

Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

For some time, it has been the aim of VU Amsterdam to set down rules and agreements in relation to the consumption of alcohol, for employees and students alike. This is in line with the countless activities that take place at VU Amsterdam in the field of health and sustainability. For example, a sustainability vision has been drawn up and various profile themes have been established. At national and international level, too, numerous initiatives have been launched in support of a healthy and sustainable society – these include the National Prevention Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This document contains agreements and measures for employees and students in relation to the consumption of alcohol in the context of work and study. The National Prevention Agreement¹ (which seeks to reduce smoking, obesity and alcohol abuse) places a duty on every university in the Netherlands to introduce agreements concerning the consumption of alcohol by the end of 2022. In the context of the Prevention Agreement, schools and universities are committed to reducing excessive alcohol consumption among young people and students. Reducing levels of alcohol consumption has the support of Universities of the Netherlands (UNL)².

VU Amsterdam is committed to prevention and to the promotion of health. Raising the subject of alcohol abuse and, in that context, positively promoting the use of non-alcoholic or low-alcoholic drinks, forms the basis of this document. This includes encouraging initiatives involving non-alcoholic and low-alcoholic drinks and providing information about the health-related and other effects of alcohol abuse. So we are not banning drinking, but instead treating alcohol with respect. As is the case with many other aspects of health and safety for employees and students, it is the individuals themselves who carry a large degree of responsibility in adhering to the agreements.

2. SCOPE

The Executive Board adopted the VU Amsterdam Health and Safety Policy Framework in 2019. The present document is consistent with the university's vision on safety and with the aforementioned policy framework and occupational health and safety policies.

The modified rules and agreements apply to every VU Amsterdam employee and student. Although the university has a different relationship with its employees than it has with its students, it has been decided that the document should be as uniform as possible. The study, student and sports associations form part of this document. VU Amsterdam is linked to the associations through the awarding of the administrative grants and has the authority to impose conditions on the associations.

The 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document has been adopted for a period of three years. During this time, it will be periodically evaluated to see whether the rules and agreements are effective or whether alternative options should be explored. Interim amendments to the document may be made if there are reasons for doing so, such as changes in circumstances, apparent deficiencies in the document, changes to legislation, effectiveness, etc. Consideration will be given during the period of validity of the document to how alcohol policies could be better integrated.

The application of the document lies between the regular line and staffing organisation and with the boards of the study and student associations. The document will be administered by Corporate Real Estate and Facilities (FCO), which is also responsible for supporting the study associations (provision of step-by-step plan/checklist) whenever licences are applied for.

The 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document does not apply to:

1. VU Amsterdam employees and students who are abroad for their work/studies. Employees and students abroad are subject to local laws and regulations.

¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/gezondheid-en-preventie/nationaal-preventieakkoord>
<https://www.trimbos.nl/kennis/preventieakkoord-alcohol>

² <https://www.trimbos.nl/aanbod/webwinkel/af1777-effectief-alcoholbeleid-op-het-hoger-onderwijs/>

2. The monitored consumption of alcohol by human subjects in the context of scientific research.
3. Student accommodation.

3. PREVENTION AND INFORMATION

An important part of the 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document is aimed at prevention, including the raising of awareness and provision of information about the harmful effects of alcohol.

Social safety – feeling safe and welcome – is a key aspect of life at VU Amsterdam and is a prerequisite for being able to study and work effectively. Social safety contributes towards the well-being of students and employees. As an open and welcoming environment, VU Amsterdam does not tolerate any form of discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment or any other behaviours that violates our values. Research has shown that the excessive consumption of alcohol can lead to undesirable behaviour. VU Amsterdam is keenly aware of this and has set up a hotline for this purpose. Anyone facing an unsafe or undesirable situation may contact the 'social safety hotline'.

Through the provision of information, VU Amsterdam is seeking to achieve:

1. Raised awareness about what alcohol consumption (including to excess) entails and what consequences it can have.
2. The active promotion of the provision of non-alcoholic drinks.
3. Relevant groups knowing that help is available and how to get it.

In this context, the following activities are among those currently taking place:

1. Training courses on the theme of 'alcohol and the possible risks when consumed to excess' are given every year to the board members of the introduction days. The courses focus on identifying the problem and speaking to the individuals concerned, and we also give tips on how to deal with specific incidents.
2. At the Info Fair and the Uilenstede Festival, student volunteers – who have been specially trained by Jellinek – share peer-to-peer information about the risks associated with the consumption of alcohol and the use of drugs.
3. For international students and others, a workshop on the consumption of alcohol and drugs is held during the introduction days, in collaboration with the International Office. The workshop focuses on the provision of information, prevention, and where to get help in Amsterdam.
4. A communication plan has been devised, with information for students and employees. There is a regular focus on prevention and the provision of information.
5. The document includes an appendix containing an action plan, setting out the necessary actions and tasks. Once the document has been approved by the Executive Board, and after it has been accepted by the Staff Council and the University Student Council, the project group will meet in order to allocate the various roles and tasks referred to in the action plan, and to describe the roles and tasks in more detail.

4. EMPLOYEES

VU Amsterdam provides a safe environment for its employees and students. An important aspect of this is the 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document, which supports the social, psychological and physical safety of employees and students, and which sets down the rules that apply to employees.

4.1. DEALING WITH ALCOHOL AT VU AMSTERDAM

The following specific agreements and measures are based on current legislation: The Dutch Civil Code, Book 7; working conditions legislation, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Eligibility for Permanent Incapacity Benefit (Restrictions) Act; and the VU Amsterdam Health and Safety Policy Framework.

The general starting point is that work and alcohol do not mix. The 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document is intended to promote working in a healthy and safe manner in an open

environment in which problems in this area can be easily discussed. The document also seeks to promote the provision of guidance, support and care for employees with an alcohol problem.

VU Amsterdam attaches much importance to emphasising its duty of care towards its employees. This means it supports its employees in resolving the consequences of alcohol abuse by addressing their behaviour and offering help. The university is bound to address its employees in relation to their conduct as part of its responsibility towards colleagues, students, the university itself, and third parties.

4.2. HELP AND GUIDANCE (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

Alcohol abuse

A safe setting must be available for reporting or discussing the consumption of alcohol and any problems related to it. If an employee has a problem, it is important that they encounter no obstacles in being able to talk about it. For support, employees can contact the occupational health physician, the Staff Welfare Office or a confidential counsellor. Their door is always open, your conversations are confidential, and they can make referrals.

Occupational health physician

Employees can make an appointment with the occupational health physician at any time for a confidential conversation about working conditions. If necessary, the occupational health physician can make a referral to a specialist. The employee and the occupational health physician decide together whether the nature of the initial consultation should be fed back to the employee's manager.

Staff Welfare Office

Employees may also contact the Staff Welfare Office directly for a confidential consultation. The Staff Welfare Office has a duty of confidentiality and offers short-term support for employees who become incapacitated for work (or who are likely to become so) as a result of psychosocial problems, work or their personal circumstances. The office can play a role in providing information about the consequences of alcohol consumption and in promoting prevention. It can also help with making referrals to more specialist care or supervision.

Confidential counsellor

The confidential counsellor can sometimes help with a plan for a preventive approach. For example, an employee might first contact the confidential counsellor so that they can jointly decide which body is best suited to tackle his or her problem. Colleagues of an employee who suspect that he or she may have a problem, but who are reluctant to say so directly, may also consult the confidential counsellor.

Absence through illness

Employees who have been absent due to illness for four weeks are invited to see the occupational health physician. If an employee is absent because of alcohol abuse, the following rules and agreements apply, in addition to those that apply in general in the case of absence through illness:

1. Subject to the assessment by the occupational health physician, the employee has the right to specific specialist help.
2. He or she should cooperate with the specialist help that is offered.

In the event of an employee not fully cooperating with their reintegration plan without good reason, the employer is entitled to suspend or even stop payment of their salary.

4.3. RULES AND MEASURES

The following agreements and measures set out the rules that apply to VU Amsterdam and its employees.

1. Employees should be sober when carrying out their work. This means employees may not be under the influence of alcohol when carrying out their work.
2. Employees with a problem of alcohol abuse are expected to seek help. We support employees as they recover and, if necessary, during their reintegration into the workplace.
3. The consumption of alcohol during working hours is restricted to official or designated meetings such as drinks gatherings, including those at Christmas and the New Year's drinks reception, events, degree award ceremonies, or with the permission of the relevant managers, directors or faculty boards.

Measures

1. If an employee is suspected of any breach of the rules, a discussion with the individual concerned will be held as soon as possible.
2. If an employee is found to be under the influence at work, their manager will order them to stop working. The manager may advise the employee to make an appointment with the occupational health physician or other source of help.
3. Managers may not ask employees directly if they have an addiction. In principle, no information on this matter may be added to an employee's personal file, even in the event of the employee mentioning it him/herself. This is because it involves the processing of special personal data, which is generally not permitted under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation.
4. Alcohol abuse is not a reason for legal action, given that it is an illness. The employer provides help and support through the occupational health physician, the Staff Welfare Office, etc.
5. If an individual does not adhere to the rules or agreements, does not wish to recognise the problem, or does not cooperate in bringing about their recovery, there may be legal consequences in relation to their employment. This could include an official warning, suspension, withholding of salary, or as a last resort, dismissal. What measure is taken depends on the circumstances. This process involves the employee, HR and the employee's manager.

5. STUDENTS AND ASSOCIATIONS

VU Amsterdam ensures that the conditions for studying on its premises are good and safe. The 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document is part of this. Students may not consume alcohol during teaching activities, such as lectures, practical classes and examinations. Relevant agreements and measures relating to students and the consumption of alcohol are contained in:

1. The House Rules and disciplinary measures in the Student Charter.
2. The Introductory Period Code of Conduct that governs student associations in Amsterdam, signed by VU Amsterdam, the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.
3. A covenant, setting down the regulations, agreements and guidelines for each faculty, between the faculty board and the study associations.

5.1. ASSOCIATIONS

The study, student and sports associations form part of the 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document. VU Amsterdam is linked to student organisations through the awarding of the administrative grants and has the authority to impose conditions on the associations. Any student organisation carrying out activities on university premises should observe the prevailing guidelines.

Student organisations are in many cases 'quasi-commercial' in nature, which means that catering and alcohol are not their main activity, but a secondary one. Students wishing to organise an event at which alcohol is to be sold or served must have a licence under the terms of the Alcohol Act. An operating licence is not required. No licence is required for organised gatherings of a private nature. This means that only internal members may be present and no charge is made for the alcoholic beverages.

An Introductory Period Code of Conduct governing student associations in Amsterdam is signed every year by VU Amsterdam, the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. It contains the rules relating to the consumption of alcohol during the introductory period. The Amsterdam Chamber of Associations (AKvV) signs the code of conduct on behalf of the student associations affiliated to it. The AKvV has also written a covenant ('alcohol and social safety'), which contains new alcohol-related agreements for student and study associations³. The covenant has recently been signed by 24 member associations.

³ [Covenant on alcohol and social safety | Amsterdam Chamber of Associations \(akvv.nl\)](#)

5.2. RULES AND MEASURES

Wherever alcohol is served, the university expects faculties and study associations to set down relevant agreements. A number of study associations at the university have already drawn up a covenant. This covenant, which is updated every three years, and the Introductory Period Code of Conduct can be used as the basis for 'good practices' for agreements between study associations and faculties. The faculty boards are responsible for drawing up the covenant. The Administration Office can provide support with this, if necessary. Agreements should be made subject to the following provisions:

1. Student associations should actively engage in raising awareness and take initiatives in putting the spotlight on alcohol consumption. This should include a reduced emphasis on alcohol and the promotion of alcohol-free afternoons/evenings. This involves working closely with suppliers of alcohol (for example, having a bar with 0% alcohol).
2. Study associations know that they need a licence for organised meetings at which alcohol is to be served. The licence in question is an Alcohol Act licence; an operating licence is not needed in such cases. Alcohol Act licences must be applied for by one association, which must have a space of at least 35m² at its disposal. The other associations (spaces) are designated as 'localities', which means that the costs for the licence application are incurred only once. Study associations understand that the responsible consumption of alcohol is a shared responsibility that lies not just with the association that applied for the licence.
3. The names of at least two members of the board of the association must be stated on the licence. They must both be at least 21 years of age. They must meet the same requirements as a manager. FCO can provide advice and support in the form of a step-by-step plan or checklist in relation to the licence application. However, the associations themselves are responsible for ensuring they have the required licences. VU Amsterdam is not responsible for this process. Any association applying for a licence must notify FCO of the fact.
4. At least two people must be in possession of a Social Hygiene qualification. They do not have to be the same two people whose names appear on the licence. Nor do they have to be members of the association.
5. Everyone working behind the bar must have completed the following brief training course: 'Verantwoord Alcoholschenken' (serving alcohol responsibly).
6. Instructions should be present at the bar or at the venue for bar staff, stating among other things that no alcohol should be served to anyone who is drunk.
7. Bar volunteers must be at least 16 years of age.
8. During the hours when alcohol is served, one manager or an individual in possession of a Social Hygiene qualification must be present at all times.
9. In order to obtain an Alcohol Act licence, the board should set down regulations guaranteeing that the serving of alcoholic beverages will be done responsibly, with a view to social hygiene.
10. Associations must ensure that the latest versions of any agreements are included periodically on their agendas and discussed jointly.

Measures

Anyone failing to comply with the rules will be spoken to by the board of the association and reminded of the relevant agreements. In the event of any repetition, the board of the association may take measures, which could include closing the association's premises for a period of at least two weeks. If any person has consumed too much alcohol and is consequently unable to take care of him/herself, the student organisation will assume responsibility for them. Student associations must familiarise themselves with the relevant procedures in the event of an emergency.

6. CATERING, HOSPITALITY AND RETAIL OPERATORS ON THE CAMPUS

Catering, hospitality and retail operators on the campus are expected to observe the law and to promote low and non-alcoholic drinks. Future (rental) agreements will include a provision, where possible, stating that we can give instructions to renters with regard to this topic.

FCO is responsible for contact with catering and hospitality operators on the VU campus. FCO draws up and enforces contract agreements, including the availability of alcohol and the way in which low and

non-alcoholic drinks are provided. In that context, FCO will ask catering and hospitality operators – in line with the policies of the university – to actively and appealingly highlight the provision of low and non-alcoholic drinks.⁴

⁴ <https://expertisecentrumalcohol.trimbos.nl/items/details/wat-zijn-alcoholvrije-dranken>

APPENDIX I: NATIONAL PREVENTION AGREEMENT⁵

In 2018, the government launched the National Prevention Agreement as a means of making the Netherlands⁶ healthier. The agreement was drawn up by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in consultation with a range of civil society organisation. The purpose of the agreement is to make preventive and early interventions so that people are less likely to fall ill and more likely to stay healthy as they get older. The agreement sets out three important areas that have a direct impact on health: *Smoking, obesity and alcohol abuse*. Various parties have signed up to the agreement, including the private sector, local authorities, organisations representing patients and sports associations.

The government is keen to combat alcohol abuse. Alcohol is particularly harmful to young people. It impedes the development of their brains. The National Prevention Agreement contains measures for tackling alcohol abuse. It includes an expectation of universities to take responsibility and to make agreements concerning the consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol abuse is defined in the prevention agreement as follows:

1. Any alcohol consumption by **people under the age of 18**;
2. Any alcohol consumption by **pregnant women**. It should also be pointed out that the consumption of alcohol can affect the fertility of men and women alike;
3. **Excessive drinking**: more than 14 glasses a week for women and more than 21 glasses for men. 8.8% of the population of the Netherlands aged 18 or over drink to excess. Excessive alcohol consumption is particularly prevalent among young adults and those aged 50 or over;
4. **Heavy drinking**: 4 glasses (for women) and 6 glasses (for men) at one 'sitting' at least once a week. 8.5% of the population of the Netherlands aged 18 or over drink heavily. Heavy drinking is particularly prevalent among young adults;
5. **Regular binge drinking**: at least 5 glasses at one 'sitting' at least once a month. This pattern of drinking is particularly common among juveniles and young adults. Binge drinking every week or more frequently is regarded as heavy drinking;
6. A pattern of drinking that leads to **physical complaints and/or psychological or social problems** and which impedes the tackling of existing problems.

Since 2015, the Health Council of the Netherlands has advised against the drinking of alcohol or at least no more than one glass per day. The risks associated with the consumption of alcohol increase the greater the quantity consumed. For this reason, the government has included targets for reducing alcohol abuse in its plan. The government's actions are therefore primarily targeted at reducing alcohol abuse, but action is also planned that is aimed at improving people's knowledge about the effects alcohol has on health.

⁵ [Measures in the Nationale Prevention Agreement | Health and prevention | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)

APPENDIX II: STAKEHOLDERS

The roles and tasks of the various stakeholders are set out below.

Internal stakeholders

1. Executive Board > adopting and publicising the rules and agreements, creating support and facilitating structure
2. Staff Council > approving the 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document
3. FCO > buildings, managing catering operators, contract agreements on catering facilities, basic communications regarding this document
4. Student and Educational Affairs > student facilities, identifying problems and giving guidance, referring students
5. Student psychologists, academic counsellors, occupational health physicians > coaching students, referrals
6. Faculties and service departments > creating awareness and compliance / enforcement
7. HRMAM > 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' employees, consultation hour for employees
8. HRM, Occupational Health, Safety and the Environment > advising associations when applying for Alcohol Act licences
9. Study and student associations > covenant, agreements and licences, compliance with agreements
10. Communication and Marketing HRM and Student and Educational Affairs > communicating about the 'Dealing with alcohol at VU Amsterdam' document for employees and students and helping to raise awareness / prevention
11. Student participation bodies > highlighting initiatives in this area
12. Team leaders / management > identifying problems and making referrals

External stakeholders

13. External experts (such as Trimbos Institute) > input of expertise and information
14. Universities of the Netherlands > approval, active participation / input of knowledge and expertise
15. Retailers / breweries > cocreation in the provision of low or non-alcoholic beverages
16. Jellinek / Trimbos Institute / Brijder > provision of information, awareness, prevention