

# **TALK CAMPAIGN EVALUATION**

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## Executive Summary

- The Drinkaware Talk Campaign aims to: i) reinforce parents' behaviour of having proactive, regular and well informed conversations with their children about alcohol before the child is 13; ii) improve the quality of conversations that parents are having with their children about the risks associated with alcohol.
- This evaluation was informed by a 'pop-up' survey (n=248) on the Drinkaware website and telephone interviews with 20 parents/carers.
- Almost three quarters of those who responded to the survey had already spoken to their child(ren) about the potential risks associated with alcohol. Of these almost two thirds had done so on at least four occasions.
- Most parents feel confident talking to their children about alcohol. But they are anxious about striking the right balance between being open and ensuring that their children learn a sensible approach towards alcohol, yet not normalising it to such an extent their children become ambivalent to the potential risks associated with drinking.
- Most of the parents interviewed had accessed the Drinkaware website because they were concerned about their own or another family member's drinking, not because they were seeking advice about children and alcohol.
- The majority of parents surveyed agreed /strongly agreed with the statement *'I have learnt something new about alcohol'*. Interviewees described the website as user friendly, interesting and easy to navigate, and stated it had given them answers to questions that they had found it difficult to deal with.
- Information about the effect of alcohol on a child's developing body was considered the most useful content. Some of the interviewees criticised the website as too text-heavy and as not accessible for those for whom English is not a first language; and the advice as too 'middle class' or elitist in its tone.
- Parents suggested that the website needs to include more material aimed at children themselves, such as 'real life' video clips from young people to explain the negative consequences of underage drinking - rather than just 'expert' advice aimed at adults.
- Parents need guidance about how to negotiate and agree a consistent approach towards children's exposure to alcohol with partners, other family members or adult friends who have different attitudes or practices, and how to resist peer pressure from other adults.
- The evidence of this evaluation is that the Talk Campaign has been very well received. Feedback from the research participants about the Campaign is used to identify a set of recommendations to improve its reach and effectiveness.

## **1. Background**

Recent policy attention has focused on the potential role of parents in preventing alcohol misuse by children and in supporting the introduction of alcohol to young people in safe and sensible ways. Despite Foxcroft and Lowe's (1997:227) assertion that - 'the family is the primary context for the socialisation of drinking behaviour in young people' - the role of alcohol within the family has been the subject of relatively limited research to-date. Most academic attention has focused on quantitative analysis of the links between family structure and risk and protective factors (e.g. socio-economic factors, parents with alcohol problems) rather than family relationships, with only a handful of studies addressing parents' communication and supervisory strategies (e.g. van der Vorst et al 2005, Kypri et al 2007, Valentine et al 2012). Relatively little is known about whether, and how, parents actively teach children about alcohol – particularly in the critical period of middle childhood in which young people develop their knowledge about, and experiment, with alcohol. Indeed, recent research has identified parents' own lack of understanding of the harms associated with alcohol and the need for parents to receive more advice and guidance about how to talk to their children about alcohol (Valentine et al. 2014).

In this context, the Drinkaware campaign 'Talk', targeted at parents of 9-13 year olds, aims to drive traffic to the Underage Drinking section of its website in order to: i) reinforce parents' behaviour of having proactive, regular and well informed conversations with their children about alcohol (before the child is 13); ii) improve the quality of conversations that parents are having with their children about the risks associated with alcohol.

## **2 Aims of the Evaluation**

1. To explore parents/carers' response to the Talk campaign and to assess the quality and effectiveness of its resources.
2. To identify what resources or strategies parents/carers use to inform quality conversations with their children about alcohol.
3. To explore what resources or strategies parents/carers have found to be helpful and unhelpful when talking to their children.
4. To identify whether the parents/carers, when talking to their children, perceive any gender or age differences in terms of the effectiveness of the resources and strategies, and the outcomes for their child/children.
5. To identify any barriers that prevent parents/carers from talking to their children about alcohol.

6. To interrogate whether any of the parents/carers' own informal or self-developed strategies might be scaled-up or developed by Drinkaware to improve its resources to be shared with other parents through the website.

7. To make recommendations as to how Drinkaware can effectively empower parents/carers to offer quality information and guidance that may prevent underage drinking and help children and young people to avoid alcohol harm

### **3. Research Design**

A short online pop up survey (n=248) on the Underage section of the Drinkaware website was used to explore what parents/carers have learned on the Talk site and if their commitment to, and strategies for, communicating with their children had changed as a result. Respondents were invited to volunteer to take part in a follow up telephone interview – 33 people agreed they were willing to be contacted. Of these, 20 were interviewed on the phone between mid to late November/early December. A summary of the social characteristics of the survey participants and interviewees is provided in Appendix A. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews explored the parent/carers':

- Experiences of discussing alcohol with their children.
- The parents/carers' views on whether their own drinking may influence children's approach to drinking – and whether they have any particular strategies in this regard.
- Perceptions of the interviewees' own and their children's needs/wants in terms of alcohol information?
- Initial responses to the campaign
- Motivations for visiting the website
- Effect of the visit to the website on their intended or actual parenting with respect to drinking?
- Whether any of the Talk resources were found to be unhelpful and if so why? What barriers remain in terms of preventing parents/carers talking to their children about alcohol or affect the outcomes of parental strategies.
- Areas where the website worked well
- Areas where the website could be improved

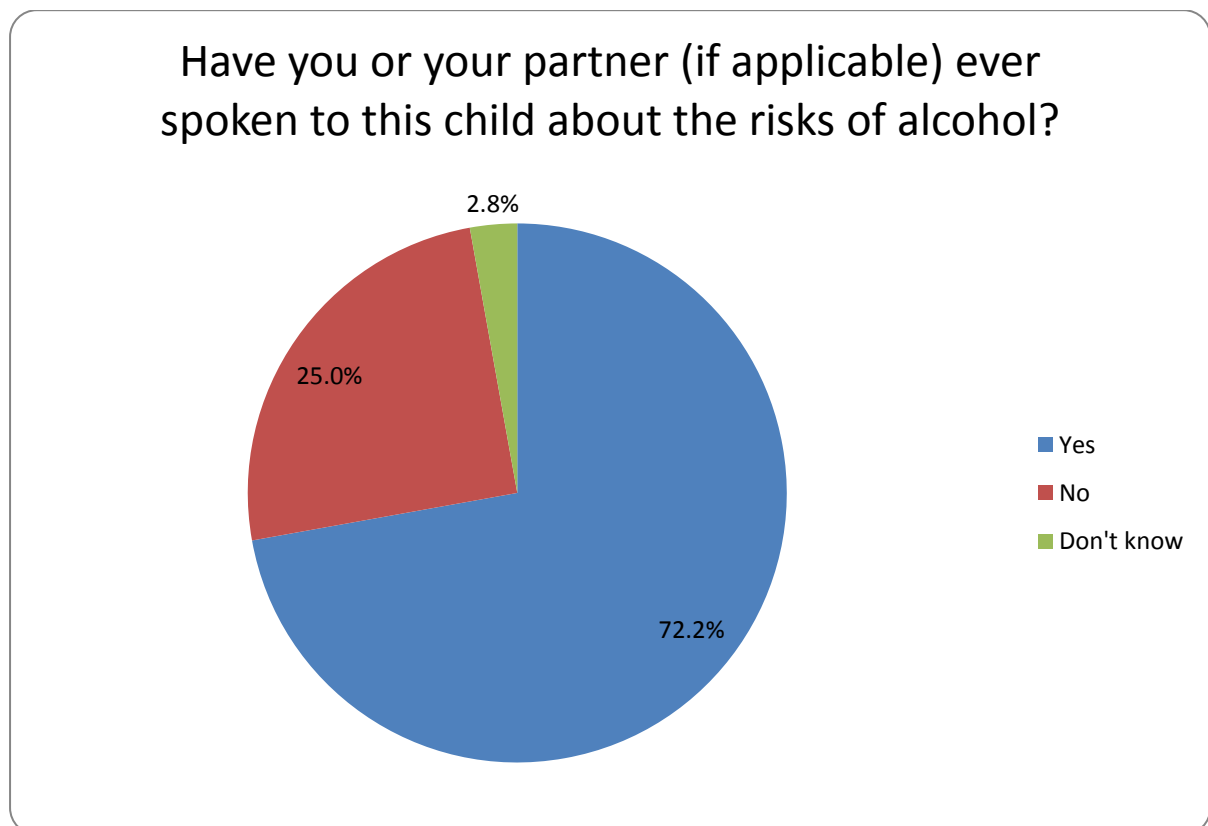
The interviewer also asked the interviewees if it would be possible to conduct a brief interview with a child provided he/she also consented to take part in the research.

Although several parents agreed to this in principle, in practice it was only possible to speak to two children as the others did not consent or did not answer the phone at the arranged time of the interview. The two interviews which did take place explored children's perceptions and experiences of talking with their parents about drinking and their knowledge of the harms associated with alcohol. Brief summaries of these interviews are provided in Appendix B.

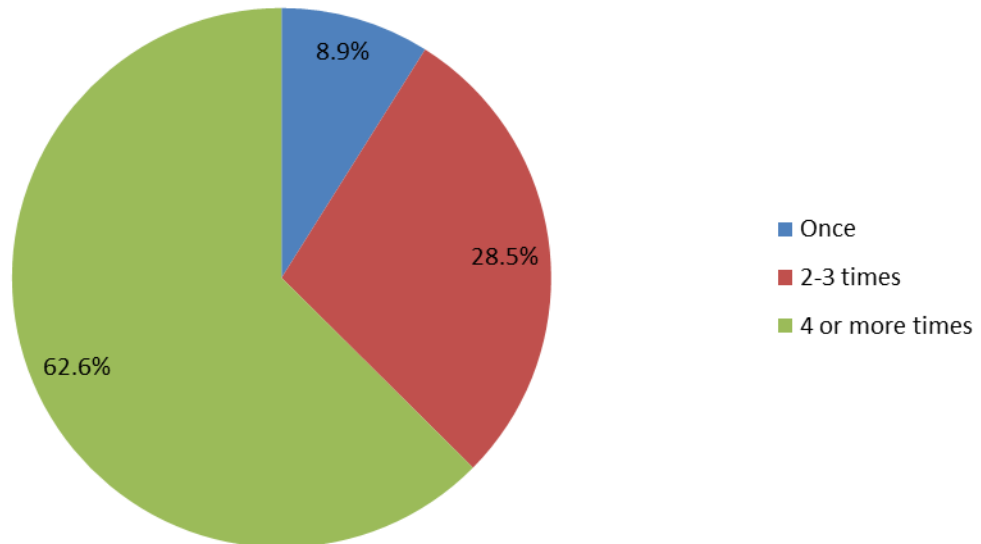
All the interviews were transcribed and analysed. Quotations used in this article are verbatim and have been anonymised (e.g. names of people, places and other specific details which may compromise the identity of the interviewees have been changed).

#### 4. How Confident Do Parents Feel About Talking About Alcohol With Children?

Almost three quarters of the parents/carers (72.2 per cent) who responded to the survey had already spoken to their child(ren) about the potential risks associated with alcohol. Of these parents almost two thirds (62.6 per cent) had done so on at least four occasions and almost all of them (91.1 per cent) had done so two or three times. The main reasons for not talking to children about alcohol was because their offspring were too young (41.3 per cent) or they are not interested (27 per cent).



## Approximately, how many times have you spoken to this child about alcohol?



In a contemporary context, where alcohol consumption is constituted as a normal part of everyday life, and underage drinking in teenage years is seen as almost a rite of passage to adulthood, the key question for most contemporary parents is not how should they discourage their children from drinking alcohol, but how they might best introduce them to it in order to encourage them to adopt a sensible approach to alcohol as they grow up. Many of the parents who were interviewed felt quite comfortable talking to their children about alcohol because they said that they have open and honest relationships with their offspring. This was contrasted with some interviewees' memories of their own childhoods where it was more common for adults to have hierarchical or authoritarian relationships with their children.

Several parents described using memories of their own childhoods as a resource to guide them as to how not to approach alcohol with their children. Or drew on observations of how they have seen others parent unsuccessfully in relation to alcohol. For these parents being too strict or too secretive about alcohol – rather than protecting children from experimenting – was understood to have the potential to rebound because forbidding drinking might actually serve to make experimentation seem more exciting. Rather, these parents considered that being open with their children about drinking and normalising alcohol was the most appropriate strategy to deal with it in the context of family life.

My father had a lot of problems with alcohol when I was growing up...So I decided that I wasn't going to go down that route because it was not spoken about and we weren't allowed [to drink]. So when we could drink we all went a bit crazy you

know...[Referring to discussing alcohol with her own children] we try and do it so matter of fact, so it's not a big deal. Do you see what I'm getting at? So the idea is...it's something you discuss but it's not something exciting. So that it's almost as boring as if - what do you want for breakfast, something that's really dull...As soon as you hide it, it becomes exciting doesn't it? It becomes something forbidden...something you shouldn't be doing. If you have it out in the open it becomes very normal and boring. If it's normal and boring you're not rebelling in any way. I mean time will tell, she's young at the moment (mother).

I do think that that a vice-like hold on them is making them rebel. I can see it happening already where the trust isn't there, like Naomi [her daughter's friend] for example she's scared to tell her Mum where she's going, who she's going with in case Mum says no. So the lies are starting and she's getting caught out. There's this distrust building up whereas Abigail [her daughter] is very open with me...I'm allowing her. I'm saying: 'Right, okay, you can go to this particular place...Here's when you come in. Here's how often you text me. Here's what you tell me'. She has been doing all that. So that's why I've been letting the leash loose a wee bit with her, because I trust her because she's allowing me to - but she knows that if the trust is broken down, the consequences...- she'll not be able to do anything after that (mother).

Other parents however expressed more anxiety about striking the right balance between being open and ensuring that children learn a sensible approach to alcohol yet not normalising alcohol to such an extent that children become ambivalent to the potential risks of drinking, or they learn to drink at an early age such that it becomes habitual. These mothers both describe how they drank too much in their youth – one attributes this to her own parents being too strict; and the other to her parents being too relaxed about alcohol.

I know even by law if you're inside your own home, even from the age of five you can give a child alcohol actually. So I know it's not against the law to give a child alcohol although just something in you just thinks, it's not right to be teaching them these habits from such a young age because it does become habit then...So part of me thinks, no, I don't want to encourage him to drink, I certainly don't want to be giving him alcohol. But then the other part of me thinks I see other adults who have raised kids; who are adults now that I've watched them growing up and their parents have let them have small amounts of alcohol at home and they've grown up perfectly fine and they can drink sensibly. In fact, one friend that I've got; both of her kids are adults now and she's always been very open with them. She's allowed them to have maybe a lager or alcopops or things at home. They've both grown up and they don't drink which is quite funny. Whereas on the other hand like I say I did drink from a young age. I would never have been allowed to have alcohol in the home and my mum was very strict in that way. But she didn't really



discuss things with us either thought, it was just, no you don't get it. I think - well then I went right off the rails and I did end up drinking from a young age. So it's hard to try and strike the balance (mother).

My parents they never hid the fact that they drank alcohol from me, again, it was in circumstances very similar to myself. My Mum had a glass...if we had a Chinese sort of thing my mum would have one then. My Dad would have a couple of cans on a Friday night or whatever. But my Dad would also go to the pub twice a week so it was out of the house but we knew where he was. By the time I was a teenager I was allowed a glass of wine with my Christmas dinner, a table wine. I was certainly allowed to have a glass of lager if everybody was having one sort of thing and it was a family occasion sort of thing, nothing more than that. It was never hidden from me, it was never kept from me. Again, if I asked to taste to it I would be allowed to taste it. I think that they were right in that approach but it still didn't stop me from going out and drinking. So it's been - you're seeing these adverts in the papers and different things saying, if you hide alcohol from your child completely they're going to go out and drink. Well my experience is the complete opposite, they're going to go and do it anyway. Well that's certainly what I did, it's certainly what my husband did and I think the culture of where we are in [name of place removed] is that that is what's going to happen. Therefore, I think my approach to try and educate as much as possible to make her realise how to keep herself safe, how to keep her friends safe and be open and honest with us. If she wants to drink, she wants to taste it and whatever, I would rather she came to me for it than went to her friends. However, I'm absolutely 100 per cent certain that was my Mum's plan as well and that didn't work for her so - that's where I'm struggling, I don't know where to go (mother).

Given these experiences, while most of the parents interviewed felt comfortable talking to their children about alcohol, they also recognised that they would benefit from guidance and advice from organisations such as Drinkaware.

## **5. Why Parents Need Advice or Access The Drinkaware Web Site**

Most of the parents interviewed had accessed the Drinkaware website because they were concerned about their own or another family member's drinking. They were primarily seeking guidance to evaluate or deal with their own, or another adult's problem drinking and had stumbled unintentionally upon the Drinkaware information about underage drinking. These parents were very appreciative about finding guidance about how to talk to young people recognising the importance of addressing alcohol with their children because of such family histories. Indeed, studies of alcohol consumption within families suggests that parents can unintentionally model drinking practices to their children by drinking in front of them, teaching them to serve alcohol to family members or guests, and encouraging them to imitate adult drinking practices by giving them non-alcoholic cocktails that look like alcoholics drink or to drink shots of water rather than vodka. The 'modelling' of

behaviours such as drinking or gambling to excess has been dubbed an intergenerational multiplier effect. It commonly follows gender lines. For example a family study has found that mothers' health-risk lifestyles are only passed on to girls, whereas father's health-risk lifestyles are only transmitted to boys (Wickrama et al, 1999). The researchers suggested that this pattern occurs because within families children and parents are more likely to spend time interacting in same-gender pairs (Wickrama et al, 1999). In the field of gambling studies having a father who is a problem gambler has been identified as increasing the risk that a son will follow suit, more than having a mother who is a problem gambler raises the likelihood that a daughter will do so (Walters 2001, Dowling et al. 2010). However, a study of alcohol consumption in families (Valentine et al 2012, 2014) found that drinking practices were more commonly modelled from father to daughter than from father to son or mother to daughter. This is perhaps because fathers tend to consume more alcohol than do mothers; and young girls are more interested in the lives of adults and therefore keen to imitate parental behaviour than are boys.

While the parents/carers interviewed for this evaluation were keen to share information about the Talk information more widely amongst family and social circles it also suggests that Drinkaware could do more to promote awareness of its resources to a wider constituency beyond those concerned about problem adult drinking.

I was just curious as much as anything else to see where information's going, what's available now... Doctors always now go on about drinking too much so I had a look at that as well to see how my drinking pattern is, in some perspective and what if anything you can monitor to see whether you're okay or not.(father)

I was looking to the Drinkaware site more for him [her husband who she thinks has an alcohol problem] to be honest and then came across all the underage and teenage drinking information (mother)

I'd been talking to somebody at my work about it [problems with alcohol] and she seemed a bit - she seemed just as if she wasn't wanting to talk about it, I thought I'm going to see if there's anything that can help to bring up the subject with her. So I was just really browsing through the internet and then I came across the Drinkaware website (mother).

Those parents interviewed who had deliberately accessed the site in order to find advice about alcohol in relation to children had one of two key motivations. First they had a concern about their own child's interest in alcohol. This is significant because academic research has shown that children pick up a specific association of alcohol with friendship and sociality modelled through their parents' practices and as a consequence often want to mimic their parents' drinking.

She's quite a clever girl. So when we had wine in the house since before, she was about two she always said 'Mummy, what are you drinking?' 'It's like I'm having some wine'. So she asked to have it and we were like 'No, no, you can't have this at all'. We just tell her that she's not allowed to have it because she's not old enough (mother).

[her two children] they certainly want to know what alcohol tastes like and why people drink alcohol and what it does to people. They're curious about it... They have asked if they could have a taste or when can they have a drink of wine, things like that (mother).

In assessing how to respond to their children's interest in alcohol, interviewees described how they often talk to other parents/carers about the best approach. This had sometimes exposed differences in attitudes and practices. The Drinkaware web site had therefore been accessed by some parents anxious to assess whether their own approach to alcohol was 'right' or not.

We've [Mums at school] actually talked about it on nights out... There's been a couple who have actually said that the kids could actually ask for a small glass of wine or something at dinner or something and they've thought well maybe not just now; we'll have a look at something like that maybe in another year or something. I'm thinking I don't even want to go down that path, because we don't really - we don't have wine at dinner or anything like that, so it wouldn't be something that I would be looking at. But they're looking at doing it.

Other parents were motivated to access the Drinkaware website because they wanted to gain specific knowledge to inform conversations with their children about alcohol, rather than because they wanted to know how to raise the topic or talk about it. Here, parents were primarily seeking knowledge and information about the health risks associated with drinking underage, as most had little understanding of this compared to their familiarity with the social risks associated with drinking.

*Interviewee:* I'm happy talking to her about more or less anything. It's more that I don't know a lot of the facts and the information about it that undermines your confidence at the minute.

*Interviewer:* So in order to feel more confident, what kind of information do you want...?

*Interviewee:* I think the effect it has on the body, especially when you're younger. This probably is a bit skewed because of my experiences ... how you can tell whether you've got a healthy attitude towards it or whether it's become a problem? A bit more about social aspects and preparing her that there could be people when she's older that are drinking underage and trying to stop her from doing it.

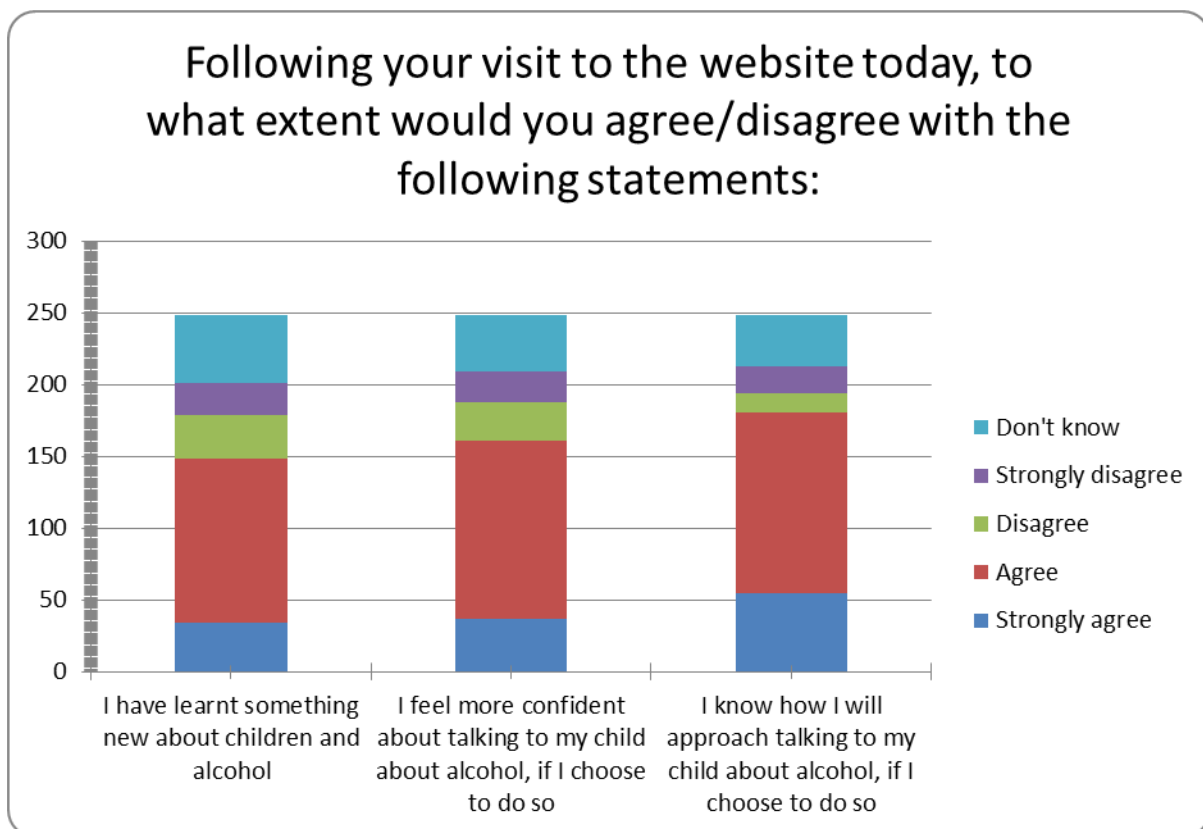
*Interviewer:* What sort of information do you think she might want? Do you think it's the same kind of information that you think she needs or do you think she'd want different information?

*Interviewee:* I think she'd probably want different information to be honest. She's asked about things like what happens when you're drunk, because she's heard other people using the word. You know, what does it feel like, what does it do to you? I sort of told her basically it's a horrible experience (mother).

The following section focuses on parents/carers' responses to the Talk Campaign outlining firstly positive feedback and then suggestions for how it might be improved.

## 6. Responses To The Talk Campaign

### 6.1 Positive Feedback



The majority of parents/carers (59.6 per cent) surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *'I have learnt something new about alcohol'*. Only 21.3 percent disagreed or disagreed strongly. Likewise, most of the parents who were interviewed were very positive about the Talk Campaign. They described it as user friendly, interesting and very easy to navigate. Several parents commented that they had spent much longer on the website than they anticipated because there were so many different resources. Parents particularly valued the range of information available,

describing it as very helpful. The drop down boxes proposing answers to questions which children commonly ask about alcohol was highly commended by most of those interviewed. Several parents observed that this element of the website provided them with answers to questions that they had found it difficult to deal with. One parent had used the interactive quiz for children and reported this was very useful because it was more child-centred. These views are reflected in the following quotations from the interviews:

I think the website's really good....it's like widgets [drop down boxes], the way you have got it laid out. It looks quite good...the different graphics and so on. It's user friendly and it is attractive ... I think there's loads of information there. It's fantastic. It's easy to find and navigate your way around for me definitely (mother).

I felt I got what I needed and, as I say, I explored a little bit more than I intended to when I started because it was interesting and easy to navigate (father)

I think the layout was pretty good, quite easy to look at and it was just quite full of information (mother)

I think the quiz was useful, it was interesting as well. I guess it's just getting down to the child's level sometimes it's better to sort of think about how they think about it (mother)

What I found helpful was the answers to the most common questions about things like what alcohol tastes like and why people drink alcohol and that type of thing.(mother)

I think there's guidance on there that will answer some of their questions that I can't answer (father)

I liked there was things on there about how to deal with peer pressure and why other people drink and why we don't - why you shouldn't. So, you could say to them like - and they say my friends are drinking, my friends' parents let them drink [the website tells you] what you could say to them [about] why you shouldn't. Yeah, I like that, that side of it was helpful (mother)

Parents appreciated the factual approach of the website. Its neutral tone was particularly welcomed because many of those interviewed feel anxious about whether they are approaching alcohol with their children in the right way. They are also fearful of being judged by other family members and friends if they do the 'wrong thing' particularly in relation to striking the right balance between establishing rules without being so strict that they alienate their children (described above).

See the information is concise, it's factual, it's good, it's to the point without hammering it home. There's no lecture, there's no guilt, there's no pressure on the website that makes you feel bad for accessing this information, there's no - oh my God this is terrible. How dare you even think about alcohol on there which I really - that's my favourite part of it if I'm really honest with you, the whole tone (mother)

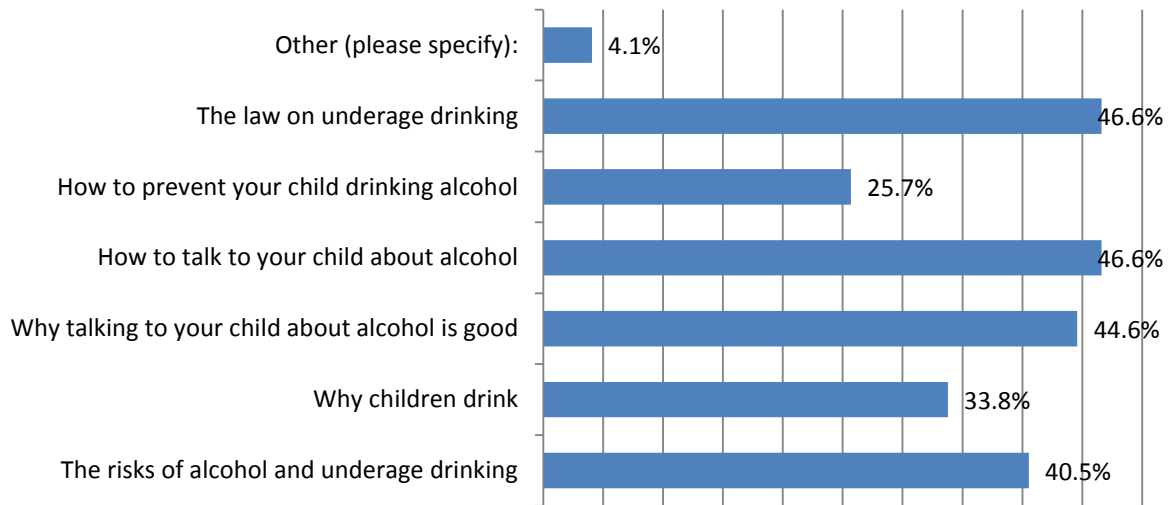
...there's positive guidance on there - a great deal of positive guidance without lecturing or hectoring style. Which of course to my mind would put young people and possibly any parents off it.(father)

Nearly two thirds of those (64.9 per cent) who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *'I feel more confident about talking to my child about alcohol, if I chose to do so*. Only 19.3 percent disagreed or disagreed strongly. Interviewees attributed their increased confidence to the improved knowledge and understanding they had gained from the Talk Campaign. As a result they felt more aware of the need to speak to their children and better equipped to do so; as well as more confident that if their child raised any questions they could not answer they were confident they could access this information from the Drinkaware website, as this parent describes:

*Interviewer*: So have you done anything differently as a result of visiting the website?

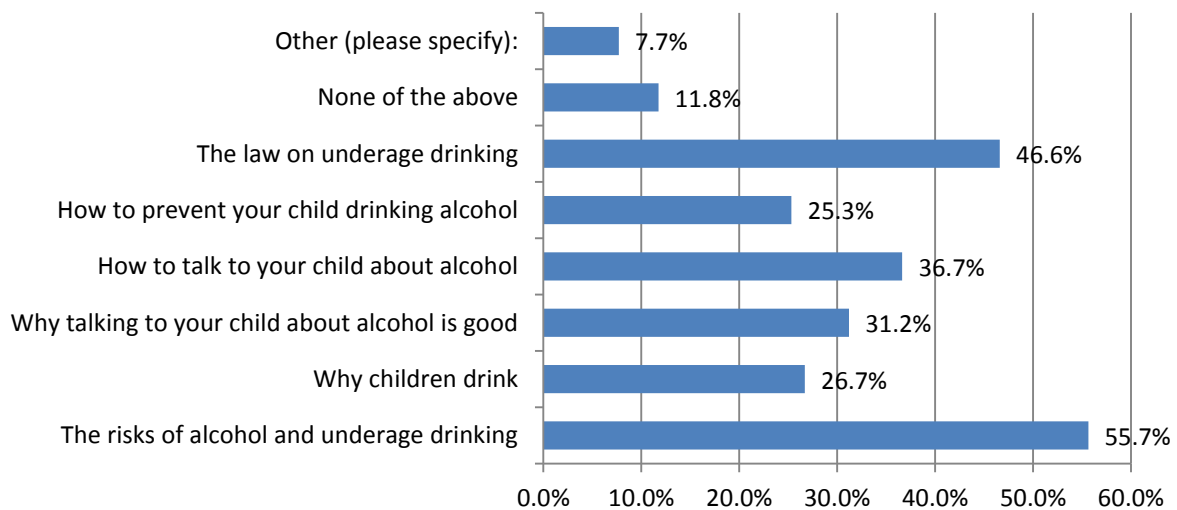
*Interviewee*: I would say the thing I've done differently is being able to discuss the issues with alcohol with facts as opposed to just me making things up or then finding out that, oh, actually that's not the case. I think it's educated me with the units kind of thing and being able to speak to kids....it's brought more knowledge to me and armed me to have more facts and to be more comfortable speaking to my daughter about it and just put it at the forefront a wee bit...It's certainly made me think about things in a different way and again realise the importance of being able to speak to my daughter about alcohol...There's information's out there if we need it. We both know where we can go if we want any more. I know where to look because I've been on that Drinkaware site (mother).

## Could you tell us specifically what new information you have learnt?



When asked what new information parents had learnt from the website the three most popular answers were *how to talk to your child about alcohol* (46.6%); *the law on underage drinking* (46.6%) and *the risks of alcohol and underage drinking* (40.5%) (respondents were able to give more than one response to this question). The two most popular types of information which the survey respondents identified that they will use when talking to their child were: '*the risks of alcohol and underage drinking*' (55.7%) and *the law on underage drinking* (46.6%).

## What information from the website will you use when talking to your child?



The interviewees particularly welcomed the information about the effect of alcohol on a child's developing body as many were unaware of the health risks. This chimes with previous academic research with children which has found they are much less familiar with the health risks of alcohol compared with the social risks and can muddle the risks of smoking and drinking (Valentine et al. 2012). Most parents were unaware of the Chief Medical Officer's guidance that children should not try alcohol until the age of 15. This age specific guidance was therefore particularly valued because parents described being very confused by competing ideas about the appropriate age to allow a child to experiment with alcohol which is evident in popular culture, the media and which they receive from other parents and their extended families.

I thought it was really good and I learned quite a bit about it that I didn't know. To be honest, you know I knew a little bit about the effects on the adult body but hadn't realised that there would be so much difference on a younger body (mother)

I've always like at Christmas and wine and stuff, I have given them, especially as the older one got to 16, given them half a glass of wine. I thought I was doing the right thing. So, I did learn that I shouldn't have done that. But that's what I learned from it really that I didn't know already (mother).

This guidance was identified by interviewees as the information on the website which had most influenced on their approach to parenting around alcohol. Some reported that this would lead them to change their behaviour as a consequence because they had either allowed an older child to drink before the age of 15 and would not now do so with a younger child; or because they had been contemplating allowing their child to try alcohol before age 15 (in some cases because other parents or relatives allowed this) but would not now do so. For other parents, the age specific guidance reinforced their belief that children should not experiment with alcohol but also it gave them the evidence they needed to justify this approach in relation to friends and relatives who may have a more liberal approach.

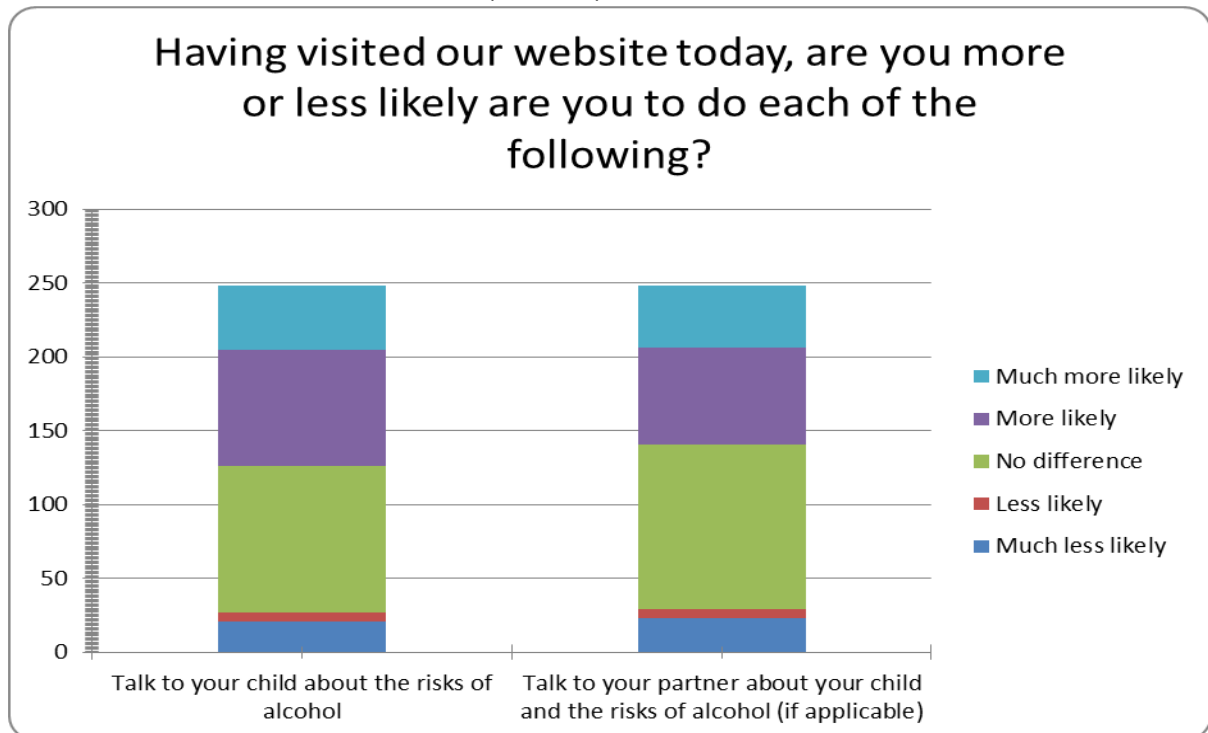
I thought it [the Talk Campaign] was really good. I thought the fact that it talks about health and the effects it can have on the developing body, that is what I always believed and I always said we mustn't let them drink anything, because while their bodies and livers are developing, it would be a really bad thing to do. That is - everything on there just confirmed what I believed. And it almost made me think we can keep going with this as well, because you start to think oh well, she's 12, maybe she could try a bit now and no, it says 15, and that's fine by me. I'll stick to that now...I think possibly I might have been thinking oh well she could perhaps try a little bit of fizz at Christmas, my 12-year-old, but no, I'm not going to. I'm going to keep on with this as long as I can. So that [the Talk Campaign] has changed my opinion on that (mother).



I think what it might be most useful for is those relatives that might be going let her have a drink, she's old enough now, you were drinking at that age, and I might say, no actually, and then I might say this website. Because I think my friends are all very similar to me and they probably have the same opinions as me, but it's those older relatives that might. I was allowed to drink at this age, not a lot obviously, but I was given hot milk with a bit of whisky in to help me sleep and things like that, and I don't want my parents giving that to them (mother)

Alongside the information about the health risks associated with alcohol parents were particularly interested in the legal information. Here, most were surprised that children are legally allowed to drink at home and in public places with a meal at ages which fall below the Chief Medical Officer's guidance for when a child should first be allowed to try alcohol. This interviewee suggests that the law in relation to children and alcohol consumption is not widely known by other parents.

They all think I'm a bit out there with it [referring to conversations with other parents about children and alcohol...Because everybody thought that you couldn't have a drink with a meal. But that was one of the things on your website, if you're 12 can you have a drink with a meal in a pub so I didn't really know about – and other people didn't really know about that... I mean it was against expectations, some of the things that everybody thought they knew but they didn't actually know.... around the law and stuff (mother).



About half (49.1 per cent) of those who responded to the survey said that having visited the web site they would be 'more likely or much more likely to talk to their child about alcohol' (43.1 per cent responded in a positive way about the likelihood of

talking to a partner). Interviewees in particular described the videos on how to talk to your child about alcohol as very helpful. Other elements that were commended were the resource packs and leaflets that could be downloaded and ordered as some parents considered it helpful to have material accessible at home rather than relying on their memories of the Talk Campaign or having to make frequent repeat visits to the website.

It's the educational things that you do which is good. You've got all the videos on there, like the one about how to talk to your child about alcohol...Then the other thing that I found really good was how you can download all the things from it. You can use resource packs, so you can keep it in your home and it's always going to be there, because I think sometimes it's easier to have something that's tangible rather than on the computer all the time (mother).

I see you could order factsheets and stuff. I think that's fantastic, because it is something that needs to be shared (mother).

Only 10.8 per cent of survey respondents said they were less or much less likely to talk to their child about alcohol having visited the website. Interviewees suggested that this was because they considered their child too young in terms of their personality and level of maturity for such conversations or he/she was not yet showing an interest in alcohol, rather than because they had been deterred from doing so by the Talk Campaign.

I've had a look at it obviously just to see if there were things that I should have been doing or should have been saying. But no, I haven't talked to him...I didn't think it was necessary at this moment in time because his views at the moment are I'm never going to drink and I'll never get in that situation. I didn't think there was any need for him to see it [information on the website]. It's not really an issue. I think his friends and his peer group are not at that stage...I know that some children are at that age, but he isn't (mother)

A number of the interviewees reported that they had already shared information about the Talk Campaign with other parents or intend to do so in the future. In this way, awareness of the website will be disseminated by word of mouth. The website information is particularly valued as a potential resource to help others who are perceived to have alcohol related problems.

*Interviewer:* Has it changed your understanding about alcohol and the way you can talk to your daughter?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, it has. I noticed the helpful tips and things like that quiz are useful to look at and I tell a lot of my friends about it... it gave me some good points and it made me think about it a bit more where I probably wouldn't have done before I read it (mother)

Have you or will you recommend it to parents or family members?

Interviewee: Well I have done, yeah....Well I run - believe it or not - I run a boys' football team and...One of the - well one of the boys had been in a bit of bother and it was a single parent, female to be honest. I think quite a protected life, really didn't have a bit of an idea about what was going on. So quick chat but I just didn't feel comfortable - it was really just after the football training. I didn't feel comfortable in terms of saying I'll meet you to discuss it just because of the male, female thing...So all I did was I just gave her reference points of the website to go and have a look at and get up to speed to enable her to have the conversation (father)

However, the fact that none of the parents interviewed knew any friends or family who were already aware of the Talk Campaign suggests that Drinkaware needs to do more to promote the campaign effectively amongst parents. Here, one parent suggested that the website needs to be disseminated via social media more effectively to reach a wider audience.

I think the facts and the factsheets and stuff worked really, really well. I do think the area for parents to speak to kids, it is really, really good. There's no other resources really that I'm aware of out there like that....So I think it would be great if this website could be used more, could be channelled more into the social media stream.

## **6.2 Critical Feedback and Suggested Improvements**

While most of those who were interviewed were very positive about the Talk Campaign a few interviewees did offer some critical feedback. Some of the comments related to presentation. Although, the web site does include some video clips and a few interactive tools such as the quiz wheel with bottle pointer that enables users to explore the risks associated with drinking, several interviewees considered the tips section (with drop down boxes) and the 'how to prevent underage drinking' sections to have too much text. These sections were also described as not colourful enough or visually stimulating.

Some interviewees suggested that the website was somewhat 'middle class', raising concerns that the emphasis on written material means that the website is not very user friendly for those with a limited education or from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those for whom English is not a first language. Likewise, the tips about how to talk to your child (described as scenarios by some of the parents) were described by one interviewee as quite elitist. In other words, they presume a certain kind of middle class family lifestyle where parents and children sit down at the table together for dinner or have the interpersonal skills and type of pre-existing familial relationships necessary to be able to hold a family meeting to develop rules about drinking. One

parent also expressed disappointment that you had to register an account or pay to access some of the downloadable resources which may deter some of the families most in need of help from obtaining this material.

*Interviewer:* Are there any areas where you think the website could be improved?

*Interviewee:* Possibly the colours, as silly as that seems. Yes, just the colours, I just think they seem quite bland and pastel, they need to be a bit bolder (mother)

There wasn't any - what would be called in the olden days, white space. You know there was just loads and loads of reading on the page. Maybe as I said brighten it up and space it out a wee bit more. I'm not very good at these things on a technical aspect. The information is great. I definitely cannot fault what it's saying it's just the way it's presented (mother)

I think just some of the real life scenarios when the child asks you a question and how you would respond to it. I just felt it was a bit formal and a bit more from an educational perspective as opposed to an everyday real life scenario. Because at the risk of sounding elitist here, I do think that there are certain parents that are going to read that and are going to need support from that but just couldn't relate to it. I mean, I'm certainly not elitist in any manner or means, so personally for me, I got stuff from it. But I do think that, for how I speak to my daughter and how I conduct myself in my home with my kids, it was just a bit too on a higher level. I think the kids that perhaps don't necessarily find themselves involved in situations with alcohol are maybe more likely to have parents that would use it but are less likely to be affected and therefore need that resource. But the kids that will need that resource and the parents that could potentially need that resource, it's maybe not user friendly for them (father).

Other parents were critical of the advice to prepare a plan to talk to children about alcohol in advance rather than waiting to deal with it when the issue arises. Guidance which involved contrived scenarios such as encouraging a child to practise saying 'no' to friends who may tempt them into underage drinking or calling a family meeting to discuss drinking rules were also considered unlikely to be successful. This was because these approaches were considered to be too educational or authoritarian and did not align with the interviewees' more open and informal parenting styles. Instead, some parents argued it was more appropriate to allow these issues to come up naturally and to address them in their 'normal' parenting style. None of the interviewees said they had taught their children to say 'no', or had deliberately called a family meeting to negotiate rules about drinking and no one intended to do so in future.

I think some of it...felt to us a little bit forced to be honest with you... and it's different for all sorts of different people but we take a very ad hoc approach to an awful lot of things, alcohol included, and coming up with scenarios where we

manufactured a situation where we could talk about it would feel difficult for us. Like I said to you, some of the ideas then soak in, don't they, and then you talk about things later on...as the situation and curiosity demand... You've got to pick your moments. That's why I think trying to judge when they are curious is better than trying to force them (father)

Several interviewees also suggested that the proposed answer to key questions section of the website could also be improved. Here again, there were concerns that some of the question/answers were not realistic enough because they do not acknowledge the complexity of 'real life' situations or the extent to which contemporary children do not automatically accept parental authority and will not take 'no' for an answer but rather will challenge their parents' arguments and press for further explanations or justifications. As such, several parents suggested that the website needed to include more material aimed at children and young people themselves, such as 'real life' video clips - particularly to demonstrate the negative consequences of underage drinking - rather than 'expert' advice aimed at adults.

I do think that when you look at it, the tough questions being answered, I'm not sure that the kind of questions that you're giving examples tend to be the ones that kids are asking. Like what does it taste like and why do you drink and stuff like that? What does it feel like? I think one thing I think what concerns kids - well that my kids are asking about it nowadays is more about how do I cope with an environment where the people are all drinking? How do I conduct myself? What does it mean? Things like that..(mother).

I think you need to look at some of the responses as well when the kids are asking questions. One of the ones - I'm actually on the website just now, because I'm at my desk. I remember thinking of a question. I thought, mm, I'm not sure about that bit. It looks really fun, why are you trying to stop me enjoying myself? Yes, it can be fun when you're fully grown blah, blah, blah. It says, name something I can do to help you enjoy yourself, but drinking isn't one of them. It's bad for you and I say no. I felt that that last line was very much like, yeah, you can do it and [it is this] but no. It's quite final and quite closed at that point. It's almost like I'm telling you it's bad for you and I am saying no instead of here's why I'm saying no. Here's what I want you to understand. Yeah, do you get it? Kids don't accept no. They don't want to just hear no. They want to know why you're saying no... maybe get some real life examples of what goes on when you're drunk. I'm sure there are plenty case studies out there and without using the fear factor but some things that girls and boys have done - real footage... With the internet access and stuff like that, they are - and TV - sadly seeing things a lot more adult and therefore they are more open to seeing things that are a bit more...I don't think just giving paragraphs and stuff works now. I think it has to be this is what happened to them on a night out - something that's specific to girls, something that's specific to boys - how it's ruined their reputation, how it's went viral on social media, what happens

in their class...but real case scenarios of when things go wrong and could go wrong. Not just I'm your mum and I'm an adult and therefore that's what you expect me to say. Does that make sense?(mother)

While parents recognised that the Talk Campaign was intended for adults most of the interviewees were concerned that there is lack of accessible child-centred material for parents and/or teachers to use with children or for children to access on their own. If developed it was also pointed out that such child-centred web page content would need to use appropriate 'street' language which would resonate with young people, rather than be educational in tone/style.

The only criticism - and perhaps it's not really a criticism. It's just my opinion, but I felt that with the Drinkaware stuff, it was very much - it was great at telling you how to tell kids no, but I don't think it was in today's kind of speak, the way that kids kind of talk. So it perhaps wasn't as - what's the word I'm looking for? I think you knew your demographic but perhaps not understanding the way the kids talk and putting it into a way that it makes it cool and trendy for them to read as opposed to it being a, no, you will not touch alcohol....A bit more colloquial and a bit more funky and maybe a bit more interactive, something that you can do that - because I was even thinking about giving them like case - not case studies but something that they could do to answer questions on and make it a bit kind of - because they're less likely to just sit and read. But if there was something that - like exercises they could do that was informative and scenarios and things like that. What do you think would happen if such and such drank this? Even things like they had three vodkas and they had three Peach Schnapps. Who would potentially be the drunkest? I don't know. I'm not the expert, but something to let them understand the difference in units and volume between drink types and that as well could be quite good (mother)

*Interviewer:* Can you think of any ways in which Drinkaware might be able to use your son's experiences of learning about alcohol to improve the guidance and information for other parents?

*Interviewee:* I think - well, maybe not my son, but I think maybe using more what went wrong scenarios from actual real people. This happened or that could have happened [edit later] Some real-life experiences, because I think especially in those teenage years, sometimes if you are getting into difficult situations or difficult conversations, the last thing the child wants is to hear you or listen to your side of the story, but they are more willing to listen to somebody who is the same age or a little bit older and has maybe done these things. (mother)

The most common suggestion for how the Drinkaware web pages might be improved was to include material for children and young people (in different age appropriate formats) to use without requiring parental mediation as children are generally techno-savvy and do not always want to talk about sensitive topics with their parents. It was

also suggested that children are more likely to listen to and learn from on-line other real life accounts from young people of problems they have experienced, mistakes they have made and how they learnt to handle problems related to alcohol such as peer pressure.

I think it's great...I think it would be good, though, if you're doing another promoted post on Facebook to have it linking you to another URL or another window perhaps to focus more on the kids' side of it. Because when you go to just the homepage, it's nice and I like the way it's designed and so forth, but it does seem to be more about adults. It's more about helping parents, but I don't know what's out there that's for helping kids... Yeah, so having a webpage somewhere in-between your website that perhaps can then be used again as another targeted marketing campaign to push kids towards an area that is more focused around their age group, their language, the graphics and so forth are a bit more funky and trendy for them, that's going to keep them there...Kind of game stuff that tests their knowledge and can be done in a fun way that even teachers can use as well in the class (mother).

Things like how to deal with peer [pressure], not just for me but for her. I don't know whether having - like a little children or teenager section and it would help not - as in not for the parents but for the children themselves (mother)

*Interviewer:* Do you feel there are any barriers in terms of preventing you from talking to your son about alcohol?

*Interviewee:* The only barrier will be probably... if he doesn't want to speak about it, there's things going on, it's his problem, then I think that's the barrier that you have to try your hardest to get over....But then maybe with a resource of something that was a bit more kid friendly would be something that you could - like I could signpost them to and say have a look at that. It's not just me telling you that; it's other people, it's people like you. So it could help.(mother)

*Interviewee:* I just think young people tend to believe and respect websites more than parents or grandparents and that's why I think it's important that they're able to see a website which is informative and useful, because they believe them. They don't believe fogies like me... I could have all the wisdom in the world, but unless I put it on a website... (father)

...they're always on tablets, there might be an app, like a game thing, where you could - it would be like a quiz, but you'd have an educational programme. Then there should be a quiz on the app (mother)

One parent also suggested that the Talk Campaign might be aligned with other health education messages targeted at children and young people such as healthy

eating. Here, it was suggested information such as the Drinkaware calorie counter might be an effective tool to deter young girls from drinking.

One issue that was considered to be missing from the Talk Campaign guidance for parents was how to respond to the way that alcohol is celebrated or glorified in social media. This was identified as a particular and growing form of peer pressure at increasingly young ages which parents feel ill-equipped to deal with and where they would appreciate more specific advice and guidance.

...if you go out more on the social media because some of the stuff I see on there is absolutely horrendous...It tends to be more females, I must admit, that I know and boasting about how much drink they've had and about getting mad with it, MWI because I had to ask my kids what that (MWI) meant and it's mad with it. I said what does that mean, they're like oh it can mean getting drunk. They make it as if it's exciting and...we've spoke about that as well about how all of this - once you've got it on the net it's there forever...then 20 years down the road, when you're happily married or settled in a nice job and all these things start appearing on the internet about you that you'd rather forget. (mother)

Notwithstanding the suggested ways that the Talk Campaign could be improved or developed further in future, most parents had found the site useful. The following section reflects on how parents have used the information to inform their conversations with their children.

## **7. The Resources Or Strategies Parents Use To Inform Conversations With Their Children About Alcohol**

A number of the parents interviewed have used, or planned to use, strategies and resources from the Talk Campaign website to talk to their children about alcohol. Although the website was not explicitly designed to be used with children several parents had looked at it with their offspring or had encouraged their children to access it on their own because they considered the material to be accessible and helpful.

I said to her, look, I want you to go on that (Drinkaware website) and have a look and have a read at some of the facts and stuff. Even though the information is for parents, I thought it was educational enough and literate enough for her to read it. So she's had a good read at things like that as well (mother).

Parents had particularly used the information on the website about the health risks associated with alcohol in this way. This is because it is an area where they consider themselves and their children to be ill-informed; it resonates with the wider health education messages which children aged 9 to 13 receive at school; and the Talk



Campaign quiz with the graphic of the wheel and bottle to look at risks associated with drinking is a tool which appeals to, and is readily useable with, children.

Well I sat down with her and I showed her the website because...she loves the internet, she loves anything like that. So we went on to the internet and I showed her some of the things. Obviously I had looked at it first before I showed her it. But we looked again at the health implications part where it showed you there because as I said I try and focus on that part with her at the moment, I don't want her to know about blacking out and things like that at the minute. I just feel that's a wee bit too much...So we looked at the longer term health implications and that kind of part (mother)

Myself I've shown the kids the damage you do to your liver and your brain (mother)

We just say that sometimes it's acceptable for an adult to have a drink but not for her age and that it can do damage to your insides. But about healthy living, they're doing a lot of stuff like that at school at the moment. So I've kind of been using the negative aspects of alcohol to speak to her about that and tell her you really don't want to drink until you're 18 because it's bad for your health and just explaining the implications that it can have without getting into anything too risky at the minute (mother).

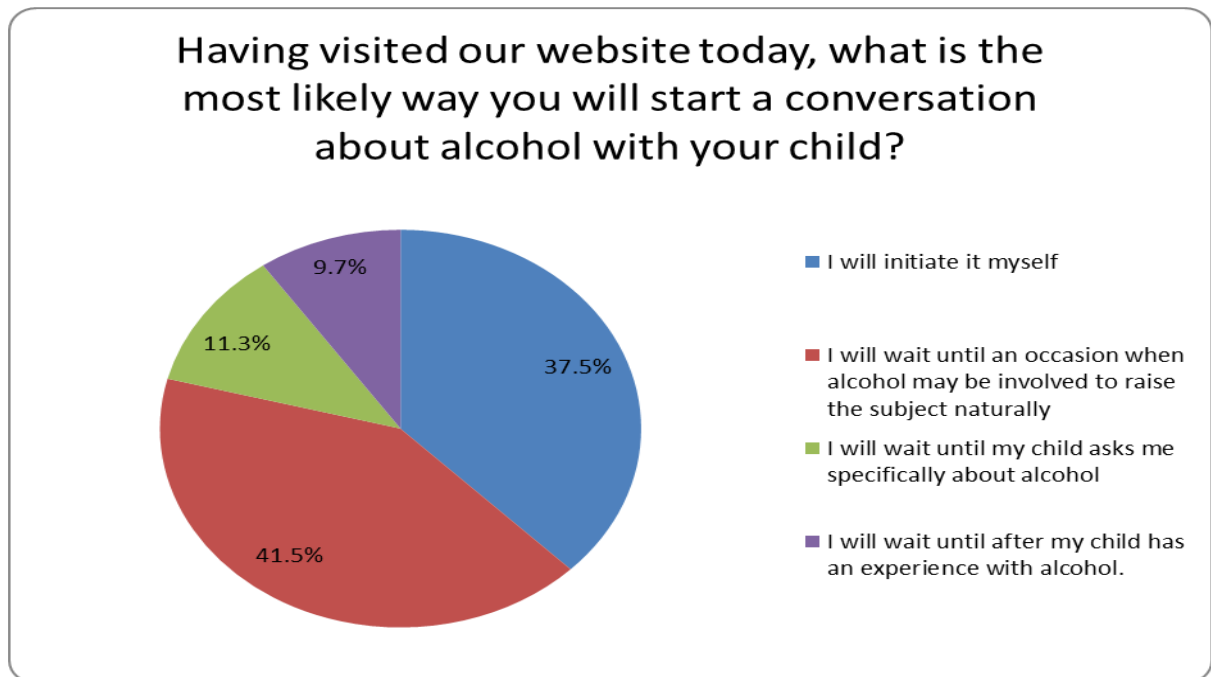
Other parents had used the *popular products unit and calorie calculator* with their children. This was considered important information that would enable their children to make sensible informed choices for themselves if/when they are in situations in the future where they are offered alcohol. The parents also found it useful themselves as many are unsure about the alcohol content – particularly of contemporary rather than traditional types of alcohol.

So when you've had these conversations with your son about alcohol have you used any of the Drinkaware information as part of your conversations?

Interviewee: I've certainly used the thing about the relative strengths because I didn't actually know that. I mean when I used to drink lager or Guinness or Buckfast I would know the relative strengths of them. But some of the other stuff, the more modern, trendy stuff I hadn't a clue. So we had a - look and we had all the cards with what the strength was in it so...he liked it because he's that sort of boy, he likes information. If you tell him something and you don't have stats or something to back it up [you get a] kind of how, who, when, why sort of response. So if you're able to say right, if you - like some day - a typical thing would be somebody went into the shop and blagged six cans of beer. They came out and they're splitting them up to drink. He'll tell me what kind it is and he'll be okay, right, that was whatever percentage...So we're able to explain that to him and say you need to be very careful what you're drinking. Apart from the fact - I mean I

don't want you to think I'm encouraging him to drink or anything. I'm just saying that the reality is he's going to be in situations where that happens (father)

It was like a safe drinking and it showed you units of alcohol for a man and a woman and what the differences were for stronger beers and ciders because there's a lot of new stuff in the market that wasn't there when I was younger. So the kids actually know quite a lot more about the newer stuff than I do. So it's quite good to have a discussion and they always think it's good when they know something more about it and they can give me that information - even if I do know about it, I get them to tell me what their interpretation of it is...I think the strengths of what's in alcohol is good for kids, because some kids in school - the bravado, we had a bottle of vodka. I would say to them and what happened? I think they were fine. I'd say, well, let's look at that then. If somebody drank a bottle of vodka at that age, what do you think would happen? We've spoke about it. They seemed pretty clued up with it. So, no, we have quite open discussions about it (mother).



In response to the question '*having visited our website today what is the most likely way you will start a conversation about alcohol with your child*' – the most popular answer (41.5 per cent) was that I will wait until an occasion when alcohol may be involved to raise the subject naturally. During the interviews parents described how they have used every day 'natural' situations – for example having a drink at a family meal, or commenting on drinking in a television programme - as 'hooks' to discuss alcohol with their children. Such strategies are recommended on the Talk Campaign website but in some cases parents had already self-developed this approach.

*Interviewer:* So, when you talk to your son about alcohol, how and when do you do this? How do the conversations happen?

*Interviewee:* Usually, we try to always have at least three to four dinners a week where we actually all sit down together and we try to bring up things that are issues that we maybe need to talk about at that time rather than just sitting them down somewhere special. I think it's better when it's sociably done within the family (mother).

It might be something that we've seen on the telly. It might be something he's learnt about in school or it might be something that's come up in my working day to day...things like that will come up conversation around the dinner table or - so yeah, I tend to discuss things like this quite freely with him... I'm happy to discuss it with him. (mother)

Basically we've always talked over the dinner table...They've always seen me drinking a glass of wine with dinner generally, an occasional beer or something. When they've been curious - we've shared it with them. So from a very early age on they were invited to taste a wine or a beer and then invited to comment on it. So what they tasted in there and how they felt about it...Then there have been a couple of occasions where of course they've seen us at the New Year's party or something like that where we've perhaps consumed more than we normally do. So - and we've talked about the effects and generally it's done with humour...Obviously talking about things like the news and particularly in local news where we see the effects of drink and drugs. So that provides us - it's difficult to say a positive counterpoint but it provides the counterpoint to the way we talk about drink and what effect it has on people's lives (father).

The second most popular response to the question '*having visited our website today what is the most likely way you will start a conversation about alcohol with your child*' –was I will initiate it myself (37.5 per cent). During the interviews some parents gave examples of when they had deliberately initiated a conversation with their child about alcohol or anticipated needing to do so and how they had used or planned to use the Drinkaware website in doing so.

*Interviewee:* We were going shopping and she [10 year old daughter] was looking for Christmas presents for him [her husband who had a drink problem] and she found like a wine glass set. I can't remember what it said on it but it had some kind of slogan on it, just after he'd stopped [drinking]. So I had to take her aside and kind of explain, if you see what I'm trying to say.

*Interviewer:* Did you find it easier, given that you'd visited the website?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, that definitely helped, just giving me some facts to back up what I was saying, because she's definitely one of those that will want to know all the ins and outs of everything and ask all the awkward questions. So it helps having some ammunition. (mother)

...with the Christmas and New Year period coming up we're actually - we're going out for New Year's Eve and it's a child friendly ceilidh we're going to. But I know that there'll be alcohol and stuff there so I probably will visit [the Talk Campaign website] again actually. Kind of just between Christmas and New Year, use it as a chance to have a conversation with her because again I've never been to this place before so you don't know what you're going to encounter...She's met our friends - it's actually my husband's boss who got very drunk one night at a party we were attending and he frightened the living daylights out of her. He did not mean it... But for somebody that she usually sees in a shirt and tie, pick you up dancing and singing and kind of swinging about that, it totally threw her. So I might use that and use the website again just before we go there just in case there's anything crops up at this...you know alcohol and inhibitions and things like that. So I probably will use the website again actually before the New Year. Hopefully I can use it on a regular basis especially if there's a children area set up. What I would look to do is hopefully set it up into her bookmarks so that she could access it herself.(mother)

## **8. Parents' Own Informal Or Self-Developed Strategies For Managing Children's Exposure To Alcohol**

In addition to learning from the Talk Campaign website and resources, parents also described strategies that they have self-developed to manage their children's awareness of, and exposure to, alcohol. A contrast is apparent in the approach adopted by different parents. Some deliberately conceal alcohol in the home in order to de-normalise it and to reduce their children's temptation to experiment with drink.

*Interviewee:* I don't think she'd go looking but if she doesn't see it lying about and think it's kind of a permanent feature of the household then hopefully that will give her - I don't know what you call it but a healthier attitude towards it.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that doing that is kind of a helpful strategy that other people could use to kind of help prevent their children from accessing alcohol?

*Interviewee:* I think so because if it's always visible, you know like a bottle of squash or something, it can be seen as just another drink. (mother)

*Interviewer:* At home do you have any particular strategies about alcohol?...

*Interviewee:* What I've done, for me myself, instead of using a wine glass I just use a normal - I do the measurement with the wine glass, but pour it into a normal tumbler. I have one which is dark coloured, because she has her cup so she's distracted by her cup so she's not interested in having what's in my cup anymore. My strategy was not making her notice that we're having that. (mother)

Indeed, some parents were strong advocates that children should not be taught about how to drink sensibly but rather should receive a stronger message about

abstinence, coupled with clear warnings about the social origins and dangers of drinking to excess.

My personal view is that the biggest mistake that alcohol education makes, is - maybe it's different now - when I was at school, I was taught how to drink responsibly. No one ever suggested that I don't actually have to drink and I think - I think that's a shame. [Edit] I think he needs to know that he doesn't have to drink. Actually that's very important. He needs to know I think as well how - and again this is specifically from my personal experience - he needs to know how people can use alcohol to hide problems in their life and in so doing, that the problems in their life never become - are never resolved (father).

Other parents have the opposite strategy – instead of concealing alcohol in the home from their children or instilling a message of abstinence they actually encourage them to try it in a managed way. Such strategies are predicated on modelling a 'balanced' approach: acknowledging the pleasures and rewards of drinking alcohol but within a framework where the risks of excess and the importance of self-discipline and control are also explained.

I think anything in life that you hide away and make a secret becomes quite appealing...at Christmas time when we're having maybe wine or something at the table, I've asked him if he would like some. He tastes a bit, didn't like it. I've never shied away. I know that it says that you shouldn't but I've never shied away from it if they said well, I would like to taste what it's like. Okay. But, not like have big glasses of it or anything like that. But it goes along that logic that if you hide something or treat it as a mystery, it becomes that. So, that's more my viewpoint. I think that under my supervision, then I think that's acceptable (father).

My two kids are heavily involved in athletics and my husband is as well, so they've got a cultured view of healthy eating, healthy diets and so forth. They see when Dad's training for marathons and so forth that he says, okay, alcohol and whatever else is totally off the book. So they do understand that having a healthy lifestyle means that alcohol doesn't really fit quite in with that. But then after the event, he'll sit down, say okay, so I've worked hard. I'm celebrating and I'm going to have a couple of beers tonight in recognition of the efforts I've put in. So it's trying to help them understand that there's nothing wrong in having a couple of drinks. It's just moderately (mother).

The Talk Campaign offers guidance about how to teach children to say 'no' to alcohol and more generally to resist peer pressure. Recognising the difficulties for young people of doing so and the different approach to alcohol adopted by other parents, one interviewee described how she and her husband have developed their own strategy to help their children to escape from unwanted peer pressure. Her children are primed to text their parents for assistance just as they would if they encountered other problems such as getting lost.

I know that kids have got different perceptions of alcohol and whatever happens at their home, you don't know what goes on behind closed doors. So when they meet up, yeah, I do sometimes worry that they might get involved in it, despite - you can give your kids all the information in the world. I don't think, for one minute, that they're never going to - not try it, but I would like to think that they would be able to say no. If they weren't they've got the option of texting. They'd phone me...and then we would go and get them to get out of the situation, if they didn't feel confident (mother).

While the self-developed strategies identified in this section are unique and are not informed by professional guidance, they may be useful to inform the future development of the Talk Campaign because they shed light on the heterogeneity of parents' attitudes towards alcohol. Understanding the range of different standpoints from which parents approach the issue of alcohol with their children may enable Drinkaware to refine its future campaigns to reach and engage a wider audience.

## **9. Barriers That Prevent Parents From Talking To Children About Alcohol And Ongoing Problem Areas.**

One of the most common problems that interviewees encounter in guiding their children's exposure to alcohol is trying to do so in a context where their partner or another family member has a problem with alcohol. Or where members of the family disagree on the best approach to take: whether to allow a child to taste alcohol before the age of 15 or to insist on abstinence. Such conflicts are evident not just between partners but also between different generations with grandparents identified by several interviewees as having a more relaxed approach to allowing experimentation, than parents themselves. As a consequence children can receive inconsistent and confusing messages about alcohol.

Interviewee: I think it's quite challenging [talking to her daughter about alcohol] if my partner is around, but on my own, I find it much easier.. Because I don't drink, I find it easy talking to her about it. Whereas you've probably gathered that he's got issues with it. It can make things quite difficult...I'm of the opinion that, you know, there should be nothing until 18 whatsoever whereas he's more, no you should have a little bit every so often and let her try these things and then it's going to take away the temptation later on.

Interviewer: So when you're discussing it with your daughter, given that you disagree with your partner, whose views tend to prevail?

Interviewee: It's me a lot of the time but then if - he's recently stopped drinking but when he was drinking, if he had say wine or something around her and she asked for a taste, he'd give it to her even though I disagreed. (mother)

Similar problems are evident in relation to the differential attitudes and practices of other parents. Interviewees recognised that their own guidance about sensible approaches to alcohol can be undone when their children spend time at the homes of friends whose parents model different behaviours. Just like children, parents can also experience 'peer pressure' from other adults. Such experiences led some interviewees to suggest that alongside its guidance on how children might respond to peer pressure, Drinkaware might usefully provide guidance for parents about how they should deal with 'peer' pressure from other adults to take a more liberal approach towards children's exposure to alcohol than they would prefer to do so.

*Interviewer:* So have you allowed your children to try alcohol?

*Interviewee:* No. Well, in saying that, about three years ago we were in the south of France - we met some friends there and we were all sitting - you know al fresco's a big thing - and they're all sitting - we were having a lunch - it was lunchtime. There was wine on the table and people were there drinking wine. Clare was sitting at the other end and she kept saying 'Can I try that? Can I try that?' I said, 'No, Clare, you're 10'. I said, 'Why would you want to try?' Some of our friends were, 'Oh, let her try it and mine have tried it and they're 16, 17, they don't drink'. I said, 'Well I'm not really very happy at 10'. So we had a big discussion about it. Clare said, 'But, it's only a sip, if I don't like it - I just want to know what all this - I want to taste it'. So I think I did give into pressure and she took a sip and she proceeded to vomit, which was good. I was happy about that (mother).

Moreover, some interviewees recognised that the need for many parents to work full time means that their children necessarily spend significant amounts of time in the care of other adults (family members, the parents of their children's friends and formal child care arrangements) whose attitudes and practices in relation to alcohol will not necessarily be known. As such, they acknowledged that some working parents do not necessarily know or have much control over what their children learn about alcohol.

[Reflecting on other adults' practices versus her family's open conversations about alcohol] You might not have the same boundaries or the same control if you're out working all day and the kids have come home from school and you don't know what they're getting up to or - I think that's a lot to do with it, because people are working all the time. (mother).

The ubiquity of pro-drinking messages in popular culture and advertisements was also identified as a factor which undermines parents' ability to restrict their children's exposure to positive messages about drinking and to highlight the risks of alcohol related harms.

A big issue..I think is how readily available it is. You know, it kind of undermines the message you're trying to give about being careful with it because it's absolutely everywhere. You can't get away from it and it's just all these posters and slogans and things, you know, this is how I get through the days or it's wine o'clock or keep calm and have a beer and that kind of thing. That [can] undermine what you're trying to teach them (mother)

While parents generally responded positively to the Talk Campaign two interviewees suggested that some children are more responsive to parental guidance than others. This was not attributed to gender or age, but rather ascribed to differences in personalities. These parents were concerned that individual children might be resistant to guidance about how to develop a sensible approach to alcohol. They would welcome support about how to talk to children who are not responsive to normal boundary setting and are prone to more risky behaviour.

Well, for my child anyway, I think she's quite different. She's more - would want to - I think she's the kind of person - she likes to explore things. So... I just think that growing up, I knew that we'd not have that much trouble with David, he's a really, really good boy, but my daughter, she is slightly different. She wants to do more and even outside playing she wants to go further away or whatever. David didn't. So, I'm not saying she'll have a problem or whatever, but I think it [Talk Campaign or other expert advice] would probably be used more.

Given these on-going barriers the final section of this report provides recommendations for how Drinkaware might develop its resources further to effectively empower parents to offer quality information and guidance that may prevent underage drinking and help children and young people to avoid alcohol harm

## **10. Recommendations**

The evidence of this evaluation is that the Talk Campaign has been very well received and that parents have found the information and guidance to be very useful. Feedback from parents about the strengths and weaknesses of the Campaign suggest the following recommendations:

- The Talk Campaign needs to be promoted further to reach a wider community of parents/carers more effectively. The evidence of this evaluation is that most of those who accessed the Campaign did so because they had concerns about their own or a partner's drinking rather than because they were parents seeking guidance about how to talk to their children about alcohol.
- The web-pages need to be more colourful and include more graphics (like the wheel/bottle quiz) and videos as they are currently perceived to be too text



heavy and so not accessible to a diverse range of parents. The advice is also considered to be too 'middle class' in its tone.

- The Talk Campaign needs to present material in different styles and formats so it is as accessible as possible to as wide a range of parents/carers.
- Real life 'scenarios', or accounts from young people who developed problems with alcohol explaining 'what went wrong' are suggested by parents to be a potentially effective way of reaching a young audience because peer advice is considered to be more meaningful than guidance from adults.
- Material should be available for those for whom English is not a first language.
- Parents would like the Drinkaware website to include child-centred information and activities for young people to explore on their own without adult supervision. This material needs to be organised in age appropriate pages – with material for primary school aged children particularly welcomed.
- Apps for both children and parents about sensible approaches to alcohol with a quiz and other interactive elements should be developed.
- More guidance is needed for children and young people about how to handle peer pressure in 'street' language with which children will identify (see above about 'real-life scenarios' and using the voice of young people themselves).
- Parents/carers need guidance about how to negotiate and agree a consistent approach towards children's exposure to alcohol with partners, other family members or adult friends who have different attitudes or practices. They also need guidance on how to resist peer pressure from other adults.
- Advice on new topics: such as how to talk to children who are not responsive to normal boundary setting and are prone to risky behaviour, and how to address the glorification of drinking on social media with children would be welcomed.

## Appendix A: Information About the Survey and Interviews

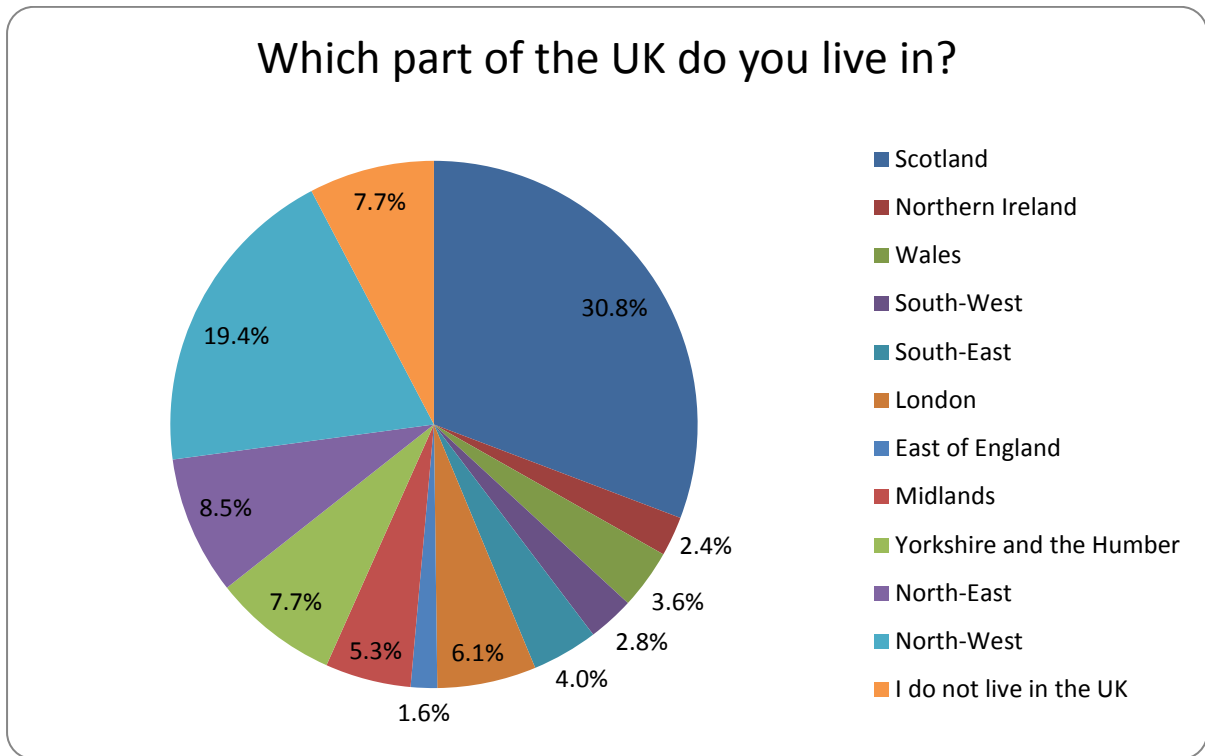
### A1: Employment Status of Survey Respondents

Employed full-time (more than 30 hours)	43.1%
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours)	19.8%
Self-employed	8.5%
Unemployed but looking for a job	2.8%
Unemployed and not looking for a job / Long-term sick or disabled / Housewife	9.7%
Retired	7.3%
Pupil / Student / In full time education	3.6%
I prefer not to say	5.2%

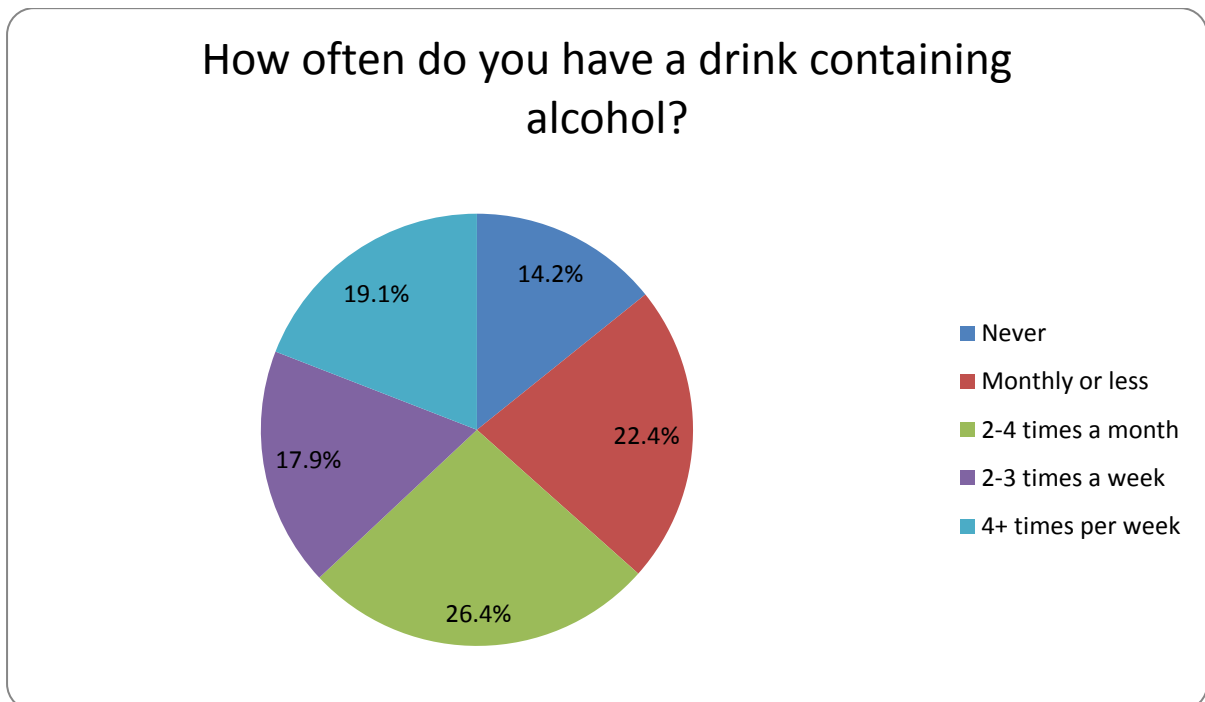
### A2: Highest Level of Qualification Achieved by Survey Respondents

Left school without sitting exams	6.0%
O Levels/O Grades/GSCE/Standard Grades	15.3%
A-Levels/Highers	10.5%
Further Education	14.9%
Undergraduate degree or higher	42.7%
I prefer not to say	10.5%

### A3: Location of Survey Participants



### A4: Drinking Habits of Survey Participants



## A5: Key Characteristics of Interviewees

Number	Gender	Age	Religious belief	Ethnicity	Current Parental Status
1	Female	30s	Scottish Episcopalian	White British	Lone parent
2	Female	30s	Atheist	White British	Married/partnered
3	Male	50s	None	White British	Married/partnered
4	Female	40s	Christian	White British	Lone parent
5	Female	30s	Christian	White British	Married/partnered
6	Female	20s	None	White British	Married/partnered
7	Female	50s	Christian	White British	Married/partnered
8	Female	40s	Christian	White British	Married/partnered
9	Male	50s	Christian	White British	Married/partnered
10	Female	40s	Atheist	White British	Married/partnered
11	Male	40s	Christian	White British	Lone parent
12	Male	50s	Catholic	White British	Married/partnered
13	Female	30s	Atheist	White British	Married/partnered
14	Female	30s	Atheist	White British	Married/partnered
15	Male	50s	Jehovah Witness	White British	Married/partnered
16	Male	40s	Atheist	White British	Married/partnered
17	Female	30s	Church of Scotland	White British	Lone parent
18	Female	20s	Atheist	White British	Lone parent
19	Female	20s	Christian	Mixed Race	Married/partnered
20	Female	30s	None	White British	Married/partnered

## Appendix B: Children's Views

Two children were interviewed –a girl aged 13 and a boy aged 12 from two different families.

Both the children identified the positive benefits of alcohol as: it makes you have fun and gives you a buzz respectively. The girl identified the risks of drinking as 'you get drunk and get lost' and 'kiss boys'. The boy described the effects as 'quite bad' suggesting that you get hangovers, become tired, ill and it can slow your reactions and might make you crash your car or break the law.

Both children said most of their knowledge about alcohol came from conversations with their mothers; neither had received much education about alcohol related harms at schools. The girl described her relationship with her Mum as open and honest and said she would turn to her Mum if she had any problems. But she felt that her friends do not have as good relationships with their mothers and do not talk about topics like alcohol with their parents because they are embarrassed.

The girl described pressure from older pupils (friends of friends) to drink and that boys at school pretended to drink to impress people and because they think it is cool. She has tried alcohol (peach schnapps) but she found it disgusting because it burnt her throat and made her giggly – though she has also tasted a fruits of the forest beer which she liked.

The boy also said that his friends do not talk about alcohol at home as much as he does with his Mum. He has not tried alcohol and does not think he will like the taste as his Mum has warned him he will not like it.

As an adult the girl anticipates that she will not drink on weekdays when she is working because it is important to be responsible when you work but thinks that she will drink at weekends. The boy is not sure whether he will drink as an adult and would rather wait and see. He anticipates he will probably only drink at birthday parties and on nights out.

Neither of the children said they had looked at information about alcohol on the internet. Neither child could identify any information they would like to know about alcohol or alcohol related harms, nor did they identify any advice they would find useful.

## **Appendix C: References**

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