

HSE Market Research

**Nightlife drug use, attitudes,
beliefs, responses and
communications**

*Findings presented for FOI
request.*



DRUGS.ie
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support

Background to the research

Drugs.ie is Ireland's national drug information and support website managed by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office.

The website creates novel campaign resources and social media content to raise awareness of risks and advise on harm reduction.

Campaigns are targeted at those not presenting to traditional addiction services, such as novel user groups, students and festival attendees.

Research was required to establish a pre-campaign baseline measure of the attitudes of people in relation to risk communication and harm reduction information to feed into campaign and content development for Drugs.ie



We spoke to a range of people to understand perceptions and behaviours as well as testing messaging to find out what will have the most cut through

Quantitative

phase: survey of 511 18-44s in Ireland, half of whom possessed a 'good knowledge' of drug use in Ireland

- Initial section around current landscape and second section focusing on preferences when it comes to communications
- Research took place 5th – 19th August

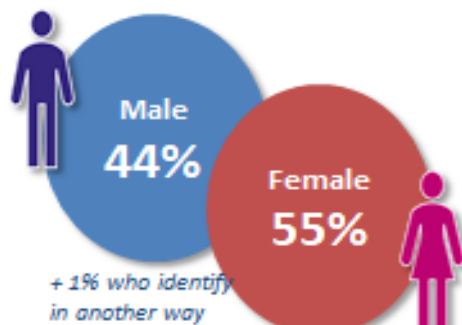
Qualitative phase:

online focus groups with 12 participants aged 22-32

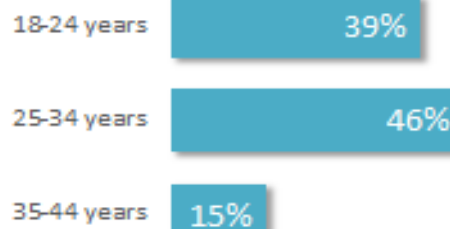
- Deep dive into occasions, triggers and barriers to drug use
- Discussion of drugs campaigns, how info is shared, and testing of comms including posters and videos
- Groups took place 9th & 10th September

Quantitative sample – we spoke to a broad range of people, primarily targeting younger people with a good knowledge of drugs

GENDER



AGE



51% Good knowledge of drugs in Ireland

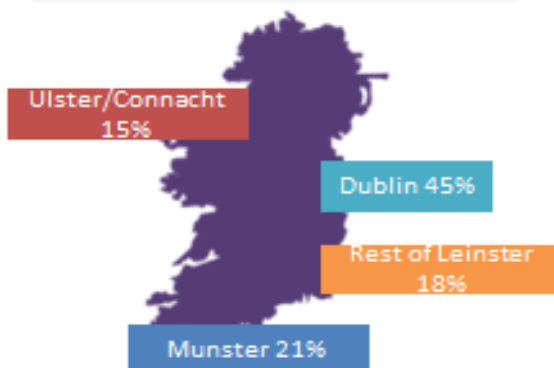
37% Reasonable knowledge of drugs

12% Poor knowledge of drugs

SOCIAL GRADE



REGION



78 participants (or 15% of the total sample) came from paid adverts by the HSE

The landscape, drug use and opinions



Days of chastising recreational drug taking are gone - society is more tolerant & accepting of it vs previous generations

49%

agree drug use is normalised in Ireland
25% disagree

"At my age of 22 you cant escape it – it's in your face"

"My 15 year old brother knows more at his age than I did (22)...it's on every social media & you can buy via social media now too"

"Recreational drugs like weed and cocaine are not seen as much as a big deal (serious) compared to someone who is 15 years older than me"

OPENNESS

Taking drugs not seen as serious vs previous generations

More tolerance to recreational drug taking - more acceptance it's happening

AWARENESS

Higher awareness of drugs & different types

More exposure to drugs younger - 14/15 & very accessible (too accessible for teens)) via social media

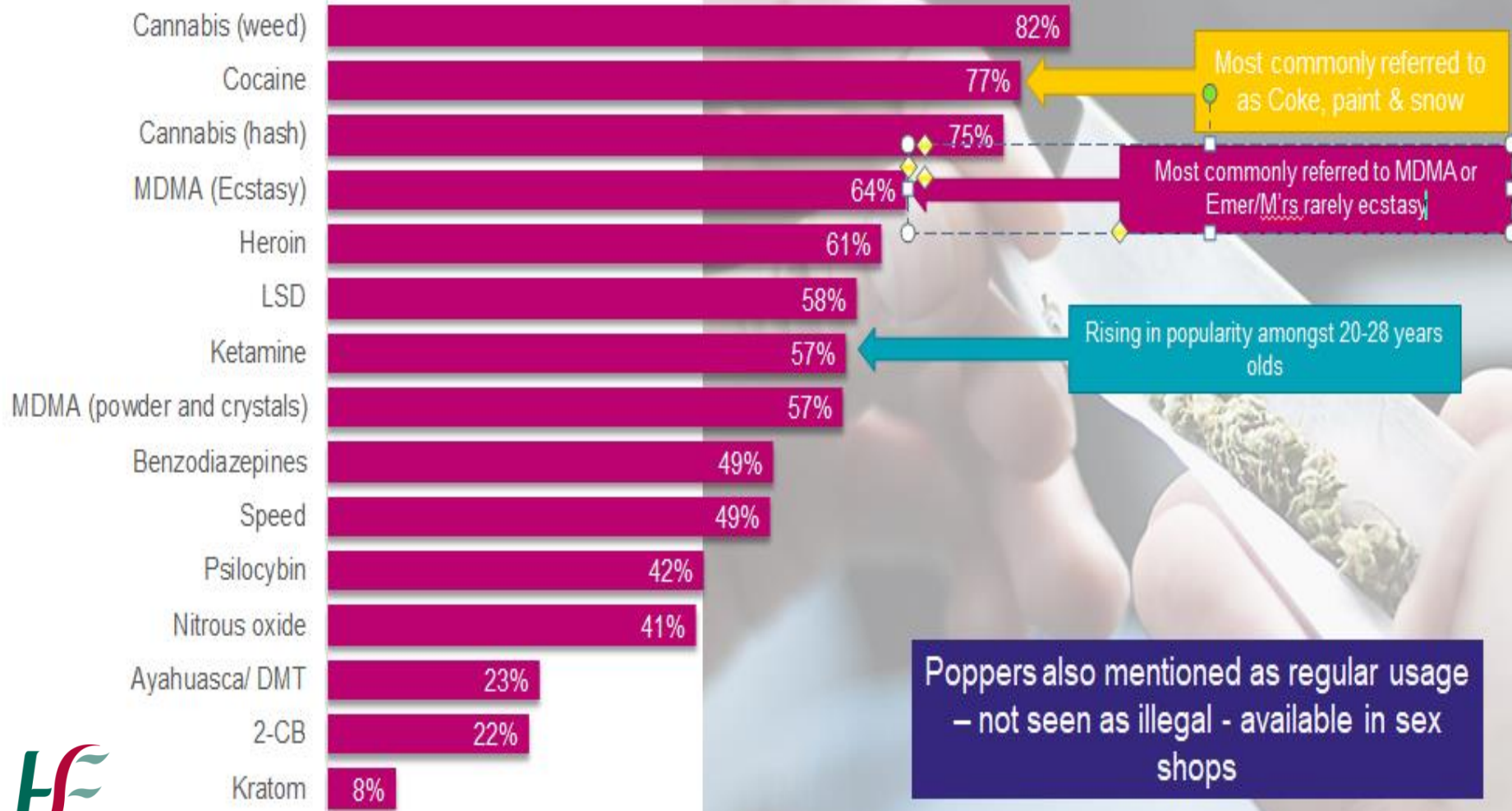
INFORMATION

Dangers still there - but this generation more informed

Schools & colleges more proactive in trying to educate

Clear that many encounter cannabis and cocaine use in some form – awareness of their usage considerably higher than other well-known drugs

Which of these drugs are you aware of being used in Ireland?



Many continuing with a form of social life despite pandemic and will likely do so with lockdowns back in place – need to stay informed of dangers

Nightlife behaviour – during Covid

23%

attended a **house party** this summer

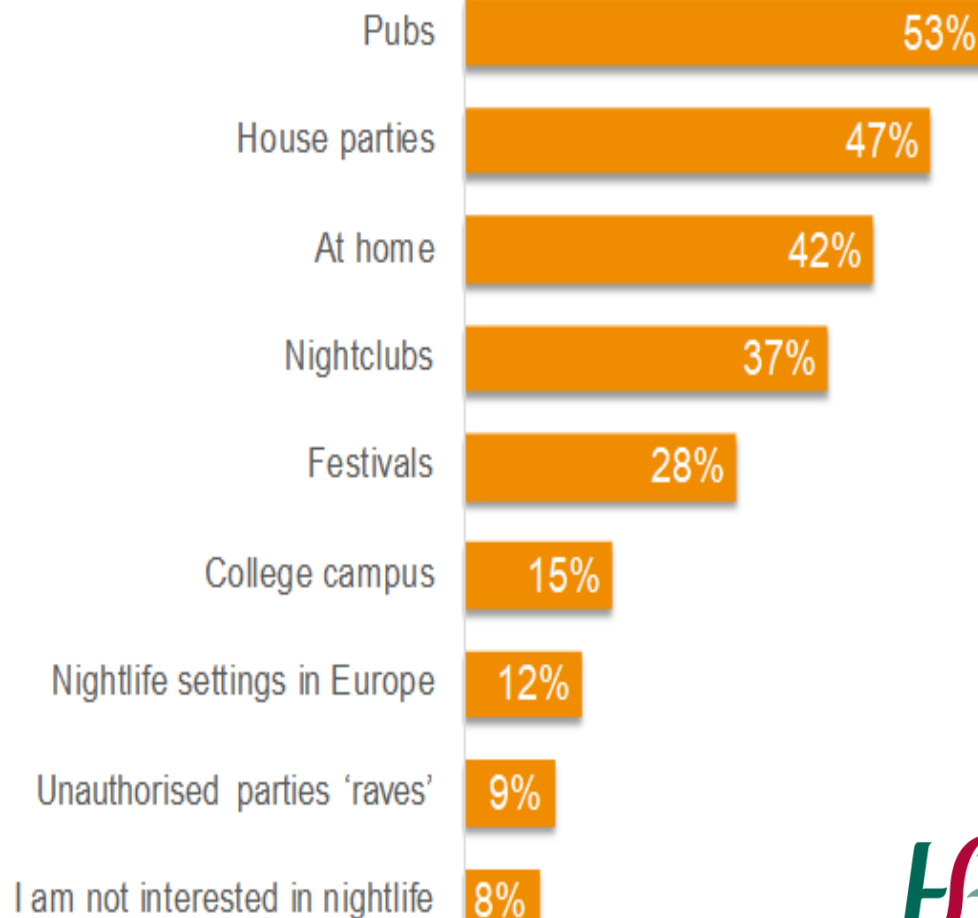
25%

were planning to do so when asked

6%

attended an **unauthorised rave**

Nightlife locations before Covid – those with good knowledge



n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Despite huge changes in their social life structure - recreational use become more frequent during Covid - more likely softer drugs

Smoking more at home - to cope with being cooped up, stress or anxiety

Less taking (hard) party drugs like cocaine due to social constraints - but rising back up once pubs re-opened

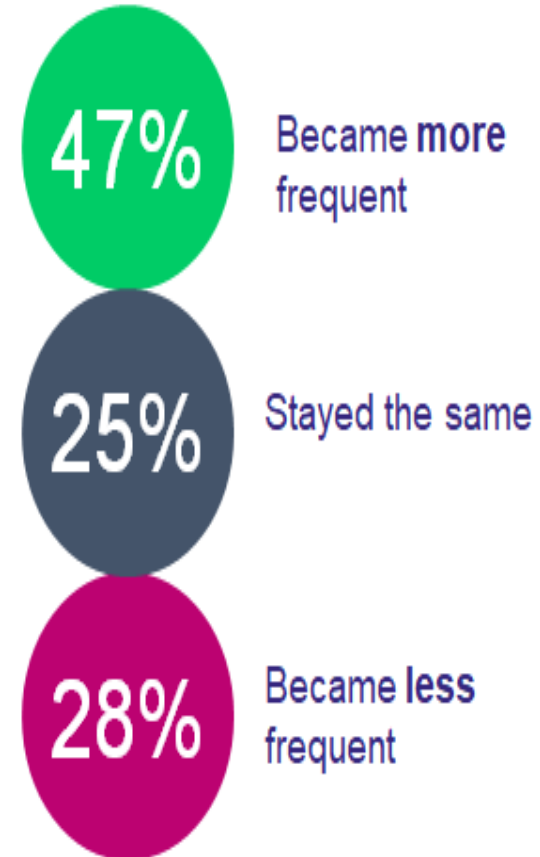
Some had more money to do - due to Covid Payment (increase in income)

No routine, no deadline for those NOT able to go to work - boredom

Working from home so no commute. Results in staying up later & less visible at work, so less care taken. Free to do it more without consequence at work



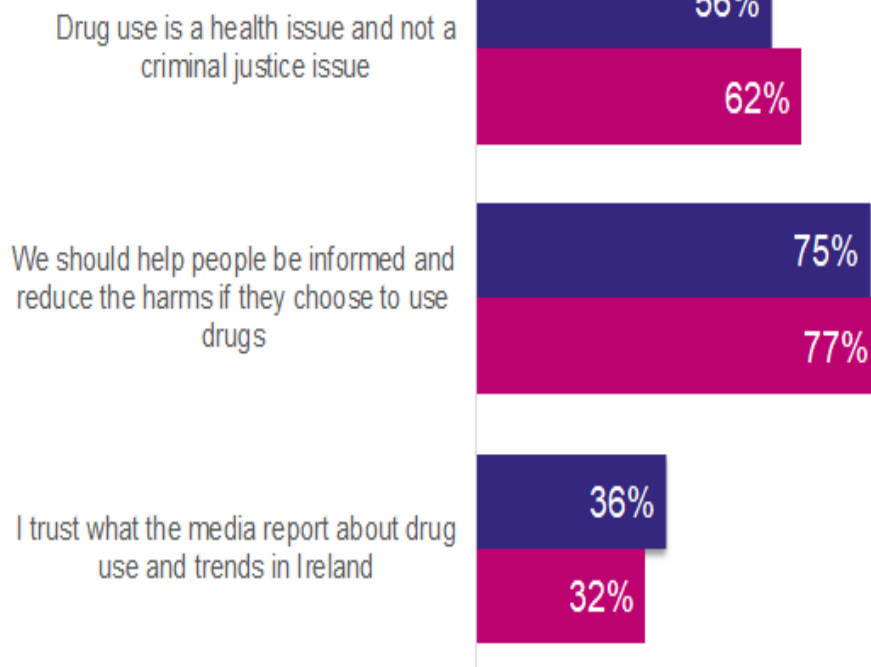
How did drug use change during Covid-19?



Harm reduction is generally seen positively – this should be capitalised on in messaging

Government and media approach to drugs - statements

■ Total ■ Good knowledge



We showed participants a short text about a **'Health Led Response'** to drug possession – referring those found in possession of drugs to health services in the first instance and serving them with a caution in the second instance

67%

agree this proposition is a good response to drug possession

12%

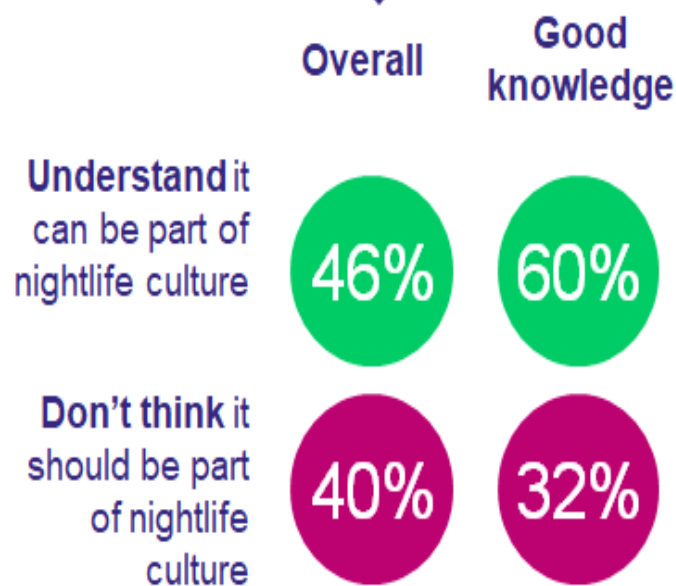
disagree

Those with a 'good knowledge' of drugs more likely to **disagree** (17%)

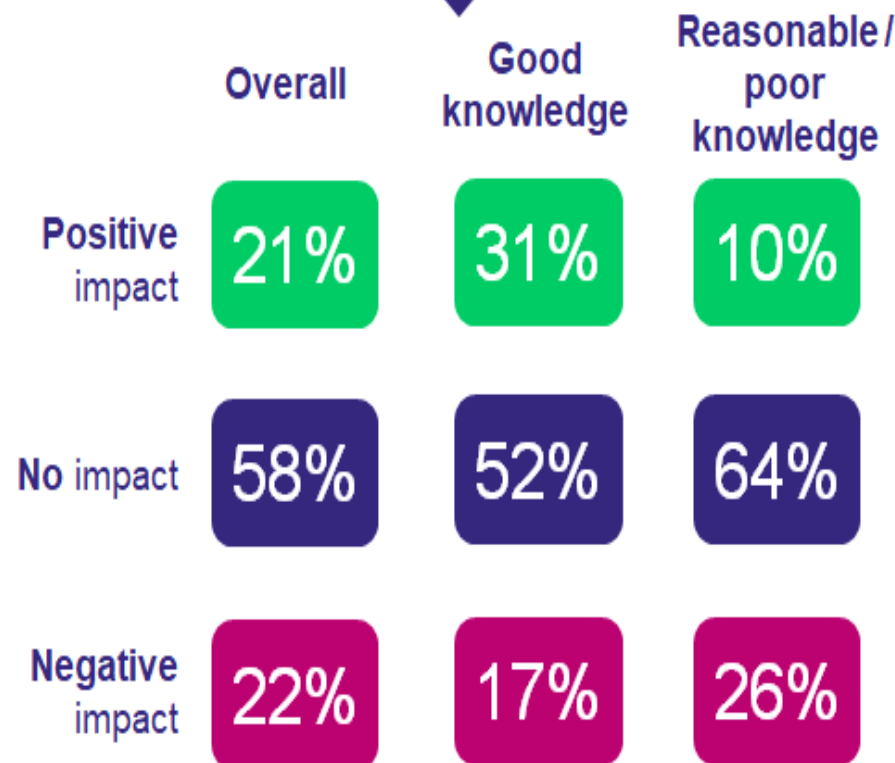
n = 511 / 260 with a good knowledge

Opinion split on whether drug use should be part of nightlife culture but most find drug use does not impact their experience

Drug use in nightlife settings – opinions



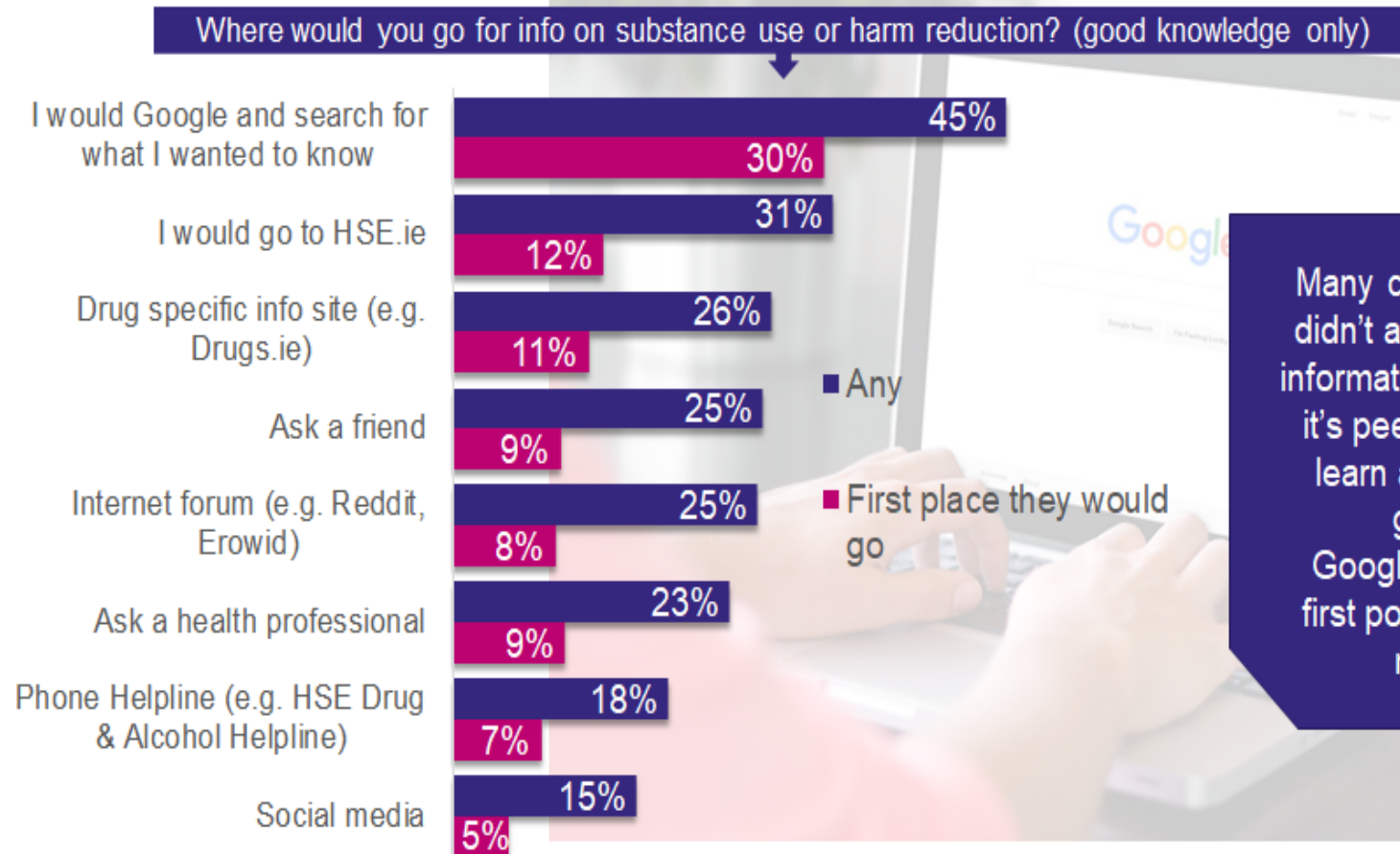
How does drug use impact on your enjoyment of nightlife settings?



Sources of information



Google first place people look for info – need to push HSE and Drugs.ie websites further



Many claimed they didn't actively seek information- claiming it's peer led & you learn as you go/ grow!
Google would be first port of call for many

= 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Many prefer to look into harm reduction in their own time, but there is appetite for learning from professionals or info stands

Where would you prefer to receive information on drugs? (good knowledge)



40% Research online myself



20% Sit with a professional in service



14% Talk with someone at a stand – either a nightclub or festival



10% Leaflets I can read in my own time



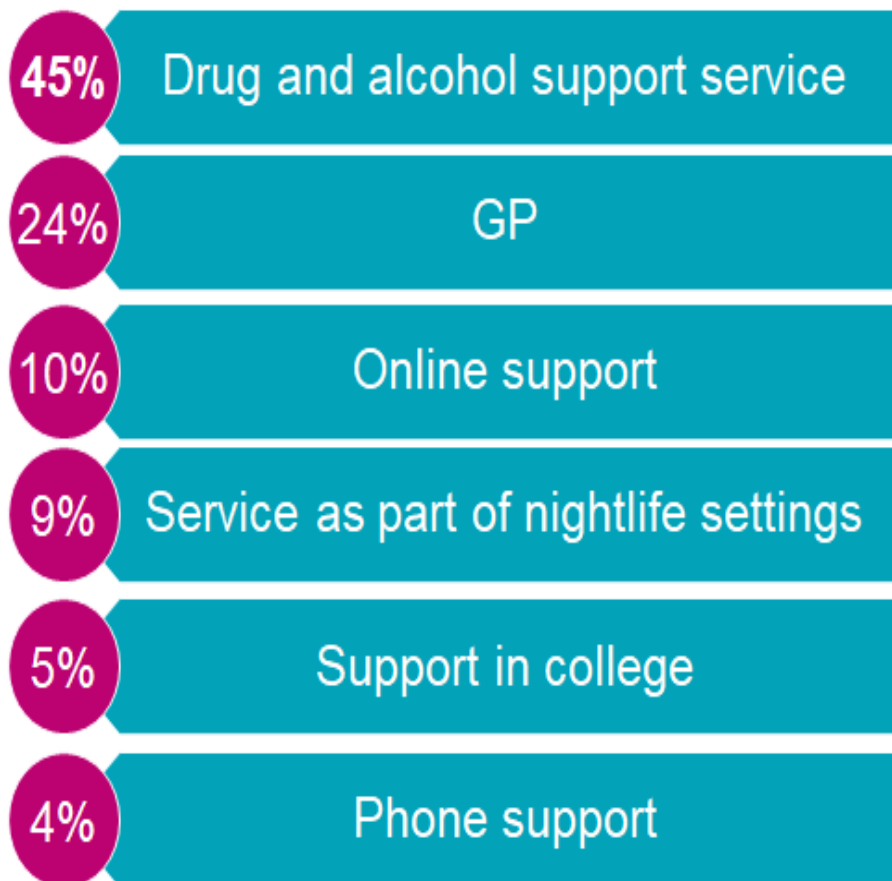
10% Read social media imagery and messages

34% would rather speak to a professional or someone at a stand

n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Support services by far the most trusted place to receive help – fear of consequences prevents some from talking to GP

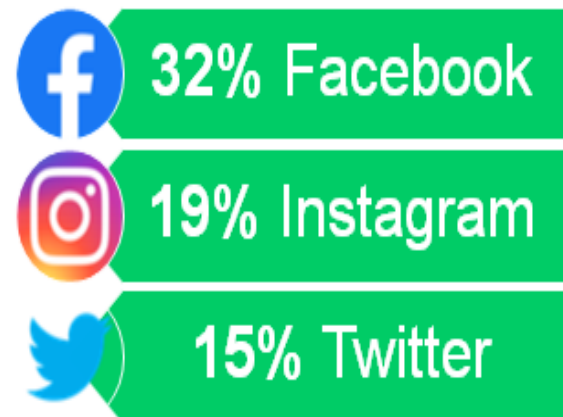
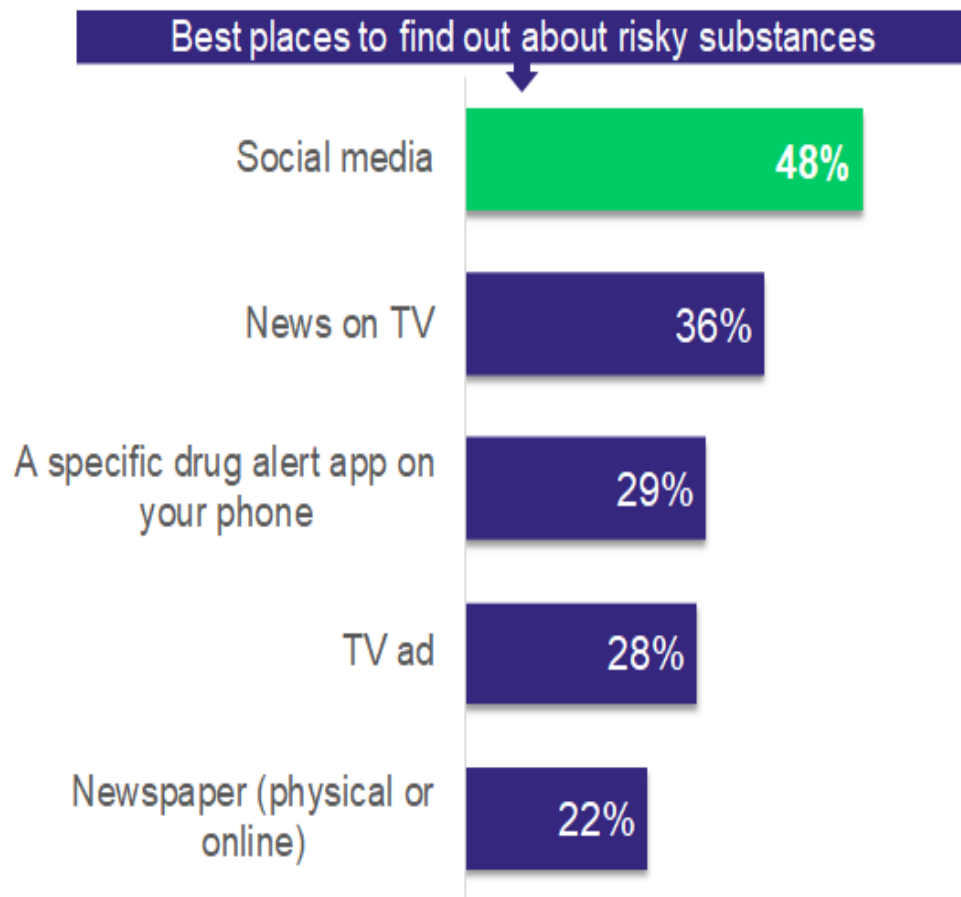
Where is the best place to receive help for a drug-related issue? (good knowledge)



- Biggest barrier for most to seeking help is the fear of **consequences, repercussion** and risk of **prosecution**
- When compared to other countries' comms- Ireland seen as **judgemental and cautionary** & prosecution focused rather than prioritising safe use
- Drug users need to be made aware that HSE is already promoting harm reduction approach – this will allow messaging to reach them

n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Social media clearly valued as a source of info with Facebook the preferred location – info can be targeted here effectively



- Most open to taking information in on social media- its where they consume their information/news
- Digital content stated as most engaging- more likely to be pre event or at an event- timely

n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Positive to see that locations where HSE drug info seen tally up with preferences

52%

have seen drug info from HSE in past 2 years



Where have they seen drug information from the HSE?

Social media

58%

In the media

41%

Through college

23%

Leaflets

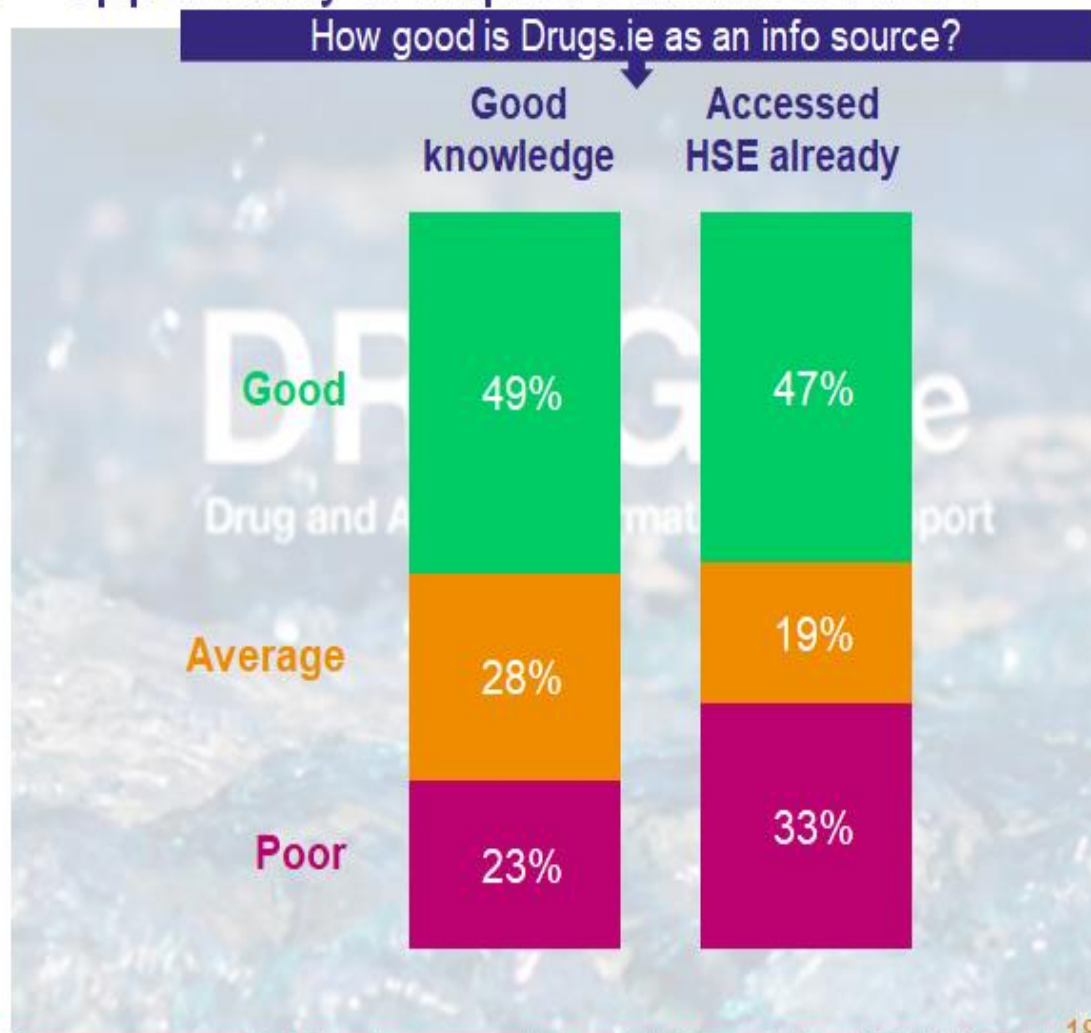
21%

At a festival

15%

n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

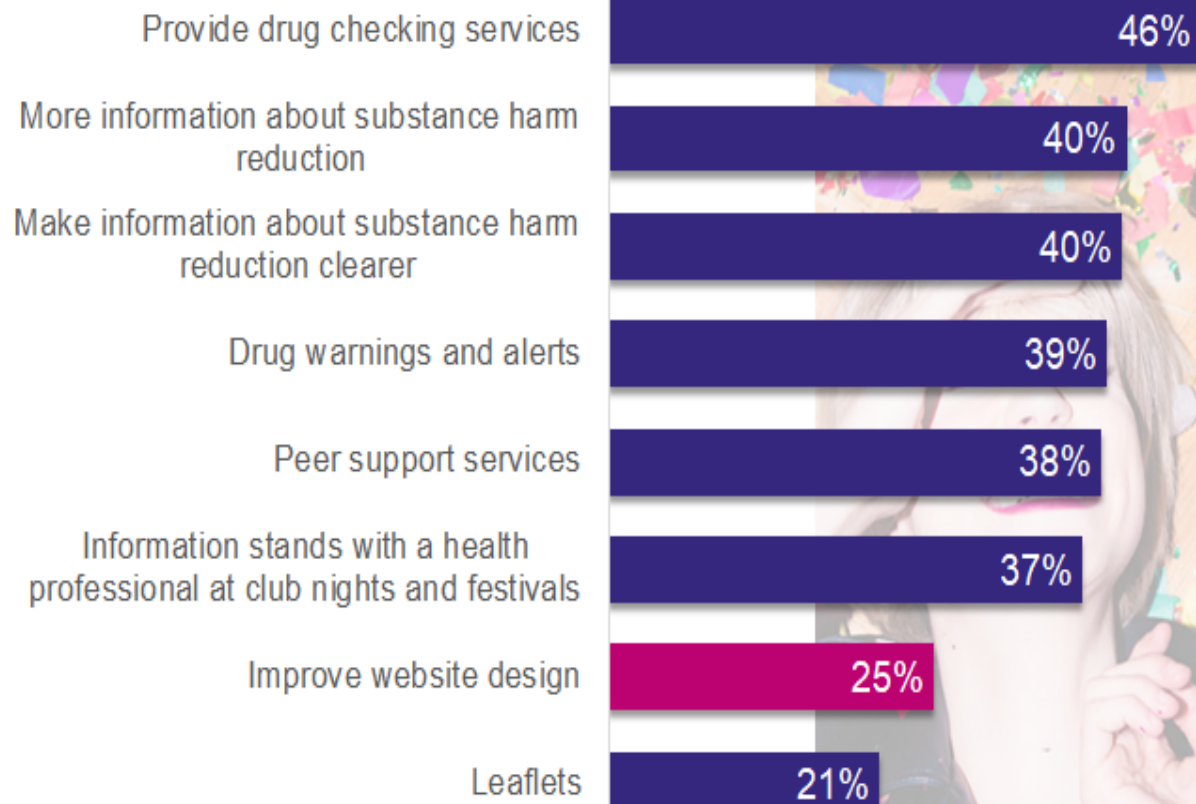
Positive perception decreases after visiting Drugs.ie website and only 1 in 4 have accessed the service – opportunity to improve numbers here



n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

However site design not a priority when it comes to drug awareness – focus needs to be on making info better and clearer

What can the HSE do to improve drug awareness?



78%

are more likely to trust a service if run by the HSE

Drug checking services-a service cited as available in UK & other European countries-seen as forward thinking

Most takers state Ireland is so focused on prosecution that introduction of this service would be a positive move

n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland

Many would prefer a holistic stand over a drug-specific stand – but if focused on drugs, Drugs.ie will not be an off-putting name

52%

would be likely to use an HSE drug stand

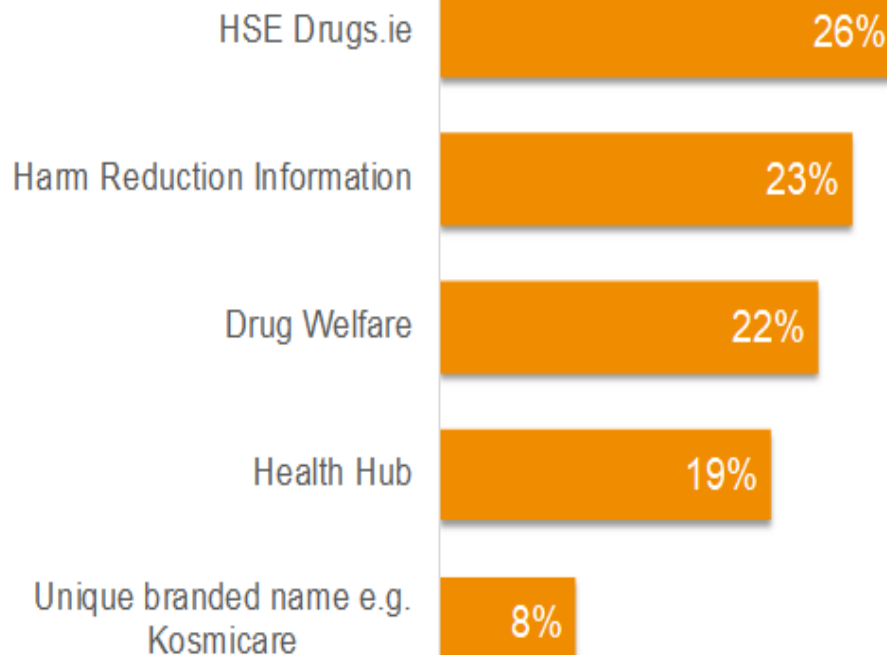
53%

would not be put off by the name 'Drugs' in the title


61%

would prefer a combined stand for drugs, mental health and sexual health support

Preferred names for HSE drug stands



n = 260, all with a 'good knowledge' of drugs in Ireland



45% would Google if they wanted info
on substance use or harm reduction –
just 28% have accessed Drugs.ie

Sources of Information – Key Insights: Google the preferred place for seeking out info, but there is openness to other routes, particularly on social media

Good awareness of
Drugs.ie but poor
perception –
improvements to design
should increase traffic

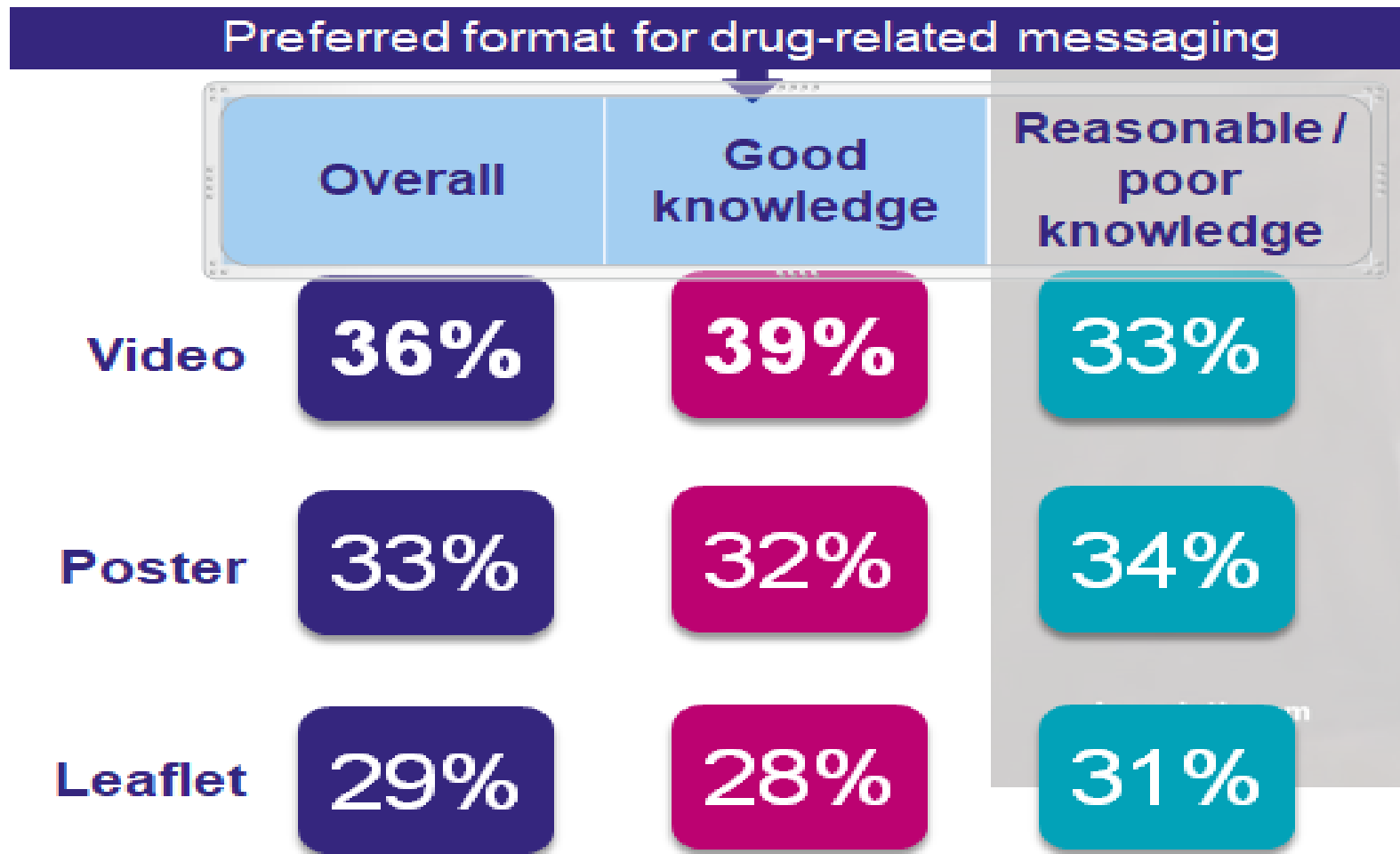
Most would prefer to
use Google rather than
go directly to a website

Substance users feel
comfortable taking info
in on social media –
digital content seen as
more engaging

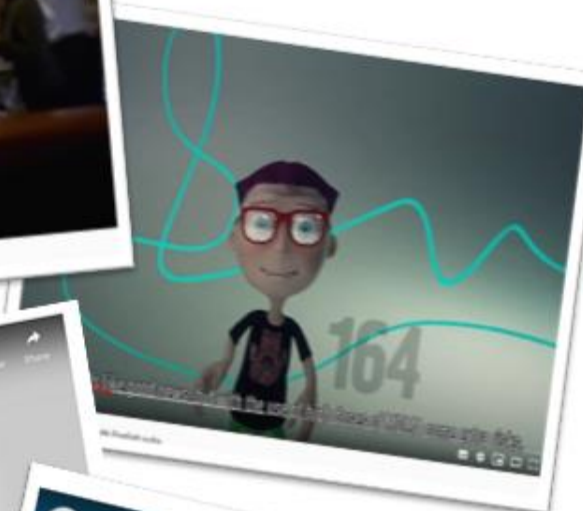
Many still see Irish govt
attitude as reactionary –
changing this view is an
important first step to
reaching them

Comms Testing





Video Reviews



Content & tone of this video balanced, realistic & informative but childlike creative execution lets it down- watchout for HSE creative

Triggers

- Informative & inclusive
- **Doesn't** condemn drug use/ no shameful tone/ criminalise drug use
- **Liberal**- focused on safe use of the drug highlighting dangers but also positives of drug
- **Charts & visuals helpful** and engaging- e.g. showing the brain & illustrates how risky drug use is
- Good safety info e.g. 1.5mg/kg and body temp that users wouldn't otherwise.
- The side effect stats; e.g. diff between dopamine and serotonin

Barriers

- Animation - cheesy and childish-like primary school video.
- Cartoon style dated & immature -doesn't appeal
- Informative tone- but too childish to engage with
- Music off putting- similar to heavy electro music played at 'heavy' nightclubs

"Non-Judgmental more educate and support. Not something I have seen for this topic before!"

The animation made it lighthearted but contained lots of info, some of which was quite serious. Balanced is the word. I think this is a good video for young people to see



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGJIVw0OXM>

This video had a more serious, ominous tone, but was still factual
– when compared to others could be more engaging

Triggers

Design and style of the video simplistic & informative - good diagrams & animations

Approach to drug taking is be safe- recognising people take drugs recreationally

Informative and cautious tone

Tone is clear but voiceover tone reduces impact- more character/intonation required

Design boring but equally easy to follow & understand.

The emphasis on the 'do not do' & scaring people vs other videos

Barriers

"Helpful advice re: half pill. If I used I think I would remember this advice"

"Informs users of genuine risks and explains that some drugs are more dangerous than others. I'm sure many people would never even have heard of PMA."

"I think it's clear this is for an Irish audience rather than a European one like the German and Netherlands video. I think this as it's a little naive and more anti-drug rather than accepting that drug taking is a part of nightlife"



This video strikes the best tone between informative, taking drugs seriously but understanding that people take drugs recreationally

Triggers

- Name Celebrate Safe- positive
- Realistic tone -casual yet serious and informative
- Graphic design; white background active imagery- bright colours & clear V/O & straight talking
- Encourages safeguarding rather than avoidance
- Talks about the legal ramifications of drug use in a non-threatening but informative way.
- Contains facts about what's legal & what's not e.g. adjusting doses/ who to go to if anything goes wrong.
- Tone is sterner than the others but deemed fair and offset by the other elements of the video.

Barriers

- Too long- lose interest- needs to be snappier
- The law section however is over complicated it sounds more confusing than it is

"Of the videos so far the best! Well informed, and the best focus on well being and support yet! Putting people at ease to be honest and speak if they need help is great!"



<https://celebratesafe.nl/en/about-en/>

Least liked video; patronising tone & lack of balance. Expectation that non judgemental harm reduction is included in any comms

Triggers

Normalising - set small local pub highlights how prevalent coke is now

Shows that drugs change a person's personality- truth

Bit loud , uninformative

Lacking drug use safety.

Boring to watch- poor use of humour

Marginalises drug users by calling them "disgusting"

Tone is cautionary & shameful-
Infers all drug taking is bad

Unbalanced vs other videos

Animation, dark comedy & succinctness catches attention but not backed up fact

More humorous rather than raising awareness

Errs on the side of "drugs will ruin your life" as opposed to, "drugs can be fun, but be careful and understand the risks"

"Coke changing your personality isn't high up on the list reasons someone shouldn't do coke, in my opinion. The nosebleed thing is a bit of a cliché. But the humour didn't land with me.

Barriers



Talk To Frank: Pablo The Drug Mule Dog - Ben's Banknote

I think it's good as a TV ad to maybe raise awareness or grab your attention, but does little in terms of informing me of specific dangers of drug taking other than I can get a nosebleed and "could ruin my life"

"The makers of the video were clearly very judgy of people taking drugs"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_v3Mwqah-E

Leaflet Reviews

[illegible]

Release: Drugs Act 1979 (Medicines)

There is a requirement to obtain a licence to market a medicine in the UK. The licence is issued by the MHRA and is valid for 5 years. The licence holder must submit a dossier to the MHRA containing information on the safety, efficacy and quality of the medicine. The dossier must be updated if there is any change in the information. The licence holder must also submit a periodic safety update report (PSUR) to the MHRA. The PSUR is a report on the safety of the medicine and is submitted annually. The licence holder must also submit a quality management system (QMS) report to the MHRA. The QMS report is a report on the quality of the medicine and is submitted annually.

Document	Frequency	Content
Dossier <td>Once <td>Information on safety, efficacy and quality</td> </td>	Once <td>Information on safety, efficacy and quality</td>	Information on safety, efficacy and quality
PSUR <td>Annually</td> <td>Information on safety</td>	Annually	Information on safety
QMS Report <td>Annually</td> <td>Information on quality</td>	Annually	Information on quality

Additional information: The licence holder must also submit a pharmacovigilance plan (PVP) to the MHRA. The PVP is a plan for monitoring the safety of the medicine and is submitted annually. The licence holder must also submit a risk management plan (RMP) to the MHRA. The RMP is a plan for managing the risks of the medicine and is submitted annually.

Practitioner Information Act 2016 (PPI)

The PPI Act 2016 is a new piece of legislation that aims to improve the safety and efficacy of medicines. It introduces a number of new requirements for the pharmaceutical industry, including:

- Requirement to submit a PVP to the MHRA
- Requirement to submit an RMP to the MHRA
- Requirement to submit a QMS report to the MHRA
- Requirement to submit a PSUR to the MHRA
- Requirement to submit a dossier to the MHRA

THE DRUGS WHEEL

A NEW MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

A colourful well thought out & informative & easy to navigate leaflet- written by someone who understands & isn't judging



Triggers

- Nice, eye catching design & good use of visuals/icons
- Informative on each drug & possible effects
- Advises on safe ways to take the drugs - Non Judgmental tone
- Color scheme facilitates easy navigation

"Clearly purpose of the leaflet is to show all side effects that are so true indeed would make people rethink of using substances if they had more useful information which was provided in this"

Barriers

- Infor overload- preference shorter succinct pieces of info
- Design & style of the leaflet overall too wordy- More lists/bullet points needed not large paragraphs
- A dedicated read rather than a leaflet- better as set of shorter leaflets

"It's also good as it gives you an insight into how drugs are brought into society, I don't think I've ever seen that kind of information before"



Approach & content of this leaflet appeals- yet important messages lost via design & presentation- key to keep big messages clear

Triggers

Non-judgemental, well informed
Generally supportive & approachable tone.

The practicality of the info & advice offered.

Barriers

Dated, basic, hard to read and too much text!
Content good but not appealing aesthetically-
off putting- important points lost!



"I don't like the tiny print -
the background is cool
but maybe a better
pattern more subtle or
even more graphics but
this is interesting info"

"The leaflet design was ok, it
was shorter than the other
but had less pictures and
was harder to follow what
order to read the information
in."

The simplicity of this leaflet works well overall- it wont stop them but will make them be more aware or second guess themselves



Triggers

- Like the simplicity
- The fact it includes do 's and not all donts!
- On Do's- the bullet headline- supported by more info is ideal

Barriers

- No bold headlines on the don'ts
- More imagery or icons



" if someone rad this- it might bring them back to earth a bit- and be more alert or conscious of what you doing "

" I think if I handed this to someone it would STOP them but it would make them more careful "

“

Their approach is informative and inclusive. I like that it doesn't completely condemn drug use but informs and advises the safest way.

”

Leaflet & Video Review Key Takeouts: This cohort are open & ready for Harm Reduction messages

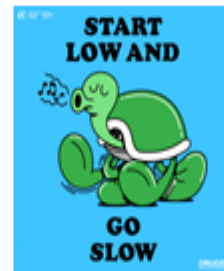
It's vital to ensure it's engaging, balanced & not seen as judgemental

UK & European countries seen as leading the way with this approach - time for Ireland to catch up

Opportunity for HSE to raise profile here and be seen as the go to source & voice of reason & balance

Social Media and Poster Scores

How we tested social media images and posters



Participants shown one image/poster and asked a series of questions around appeal, communication and call to action



Then repeated for three other images/posters – mixture of HSE and other countries



Finally, participants shown all four images together, asked to choose which they prefer and why they prefer it

Social Media Image 1: Seen as communicating its message poorly although some like the non-judgemental approach



54%

Like this image

Rank:

3rd

42%

Think it communicates its message well

4th

41%

Would make you want to find out more

4th

16%

chose this image of the four
(rank: 3rd)

'I prefer it because it doesn't make the assumption that just because someone has seen a poster that they will NOT do drugs. People are going to do drugs, that's it, and its a good message. Learn your limits. Start low and take it from there.'

Image 2: Low appeal compared to more slogan-based designs, but preferred by some who want a more informative style

Taking nitrous oxide?



Nitrous oxide is a quick acting and short lasting dissociative drug with anaesthetic and psychedelic properties.

- Ensure that the cartridges contain nitrous oxide gas. Cartridges of other gases, such as CO2 used for inflating bike tyres, can look similar.
- Plan your doses and use a watch or timer to keep track of how frequently you are dosing. Nitrous oxide can cause time distortion - time may feel like it has sped up or slowed down.
- Avoid mixing different drugs (inc. alcohol and medicines) as this can cause dangerous or unintended effects. Nitrous oxide may make the experience of any other drugs you have taken more intense and difficult to control.
- Inhaling directly from the cartridge/canister/cracker is dangerous. To release the gas from the cartridge, use a cracker or cream charger and fill a strong balloon.
- Sharing balloons can spread infections - only use your own balloon and charger. If you are sharing chargers, clean the dispenser with alcohol wipes between each use.
- Make sure your environment is safe. Ensure you are in a well-ventilated area - avoid doing balloons in confined spaces such as cars and tents. Sit down when inhaling the balloon - you could collapse if taking the balloon quickly while standing.

PICK UP ANY LITTER BEFORE YOU LEAVE A PUBLIC SPACE

www.crew.scot

39%

Like this image

Rank:

4th

57%

Think it communicates its message well

3rd

50%

Would make you want to find out more

3rd

16%

chose this image of the four
(rank: 4th)

'Harm reduction is serious and requires concise information to be delivered. The other images (K and R particularly) are far too vague and don't give concise information that the user can interpret and actually use to help reduce any harm done.'

Image 3: The strongest of the four – seen as a good middle ground that provides a reasonable amount of information



69%

Like this image

Rank:

1st

71%

Think it communicates its message well

1st

67%

Would make you want to find out more

1st

36%

chose this image of the four
(rank: 1st)

'It's a creative design that attracts the eye. Has enough information that people could read quickly – image L has too much going on in it, while the other two provide no information at all.'

Image 4: simple, playful design seen as appealing



68%

Like this image

Rank:

2nd

66%

Think it communicates its
message well

2nd

57%

Would make you want to
find out more

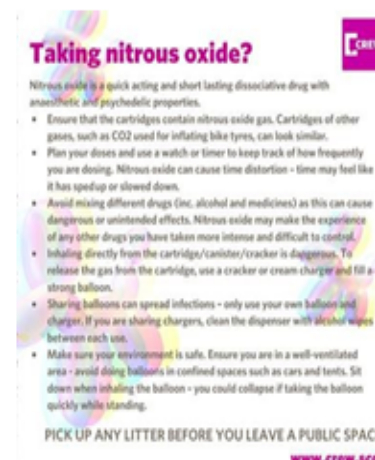
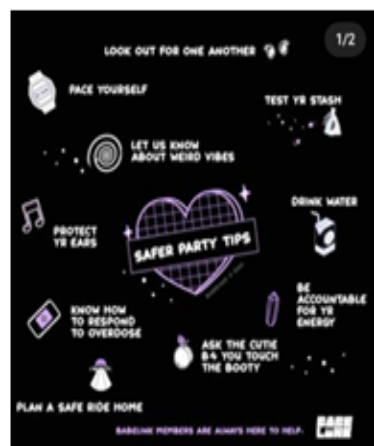
2nd

33%

chose this image of the four
(rank: 2nd)

'It delivers the message in a subtle way and isn't super serious or preachy. It has humour which would appeal to a lot of people.'

'Safer party tips' a clear winner among those with a good knowledge - some appear to be put off by 'leave the mixing to the DJ'



Total 36%

33%

16%

16%

Good knowledge 37%

27%

20%

16%

Poster 1: More simple than the other designs, but this may be advantageous in a nightlife setting



59%

Like this poster

Rank:

3rd

54%

Think it communicates its message well

4th

24%

Chose this poster out of the four

2nd

'The others had too much to read, no one would stop and read those, especially people on drugs or at events where lots of drugs are going on. Poster K is simple'

'It had a simple message which will get through to a larger amount of people - the others require you to spend more time reading and as a result some people just won't bother at all'

Poster 2: Participants very impressed with clarity and inclusion of subtitles – the strongest of the four designs



MDMA / Ecstasy
HARM REDUCTION

The easiest way to stay safe is by not taking drugs.
However, if you still decide to use MDMA:

Consider just ¼ of a pill, or a small dab of powder

Wait at least one hour before taking any more
Many pills in circulation contain a large amount of MDMA - sometimes up to 3x an average adult dose. Pills that look the same, even from the same batch, may have different contents. It may take longer to feel the effects. Always start with a small dose and wait for the effects to hit, this can take 90 minutes or more.

Avoid mixing with other drugs

Mixing with alcohol & other drugs (eg. cocaine & ketamine) increase the risk
Mixing drugs increases their risk to you - be aware of any interactions between drugs including alcohol & prescription medications including antidepressants (e.g. SSRIs). Mixing with stimulants like cocaine and MDMA increases the risk to your heart.

Sip water regularly

Aim to drink around 1/2 pint per hour
MDMA makes it difficult to urinate and makes you feel thirsty. This means it's easy to drink too much. If you don't urinate enough this can cause **overhydration** which is dangerous. If you are sweating a lot you will lose essential electrolytes your brain and body need. Drink slowly and replenish these! Sports drinks are a good choice because they contain electrolytes.

Take frequent breaks to cool down

Pay attention to your body & be mindful of heatstroke
MDMA makes it hard for your body to control temperature. If you are in a hot, crowded environment it can be easy to overheat. Take regular breaks from dancing in a cool area - your body will thank you the next day.

Ask for help if needed

Be aware of the signs of an emergency and know when to get help
Look out for: excessive sweating, disorientation, agitation, people who are hot to the touch or so hot they have stopped sweating. Pass yourself, know your limits & look after yourself and those around you.

Remember only to use with safety testing drugs. Be aware of counterfeit substances as these can lead to serious harm or death. Never use drugs if you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant. If you are unsure, ask a professional for advice. <https://www.thefix.org.uk/health-advice>

Oral MDMA Dosages, provided by www.knowled.org
Light 40 - 75 mg
Common (small or sensitive people) 80 - 90 mg
Common (most people) 75 - 125 mg
Common (large or less sensitive people) 110 - 150 mg

www.WeAreTheLoop.org

Rank:

65%

Like this poster

1st

69%

Think it communicates its message well

1st

44%

Chose this poster out of the four

1st

'The title is very clear. It is easy to skim the poster and get the important information highlights or take time to read more. It catches the eye without being eyesore.'

'The message is clear. And the subtitles allow you to see the main information quickly without having to stop and read.'

Poster 3: Lower appeal than other posters but overall message lands well



51%

Like this poster

Rank:

4th

62%

Think it communicates its message well

3rd

18%

Chose this poster out of the four

3rd

'It's clinical in its approach but it has a caring and tolerant message. The information is communicated very clearly and is about harm reduction, not shaming. People are bound to mix drugs/substances, it is more important to try and create a culture wherein people can access the needed healthcare without being afraid of being villainised.'

Poster 4: Scores strongly on appeal and communication but less likely to be chosen – too much info may be a problem here



Rank:

63%

Like this poster

2nd

68%

Think it communicates its message well

2nd

14%

Chose this poster out of the four

4th

'Aesthetically pleasing, has a good balance of used vs blank space, good amount of info and not so much that you glaze over and don't read it'

'I think this poster is the clearest of all the examples - However the text is very small and it only focuses on one drug'



Total

44%

24%

18%

14%

Good
knowledge

48%

20%

20%

12%

Warnings – Messaging focused on harm reduction is preferred particularly by those with a good knowledge of drugs



Total

31%

30%

21%

18%

Good knowledge

33%

33%

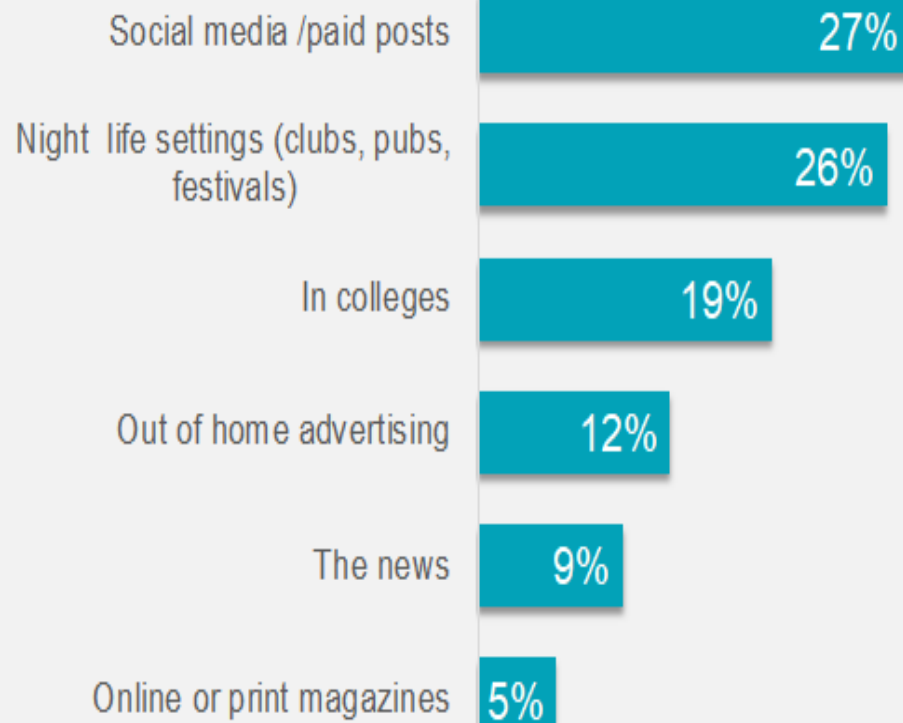
20%

14%

n = 511

Traditional media can be avoided when targeting substance users – a mixture of online and in pubs and clubs will be most effective

Most effective locations for messaging to reach substance users (all respondents)



Preferred slogans

Don't be afraid to get help **46%**

Leave the mixing to the DJ **29%**

Start low go slow **25%**
(31% - good knowledge)





“

It is easy to skim the poster and get the important information highlights or take time to read more. It catches the eye without being an eyesore

”

Posters and Social Images – Key Insights: Clear headlines and takeouts desired but with option to find out more

Stated preference is for snappy, imagery-heavy content

However comms chosen as best tended to have a mixture of the two

Designs need to have clear messages that can be read quickly but also more detail if possible

Appetite for more info around harm reduction – needs to be balanced, non-judgmental and not patronising

Drug use seen as more normalised and perceptions of harm reduction positive including among those who are not drug users – sea change in how messaging perceived

When looking for info Google by far the preferred route – unlikely to go directly to HSE or Drugs.ie – and a third who have used Drugs.ie unimpressed by the site

Most would visit an HSE stand and there is appetite for talking to professionals – need to maintain visibility at key events

Still a perception that HSE (or Ireland) is behind on drug messaging compared to other countries – where possible, need to shout louder about focus on harm reduction & keep message balanced

Video/Digital the preferred format for comms – but needs to be straightforward and inclusive – many put off by childish or patronising nature of videos

44% say they want content to be more imagery-based and snappy – however social media and poster designs with more info did well – a balance of imagery and info will have best cut-through

