

**A contextual review of the provision of campus-based licensed trade facilities in a modern context:  
A case study on the feasibility of opening a student bar at Cork Institute of Technology.**

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This study was undertaken during the summer of 2014 at the request of the Students Union in response to an application to them with the view to the opening of a bar on campus at Cork Institute of Technology (CIT). The study reports on the current economic climate and other factors that have contributed to the continuous decline in alcohol sales in the on-trade in Ireland which is the alleged main contributing factor to the changed drinking culture of young Irish people today. A quantitative approach was applied and the research questionnaire yielded 1,229 responses representing the student body of CIT, both past and present.

The findings of the survey influenced the decision by the Students Union not to pursue the establishment of a campus bar at Cork Institute of Technology in the foreseeable future. This study should be of benefit to the hospitality industry, industry trade associations, such as the Vintners Federation of Ireland and the National Off-license Association and student bodies, such as The Union of Students in Ireland

**Keywords:** Binge drinking, Campus Bars, Licensed Trade, Public house, Vintners, Alcohol consumption, Irish drinking culture.

**Background and Introduction to the Study**

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), formerly the Regional Technical College, Cork, opened in 1974 at its current location in Bishopstown, Cork. The Institute has approximately 17,000 students spread across its four campuses with the majority based in the main campus in Bishopstown.

In 2007, upon the completion of Nexus, a new student centre built on the main campus a plan existed to open a bar on campus at CIT. A committee was established, plans were drafted and Ms. Constance Cassidy S.C. was successful in obtaining a club license, issued in the Cork Circuit Court. A club license, as used by other universities, is a license to sell alcohol but with restrictions.

As the design plans were being finalised the funding for the project was withdrawn and it was decided to declare CIT an alcohol free campus. CIT, therefore, has been an alcohol free campus since it opened forty years ago. This study was commissioned by the Students Union Officers at CIT in 2014. The incoming CIT Student Union President, Michael Linehan identified upon his election that the student population favoured a bar facility on campus, and he

This study was undertaken during the summer of 2014 at the request of the Students Union in response to an application to them with the view to opening a bar on campus at CIT. A quantitative approach was applied and the research questionnaire yielded 1,229 responses representing the student body of CIT, both past and present. Two additional in-depth interviews were conducted with other stakeholders. The study also reports on the current economic climate and other factors

that have contributed to the continuous decline in alcohol sales in the on-trade in Ireland which is the alleged main contributing factor to the changed drinking culture of young Irish people today.

### **Brief Review of Relevant Literature**

A survey conducted by the World Health Organisation (2014) into Ireland's drinking culture noted that when it comes to alcohol, 'the Irish are in a league of their own'. The Irish population's consumption of alcohol far exceeds that of Europeans and in Ireland there are more problems per drinker. It is estimated that currently in Ireland, alcohol-related problems now cost Irish society €2.4 billion per year.

Recent research conducted by Kaufmann (2013), claims that the 'world knows Ireland as a country of pubs, and happy, hard-working, hard-drinking folk'. The research continues that this is often a proudly displayed badge of honour for the Irish population. Alcohol has and remains a fundamental part of Irish culture. Alcohol plays a complex role in Irish society and is associated with many aspects of everyday life. There are many reasons given for the Irish drinking culture. The pub tradition is embedded in Irish society and culture. The local pub is often an important component of the social fabric of a community. Traditionally, Irish people had a lenient attitude towards alcohol use in drinking establishments, and these were places where communities come together.

There are a number of propositions in relation to why [excessive alcohol intake continues to be a problem](#) in Ireland; these include the argument that alcohol is now more available in Ireland than it ever was. It is now possible to buy alcohol throughout the day and night from a retail outlet, bar or club. The cost of alcoholic drinks is falling as the superstores reduce prices in an attempt to keep up with competitors. Cheap imports mean that even those on a limited income can afford to buy alcoholic beverages. Since the smoking ban was introduced in 2004, there has been an increase in the number of people drinking at home, where they can smoke if they desire. People can afford to buy more alcohol when purchasing from retail outlets as opposed to bars. The marketing of alcoholic drinks in Ireland tends to be aggressive. Many media campaigns associate drinking with glamour or with the traditional Irish heritage. In the past such advertisements have been accused of glorifying binge drinking.

### **Current Trends in the Licensed Trade Industry: A Changed Drinking Culture**

The retail alcohol drinks sector in Ireland has been adversely affected by a continual drift in consumption from 'on sales' to 'off sales'. According to Kenny in Cullen (2012) 'it is easy to blame the smoking ban or drink driving laws but the greatest tragedy about pubs is that they have become irrelevant to a generation'. Alcohol plays a complex role in Irish society and is associated with many aspects of everyday life. Irish culture has always been associated with alcohol consumption and 'going for a pint'. The availability of cheaper alcohol in retail outlets, however, has led to the younger generation consuming more alcohol at home; an activity referred to as 'prinking' an abbreviation of pre-drinking. Research conducted by Ingle (2010) found that in Ireland in 2000, three-quarters of alcoholic drink was consumed in the confines of the public house. Pub sales, however declined by 34% between 2007 and 2013, (DIGI, 2014) and according to the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland's (2012) the on trade is experiencing continued significant decline with 65% of alcohol consumption now taking place in a 'home' environment (DIGI, 2013).

The cost of alcohol in a pub compared to an off license shows an imbalance. While the cost of alcohol in a public house has risen by 300% since 1996, the cost of alcohol in an off-license has fallen

precipitously and, in real terms, it now costs 50 per cent less to drink at home than it did in 1996 (Pope, 2011).

Research conducted by The Health Research Board (2012) found that 76% of respondents had purchased alcohol in a supermarket in the last few years and if the price in supermarkets was to decrease further, 24% of respondents said they would buy more alcohol. Fifty percent of respondents who took part in that research in the 18 to 24 age group also stated they would buy more alcohol, and also agreed that they would buy more alcohol when it is on special offer. Recent figures from the Irish CSO show that the average Irish person spends between €1,300 and €2,000 per year on alcohol, with a total of €6.36 billion spent on alcohol in 2012, an increase of 1.2% from the year before. This accounted for around 7.7% of total personal expenditure of €82.63bn on goods and services (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2014).

### **Binge drinking**

Harmful drinking is defined in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) as a pattern of drinking that causes damage to physical (e.g. to the liver) or mental health (e.g. episodes of depression, secondary to heavy consumption of alcohol). The term hazardous drinking is widely used today. It is synonymous with “at-risk drinking” and is defined by the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) as the regular consumption of over 40 g of pure ethanol (5 units) per day for men and over 24 g of pure ethanol (3 units) per day for women.

In research conducted on the mental health of young people in Ireland it was found that along with rates of alcohol use disorders, almost one in two young adults (48%) reported current patterns of binge-drinking at the time of the study. By the age of 24 years, almost 3 in 4 young adults had engaged in binge drinking, (Cannon 2013).

Almost two thirds of 18-24 year old drinkers binge drink that is a consumption rate of six or more standard drinks at a typical drinking session. Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI) found that in 2011 over half of all Irish drinkers had a harmful pattern of drinking; that is four in ten women and seven in ten men who drink. Harmful drinking in Ireland is highest among the 18-24 year old age group at 75%, (Health Research Board, 2014). The current level of alcohol consumption in Ireland, based on 2014 figures, is 11 litres. If 20% of the population aged 15+ who do not drink alcohol, Irish per capita alcohol consumption rises to 13.75 litres of pure alcohol for every Irish person aged 15 and over (AAI, 2015). That is the equivalent of 53 standard (700ml) bottles of vodka, 567 pints of beer or 147 bottles of wine.

The WHO Global status report on alcohol and health (2014) found that 39% of all Irish people aged 15-years-old and over had engaged in binge drinking, or “heavy episodic drinking”, in the past 30 days. This puts Ireland just behind Austria (40.5%) at the top of the 194 countries studied and well ahead Britain (28%). When the 19% of non-drinkers in Ireland were excluded by the WHO, it found that almost two thirds of Irish men (62%) and one third of Irish women (33%) who drink alcohol had engaged in binge drinking in the previous month which gives a total of almost half (48%) of all drinkers aged over 15 years.

The Department of Health and Children, (2009) found that Irish adults binge drink more than adults in any other European country with young people most likely to exceed the weekly low-risk limit for alcohol consumption. A more recent report by the Health Research Board of Ireland (2011) outlined

dramatic figures which showed the number of people seeking treatment for alcohol abuse increasing by 50% in the previous five years with a 145% increase in those under 18. Similarly, according to Alcohol Action Ireland (2105), alcohol-related harms cost each tax payer in Ireland an estimated €3,318 a year. There are 88 deaths recorded on average, every month in Ireland which are directly attributable to alcohol. There are 1,200 cases of cancer each year from alcohol in Ireland, and one in four deaths of young men aged 15-39 in Ireland is due to alcohol. One in three road crash deaths is alcohol-related. Based on the figures in the Health Research Board's Irish Alcohol Diaries report (2013), more than 150,000 Irish people are dependent drinkers, more than a 1.35 million are harmful drinkers and 30% of people interviewed say that they experienced some form of harm as a result of their own drinking. These figures do not take into account the intangible costs associated with excessive alcohol consumption, such as, the diminished quality of life along with pain and suffering experienced by associated families and friends.

### **Alcohol consumption in third-level institutions**

University students represent a unique subsection of society (Hope, 2008). According to Hope (2005) in this environment, there is a culture of hazardous alcohol consumption, which is defined as "a pattern of alcohol consumption that increases the risk of harmful consequences for the user or others" (WHO, 1992).

A study conducted in University College Cork found a higher prevalence of hazardous alcohol consumption among the 2,275 undergraduates responses compared to the general population with 66% of respondents reporting hazardous alcohol consumption (Davoren, 2015). The survey also found that approximately 17% of the men and 5% of the women surveyed were consuming more than six units of alcohol at least four times per week, and in some cases on a daily basis.

Alcohol consumption has been noted as the number one public health problem facing universities (Wechsler *et al.*, 2002). According to Davoren (2015) a large proportion of students (32%) felt their drinking harmed their work or studies. Hazardous alcohol consumption drastically increased the possibility of adverse consequences, including missing days from university therefore affecting academic performance. These findings at UCC are similar to those from the Harvard College Alcohol Study where one-third of students had missed class during the last year due to their alcohol consumption (Perkins, 2002). Another study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health College Study (2001) of 119 colleges found that approximately two in five college students reported binge drinking (Wechsler *et al.* 2002).

In a study funded by the U.S. National Institute on Aging and the Irish Higher Education Authority in 2013, investigators seek to answer the question, "[Why Do Some Irish Drink So Much?](#)" This study by American and Irish academics examined drinking patterns as well as cultural norms among students at University College Dublin. The findings suggested that Irish youth drank more alcohol than students from other countries and also suggested that complex deep-rooted cultural and historical factors facilitated this excessive alcohol consumption. The study also surmised that the role of the national-level culture in influencing thresholds is borne out by the very large effect of being Irish on standards of acceptable drinking compared to foreign students (Delaney *et al.* 2013).

### **Alcohol issues at Irish third-level institutions**

Many third level institutions in Ireland have a bar on their campus, which raise several issues. In April 2014, the student bar 'Scribes' located on campus at Athlone Institute of Technology closed after 15 years, citing difficult trading conditions. The Athlone Institute of Technology's Students Union president at that time, Daniel Coulter stated the decision to close the bar was not taken lightly. He said:

*Scribes has been an institution within Athlone Institute of Technology for many years. However the trading performance of Scribes weakened significantly over the last two years. The Student Union in Athlone Institute of Technology did everything in its power to help generate business for Scribes. In the final year, the hope that it could be reinvigorated through big events such as Fresher's Week, RAG Week, theme nights, and many other parties. The drinking culture among students has changed significantly in recent years, and the bar was simply not being used by students due to the growing culture of drinking at home. Athlone Institute of Technology has plans to open a new social hub and this will have a broader appeal among students, instead of a bar (in Doherty, 2014).*

Other universities are also distancing themselves from participating in any event that involves excessive alcohol consumption. In 2012, for example, after five days of arrests, drunkenness and rampaging through the locality, the Students Union of National University Ireland (NUI) Galway, decided to cancel Rag Week. Rag Week was rebranded as 'College Week' back in 2010, however over 30 arrests in 2011 showed conclusively that the rebrand did not work, according to Emmet Connolly, the then SU President of NUI Galway.

The three Dublin universities, Trinity College, University College Dublin and Dublin City University do not have a Rag Week. University of Limerick has rebranded it to College Week also; however, they are in constant conflict with residents of surrounding estates. NUI Maynooth does not have a Rag Week but they now have a one-day event called The Gathering, (Roisin, 2012).

In September 2013, three Garda CCTV cameras were installed around Cork's university quarter (UCC) as part of a crackdown on antisocial behaviour. A rise in drink-fuelled antisocial student behaviour around UCC in the previous three years helped fast-track the project, which has been under negotiation since residents first requested it in 2003. The cameras were used as part of the policing of Fresher's Week with Superintendent Barry McPolin, who is responsible for policing the city centre, encouraging students to drink responsibly and respect residential areas. Superintendent McPolin said:

*Gardaí have continued concerns about the impact a minority of drunk and boisterous students are having on residents.*

## **Methodology**

A contextual review of the provision of campus based licensed trade facilities in a modern context presents a case study on the feasibility of opening a student bar at Cork Institute of Technology. Primary and secondary research was conducted as part of this empirical study in relation to the drinking culture of third level students in Ireland and the availability of alcoholic products on campus. For the purpose of primary research in this current study a survey was utilised through the on-line survey tool, Survey Monkey, resulting in the collection of 1,229 responses. The survey was conducted between June 18 and July 4 2014. The survey was distributed through the student MYCIT email group. According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) tools such as Survey Monkey allow researchers to create their own survey using an on-line editor. It enables researchers to track results as they are collected in real time and the application allows ease of production of results. Evidence has demonstrated that the numerous benefits of web page-based surveys include the collection of demographic information as well as other psychographic and opinion data (Sheehan & Hoy in Seale, 2004).

Participants were informed that all information given was strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this research. Required information was obtained by asking participants to answer questions which were designed to incorporate imperative questions that were relevant and unique to this study. After statistical analysis of the results, a comprehensive conclusion was reached, and the results were logically discussed by all parties involved.

Two Interviews were also conducted with the two main stakeholders involved, a Garda Superintendent and the Lord Mayor of Cork, a local resident and member of the Residents Association for the area.

## **Main Findings and Discussion**

The survey received 1,229 responses, with 85% of respondents in full-time education, 9% in part-time education and 6% other, (other included just graduated, repeating etc.). Of the responses received, 94% stated they consumed alcohol while 7% abstained. In response to the frequency of alcohol consumption, 71% of the respondents stated that they consumed alcohol 'occasionally' or 'once a week'. This finding is in contrast to secondary national statistics which illustrated 65% of alcohol consumption now takes place in a 'home' environment. Respondents in the current study stated that 38% consume alcohol in a 'home environment' and 62% in a public house/club or night club.

A very large majority of respondents (89%) stated they visit public houses/clubs or night clubs during term time, with 85% visiting them 'occasionally' or 'once a week'. Ninety percent of respondents who frequent public houses/clubs or night clubs during term time purchase alcohol at these venues. However the comments revealed that most purchase only one or two drinks as they were considered 'too expensive' to purchase in these venues.

When students were asked if they thought that having alcohol available to consume on a third level campus was a good idea, 52% replied in the affirmative and 48% replied negative. One respondent commented that . . .

*I used to be of the opinion that CIT should have a bar. But now that I am entering 4th year I'd see it as being a bad idea. People would just be skipping classes and you would get people having pints*

*before classes or on their lunch break. Especially, it is dodgy when people might consume a few drinks then turn up for a practical lab class. Things would get messy quickly.*

The above comment is also reflected in responses received in relation to alcohol availability and its impact on normal campus activities, including classes, with almost half of the respondents believing that day-to-day activities would be affected. Additionally, respondents noted the impact on the locality and local neighbours, the quotations below are reflective of these comments:

*I do not think putting a pub on campus would solve the problem of alcohol consumption, as people would still continue to pre-drink at their home before they go to the pub. Therefore, I think it would make it worse, since instead of heading to town they would just stay locally in Bishopstown causing noise for residents.*

Respondents were particularly vocal about the negative effects of alcohol being available on campus would have on the local neighbourhood; in particular, four hundred and ninety seven respondents believed that locality would be adversely affected. The respondents showed strong concern for local residents, and were conscious of the older age profile of those in the immediate locality. Some of the negative impacts that respondents highlighted were: drunkenness, anti-social behaviour, vandalism, intimidation of old people, violence, threatening behaviour, public and domestic disturbances, rowdiness, boisterous behaviour and the effects of binge drinking.

Similar concerns were raised by the 2014-2015 Lord Mayor of Cork, Councillor Mary Shields, herself a Bishopstown resident and an active member of the Bishopstown Residents Association. Councillor Shields said:

*Students at CIT have an ample provision for social drinking with the range of public houses situated locally. The college has no obligation whatsoever to provide a bar on campus; their remit is to provide education. In the past, students' drinking has caused major difficulties for local residents, for example on CIT's Christmas Day, which the college did not condone. There is now a very good relationship between CIT and the locality and we would hope to keep it that way.*

Similar sentiments were expressed by Superintendent Charles Barry of Togher Garda Station who stated:

*Since the cessation of the renowned CIT Christmas Day celebrations there is little public disorder problems involving CIT students. The bars located on the UCC campus, however, are the root cause of their on-going problems with public disorder. I would be completely opposed to a bar opening in CIT as there are now few issues with CIT students, and I hope it will remain that way.*

Thirty two respondents stated that a campus bar would affect the local pub business and 45 believed it would take drinking 'off the streets'. Other comments included:

- *Mayhem messy students and trouble and destruction*
- *Terror*
- *College will look like it is encouraging alcohol consumption*
- *Bad influence, may cause public disturbances*
- *People would be more tempted to drink more.*

- *Spending too much time in a bar , instead of being in class*
- *It might give the college a bad name as it might be seen to encourage drinking more socially*
- *Disturbance to local residence possibly giving a negative reputation to CIT*
- *Wreck and ruin.*

Finally, students were asked if they thought CIT should remain an alcohol-free campus. This question was answered by 1,228 respondents with almost a fifty-fifty split, 48% of respondents answered yes, and 52% answered no.

### **Conclusion**

On completion of this study, which supported the views of both the main stakeholders and the 1,229 respondents who participated in this research, it was decided that having a bar on campus at CIT is not feasible. The findings from the secondary research conducted also indicate that opening a bar in the current economic climate is not financially viable.

The results of this survey led to a debate held by the CIT Students Union on November 12 2014. The debate was held to determine whether the issue of pursuing a campus bar should be continued. Both sides of the argument were represented by current students and a heated open debate took place. Upon completion the attendees were balloted and the results were 48% of those in attendance were in favour of pursuing a campus bar with 52% against. The proposal of having a bar on campus was then dropped by the Students Union on hearing the wishes of the students.

The Irish Government's Strategic Task Force on Alcohol has made a number of recommendations to deal with alcohol consumption becoming a national crisis. It argued for more regulations on the availability of alcohol, better drink-driving countermeasures, increased taxation, restricting alcohol promotions, better community action, education and promoting alcohol free activities. Some of these measures are more effective than others but if they are all applied, then the impact should be significant.

REACT, a new initiative aimed to tackle excessive alcohol consumption in third-level colleges is to be launched in the summer of 2015. REACT, based in University College Cork is a joint initiative between the Union of Students in Ireland, the Irish Students Health Association and is funded by the HSE. The project has researched international best practice of actions that can be implemented on Irish campuses which has evidence based effectiveness. The aim is to create an accreditation and award system for colleges in the third-level sector who will make significant changes within their campuses in an attempt to tackle the growing issue of excessive alcohol consumption among students. Laura Harmon, USI President, noted "This is a crucial project in the improvement of our campuses and students' lives nationally. We are intent on making an impact in this area, directly, for our students' benefits".

Finally, Cork Institute of Technology has been an alcohol free campus since it opened its Bishopstown campus in 1974 and considering the results of this survey it is recommended that this status should be maintained and used by the Institute as one of its unique selling points in attracting future students.



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