR, the SBR, and College clubs and societies - should ensure that excessive quantities of alcohol are not available, and that only sensible drinking takes place. All College functions are expected to operate within the spirit of the College's premises licence, and the government's Code on Responsible Drinking. The Dean of College will not authorise

any function or private party which may involve or lead to binge drinking (defined as eight or more units of alcohol in a single session for men; six for women). College clubs and societies are expected to expand their range of social events to those that do not include alcohol. In particular, college sporting societies are expected to discourage any necessary link between participation in their activities and the consumption of alcohol. It is well documented that alcohol adversely affects sports performance and recovery. The College discourages any special promotions by College clubs and societies involving the consumption of spirits.

When offering both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, food should also be served, preferably based on carbohydrate and fat.

Any College event, including dinner in Hall, should be enjoyable and civilised for all present – and this can only happen if individuals take responsibility for their own behaviour. Everyone is expected to treat the consumption of alcohol at these events in a way that is appropriate to the tone of the occasion. Diners should exercise restraint and not drink to excess; hosts should look after their guests and friends look after one another; everybody should show consideration towards the staff.

Students who repeatedly fail to exercise self-restraint will be asked to see their Tutor to identify the underlying problems and discuss solutions, perhaps in collaboration with the College Nurse or their GP.

Alcohol lies behind many of the instances of bad behaviour that harm the character of the College. These include unsociable noise, damage to property, litter and mess, and inappropriate or discourteous behaviour towards other students, staff or members of the public. They often lead to the imposition of penalties by the Dean, as explained in his Statement of Practice.

The College treats certain kinds of conduct involving alcohol as disciplinary offences. No member of the College may be drunk and disorderly, let alone drunk to the point of incapacity. These offences routinely lead to the imposition of penalties by the Dean. They are regarded as incompatible with ordinary adult behaviour in an academic institution and, in public, would probably lead to arrest by the police. The College is particularly intolerant of any conduct that involves forced drinking or participation in events organised by drinking societies. The penalties imposed for such conduct tend to be at the upper end of the Dean's scale.

The College Bar staff have a responsibility to ensure that College members and their guests do not drink to excess; those who do will be refused further service and may be asked to leave the Bar. It is illegal for Bar staff to serve someone who is clearly inebriated.

Like many things in life, alcohol can be safe and enjoyable when consumed in moderation. Take care of your own consumption and be responsible in relation to that of others.

Health and safety issues

There is no “safe” limit for drinking and some people react badly to alcohol even in small quantities. Government guidelines, however, advise that individuals should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2-3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of wine or a pint of 4% beer). “Regularly” means drinking every day or most days of the week. As a general rule 1 unit is half a pint of beer, lager or cider, a small glass (125ml) of 13% wine, or a 25 ml measure of spirit. Spread over a week, the guidelines advise a maximum of about 14 units for women and 21 units for men.

The term “binge drinking” usually refers to drinking lots of alcohol in a short space of time or drinking to get drunk. Researchers define binge drinking as consuming eight or more units in a single session for men and six or more for women.

This is bad for your health and potentially very dangerous. It often leads to behaviour that puts you and other people at risk.

Regularly exceeding these limits increases the risk of certain chronic diseases and alcohol-related problems, including fatigue, depression, weight gain and poor sleep. Excessive consumption can lead to anti-social conduct, aggression, intimidation or violence. Long-term excessive use increases the risk of liver damage, heart disease, brain damage, some cancers and several disorders of the reproductive system and sexual organs.

The more the recommended limits are exceeded, the greater the risk to your health.

Some useful information on the amount of alcohol in commercial drinks can be found on the Drinkaware web site (<http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>) and wider advice from the Portman Group web site (<http://www.portmangroup.org.uk/>).

Managing alcohol safely

It takes your body about an hour to process one unit of alcohol, so you need to pace your drinking so that your body can cope. Also, metabolisms vary, so you need to learn how much you personally can safely drink while still remaining in control of yourself and the social situation.

1. **Eat before drinking:** food soaks up alcohol, slowing it down on its way into the bloodstream. It will provide more energy, and lessen the effects the next day.
2. **Drink lighter beers:** stronger continental beers are popular, but make for a messy night and a bigger hangover. The difference between a pint of 5% lager, and a 3.5% or 4% one is one unit.
3. **Set a drinks limit:** plan what to drink in an evening and stick to it.
4. **Have a strategic soft drink:** this keeps the body hydrated, and will lessen the effects the next day.
5. **Avoid drinking in rounds:** this can often mean drinking at a faster pace set by another one of the group.

6. **Be your own person:** nobody should feel as though they should have to drink something if they don't want to, and real friends should respect each other's wishes.
7. **Keep track of what you've had:** it is hard to say "that's my limit tonight" if you don't know how much you've had.
8. **Use more mixers:** diluting a drink with another mixer will make it last longer, and lessen the effects.
9. **Drink smaller drinks:** A large glass of wine in most bars is equivalent to a third of a bottle!
10. **Plan your journey home:** Don't leave it to chance—think about how you're going to get home, and who with, before you go out. Make arrangements before you start drinking, and make sure you don't get left to walk home alone.

The effects of alcohol can start within ten minutes and depending on the individual can last for many hours. Slurred speech, vomiting, loss of balance and distorted vision are just some of the more immediate effects of drinking on the body and, if you consume too much at once, so is unconsciousness. Alcohol drunk in gross excess at one time affects the body by depressing the brain and irritating the stomach. Someone who has drunk so much alcohol that he or she either vomits or collapses unconscious, is at risk of vomiting when "asleep" and inhaling their own vomit which could lead to asphyxiation. Choking to death is a real risk.

Remember that it is possible to remain under the influence of alcohol the morning after a heavy drinking bout. The Department of Health advises taking a 48-hour break from alcohol after a heavy drinking session to allow your body to recover.

You should not drink alcohol at all if:

- You might be in the early stages of pregnancy
- You will be working with equipment in a practical class, operating machinery
- You may be driving a car. (CUSU has a policy that no-one should drive on official CUSU business within 48 hours of drinking.)

Getting help

Alcohol is addictive. There is strong evidence that abuse of alcohol and alcohol dependency may stem from drinking in order to relieve stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts – all of which are not uncommon amongst a student population, and for all of which help is available. Alcohol is a depressant. It can exacerbate pre-existing depressive conditions as well as precipitate them. If your drinking habits are affecting your life and work, then you should ask for help with the issues underlying your drinking. If you, or one or more of your friends, are in this situation, the following organisations can advise you:

- The College Nurse, the Chaplain, your Tutor
- Your own GP
- University Counselling Service (01223 332865)
<http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/alcohol.html>

- The Cambridge Drug And Alcohol Service self referrals (01223 723069)
- www.cambsdaat.org Offers a comprehensive range of services for people experiencing difficulties with alcohol
- The Student Advice Service (01223 746999)
- www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk (e-mail advice@studentadvice.cam.ac.uk)
- **Drinksense** www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/drinksense-cambridge.htm A local charity providing counselling, education and support for people with alcohol-related problems
- Further information on alcohol (and drugs) is available on <http://www.talktofrank.com/>

Personal safety when drinking

Around 40% of A&E admissions are alcohol-related. Between midnight and 05:00 that figure rises to 70%. Being under the influence of drink puts you at greater risk of physical or sexual assault.

If you are going out with a group of friends, be wary of the risks of pre-drinking. It is best avoided, and very unwise indeed on an empty stomach. Most things that go wrong on a trip out to a club start with pre-drinking. You may feel fine when you leave College but soon be in a bad way once you are out.

If you are out in a group, don't abandon a member of the group and if one of you gets badly drunk, be sure to bring him or her back to College to the Porters. They will know best how to help. It is very dangerous to leave a badly drunken person on his or her own, or for him or her to be looked after by a person who has been drinking or who may not know how to look after him or her properly. The College has a carer scheme in place to ensure the safety of badly drunken students.

Spiking of drinks with disabling drugs is an infrequent occurrence but nevertheless one of which you should be aware. It is better not to accept drinks that you have not seen being poured from people you do not know or trust.

Antisocial behaviour is often associated with excessive drinking. Although alcohol is a depressant it can exaggerate whatever mood you are in when you start drinking. When drunk, you may unwittingly seem more threatening to others, influencing how they react to you. Avoiding violence when not fully in control of yourself can be difficult; your perceptions will be dulled, it will take you longer to react and think things through, and your judgement may be reduced. Aim to talk your way out of a situation, avoiding aggressive language, and using open body language. Bear in mind that when you have been drinking, you will be more vulnerable to difficulties and danger than when sober.

Bear in mind also that you may do things when you are drunk that you would never consider doing when you are sober. These can have life-changing consequences that neither you nor the College can put right.