



## A programme to reduce excessive alcohol consumption among college students in Ireland

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A TRADITION OF  
INDEPENDENT  
THINKING



University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

# About the intervention



REACT – Responding to  
Excessive Alcohol Consumption  
in Third-level

# Background



Alcohol has been cited as the **number one** public health problem facing colleges today (Wechsler et al, 2002)

College students reportedly drink more than their non-college peers (White and Hingson, 2013)

Ireland

CLAN Survey 2002-2003 – a pattern of **high-risk drinking the norm** among college students in Ireland (Hope et al, 2005)

UCC study (Davoren et al, 2015) – almost **two-thirds of students** showed signs of hazardous drinking and reduced **gender gap**

College sector

No **standardised or comprehensive programme** tackling alcohol consumption among college students in Ireland (ad hoc measures)

# REACT programme

Developed in 2015, **first programme** of its kind in Ireland

Consists of a suite of **mandatory** and **optional** action points which participating colleges are required to implement



Award and accreditation

Development consisted of a **three-step** process



Literature review



Knowledge exchange



Expert consultation

Informed by **4 pillars** of National Substance Misuse Strategy



Supply



Prevention



Rehabilitation



Research

STUDY PROTOCOL

Open Access



# Responding to excessive alcohol consumption in third-level (REACT): a study protocol

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## Abstract

**Background:** Problem alcohol use is an ongoing, worldwide phenomenon of considerable concern. Throughout the past 20 years, national policies have noted the importance of students when tackling alcohol consumption. Considering alcohol is a multifaceted issue, a multi-component response is required to combat its excessive use. This protocol sets out the approach used for developing, implementing and evaluating the REACT (Responding to Excessive Alcohol Consumption in Third-level) Programme.

**Methods/design:** This evaluation will provide the evidence base for programme development, implementation and improvement. Stage one involved defining the multi-component intervention. This was developed following a systematic review of existing literature and a Delphi-consensus workshop involving university students, staff and relevant stakeholders. Following this, the programme is being implemented across the Higher Education sector in Ireland. A number of Higher Education Institutes have declined the invitation to participate in the programme. These institutions will act as control sites. Each intervention site will have a steering committee whose membership will include a mix of students and academic and student service staff. This steering committee will report to the REACT research team on the implementation of mandatory and optional action points at local sites. An online cross-sectional study at baseline and two-years post intervention will be utilised to determine the impact of the REACT programme. The impact assessment will focus on (1) whether the intervention has reduced alcohol consumption among third-level students (2); whether the programme altered students attitudes toward alcohol and (3) whether the programme has decreased the second-hand effects associated with excessive consumption. Finally, qualitative research will focus on factors influencing the take-up and implementation of this programme as well as students' views on the initiative.

**Discussion:** Alcohol consumption has remained on the policy agenda at both national and international level over recent decades. Students are regularly among the highest alcohol consumers, yet university management and public policymakers struggle to tackle this burgeoning issue. The REACT Programme provides a structure to translate policy into practice for those seeking to reduce hazardous alcohol consumption and related harms among third-level students.

**Keywords:** Students, Alcohol, Intervention, University, Ireland, Multi-component, Complex

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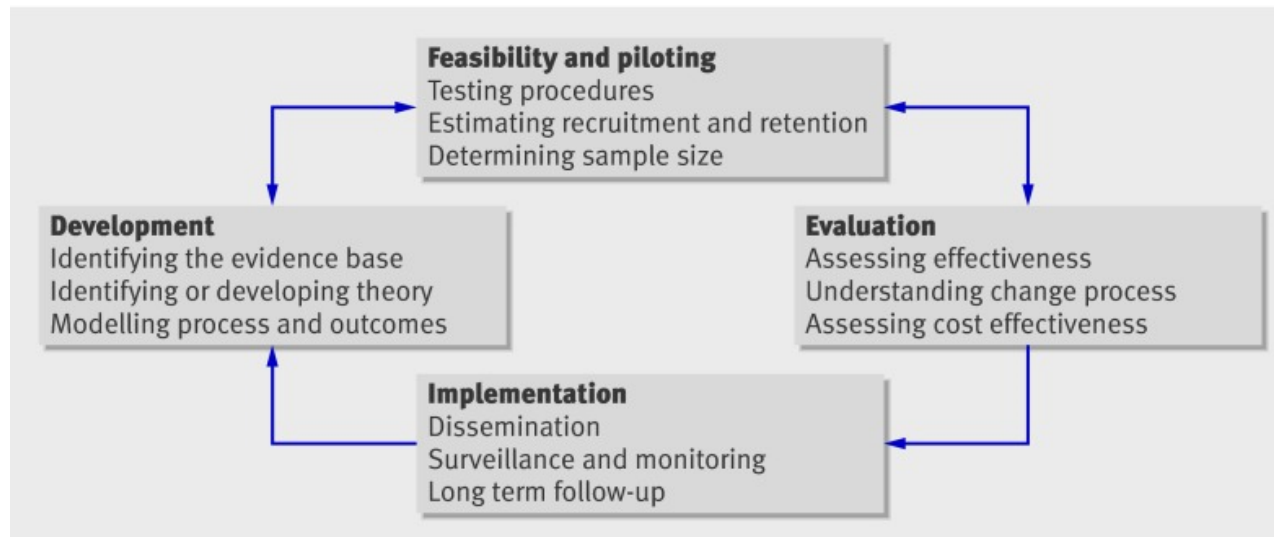


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Protocol paper

# Guiding framework

## MRC framework





# Theoretical framework

## Social ecological model

Individual behaviour is shaped by factors at multiple levels



# Mandatory and optional action points

This table details the **MANDATORY** Action Points of the REACT Award Scheme. A college must complete **ALL** aspects of the below points before application for the award

| ACTION POINT  | DESCRIPTION  |
|---|--|
| 1. All incoming students are required to take an online brief intervention tool                               | All incoming students are required to take ePUB (or other brief intervention tool if already in place) with the stats being presented to a relevant college committee on an <b>annual</b> basis <sup>1</sup> |
| 2. Develop a college alcohol policy in line with the 'National Framework to Develop A College Alcohol Policy' | Develop a college alcohol policy in line with the 'National Framework to Develop A College Alcohol Policy' <sup>2</sup>  |

This table details the **OPTIONAL** Action Points of the REACT Award Scheme.

| ACTION POINT   | DESCRIPTION  |
|--|--|
| 3. President of the college commits to the REACT programme   | The President of the college actively pursuing the criteria  |
| 4. Form a Steering Committee of staff and students, chaired by a senior college official, that meet twice a year (minimum) and review the Action Plan annually | Form a Steering Committee:<br>a) Have student and staff representation<br>b) Be chaired by a senior college official<br>c) Have a member of the Alcohol Task Force as a member<br>d) Meet a <b>minimum</b> of twice a year<br>e) Review the college Alcohol Policy annually  |
| 5. Safety issues in the context of alcohol must be considered while planning all large scale students events   | An agenda item of alcohol safety and Clubs planning meeting be available. E.g. College B&B   |
| 6. Establish a tracking and reporting mechanism for key alcohol related harm indicators  | Establish a tracking and reporting mechanism for key alcohol related harm indicators: anti-social behaviour, harm to the environment, etc.   |
| 7. The college completes its own evaluation of the effectiveness of the alcohol action plan every 3 years  | The college devises and carries out an evaluation of the effectiveness of the alcohol action plan every 3 years  |
| 8. Train relevant staff in Brief Intervention Training   | Ensure key individuals in student support services receive training in Brief Intervention Training   |
| 1. Designate a specific college official to have overall responsibility for the REACT project  | Designate a specific college official to have overall responsibility for the colleges REACT programme  |
| 2. Develop a calendar of events in conjunction with local Students' Union  | Develop a calendar of events in conjunction with local Students' Union which requires proactive planning   |
| 3. Develop reporting mechanism for tracking high risk promotions by local licensees  | Develop reporting mechanism for tracking high risk promotions by local licensees <sup>5</sup>  |
| 4. REACT Training Toolkit is utilised at class rep training to provide them with relevant safety information   | a) The REACT Training Toolkit (available via the WebApp) is utilised for a session at class rep training <b>annually</b> with a special emphasis placed upon safety <sup>6</sup><br>b) Members of Clubs and Societies for which this would hold relevance in event planning are invited to this training   |
| 5. Alcohol counselling service available to students   | Provide an alcohol counselling service to the student body   |
| 6. Hold an annual meeting with local stakeholders  | Hold a minimum of <b>one</b> meeting <b>annually</b> with local stakeholders (e.g. local Gardaí, local residents, local businesses, etc.) as a forum to discuss grievances and suggestions related to students excessive alcohol consumption   |
| 7. Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external alcohol support services for students                                 | Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external alcohol support services for students. <sup>7</sup> In addition:<br>a) The pathway will include and promote a self-referral route for students<br>b) Training and information relating to the pathway is to be offered to front line staff of the college every <b>two</b> years |
| 8. Provide alcohol free housing <b>and</b> alcohol free social spaces  | Provide:<br>a) alcohol free housing <sup>8</sup><br>b) alcohol free social spaces  |





# Mandatory action points

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| ACTION POINT   | DESCRIPTION   |
|--|---|
| 1. All incoming students are required to take an online brief intervention tool  | All incoming students are required to take ePUB (or other brief intervention tool if already in place) with the stats being presented to a relevant college committee on an <b>annual</b> basis <sup>1</sup>  |
| 2. Develop a college alcohol policy in line with the 'National Framework to Develop A College Alcohol Policy'  | Develop a college alcohol policy in line with the 'National Framework to Develop A College Alcohol Policy' <sup>2</sup>   |
| 3. President of the college commits to the REACT programme   | The President of the college (or equivalent management figure) signs a 3 year commitment to the college actively pursuing the criteria set out by the REACT programmes Action Point List  |
| 4. Form a Steering Committee of staff and students, chaired by a senior college official, that meet twice a year (minimum) and review the Action Plan annually | Form a Steering Committee which will:<br>a) Have student and staff representation<br>b) Be chaired by a senior college official<br>c) Have a member of the Gardaí, a member of the local council & a member of the Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force as committee members<br>d) Meet a <b>minimum</b> of twice a year<br>e) Review the college Alcohol Action Plan <b>annually</b> |
| 5. Safety issues in the context of alcohol must be considered while planning all large scale students events   | An agenda item of alcohol & safety issues must be present and discussed on the agenda of all SU, Societies and Clubs planning meetings related to any large scale student entertainment events at which alcohol will be available. E.g. College Balls, Gigs, R&G, etc.  |
| 6. Establish a tracking and reporting mechanism for key alcohol related harm indicators  | Establish a tracking and reporting mechanism that will track key alcohol related harm indicators e.g. injuries, anti-social behaviour, harm to relationships, studies, etc. <sup>3</sup>  |
| 7. The college completes its own evaluation of the effectiveness of the alcohol action plan every 3 years  | The college devises and completes an evaluation strategy to monitor the effectiveness of the alcohol action plan every 3 years  |
| 8. Train relevant staff in Brief Intervention Training   | Ensure key individuals in student health and the student experience are able to deliver Brief Intervention around alcohol misuse <b>and</b> have a clear understanding of the internal referral pathways <sup>4</sup>   |



Requiring a proportion of incoming students to take an online brief intervention tool (ePub)

Establishing a dedicated Steering Committee with staff, student and community representation

Developing a college alcohol policy in line with national framework

# Optional action points

This table details the **OPTIONAL** Action Points of the REACT Award Scheme.

| ACTION POINT   | DESCRIPTION  |
|--|--|
| 1. Designate a specific college official to have overall responsibility for the REACT project                                  | Designate a specific college official to have overall responsibility for the colleges REACT programme  |
| 2. Develop a calendar of events in conjunction with local Students' Union  | Develop a calendar of events in conjunction with local Students' Union which requires proactive planning   |
| 3. Develop reporting mechanism for tracking high risk promotions by local licensees  | Develop reporting mechanism for tracking high risk promotions by local licensees <sup>5</sup>  |
| 4. REACT Training Toolkit is utilised at class rep training to provide them with relevant safety information                   | a) The REACT Training Toolkit (available via the USI app) is utilised for a session at class rep training <b>annually</b> with a special emphasis placed upon safety <sup>4</sup><br>b) Members of Clubs and Societies for which they would hold relevance in event planning are invited to this training  |
| 5. Alcohol counselling service available to students   | Provide an alcohol counselling service to the student body   |
| 6. Hold an annual meeting with local stakeholders  | Hold a minimum of <b>one</b> meeting <b>annually</b> with local stakeholders (e.g. local Gardaí, local residents, local businesses, etc.) as a forum to discuss grievances and suggestions related to students excessive alcohol consumption   |
| 7. Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external alcohol support services for students | Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external alcohol support services for students. <sup>7</sup> In addition:<br>a) The pathway will include and promote a self-referral route for students<br>b) Training and information relating to the pathway is to be offered to front line staff of the college every <b>two</b> years |
| 8. Provide alcohol free housing <b>and</b> alcohol free social spaces  | Provide:<br>a) alcohol free housing <sup>8</sup><br>b) alcohol free social spaces  |

Providing alcohol-free housing and alcohol-free social spaces

Providing class rep training on relevant safety information in relation to alcohol (REACT toolkit)

Providing an alcohol counselling service to students



# Implementation

10 third-level institutions  
recently received REACT  
accreditation for actively  
implementing the measures  
(end of Aug 2019)

5 universities, 4 ITs and one college



# Evaluation

## Student perceptions

Explore students' perceptions regarding the REACT programme and alcohol more generally

## Implementation

Examine factors influencing take-up and implementation of REACT among third-level institutions

## Impact

Conduct a baseline and follow-up survey (incl. AUDIT\*) to determine any changes (e.g. consumption, attitudes, etc.)

## Policy context

Examine the wider policy context regarding alcohol regulation at time of REACT

# Summary of main findings

## Students

- Continued prevalence of hazardous alcohol consumption among college students in Ireland (60%+ in both years and for males/females)
- Low awareness of own drinking among the hazardous drinkers
- Student perspectives – sceptical about the efficacy of REACT given the perceived pervasiveness of alcohol; also many viewed it as their personal responsibility to control drinking rather than that of the institution



# Summary of main findings

## Implementation

- Significant barriers faced in implementing the programme in colleges, especially regarding resources (time and personnel)
- Need for a local champion or opinion leader to drive the programme
- Importance of increasing clarity e.g. practical steps on how to implement the programme





# Summary of main findings

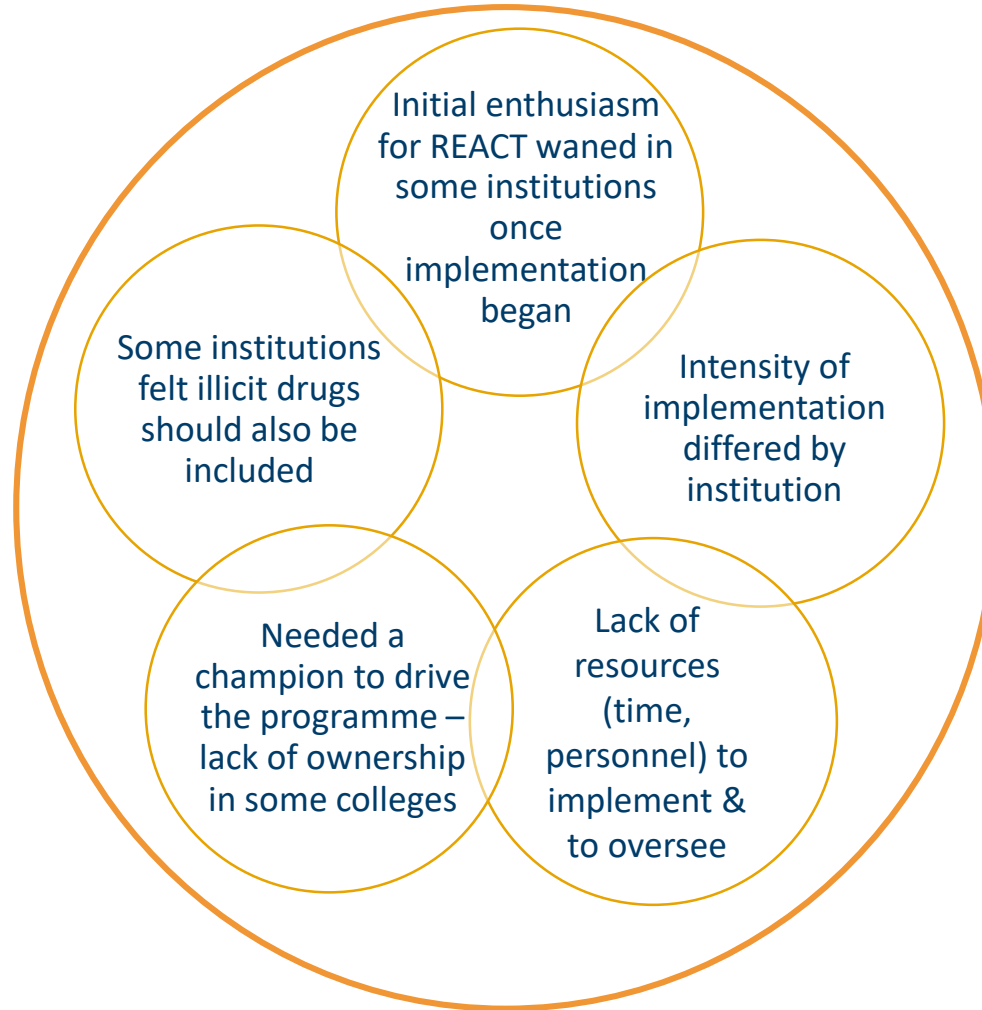
## Impact

- Lack of change in hazardous consumption levels at 2-year follow-up raises questions about efficacy of REACT
- However, low response rate of survey, short timeframe (2 years) and only one follow-up study means should remain sceptical of results



**Should REACT continue?**  
**Continue to develop and refine**  
**but critically evaluate at later**  
**time points**

# Challenges in the implementation



# Challenges in the research



# Lessons learnt

Importance of planning for **rigorous and adequately powered** evaluation study in designing complex interventions

Value of conducting a **feasibility study** before going to pilot stage (constraints of health service vs research board funding)

Need to schedule **adequate lead-in time** when planning primary research studies or surveys (it takes time)

Importance of **context** when implementing an intervention and value of an implementation strategy to accompany int.



# Parting thought

Never underestimate the importance of the particular context in which the intervention is being implemented

Also, the value of having a local champion or opinion leader to help drive the intervention – *“the new idea either finds a champion or dies”* (Rogers citing Schön, 1963)



Implementation strategy

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Thank  
you