Session Overview

6.00pm - Introduction - Paul North and Arda Ozcubukcu, NeuroSight

6.10pm - What's the situation? - Arda Ozcubukcu, NeuroSight

6.45pm - How to design tools and interventions that are relevant to students' needs and worries? - Arda Ozcubukcu, NeuroSight

7.00pm - What do students think of the support available at their university? - Eleri Crossland, SSDP

7.05pm - Engaging students through SSDP - Eleri Crossland SSDP

7.15pm - Q+A

7.30pm - Close

Questions or comments please feel free to use the chat

Who are we?

RESEARCH
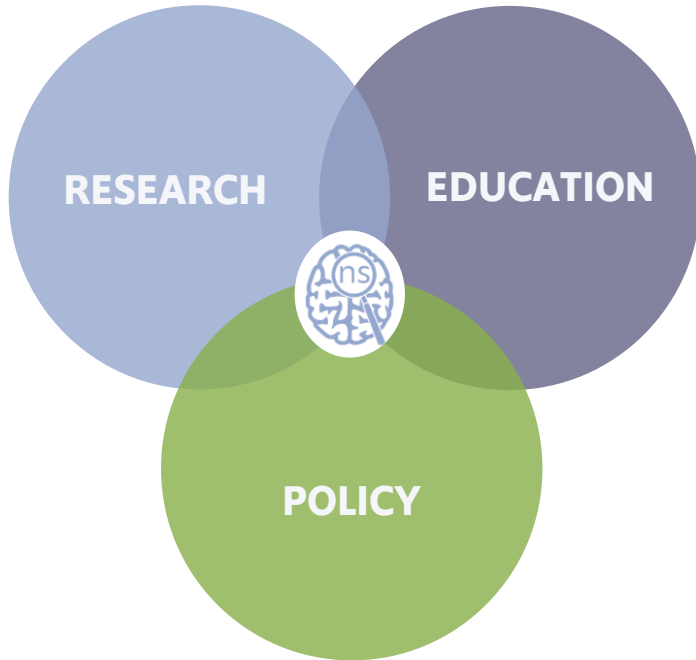
EDUCATION

POLICY

neurosight

We improve the policies and processes organisations have in place, deliver bespoke educational interventions and conduct research to reduce economic, psychological and physical harm due to drug use.

Partner organisation to www.drugsand.me

drugs and me

Introductions

Today's speakers:

Paul North

Arda Ozcubukcu

Eleri Crossland

- Huge thanks to Sabrina Bunbury for making the graphs! -

Survey

- Survey ran between 30/10/2020 and 13/12/2020 → National lockdown during November

- Content agreed in consultation with SSDP and Drug Science Student Society

- 38 questions + general demographic questions

- Offered Amazon vouchers to target all student

- Reached 1,360 students, of which 1,080 were university students

Demographics

Respondents by region (%)

%34   %62   4%

Level of study of students in the sample

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate
- Other
- Level 3

5%
8%
12%
75%
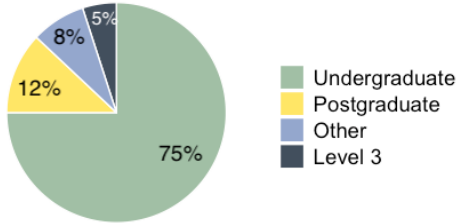
Histogram of age of students

87.4%
18 → 23

N = 1,080
732 complete responses by current students
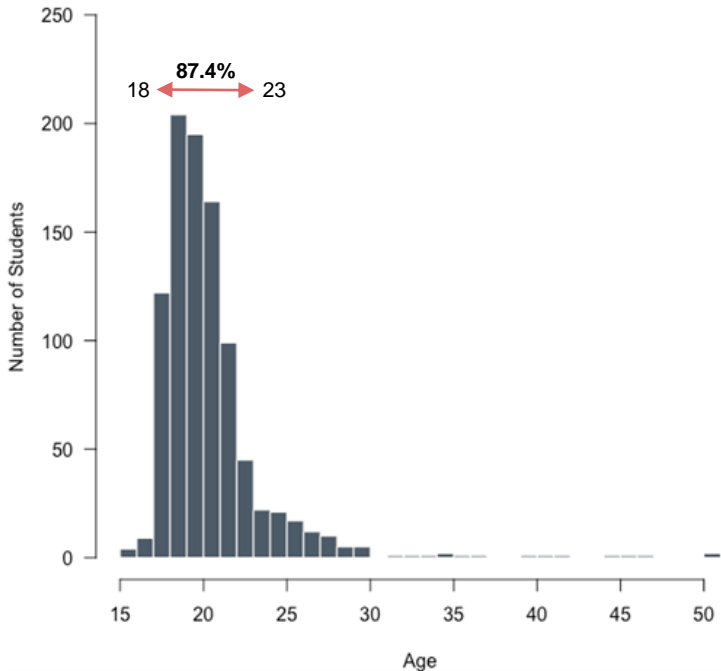
What's the Situation?

Overview of Drug Use

'Which illicit drugs have you taken since the start of term?'

Drug	Percent
Cannabis	86%
Ketamine	50%
Cocaine	42%
MDMA	33%
Nitrous Oxide	27%
Poppers	19%
LSD	16%
Magic Mushrooms	14%
2C-X	14%
Benzodiazepines	13%
SSRIs	9%
Amphetamine	7%
Modafinil	6%
Adderall	6%
DMT	4%
Opiods	3%
Other	3%
Mephedrone	1%
Crystal Meth	1%
DXM	1%
Ibogaine	1%
MAOIs	1%

Percent of students (%)

n = 534
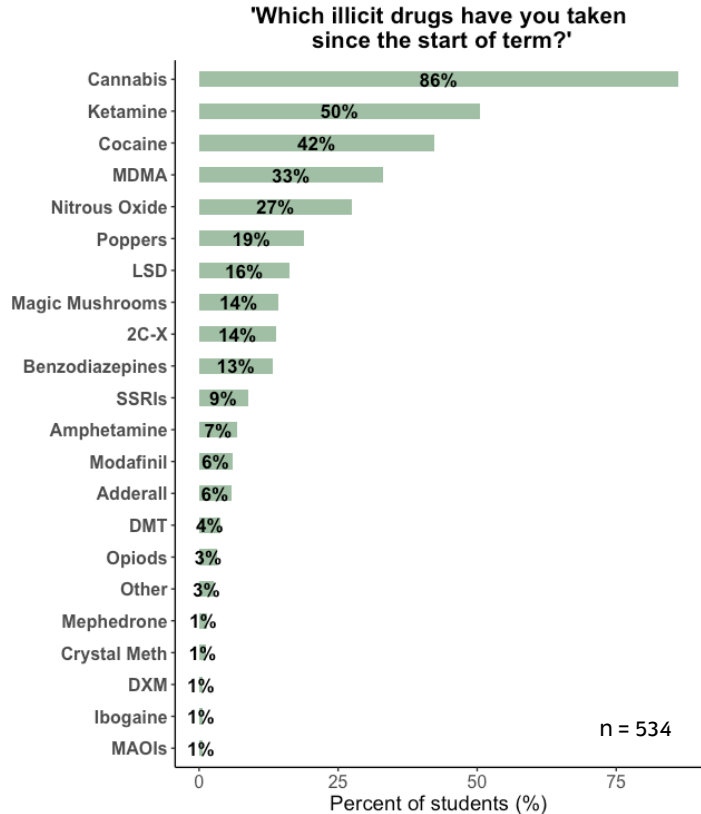
'Have you used any drugs recreationally since the start of term?'

- Yes — 58%
- Alcohol, tobacco or caffeine only — 33%
- No — 9%
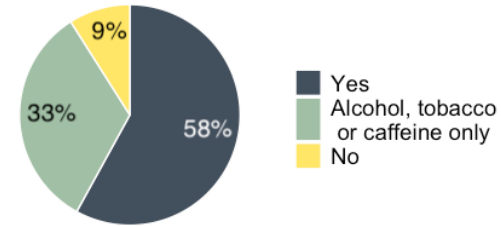
n = 949

- Drug use prevalence since the start of term was **58%** (consistent with Taking the Hit and our in-house research).

- The 5 most commonly used drugs were **cannabis, ketamine, cocaine, MDMA** and **NOS.**
- Comparison with the 1st lockdown:
  - Increased use of most drugs
  - Very consistent cannabis use
  - Greatest increase in party drugs, including poppers and NOS - freshers parties?

Overview of Drug Use

**The top five most commonly used drugs:
'How often did you take each
illicit drugs since the start of term?'**

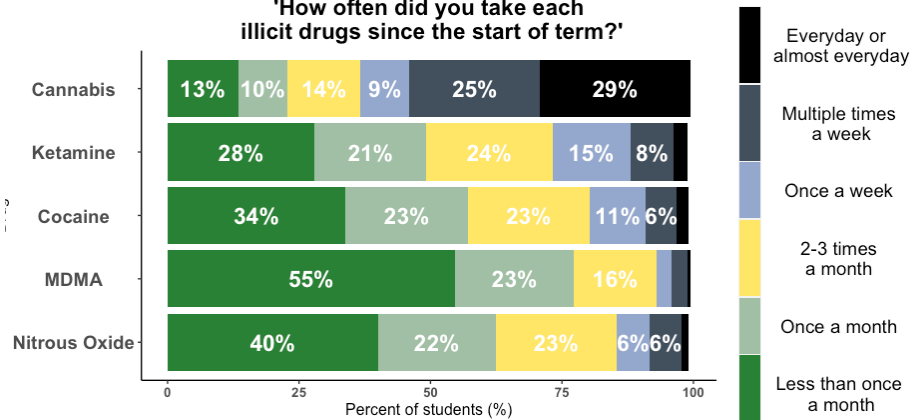| Drug					
Cannabis	13%	10%	14%	9%	25%	29%
Ketamine	28%	21%	24%	15%	8%
Cocaine	34%	23%	23%	11%	6%
MDMA	55%	23%	16%		
Nitrous Oxide	40%	22%	23%	6%	6%

Percent of students (%)

Legend:
- Everyday or almost everyday
- Multiple times a week
- Once a week
- 2-3 times a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month

n = 525

- Most frequently used drug was cannabis:
  - **29%** used it **everyday** or **almost everyday**
  - **25%** used it multiple times a week

- Least frequently used drug was MDMA.

- **27%** of ketamine users used it once a week or more.

- **20%** of cocaine users used it once a week or more.

- **15%** of NOS users used it once a week or more

Overview of Mental Health

Histogram of Mental Health Scores

57.4%   42.6%

Number of Students

Mental Health Score

n = 949
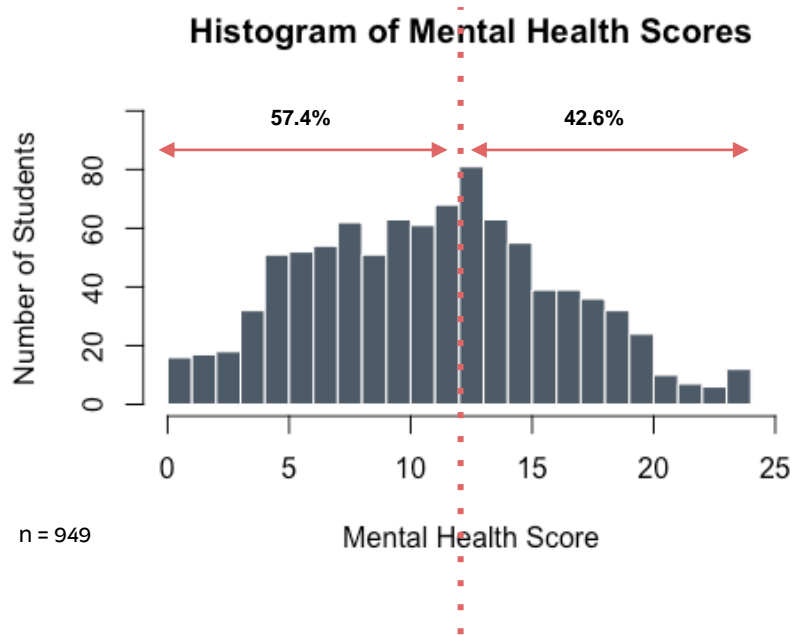
Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) was used for screening.

- A score of >12 is a strong indicator of the presence of a diagnosable mental illness with considerable disability.

- The **average score** was **11.4** (SD = 5.2, median = 11, mode 13)
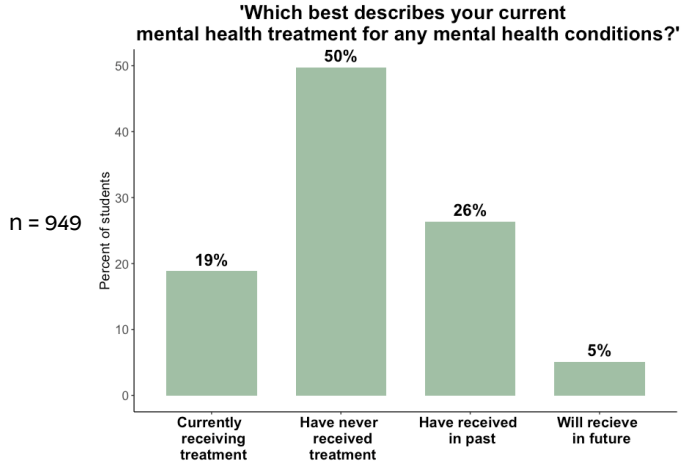 - Males' average = 10.2 (SD = 5.2)
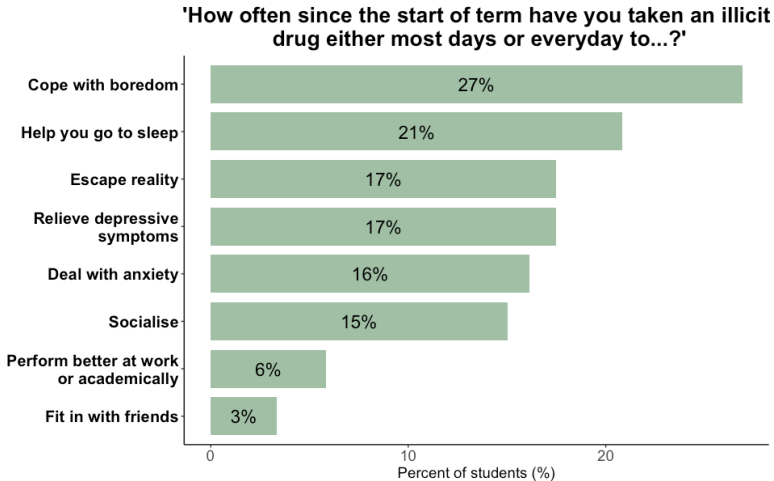 - Females' average = 11.9 (SD = 5.0)

Overview of Mental Health

'Which best describes your current mental health treatment for any mental health conditions?'

n = 949

Mental health score according to treatment			
Treatment	Mean	Median	N
Currently receiving treatment	13.58	14	179
Has never received treatment	9.86	10	472
Has received treatment in the past	12.19	12	250
Will receive treatment in future	14.25	14	48

- **24%** currently receive or will receive mental health treatment
  - This number is much less than the percentage of high scoring students (42.6%) → unmet needs?

- **Half** of students have never recieved or won't receive treatment

- Students mental health scores reflect their treatment status nicely:
  - Students who will be receiving treatment had the worst score on average
  - Students who hadn't or won't receive treatment had the lowest mental health score on average

- The scores of students who received treatment in the past were still higher than students who didn't need treatment.
  - How effective is treatment?

Mental Health

To what extent do you agree?:
'I have more reasons for using illicit drugs this year compared to other years'

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

| 12.2% | 15.3% | 18.7% | 30.5% | 9.9% |

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

'How often since the start of term have you taken an illicit drug either most days or everyday to...?'

| Reason	Percent
Cope with boredom	27%
Help you go to sleep	21%
Escape reality	17%
Relieve depressive symptoms	17%
Deal with anxiety	16%
Socialise	15%
Perform better at work or academically	6%
Fit in with friends	3%

Percent of students (%)

- **40.5%** of students thought that they "have more reasons for using illicit drugs this year compared to other years".

- Most common reasons for regular drug use were to **"cope with boredom"** and "**go to sleep**".

- Peer pressure didn't seem to be relevant to regular drug use.

Mental Health

How often since the start of term have you taken an illicit drug to....?
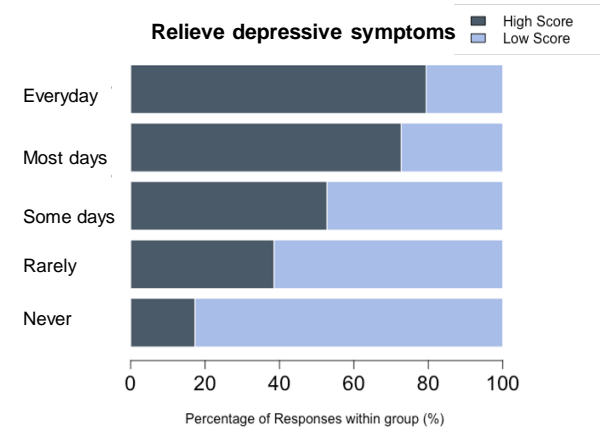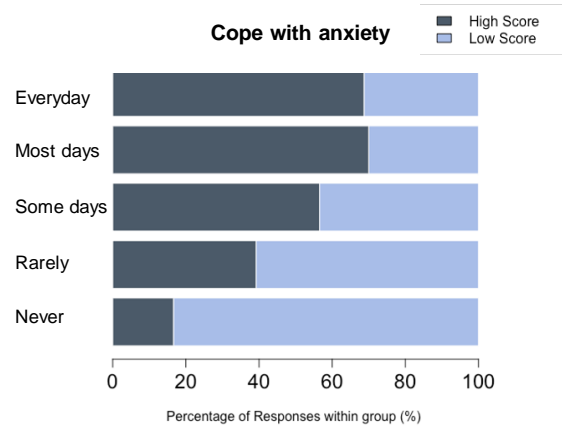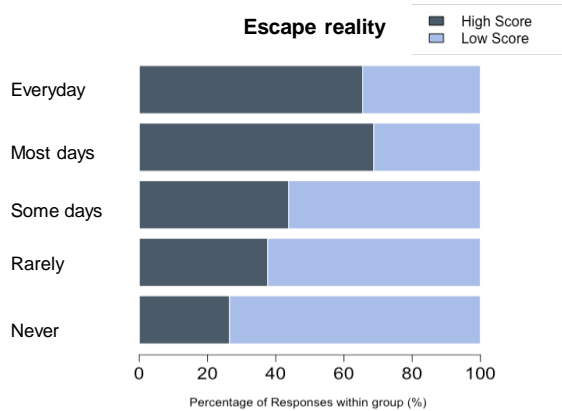
- A closer look at mental health-related reasons showed a clear relationship between the regularity of drug use and the state of mental health.
    - Students with high psychological distress use illicit drugs more regularly to cope with their mental health
    - Conscious or subconsious self-medication?

Mental Health

Regular and non-regular users: 'How often do you use illicit drugs to…?

(Stacked by whether dependent or not dependent on a drug)
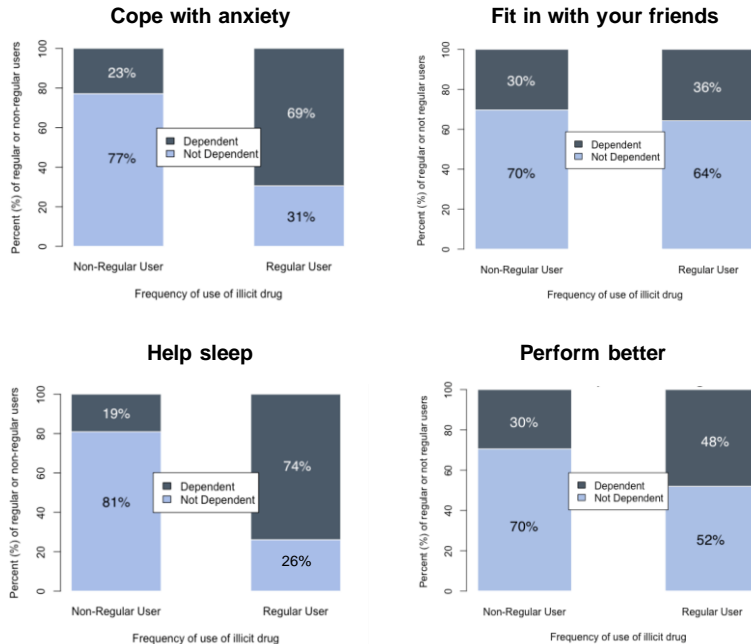
- Students who use drugs regularly are more likely to feel dependent on a drug.
  - Statistically significant difference for all reasons of use.

- Feelings of dependency is more common among regular users if the reason of use is related to mental health.

Access to Drugs

To what extent do you agree?:
'I find it easy to obtain drugs'

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

4% 5% 13% 45% 33%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

'Which of the following have you done since the start of term?
Tick all that apply'

- Given a friend a drug I bought — 51%
- Bought drugs for me and friend — 49%
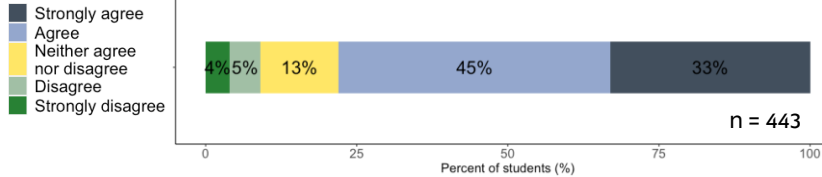- Purchased through social media — 27%
- Purchased through dark web — 10%
- Bought in bulk to sell to friends — 5%
- None — 32%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)
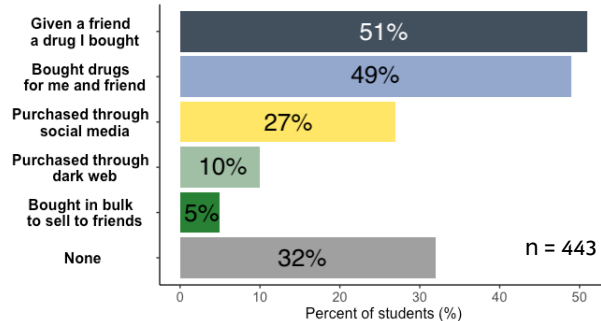
- **78%** of students who use drugs found it easy to obtain illicit drugs - despite the lockdown!

- **Half** of students who use drugs were involved in social dealing.

- **5%** of students who use drugs bought illicit drugs in bulk in order to supply their friends
  - Implications for policies?

- A significant proportion purchased their drugs online:
  - **27%** through social media
  - **10%** through dark web

How Do Students Start Taking Drugs?

'Did you try or use any illicit drugs prior to your enrolment at your university?'

20%

80%

- Yes
- No

n = 524
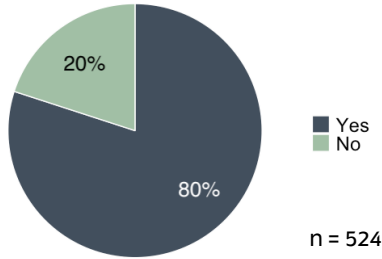
For students that have used drugs prior to enrolment at university:
'Have you tried any new drugs since the start of term?'

27%

63%

10%

- Yes
- Wanted to but couldn't
- No

n = 417
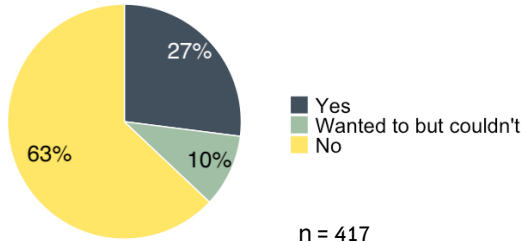
- **80%** of students who use drugs started using drugs **before university**.
  - Implications for abstinence-based policies?

- Of the students who tried illicit drugs prior to university:
  - **27%** tried a new drug
  - **10%** wanted to but couldn't

Why Do Students Start Taking Drugs?

'What was the reason for trying out a new drug? Please tick all that apply'

Reason	Percent
I was just curious at that moment and wanted to try it	56%
I've always wanted to try and there was an opportunity	54%
I knew I wanted to try a new drug and planned for it	40%
Friend suggested taking it	32%
Friends seemed to be having good time, I wanted to be part of it	20%
I tried a new drug unintentionally	7%
I felt peer pressure	3%
Other	4%

n = 165

Percent of students (%)

To what extent do you agree?: 'I want to try other illicit drugs if I get the opportunity'

Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

7.7% | 16% | 15.1% | 48.8% | 12.4%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

- Of the students who tried a new drug since the start of term:
  - **56%** tried it out of curiosity
  - **40%** actively planned for it
  - Only **3%** felt peer pressure
  - Implications for providing harm reduction advice?

- **61.2%** of students who use drugs wanted to try other illicit drugs if they had the opportunity.

1 in 2 Students Had a "Negative" Experience

'Have you experienced any of these due to taking illicit drug?'

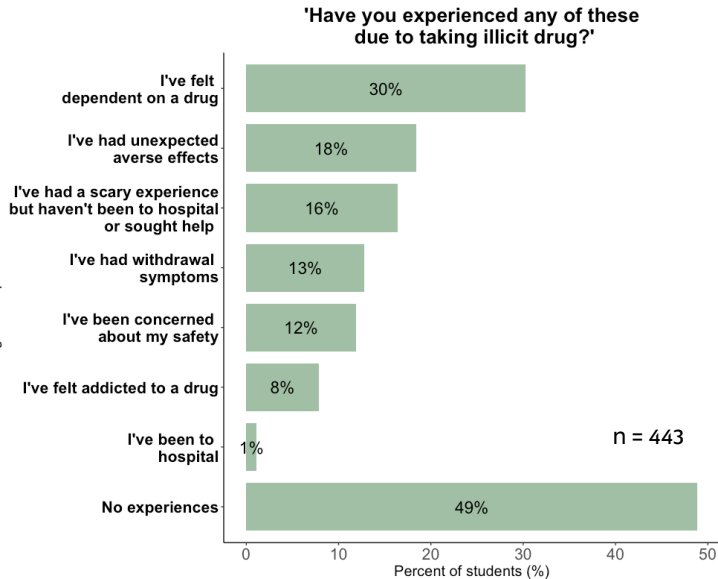| Category	Percent
I've felt dependent on a drug	30%
I've had unexpected averse effects	18%
I've had a scary experience but haven't been to hospital or sought help	16%
I've had withdrawal symptoms	13%
I've been concerned about my safety	12%
I've felt addicted to a drug	8%
I've been to hospital	1%
No experiences	49%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

- Only about **half** of students who use drugs hadn't had a negative experience

  - **30%** felt dependent
  - **13%** felt withdrawal symptoms
  - **8%** felt addicted

  - **16%** had a scary experience but didn't ask for help!
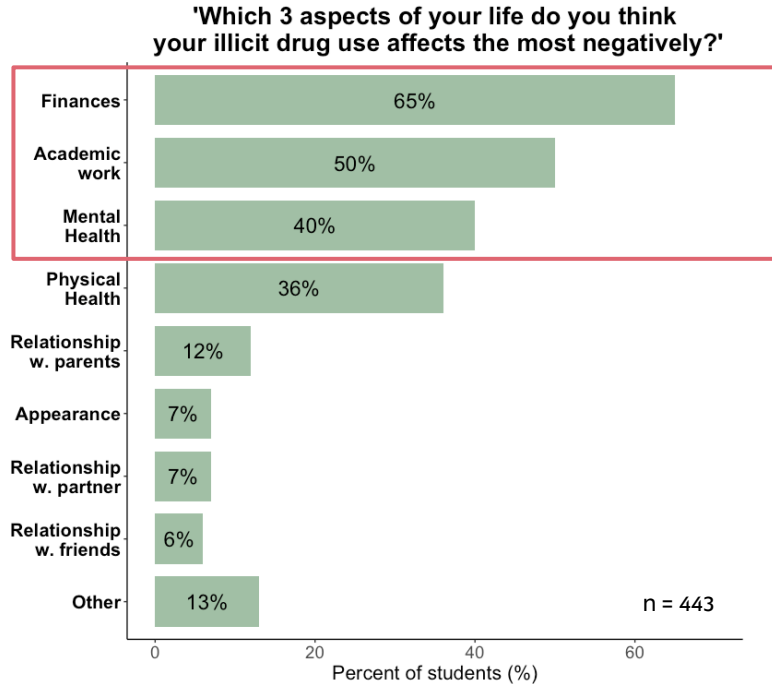 - **12%** was concerned for their safety
  - Only **1%** had been to hospital

Dependence: being reliant on a drug to feel in a certain way, and it's not the same as addiction

Addiction: compulsive drug taking despite negative consequences

How to Design Tools and Interventions That Are Relevant to Students' Needs and Worries?

Relevance

'Which 3 aspects of your life do you think your illicit drug use affects the most negatively?'

Aspect	Percent
Finances	65%
Academic work	50%
Mental Health	40%
Physical Health	36%
Relationship w. parents	12%
Appearance	7%
Relationship w. partner	7%
Relationship w. friends	6%
Other	13%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

While talking about the negative effects of drugs to discourage drug use, messaging should focus on **finances, academic work** and **mental health**.

Examples:

- Workshops activity - Make students think about something they wanted to buy, make them calculate how many g of cannabis/cocaine they need to cut down to save money.

- Share information on social media about how drugs affect executive functions and how this is relevant to academic performance.

- Integrate drug-related information into mental health resources.

Relevance

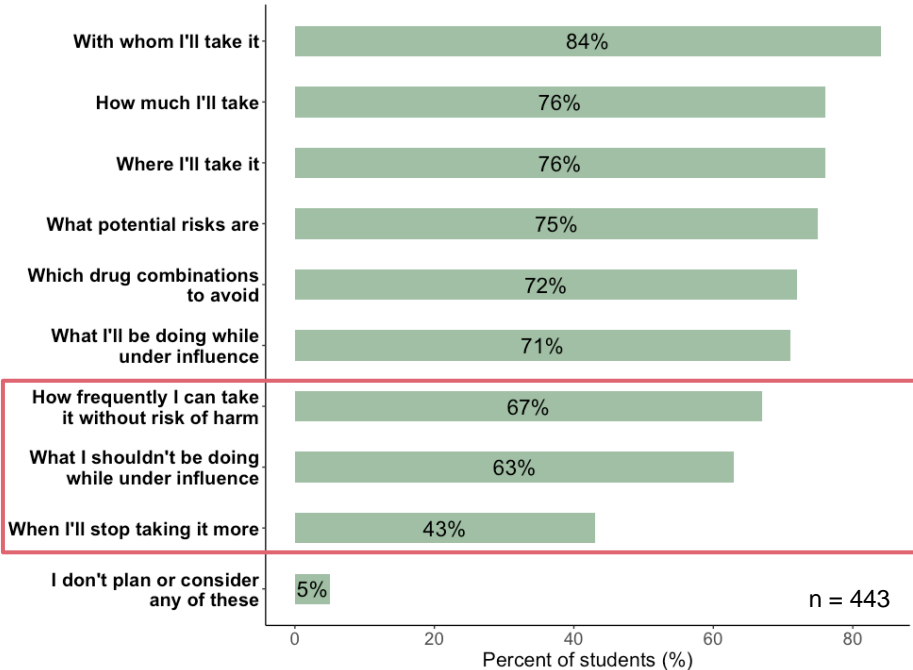'Which 3 aspects of your life do you think your illicit drug use affects the most positively?'

- Relationship with friends: 68%
- Mental Health: 57%
- Relationship with partner: 21%
- Academic work: 18%
- Physical Health: 8%
- Appearance: 8%
- Finances: 2%
- Other: 18%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)
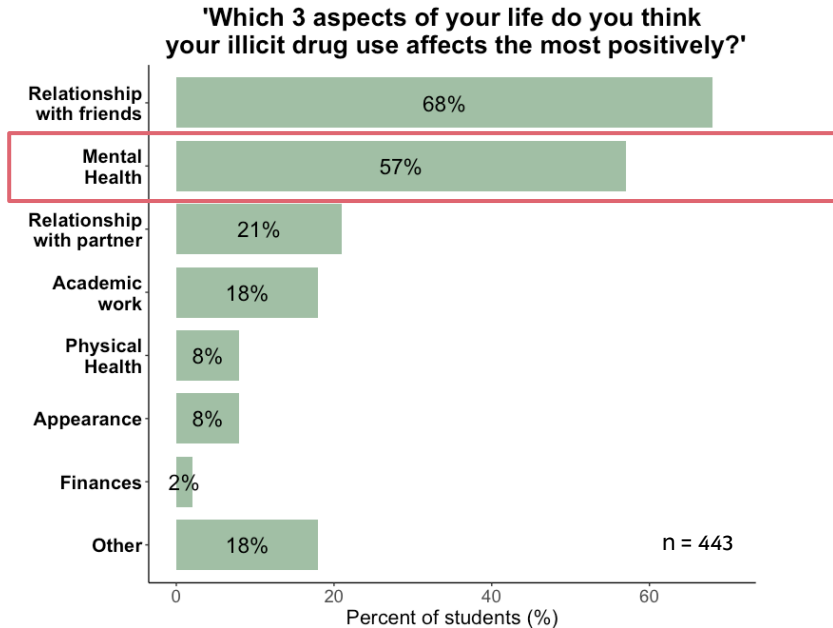
- "Mental health" is in top 3 in both graphs.
  - Illicit drug use both makes and breaks mental health.
  - Easiest path for drug use to become problematic

  → Educate students on:
  - Implications of drug use for their mental health
  - Signs to look for to spot problematic drug use

- Social aspects of drug use can't be ignored.
  → To successfully promote behaviour change, an alternative behaviour should be provided to substitute the undesired behaviour.

Which Harm Reduction Advice Is Most Needed?

'Do you plan or consider any of these before taking an illicit drug? Please tick all that apply'

Option	Percent
With whom I'll take it	84%
How much I'll take	76%
Where I'll take it	76%
What potential risks are	75%
Which drug combinations to avoid	72%
What I'll be doing while under influence	71%
How frequently I can take it without risk of harm	67%
What I shouldn't be doing while under influence	63%
When I'll stop taking it more	43%
I don't plan or consider any of these	5%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

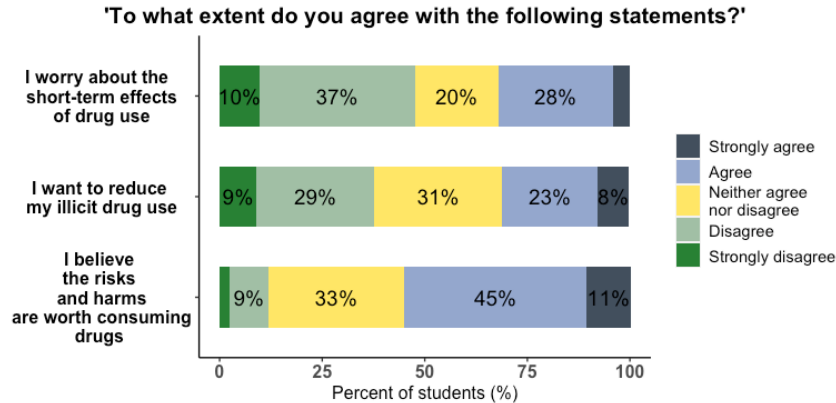Most drug harms comes from the way drugs are used.

Drugs: positive feedback mechanisms; reinforce behaviour

→ Introduce negative feedback mechanisms; thinking processes

Examples:
- Ketamine (powder) - sickness, confusion (internal feelings)
- MDMA (pill) - wait 2h
- Don't accept challenges
- Sick of comedowns? - 3 months rule

Scaremongering?

'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?'

I worry about the short-term effects of drug use	10%	37%	20%	28%	
I want to reduce my illicit drug use	9%	29%	31%	23%	8%
I believe the risks and harms are worth consuming drugs	9%	33%	45%	11%	

Percent of students (%)

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
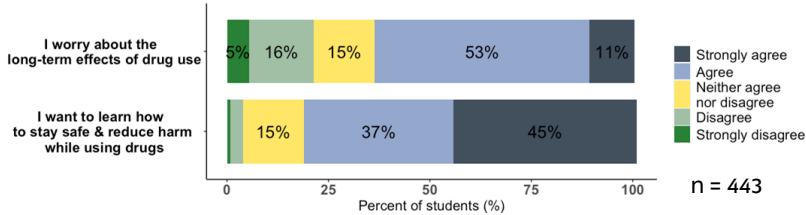- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

n = 443

- Majority of students (56%) who use drugs already made their judgment about if it's worth the risks through first-hand experience.
  - Can you change their minds?

- Only 33% worry about the short-term effects of drug use.

- Only 31% want to reduce their drug use.

What to Do Then?

'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?'

I worry about the long-term effects of drug use: 5% Strongly disagree, 16% Disagree, 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 53% Agree, 11% Strongly agree

I want to learn how to stay safe & reduce harm while using drugs: 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 37% Agree, 45% Strongly agree

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

Percent of students (%)

n = 443

'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?'

If my friend expressed their concerns about my wellbeing I would take it seriously: 5%, 10%, 47%, 37%

I would talk to my friend about their drug use if I was worried about their wellbeing: 9%, 48%, 40%

I know what to do if a friend has taken too much of a drug: 9%, 25%, 14%, 34%, 19%

I know what to do if a friend has taken drunk too much alcohol: 8%, 8%, 53%, 29%

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

Percent of students (%)

n = 732

- **64%** of students who use drugs worry about drugs' long-term effects

- **82%** want to learn about drugs

→ Even though young people are risk-takers, they don't want to be harmed. There is demand for information!

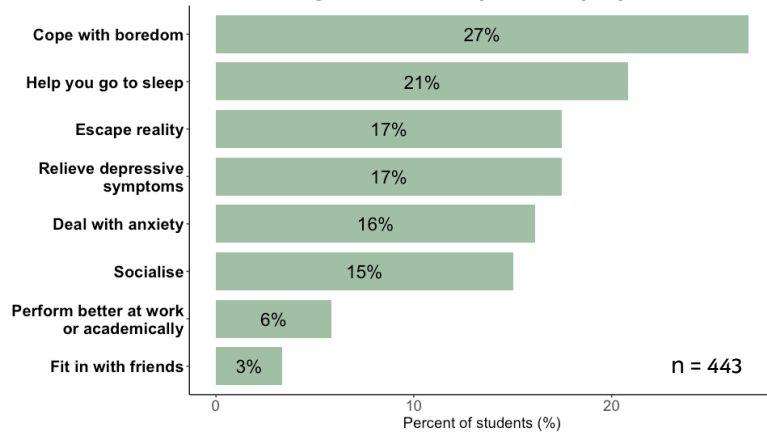**?** Inform all students or the ones using drugs **?**
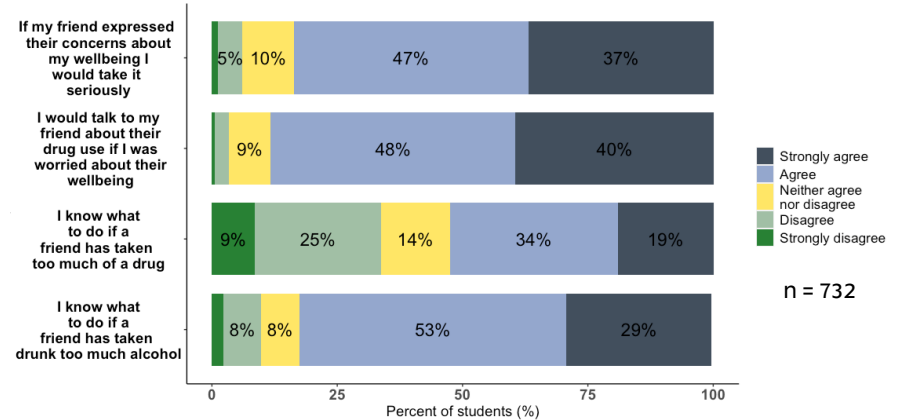
- Knowing what to do when a friend takes too much can make the difference between life and death!

- Encourage **peer support**
  - **88%** would talk to friends about their wellbeing
  - **84%** would take their friend's concerns seriously

→ Can train interested students to provide support confidentially to prevent fear of punishment
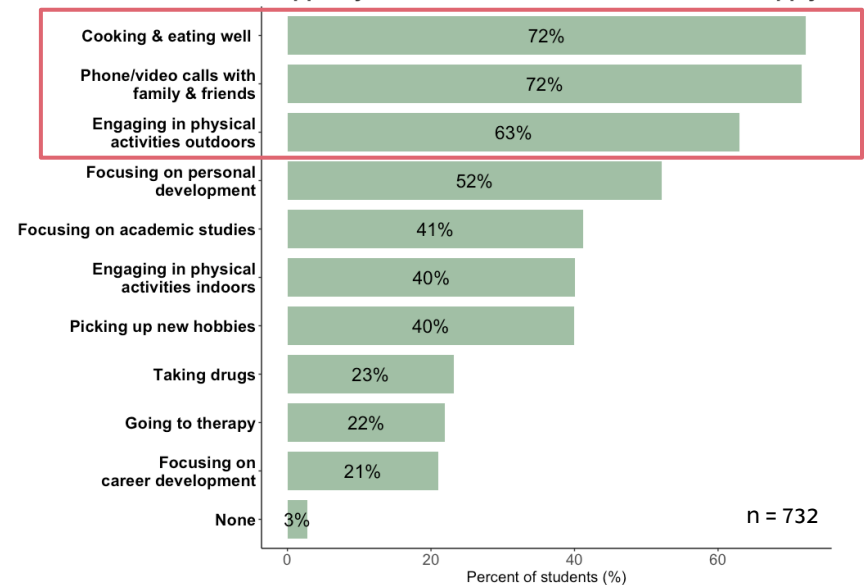
What to Do Then?

'How often since the start of term have you taken an illicit drug either most days or everyday to...?'

Cope with boredom	27%
Help you go to sleep	21%
Escape reality	17%
Relieve depressive symptoms	17%
Deal with anxiety	16%
Socialise	15%
Perform better at work or academically	6%
Fit in with friends	3%

n = 443

Percent of students (%)

'Which of the following did you find most useful to support your mental health? Please tick all that apply.'

Cooking & eating well	72%
Phone/video calls with family & friends	72%
Engaging in physical activities outdoors	63%
Focusing on personal development	52%
Focusing on academic studies	41%
Engaging in physical activities indoors	40%
Picking up new hobbies	40%
Taking drugs	23%
Going to therapy	22%
Focusing on career development	21%
None	3%

n = 732

Percent of students (%)

Offer:
- Entertaining and engaging events
  - Online cooking events by students
  - Daily walking groups (based on restrictions)
- Support/resources on sleep

What Do Students Think of the Support Available at Their University?

Wellbeing Support and Advice

'Has you university provided you additional wellbeing support and advice regarding the potential effects of COVID-19 on your mental health'


25%

42%

33%

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

n = 732
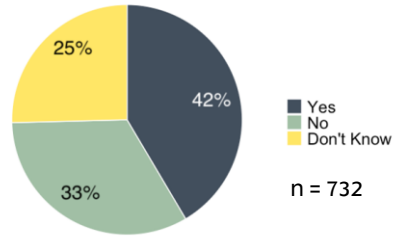
'On a scale of one to 1-100, how satisfied are you with the mental health support your university prodivded since the start of term?'

n = 732

Number of Students

Satisfaction out of 100
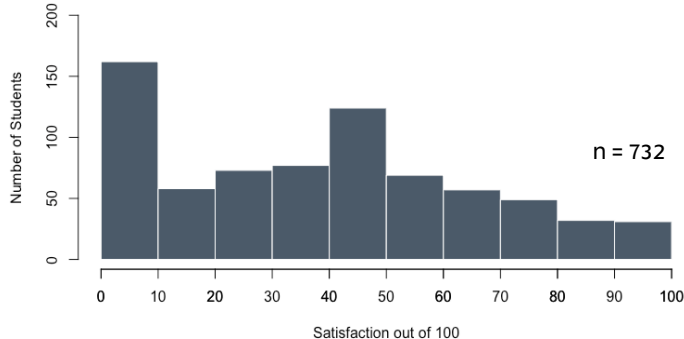
- Only **42%** received or were aware of additional wellbeing support

- Students gave an average of 40.1 points for their satisfaction with available support

Information on Drugs

Has your university provided you safety information concerning illicit drugs?'

19%

32%

49%

Yes
No
Don't know

n = 732
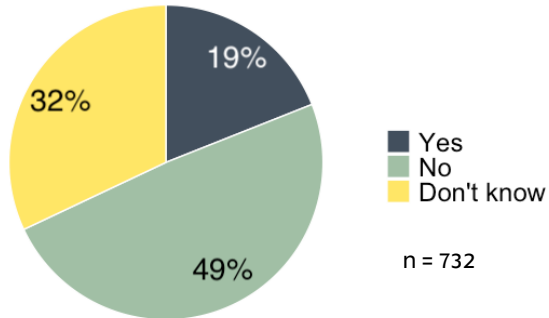
- Only **19%** reported having received safety information concerning illicit drugs

ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH SSDP

PRESENTED BY ELERI CROSSLAND

CO-CHAIR OF SSDP UK UNIVERSITY DRUG POLICY COMMITTEE

SSDP DURHAM PRESIDENT

AN INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS FOR SENSIBLE DRUG POLICY

ORGANISATION

Individual "chapters" of SSDP operate on a grassroots basis in universities and communities all over the world.

MISSION

We believe that "The War on Drugs" is failing our society. Instead we advocate a harm reduction-based approach to drug policy and education to counteract the impact of drug misuse upon our communities.

VALUES

SSDP is an inclusive, anti-racist organisation that neither condemns nor condones the use of any legal or illegal drugs - we respect the right of individuals to make decisions about their own health and wellbeing.

CHANGING DRUG POLICY IN LIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC THROUGH SSDP UK

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

- #SupportDon'tPunish
- International Overdose Awareness Day

UNIVERSITY DRUG POLICY REVIEW

- NUS Drug and Alcohol Impact
- Testing Kits

WORKING WITH PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- NeuroSight
- Volteface
- DMS Foundation
- Bristol Drug Project
- Labour Drug Policy Reform Group
- Conservative Drug Policy Reform Group

03

ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS THROUGH SSDP UK

Students for Sensible Drug Policy UK was live.
31 August 2020 · 🌐

CO-ORDINATING EVENTS, ACTION AND TRAINING WITH PARTNERS

- Survey with NeuroSight
- Drug Policy Activist Training with Transform and LEAP UK

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS

- Distributing Harm Reduction Information
- Crossover events between chapters

CO-ORDINATING CHAPTERS

- Regular meetings
- Shared actions and initiatives
- Supporting new chapters

03

WORK OF INDIVIDUAL CHAPTERS

NEW SSDP CHAPTERS RATIFIED

- King's College London
- Newcastle
- Surrey
- Huddersfield
- Queen Mary
- Bristol

INTERNAL ACTIONS

- Harm reduction leafletting in local bars and university drug policy review by SSDP Durham

EXTERNAL ACTIONS

- Online events with guest speakers, such as 'Navigating Career Opportunities in Psychedelics', hosted by SSDP UCL
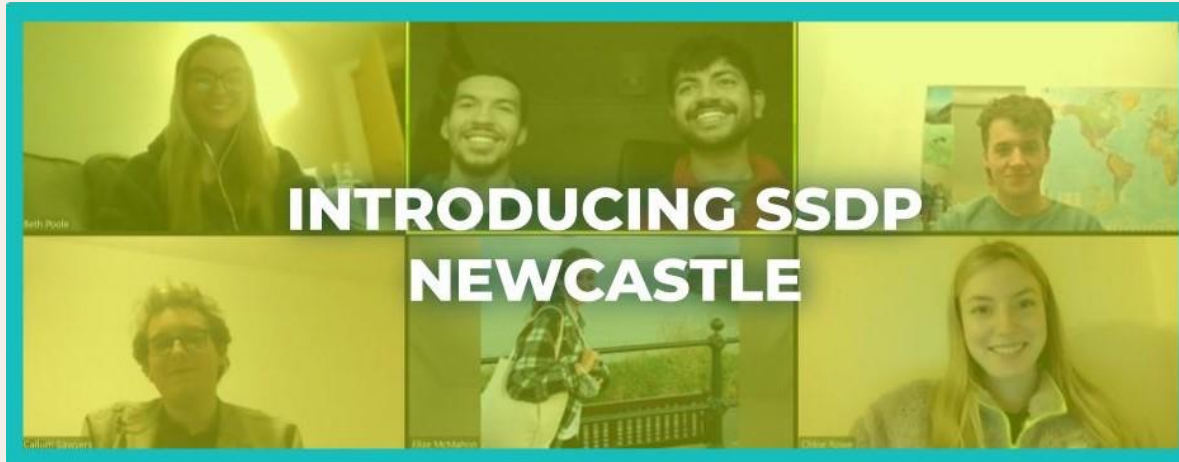
RECEIVE OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY RECOGNITION

HOLD REGULAR MEETINGS

ATTEND NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SSDP EVENTS

PERSONAL BENEFITS

LEARNING AND RESPONSIBILITY

- Life-saving harm reduction information
- New interests

SOCIAL

- Meet caring, like-minded people
- Engage with students nationwide

EMPLOYMENT AND CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

- Journalism
- Psychedelic Career Pipeline Scheme

- **BOARD MEMBER ELECTIONS**
  - Nominations close Monday 15th February
  - Join SSDP UK Network on Facebook to find out more

- **SUPPORTING NEW CHAPTERS**

  - Contact me or SSDP social media for more information on setting up a chapter

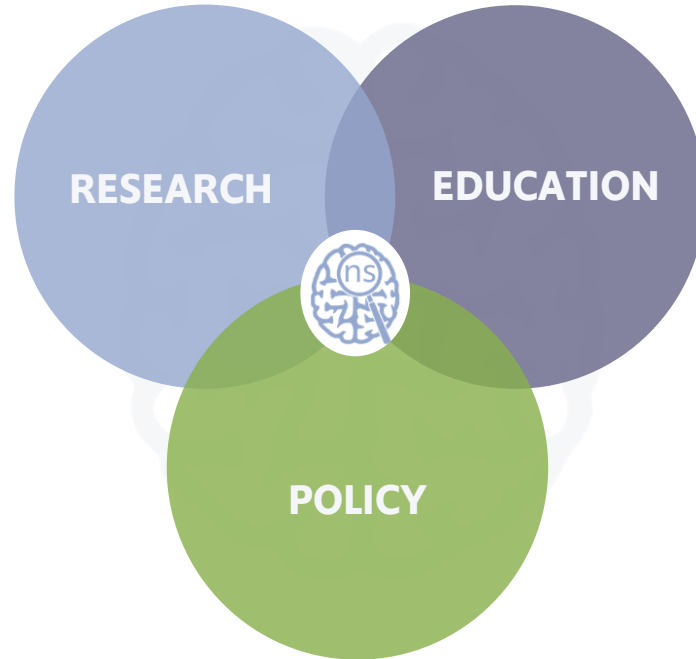- **UPCOMING EVENTS AND TRAINING**
  - Harm Reduction Workshops with DSM Foundation, Drugs & Me, and The Alcohol Education Trust

- **SOCIAL MEDIA**

  - Sharing information, events and creative content on regular platforms

What's next for SSDP UK?

Q & A

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