



**drinkaware**  
change starts with you

# Navigating unprecedented challenge

**Impact Report  
2020**

# Contents



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## Executive summary

# Introduction

The Drinkaware Impact Report 2020 sets out our refocused approach and impact during a year in which the organisation navigated unprecedented challenge and the country dealt with exceptional circumstances and lifestyle changes.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our donors resulted in Drinkaware pursuing our work with sharply reduced resources, with many established interventions put on hold and campaign spend reduced by more than 60%.

### Drinkaware activity

Switching from some of our planned activity, we created new content with a greater focus on areas like blogs and videos to reach people at risk of alcohol harm in these extraordinary circumstances.

Changes were made to the look of our brand to make it more accessible and we invested in digital innovation, launching a new website and creating more digital content.

A continuation of our Drink Free Days campaign was developed, advocating substitution of drinking for positive alternative activities and promoting healthier lifestyles. In just two months, almost 24,000 people made a commitment to take more drink-free days and more than 117,000 completed the DrinkCompare Calculator.

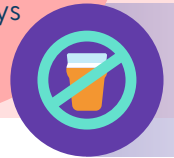
Collaboration with the EastEnders scriptwriters gave Drinkaware the opportunity to support the portrayal of one of the leading characters, Linda Carter, as she struggled with alcohol.

In 2020, Drinkaware celebrated the fourth year of our partnership with Asda and we delivered Identification and Brief Advice interventions in 47 of its stores and trained 100 Asda Community Champions, supporting them to talk confidently to customers about alcohol and its harm.

Drinkaware's Chief Medical Advisor Dr Fiona Sim chaired a roundtable of independent experts in the areas of communicating risk, policy, research, clinical practice and public health to explore the issues around communicating alcohol and breast cancer risk to inform future strategy and communications.

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In just two months, almost 24,000 people made a commitment to take more drink-free days



### Research

To supplement the Drinkaware Monitor, our annual review of the UK's drinking habits, we commissioned a series of responsive research surveys which examined the pandemic's effect on alcohol consumption, interviewing over 17,000 UK adults across the year.

People experienced life under lockdown in many different ways and our research showed that certain individuals were recording increases in their alcohol consumption compared to usual. The research showed significant changes to drinking patterns that have the potential to be harmful amongst higher risk drinkers or those vulnerable to mental and physical health issues, job uncertainty and caring responsibilities.

Our research also revealed that some people displayed worrying patterns, such as drinking earlier in the day, drinking to cope with stress or anxiety and drinking on more days of the week. And one of the top reasons for drinking more was boredom. The ‘No More Excuses’ campaign was introduced, urging people to have more drink-free days each week.

In 2020, Drinkaware played a key advisory role in the development of an important new report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) into managing drug and alcohol misuse in the workplace. By sharing its extensive research on drinking behaviours, Drinkaware has supported the CIPD in shaping its practical guide for employers which will play a vital role in being aware of alcohol misuse and to signpost their staff to appropriate support.

## Visibility

- More than six million users visited our website, with a 22% increase in the number of visitors to the home page<sup>1</sup>
- Over 800,000 people used Drinkaware’s digital tools to understand the impact of alcohol on their lives with a 34% increase in people clicking to our Self-Assessment tool from the home page and a 30% increase in people navigating to our DrinkCompare Calculator from the home page
- More than 200,000 visitors navigated from social media channels to access information on our website
- Drinkaware featured in more than 4,000 articles in UK media sources with 51% including a call to action – pointing them to support from Drinkaware via the website, our helplines or our free app, or by encouraging readers to take more drink-free days

- As face-to-face interventions became more difficult, our focus turned to digital with a coronavirus hub providing information and resources to help people navigate the pandemic and understand changes in drinking patterns
- A series of videos was created and shared widely on key issues, including the impact of alcohol on mental health
- A range of blogs was posted, with one addressing the impact of alcohol on a person’s recovery from COVID-19, receiving almost 38,000 unique views
- At the end of the year, Drinkaware had over 82,000 followers across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, plus 146,700 views on YouTube
- Almost 60,000 people downloaded the Drinkaware app
- Our online alcohol support service Drinkchat handled 5,800 personal conversations about alcohol.

## In conclusion

Drinkaware, not alone in navigating unprecedented challenge in 2020, has remained steadfastly focused on its purpose of reducing alcohol harm. Existing education, support and activity was revised to respond to changes in circumstances to ensure that people could make better choices about their drinking. Additional research and collaboration with partners and associated professionals established better understanding of some of the key challenges we face, helping to prepare for the months and years ahead, as we further see the impact of the pandemic on the nation’s health and its relationship with alcohol.



Existing education, support and activity was revised to respond to changes in circumstances to ensure that people could make better choices about drinking.





## Foreword from the Chief Executive

# Navigating unprecedented challenge

The first few weeks of 2020 were our only representation of ‘business as usual’.



**Elaine Hindal**  
Chief Executive

As the country grappled with its response to the rapidly spreading pandemic and then went into the first lockdown, the Drinkaware team put in place urgent measures to navigate unprecedented challenge.

A major focus was understanding and responding to evolving drinking patterns, including commissioning regular surveys to supplement our annual state-of-the-nation Drinkaware Monitor to lead the nation’s understanding of the pandemic’s impact on drinking habits.

Our research revealed, for example, that more than a third of furloughed workers and those facing redundancy were drinking more than they usually would since lockdown.

Working alongside the independent Medical Advisory Panel, we tailored and created additional content for a new ‘Coronavirus Hub’ on our website, visited by hundreds of thousands of people since its launch, as well as sharing information with key partners to disseminate through their own networks.

Focusing our much-reduced income, we launched a new website, continued to work in partnership with many organisations and adapted our Drink Free Days campaign to launch No More Excuses – reflecting the latest challenges faced by people up and down the country. This meant, for example, greater engagement with parents of under 18s, some of whom had increased their drinking substantially compared to their usual amount since schools and nurseries closed in mid-March.

We also placed more emphasis on digital health as the pandemic unfolded, including encouraging as many people as possible to use our tools and advice to get vital support.



As the country’s relationship with alcohol continued to shift, Drinkaware’s reach also extended to collaboration with EastEnders, and other key media, to share our advice.

A major highlight for me was being part of a Drinkaware-led roundtable of high-level experts, to jointly explore the best way to frame important messaging about the link between alcohol and breast cancer. We took these learnings into planning for 2021 and beyond.

“ A major focus was understanding and responding to evolving drinking patterns. ”

Of course, challenge also meant difficult but necessary decisions around pausing some planned work, such as targeted campaign and partnership working in Derby. That, together with the need to adapt the organisation to changing consumer behaviour and the need for greater digital and commercial skills, meant that we had to embark on a process of restructuring. This significant change, with the deployment of some employees into new roles and, sadly for a small number of employees, redundancy, has inevitably been challenging. However, we are confident that our new organisation positions Drinkaware well for the future.

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At Drinkaware, we are more focused than ever on the impact we can have on minimising the harm caused by alcohol on people’s lives.  
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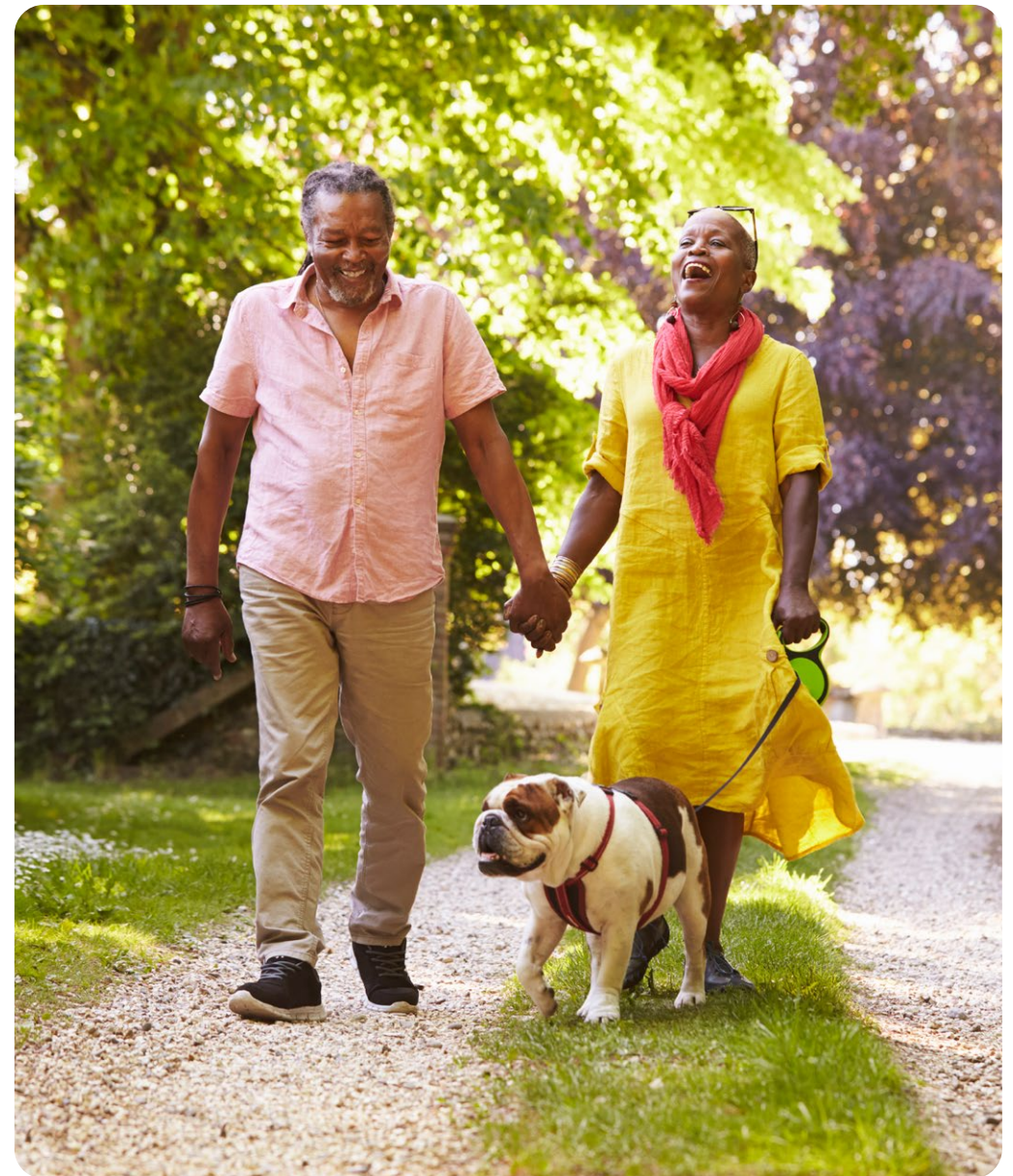
Looking ahead, 2021 marks the final year of our current five-year strategy. Our 2020 research findings will help Drinkaware begin the process of reflection and planning to make sure we are in the best possible position to develop a new strategy to meet the challenges ahead.

We have, over the course of 2020, already made some significant shifts in our strategic priorities and the way we work. At Drinkaware, we are more focused than ever on the impact we can have on minimising the harm caused by alcohol on people’s lives.

Thank you to everybody supporting Drinkaware in these uncertain times; it really does make all the difference. And thanks also to my team at Drinkaware who have worked so hard in very difficult circumstances to continue making an impact. Together, we will positively change lives.



**Elaine Hindal**  
Chief Executive, Drinkaware





# Key drinking trends in 2020

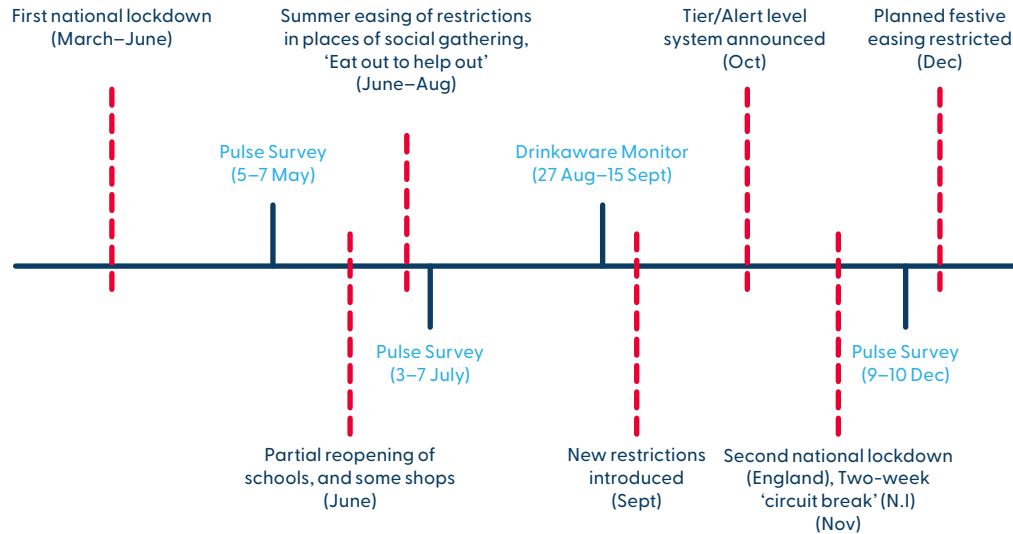
Given the unprecedented nature of 2020 and the potential for change in drinking habits and behaviours, we conducted several additional surveys to monitor the nation's drinking – beyond our annual state-of-the-nation Drinkaware Monitor.



## Key drinking trends in 2020

# Our research

### Timeline of research



### Pandemic trends

Each piece of research commissioned by Drinkaware during the pandemic highlighted specific trends, as well as areas of concern, at times of national transition.

Our first assessment of how drinking habits changed took place in May – more than a month after the first national lockdown was imposed. At this time, individuals on the Government's new furlough scheme emerged as significantly more likely to report drinking more than they would usually prior to the pandemic, compared to the national average.<sup>2,3</sup>



We pinpointed parents of children under the age of 18 emerging as a significant group at a time when home schooling had become part of their daily life.



In July, just before pubs, bars, and restaurants reopened, albeit with easing restrictions, we pinpointed parents of children under the age of 18 emerging as a significant group at a time when home schooling had become part of their daily life.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, our state-of-the-nation Drinkaware Monitor (and subsequent research in December) discovered that those either made redundant or in the process of redundancy, and drinkers who already drank at harmful levels, were more likely to drink more.

Reflecting the nation's struggles at each phase, our research highlights the changing nature of our nation's pandemic drinking habits at different points in time.



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## Overview of broad drinking trends

It has become a cliché to say that 2020 was a year like no other. It was a year characterised by change; change in the way we work, shop, travel, educate; change in how we socialise, exercise, celebrate, and mourn. Yet, at a population level, relatively little evidence of change was observed in the overall prevalence of harmful drinking compared to previous years – contrary to much media reporting on alcohol sales at the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>



Six in 10 (60%) UK adults were drinking at a level considered to be at 'low risk' of alcohol harm, according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test – Consumption (AUDIT-C)

Our Drinkaware Monitor,<sup>9</sup> carried out in late August/early September, revealed that six in 10 (60%) UK adults were drinking at a level considered to be at 'low risk' of alcohol harm, according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test – Consumption (AUDIT-C), an alcohol screening test that assists in identifying hazardous drinking.<sup>10</sup> A quarter (25%) of UK adults could be classified as drinking at 'increasing risk' of alcohol harm, and 15% as at 'higher risk'. These results were similar to those recorded in 2019<sup>11</sup> and 2018.<sup>12</sup>

These findings are broadly consistent with data indicating that net alcohol consumption in Scotland, England and Wales was lower than what would have been expected had much of the on-trade outlets not been closed.<sup>13,14</sup> Additional evidence published at the end of 2020 suggested that households did not purchase more alcohol during early lockdown when compared with the same time periods during 2015 to 2018.<sup>15</sup> This would indicate that, on average, people were not buying or drinking more alcohol during the pandemic, at least in the early stages. However, nationwide data can often mask variations among smaller groups, and therefore, does not tell the whole story.



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## The masking effect of averages

More recent population level data would indicate that the situation is not as straightforward as the previous information would suggest. For example, the population level data reported above is not consistent with alcohol duty receipts published by HM Revenue & Customs, which reported a 2% increase in duty receipts in the 2020/21 financial year, compared to the previous year.<sup>16</sup>

Given that approximately 30% of all alcohol sales would usually occur in the on-trade,<sup>17</sup> the fact that off-trade sales combined with only partial on-trade opening during periods of eased restrictions have managed to surpass this is striking.



Provisional data published on the number of alcohol-specific deaths in 2020 also suggests a different picture. There was a 19.6% increase in the number of registered alcohol-specific deaths in England and Wales, compared with the same period in 2019 (7,423 vs 6,209 deaths).<sup>18</sup>

While not final figures, the definition of an alcohol-specific death includes only those conditions that occur as a direct consequence of alcohol misuse – the vast majority of which are from chronic (longer-term) conditions, such as alcohol-related liver disease. As such, the increase is more likely to be attributed to those with a previous history of alcohol misuse, rather than lower risk drinkers drinking more during the pandemic.

While the reasons behind the increase are not yet known, it is likely to be a combination of reduced use of healthcare,<sup>19</sup> disruption to community drug and alcohol services,<sup>20</sup> and concerning changes to drinking habits among those already drinking at harmful levels.

Although alcohol risk classification for the UK population has not changed significantly from previous years, our research over the course of 2020 indicates that drinking patterns did change, but in two opposing directions and among certain groups of drinkers.

Throughout the first six months of the pandemic various surveys, including our own, reported between one-fifth and one-third of UK drinkers as drinking more than they would usually prior to the pandemic; and a similar or greater proportion drinking less.<sup>21,22,23,24</sup> Those most likely to say they were drinking less were already more likely to be drinking within the UK Chief Medical Officers' low-risk drinking guidelines of 14 units a week. Those who increased their consumption were more likely to already be drinking at harmful levels. These polar-opposite changes in drinking behaviour have the potential to average out the overall picture and mask significant changes among particular groups and individuals.

“ These polar-opposite changes in drinking behaviour have the potential to average out the overall picture and mask significant changes among particular groups and individuals.



And there are also significant health implications. We have not seen small increases in alcohol consumption across the board, but larger increases among a smaller proportion of high-risk drinkers. This has the potential to create significant additional health issues and resource implications as we emerge from the pandemic.



increase in the number of registered alcohol-specific deaths in England and Wales in 2020, compared with the same period in 2019

## Changes of concern among high-risk drinkers

Our research in 2020 highlighted that high-risk drinkers (i.e. those most at risk of alcohol harm and defined based on an AUDIT-C score between 8–12) were significantly more likely to report drinking more than usual compared to the national average – a finding further supported by published research.<sup>25,26,27</sup>

As **Table 1** demonstrates, almost half (46%) of high-risk drinkers reported drinking more than their usual amount during the first national lockdown (March–June), compared to a quarter (26%) among all UK adults.

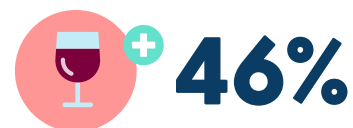
High-risk drinkers remained almost twice as likely as the national average to say they were drinking more than their usual consumption once restrictions began to ease between July and August (31% vs 15%). The reasons given by drinkers mirrored those of the wider population, including ‘having more time available’, ‘to relieve boredom’, and ‘to help with stress and anxiety’.

**Table 1. Drinking habits between March and August 2020 among high-risk drinkers compared to all UK adults**

Drinking habits	Early Lockdown (Mar–Jun)	Later Lockdown (Jul–Aug)
More than usual	▲ 46% vs 26%	▲ 31% vs 15%
About the same	▼ 33% vs 45%	▼ 47% vs 54%
Less than usual	▼ 20% vs 27%	▼ 21% vs 29%
Drank more throughout	▲ 24% vs 10%	

**Data:** Drinkaware Monitor 2020. Base: High-risk drinkers, n=1,400. Comparisons are made to the national average: UK adults who drink alcohol, n=7,834.

**Note:** Symbols (▲▼) indicate statistically significant differences between high-risk drinkers and the national average. ▲ indicates greater likelihood; ▼ indicates less likelihood.



Almost half (46%) of high-risk drinkers reported drinking more than their usual amount during the first national lockdown (March–June)

The reported increase in alcohol consumption for a large proportion of this group is of serious concern – particularly in light of the provisional data on alcohol-specific deaths. Our research in December reiterated this finding, with those already drinking more than the UK Chief Medical Officers’ low-risk drinking guidelines most likely to continue to report drinking more than usual.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this, we found widespread recognition (42%) among high-risk drinkers of the need to cut down following the easing of restrictions between July and August compared to the national average of 21%. This corroborates reports by the British Liver Trust of a surge in helpline calls from people with pre-existing alcohol-related liver conditions and from people concerned about their increasing alcohol consumption.<sup>29</sup>

However, there was also a silver lining observed for some in this group of drinkers. Specifically, one-fifth reported that they were drinking less than they would usually – both in the first national lockdown (20%) and later period of easing restrictions (July–August) (21%). The underlying motivations for drinking may partially explain this, as those who reported drinking less were far more likely to cite social motivations for drinking, while those who reported drinking more were more likely to highlight coping motivations.

Among high-risk drinkers who reported drinking less, the pandemic may act as a catalyst to change. Most of this group also reported intending to either maintain their current level of drinking (34%) or cut down further compared to during lockdown (30%) once restrictions ease. While intentions are a poor predictor of future behaviour, it does highlight the need to ensure support mechanisms are in place as the opportunity for social drinking re-emerges.





High-risk drinkers are already a group that Drinkaware has sought to reach via our campaigns and resources. The key message from our data in 2020 is that the pandemic has exacerbated the need for increased attention to this group. Failure to do so is likely to result in many more serious health issues for a long time to come.

“As well as high-risk drinkers, our research also uncovered other concerning changes in drinking habits.



### Uncovering the need

As well as high-risk drinkers, our research also uncovered other worrying changes in drinking habits, including:

- Within people who have faced redundancy due to COVID-19
- Where mental health and wellbeing was negatively affected by the pandemic to a large/very large extent
- Amongst parents of at least one child under the age of 18.

While the above was associated with ‘drinking more than their usual amounts’ during the pandemic, it is a complex picture with several individuals reporting conflicting behaviours.

### Individuals who face(d) redundancy due to the macroeconomic impact of COVID-19

Our research demonstrates that many people who have faced redundancy due to COVID-19 have experienced significant negative impacts to their mental health. This group were significantly more likely than the national average to report experiencing more anxiety (54% vs 42%), stress (56% vs 43%), depression (56% vs 40%) and sleep problems (50% vs 36%). However, our data also suggests that there may have been differences in how individuals have coped with such changes.

Specifically, those who faced redundancy appear to be a tale of two halves. On the one hand, almost three in 10 drinkers reported ‘drinking less than they usually would’ – similar to the national average during both the first national lockdown and the summer period when restrictions eased slightly (Mar–Jun, 28% vs 27%; Jul–Aug, 30% vs 29%) (Table 2). Yet, those who faced redundancy were also almost twice as likely to report ‘drinking more than they usually would’ than the national average during the first national lockdown (42% vs 26%), and they remained significantly more likely to report drinking more once restrictions began to ease between July and August (23% vs 15%).

**Table 2. Drinking habits between March and August 2020 among individuals who face(d) redundancy due to COVID-19 compared to all UK adults**

Drinking habits	Early Lockdown (Mar–Jun)	Later Lockdown (Jul–Aug)
More than usual	▲ 42% vs 26%	▲ 23% vs 15%
About the same	▼ 28% vs 45%	▼ 45% vs 54%
Less than usual	28% vs 27%	30% vs 29%
Drank more throughout	▲ 17% vs 10%	

**Data:** Drinkaware Monitor 2020. Base: Redundancy/process of redundancy: Adults who drink, n=281. Comparisons are made to the national average: All UK adults who drink alcohol, n=7,834.

**Note:** Symbols (▲▼) indicate statistically significant differences between those who face(d) redundancy and the national average. ▲ indicates greater likelihood; ▼ indicates less likelihood.



In addition, those who faced redundancy were both more likely than the national average to report eating less healthily (25% vs 19%) and more healthily (24% vs 19%), as well as to report having gained weight (40% vs 30%) and lost weight (22% vs 17%).

A potential explanation for the differences among those facing redundancy is their different coping strategies. For example, those who reported 'drinking more than usual' were no more or less likely to report experiencing specific mental health problems than those who reported 'drinking less than usual'. Instead, a key difference appears to be motivations for drinking, with those 'drinking more' significantly more likely to cite coping motivations, compared to those who reported 'drinking less'.

This is a key group of people to monitor going forward, particularly as it is likely to become substantially larger with the ending of the Job Retention Scheme in late 2021.

The most recent unemployment rate (Oct–Dec 2020) was 5.1%<sup>30</sup> – the equivalent of 1.74 million people. While these figures do not only encompass those made redundant due to COVID-19, it is estimated that unemployment will reach up to 5.5% by the end of 2021.<sup>31</sup>

As Dame Carol Black's independent review into unemployment highlights, alcohol misuse may "be a cause or a consequence of unemployment. It is certainly a predictor both of unemployment and of future job loss, but evidence also suggests that increased alcohol consumption may follow job loss."<sup>32</sup>

## Parents of at least one child under 18 years old

With the unprecedented closure of childcare facilities – nurseries, schools, childminders – for all but keyworkers throughout much of 2020, working parents faced the added challenge of full-time childcare, including home schooling. Our research conducted in July highlighted that parents of children under the age of 18 were more likely to report increased alcohol consumption than those with no children, or those with children over 18 years old.

Data from our Drinkaware Monitor indicates that for many parents, this behaviour persisted throughout the first six months of the pandemic, despite the partial reopening of some childcare facilities to non key workers from June onwards.

“ Our research conducted in July highlighted that parents of children under the age of 18 were more likely to report increased alcohol consumption than those with no children. ”

A closer look at our Monitor data indicates that this is a group which has struggled to balance work and family responsibilities throughout the pandemic. Indeed, just 23% of workers in this group did not have to juggle childcare and work – and this burden overwhelmingly fell on women – a finding already reported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)<sup>33</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> More than half (54%) of women cited sole responsibility for childcare, compared to just 12% of men.

This group was also more likely, compared to workers more generally, to cite that their job had become more stressful (32% vs 29%), and that they needed more support from their employer (21% vs 18%). Unsurprisingly, the reasons why their job had become more stressful included home-schooling (31% vs 11%), lack of childcare (26% vs 9%), and relationship pressures (14% vs 10%) – all higher than the national average.

In keeping with all four groups of concern, they are significantly more likely to report drinking more than they usually would, compared to the national average (**Table 3**) – both during the first national lockdown (34% vs 26%), and when restrictions eased between July and August (18% vs 14%). They were also more likely than the national average to report drinking on more days a week than they usually would (26% vs 19%) and starting drinking earlier in the day (12% vs 9%). However, in terms of harmful drinking based on AUDIT-C and weekly units,<sup>35</sup> this group were no more or less likely to be drinking at higher or lower risk levels – their risk levels largely reflect the national averages.

As well as the stress of juggling work and childcare, parents of young children were more likely to report negative impacts to their mental health – a finding also reported elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> This group reported more negative impacts on stress (54% vs 43%), anxiety (49% vs 42%), sleep (42% vs 36%), and depression (44% vs 40%) compared to the national average. Similarly, they were more likely to report eating less healthily (25% vs 19%) and as having gained weight (35% vs 30%) during lockdown.

“ Our research conducted in December found that parents of young children remained more likely to report ‘drinking more than usual’ than the national average. ”

A key question as the nation emerges from the pandemic is to what extent these new behaviours have become the ‘new normal’? Our research conducted in December found that parents of young children remained more likely to report ‘drinking more than usual’ than the national average, despite the partial reopening of schools and childcare facilities throughout the latter half of 2020. We will continue to monitor this in the months ahead.

**Table 3. Drinking habits between March and August 2020 among parents of at least one child under 18 years compared to all UK adults**

Drinking habits	Early Lockdown (Mar–Jun)	Later Lockdown (Jul–Aug)
More than usual	▲ 34% vs 26%	▲ 19% vs 14%
About the same	▼ 41% vs 45%	▼ 61% vs 54%
Less than usual	▼ 22% vs 27%	27% vs 29%
Drank more throughout	▲ 13% vs 10%	

**Data:** Drinkaware Monitor 2020. Base: Parents of children under 18 who drink alcohol, n=1,704. Comparisons are made to the national average: All UK adults who drink alcohol, n=7,834.

**Note:** Symbols (▲▼) indicate statistically significant differences between parents of children under 18 years and the national average. ▲ indicates greater likelihood; ▼ indicates less likelihood.



## Individuals whose mental health and wellbeing has been negatively affected by the pandemic

The pandemic (and associated restrictions) has had a profound effect on the nation's mental health and wellbeing.<sup>37,38,39</sup> This was a major finding to emerge from our Monitor research.

Those who felt the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing were more likely to report drinking more alcohol than they would usually compared to the national average throughout the first six months of the pandemic (Mar–June, 38% vs 26%; Jul–Aug, 24% vs 15%) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Drinking habits between March and August 2020 among those whose mental health and wellbeing was negatively affected by the pandemic compared to all UK adults**

Drinking habits	Early Lockdown (Mar–Jun)	Later Lockdown (Jul–Aug)
More than usual	▲ 38% vs 26%	▲ 24% vs 15%
About the same	▼ 33% vs 45%	▼ 44% vs 54%
Less than usual	26% vs 27%	30% vs 29%
Drank more throughout	▲ 17% vs 10%	

**Data:** Drinkaware Monitor 2020. Base: UK adults who reported mental health and wellbeing as negatively affected by the pandemic to a 'large' and 'very large' extent, drinkers, n=1,268. Comparisons are made to the national average: All UK adults who drink alcohol, n=7,834.

**Note:** Symbols (▲▼) indicate statistically significant differences between those who report negative impacts to their mental health and the national average. ▲ indicates greater likelihood; ▼ indicates less likelihood.

“ The pandemic (and associated restrictions) has had a profound effect on the nation's mental health and wellbeing. ”

However, in contrast to the national picture, the most common reason given for drinking more than usual among this group was to help with stress/ anxiety. This is of particular concern, as using alcohol as a coping mechanism for mental health can become a vicious cycle that can be difficult to break. This group was more likely to cite coping motivations for drinking than any other. This supports recent research, conducted during the first three months of lockdown, that demonstrated increased alcohol consumption as independently associated with poor overall mental health, increased depressive symptoms and poorer mental wellbeing.<sup>40</sup>

This group was also more likely to report other negative health-related behaviours, compared to UK adults more generally, such as eating less healthily (33% vs 19%) and gaining weight (44% vs 30%). In addition, not only were they more likely to be smoking more than the national average, but also reported smoking more since the pandemic (46% vs 30%). While almost one-third of this group were taking medication for their mental health prior to the pandemic (31% vs 16%), this group was also significantly more likely to have commenced taking such medication compared to the national average since the pandemic started (14% vs 4%).

While our research, and that of many others,<sup>41,42,43</sup> suggests that many millions of UK adults have found the pandemic and associated restrictions difficult, this group encompasses those who report having particularly struggled, and a substantial proportion of them have been drinking more than they would usually.



## Reflections

While each of the four highlighted groups have experienced the pandemic in unique ways and faced different challenges, a common thread among those who reported ‘drinking more than usual’ was mentioning coping motivations for drinking alcohol (such as ‘to cheer up when in a bad mood’, ‘to forget about problems’ and ‘to help when feeling depressed or nervous’<sup>44</sup>).

This use of alcohol during stress – and anxiety-producing times is not uncommon, but if not addressed, can lead to serious longer-term health problems. Many of the health consequences beyond COVID-19 remain to be seen, and as the nation emerges from the pandemic, addressing alcohol harm is crucial. Drinkaware will continue to monitor trends in drinking behaviour and target our information and resources to those who need it.

## Widened inequalities and hidden harms exposed

The pandemic has widened and exposed various inequalities, such as digital, gender, economic, social and health. It has also highlighted various hidden harms from alcohol that often go underreported. For example, the substantial rise of calls to intimate partner violence helplines was widely reported at the beginning of the pandemic as abusers and their partners had to self-isolate together at home.<sup>45,46,47</sup> In addition, suspected cases of domestic child abuse has also increased, with a reduction in referrals with the closure of schools, and increased calls to helplines.<sup>48,49,50</sup> While alcohol is not always a factor in intimate partner violence, it is highly correlated.<sup>51,52</sup> The impacts of parental drinking on children have also been highlighted.<sup>53,54</sup> Survey data reported during the first national lockdown illustrated how alcohol had increased household tensions.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (Nacoa) reported a 38% increase in calls compared to the previous year (around 260 extra requests for help per month – most from young people aged 12–18<sup>56</sup>).

The pandemic has also highlighted and exacerbated existing health inequalities. It is well-evidenced that alcohol-related harm falls disproportionately on the most deprived communities, despite drinking at similar levels as those from more affluent backgrounds.<sup>57,58</sup> This ‘alcohol harm paradox’<sup>59</sup> existed long before the pandemic but is likely to have been made worse during the last year when combined with other inequalities.

Public Health England has estimated that COVID-19 infection and mortality in deprived areas are twice that of the least deprived areas, even after adjusting for age, sex, region, and ethnicity.<sup>60</sup> Hospital data demonstrates that those in the most deprived decile access emergency services more than twice as often as the least deprived,<sup>61</sup> and other research has found such services are often used for routine care.<sup>62</sup> The reluctance to overburden such services to relieve capacity for COVID-19 patients is likely to have had a disproportionate negative impact on these groups and their health outcomes.

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Our Drinkaware Monitor has always provided a powerful window into the nation's drinking. Its large sample size, UK-wide coverage and repeated cross-sectional design is an invaluable asset during this time of challenge and change.

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### The value of our research in 2020

When the first national lockdown was announced on March 23, it was unclear how long such restrictions would be in place, how pervasive the infection would be throughout the nation, how high mortality rates from COVID-19 would be, how many new variants would emerge, whether a vaccine was possible, and when – and indeed, whether – life would return to normal. We monitored the nation's drinking throughout, and in doing so, have created a crucial resource documenting reported drinking behaviour during this unprecedented time of uncertainty.

Our Drinkaware Monitor has always provided a powerful window into the nation's drinking. Its large sample size, UK-wide coverage and repeated cross-sectional design is an invaluable asset during this time of challenge and change and provides the opportunity for nuanced profiling of drinking behaviour among different groups – often missed in smaller samples.





# Strategy



## Strategy

# Finding a way through

At the start of 2020 our objective was to continue to reach more of those people in the UK who drink at levels harmful to their health, with interventions that included marketing campaigns, continued research, and significant digital innovation.

However, the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the beginning of major restrictions to UK lives in March had an immediate effect across the board – including on Drinkaware’s own team and our income. With most people staying at home and having access to alcohol 24/7, the impact of the pandemic also put our strategic mission into sharper focus and brought with it a sense of urgency.

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### Progress against our strategic goals

The impact of the pandemic and the restrictions on the businesses of many of our donors meant that some had no choice but to suspend or sharply reduce their donations. A small number were in more fortunate positions to come forward with one-off donations.

“

With most people staying at home and having access to alcohol 24/7, the impact of the pandemic also put our strategic mission into sharper focus and brought with it a sense of urgency.

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Overall, this left Drinkaware with sharply reduced resources, and it was clear early on in the year that some of our ambitious 2020 targets would be adversely affected.

Social restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect our health services, coupled with reduced resource, meant that Drinkaware had to put many of our well-established interventions on hold. This included our Nightlife Crew programme, which promotes safety in the night-time economy and our workplace training programme, Drinkaware at Work, as well as collaborative local campaigns. We were also compelled to reduce our spend on campaigns, designed to help people make better choices about their drinking, by more than 60%.

However, tremendous support from our Board, our staff, our partners, the media and government throughout this enormous period of change enabled Drinkaware to shift our operations and find ways through the pandemic to reach those people at risk of alcohol harm.



Drinkaware still reached large audiences. More than six million users visited our website, over 800,000 people used our digital tools to better understand the impact of alcohol on their lives and more than 200,000 visitors navigated from our social media channels to access information on our website. Our digital campaigns encouraged people to pledge a total of more than 50,000 drink-free days over 2020, and to collectively pledge to reduce their drinking by over half a million alcohol units.<sup>63</sup>

We made changes to the 'look' of our brand in the summer of 2020 to make it more engaging and accessible. We invested in digital innovation, launching a new website, putting investment into improving the experience of people using our resources, and increasing the creation of digital content. And to better understand our audiences, and particularly the impact of the pandemic on their drinking behaviours, we commissioned a series of research surveys. We also continued to work with key partners to amplify Drinkaware's voice and communicate our messages. Across the year, Drinkaware also featured in more than 4,000 articles in the UK media.

## Data and analysis have never been needed more

Drinkaware made a commitment to monitor the pandemic's effect on alcohol consumption with a series of pulse surveys in 2020. This was in addition to our Drinkaware Monitor – our annual state-of-the-nation review of the UK's drinking habits. In 2020, our commissioned research surveyed more than 17,000 people. The results highlighted that Drinkaware's work has never been more relevant.

The impact of the pandemic on drinking behaviours is complex. Different people, from different backgrounds, in different contexts, at different stages of their lives, have experienced life under lockdown in different ways. Yet our research has shown significant changes to drinking patterns that have the potential to be harmful among higher risk drinkers or people vulnerable to mental and physical health issues, job uncertainty and caring responsibilities.

Most significantly, our data revealed that people who were high-risk drinkers pre-pandemic reported drinking more than usual during the months in lockdown. People experiencing mental health issues, those whose jobs were affected and parents with children under 18 tended to report drinking more than usual. Research by other charities and scholars identified similar concerns.<sup>64,65</sup>

Drinkaware's investment in research and understanding the impact of the pandemic on drinking habits in 2020 will support us, and many other organisations concerned with alcohol harm, to better shape future support and in developing healthcare strategies.



Most significantly, our data revealed that people who were high-risk drinkers pre-pandemic reported drinking more than usual during the months in lockdown.



In 2020 more than **six million** users visited our website. In summer 2020 we relaunched our website with improved functionality and an updated visual brand. With a continuous improvement programme, we saw a **22%** increase in visitors to the home page and increases in people navigating from there to our tools; we saw a **34%** increase in people clicking to our Self-Assessment tool which is based on the World Health Organization's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT).<sup>66</sup> We also saw a **30%** increase in people clicking to our DrinkCompare Calculator, which gives an assessment of a user's drinking habits compared to their peers, from the home page.<sup>67</sup> In total, our online tools were completed more than **800,000** times.



# Reaching our audiences through digital channels



## Reaching our audiences through digital channels

# Turning our focus to digital

As the pandemic reduced our ability to deliver face-to-face interventions across the country, our focus turned to digital to help reach our target audiences and deliver on our charitable aims for 2020.

Our main focus was mid-life men and women drinking over the UK Chief Medical Officers' low-risk drinking guidelines of 14 units a week, with a particular emphasis on regions where alcohol-related hospital admissions are greatest.

With many people now spending more time in their homes and our research telling us that some were drinking more than usual in lockdown, or forming worrying drinking habits, the agility of our digital approach meant we could quickly respond to drinkers' needs and changes in what they were searching for online due to the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we rapidly set up a coronavirus hub, providing information and resources to help our audience navigate the pandemic and understand how drinking patterns may change in response to an unprecedented crisis.

In the middle of the year, we re-launched the Drinkaware website with improved technical capabilities. This meant we could continue to be flexible as the pandemic developed, providing advice and guidance in a timely way.

As the year progressed, drawing on the innovations and successes we had with digital content, we created videos on a range of key issues, such as the impact of alcohol on mental health, helping us to reach new audiences with our message.

The flexibility and agility that we mastered by necessity throughout 2020, will help to drive our ambitions for digital innovation in 2021 and beyond, helping to reach people at risk of health issues from drinking.

## Re-launching our website

In June 2020, we relaunched our website with improved functionality and an updated 'look and feel'. This project had significant impact and allowed us to:

- Deliver a vastly improved experience with an updated look and feel to reflect our new visual brand
- Integrate the website and digital tools with a better performing, more modern system to deliver improvements in speed, content management and governance
- Lay solid foundations to better gather, track and analyse data and improve reporting
- Add enhanced functions for personalisation and campaigns.

“ We created videos on a range of key issues, such as the impact of alcohol on mental health, helping us to reach new audiences with our message.

Although we cannot isolate the impact of these website changes, we did see an improvement in some key areas in the months following their introduction, including:

- **22%** increase in the number of visitors to the home page
- **30%** increase in the number of people visiting the home page multiple times
- **26%** decrease in the number of people leaving the website directly from the home page
- **34%** increase in people navigating to the Self-Assessment tool from the home page
- **30%** increase in people navigating to the DrinkCompare Calculator from the home page.<sup>68</sup>

As we adapted our methods of communication to continue to reach our target audience throughout the pandemic, digital content became an important focus for Drinkaware.

## Blogs

We created a range of blogs to help people navigate the new issues that arose throughout the pandemic. One notable success was a blog written about the impact of alcohol on a person's recovery from COVID-19. Published on 11 June, this blog achieved almost 38,000 unique views, over 60% of the total views for all Drinkaware blogs in 2020.

## Videos

In the autumn of 2020, we used video to expand our digital reach even further. Working with GP and leading media health commentator Dr Sarah Jarvis, we created videos on a range of topics relating to alcohol, including [alcohol and mental health](#).

We are grateful for permission to share lockdown stories from some of our user panel that give first-hand examples of Drinkaware's impact in 2020.

## Jane

### Rural Scotland



**Jane lives in rural Scotland and is retired. Before the pandemic, she volunteered at a number of charities and took pleasure in seeing the benefit her volunteering had on others, particularly young people. The pandemic meant that this had to stop, and Jane is now a full-time carer for her husband.**

Jane was able to keep in touch with her adult children via the internet, but during the series of lockdowns didn't see anyone face to face for a while. She has found the pandemic hard and realised that she was drinking to cope with the situation.

Initially Jane started to have a drink at the end of a long day but found that one drink could easily turn into two. She visited the Drinkaware website and decided to take drink-free days during the week to help moderate her drinking. She found this easier to stick to if she had another activity planned, such as an online call with one of her children.

After the pandemic, Jane will continue the long dog walks which she uses as a time to meditate and says she hopes that she will be too busy to drink during the week. She may choose to have a sociable drink when she sees friends or enjoy a glass of wine in her garden on a warm evening, but will still make drink-free days part of her routine.



# Working with others to reduce alcohol harm



## Working with others to reduce alcohol harm

# Doing more together

### Identification and Brief Advice in supermarkets

Drinkaware and Asda have a long-standing partnership working together to promote our flagship campaign Drink Free Days. 2020 was the fourth year of our partnership, which saw us deliver Identification and Brief Advice interventions in 47 of its stores.<sup>69</sup> Asda staff spoke to shoppers about the risks of alcohol to health and provided advice about the health benefits of taking more drink-free days each week.

Drinkaware trained 100 Asda Community Champions, using the Drinkaware at Work e-learning, to educate them on the harms caused by alcohol, supporting them to talk confidently to Asda's customers. Branded unit measure cups and calorie measuring tools, along with information for parents on how to talk to children about alcohol, were also given out to customers.

We received very positive feedback from the store visits and from a number of local MPs that visited. In total, we had conversations with more than 3,400 people.



Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative Lothian MSP, said: "It was great to see Asda take a lead in promoting the need for responsible alcohol consumption. Drinkaware's advice provides people with an easy and achievable way to cut back and reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm to their health."

Polly Jones, Scottish Corporate Affairs Manager at Asda, said: "We are pleased to have partnered again with Drinkaware, as we know our customers respond positively to the factual and non-judgmental advice they provide. This is an important part of Asda's commitment to being a responsible alcohol retailer."



Drinkaware strongly believes it is crucial to promote appropriate and impactful messaging around the causal association between breast cancer and alcohol.



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### Communicating alcohol and breast cancer risk – Drinkaware roundtable

There is an established evidence base demonstrating a causal relationship between alcohol and breast cancer.<sup>70</sup> Yet awareness of this remains low, with fewer than 20% of people aware of the link.<sup>71,72</sup>

Drinkaware strongly believes it is crucial to promote appropriate and impactful messaging around the causal association between breast cancer and alcohol. But we are determined to thoroughly explore the most appropriate way of delivering this message, to minimise inadvertent offence or upset to individuals while ensuring the message is effective in raising awareness.

In October 2020, Drinkaware convened an expert roundtable to explore issues around communicating alcohol and breast cancer risk. The discussion, held under Chatham House rules, comprised invited independent participants, who brought expertise in communicating risk, policy, research, clinical practice, and public health, to explore these issues and inform future strategy and communications.

The roundtable was chaired by Dr Fiona Sim, Chief Medical Advisor to Drinkaware and Chair of the independent Medical Advisory Panel.

We are keen to explore potential collaborations and partnerships to take this work forward, both specifically in relation to breast cancer messaging and more widely in other areas of health messaging.

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### Communicating about alcohol and work

#### Drinkaware at Work

Drinkaware supported clients at the start of the year with internal Dry January campaigns and provided Drink Free Days toolkits adapted to suit the corporate environment. This afforded the opportunity of promoting alcohol awareness in the workplace and opened conversations about embedding training in organisational wellbeing calendars.

The Drinkaware at Work programme demonstrated its relevance through service provision across diverse sectors, ranging from heavy manufacturing to the finance industry, before the pandemic curtailed progression of further confirmed contracts. Through the scheme, organisations typically received Drinkaware support through the provision of our interactive health stand at health fairs and delivery of group workshops for employees.





## Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

In 2020 Drinkaware played a key advisory role in the development of an important new report into [managing drug and alcohol misuse in the workplace](#). The report by professional human resources body, CIPD, highlights the need for employers to take a preventative approach to drug and alcohol misuse and ensure policies and training are in place for staff. Drinkaware shared its extensive research into drinking behaviours to support the CIPD in shaping its practical guide for employers.

Research from the CIPD in 2020 revealed that one in five (21%) employers do not offer proactive support to workers to help prevent, and provide support on, issues of drugs and alcohol misuse. In its survey, the CIPD found three main pandemic-related risk factors associated with increased alcohol consumption: a high workload, a change in caring responsibilities and a change in normal workplace settings.

Drinkaware's own research found evidence to suggest that many people use alcohol to cope with increased workloads, stress, anxiety and uncertainty. Throughout 2020 our surveys showed that people juggling caring responsibilities and those whose jobs had been affected by the pandemic reported drinking more alcohol than they usually would.

Those who are drinking more than they usually would are also more likely than the national average to display worrying drinking habits, such as drinking on more days than usual, having the first alcoholic drink earlier in the day and finding it difficult to stop at one drink. Those drinking more than usual are also twice as likely than the national average to drink while working, and more than twice as likely to have had hangovers while working.<sup>73</sup>

“  
Drinkaware's own research found evidence to suggest that many people use alcohol to cope with increased workloads, stress, anxiety and uncertainty.  
”

The report and employer guide from the CIPD will play a vital role for organisations to be aware of alcohol misuse and to signpost their staff to appropriate support. They provide a good opportunity for employers to consider alcohol misuse in their wellbeing programmes and policies, as well as where alcohol features in their organisational culture.

Organisations are in a strong position to engage with their staff about alcohol awareness, and now is the time to prioritise employee health and wellbeing – whether parts of the workforce are on furlough, working from home or are adapting to changes in their normal work environments.

Dr Jill Miller, Senior Policy Adviser at the CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development, comments: “People have experienced significant changes to many aspects of their lives, including their usual work routines. Employers should communicate with their employees about the health and wellbeing support available to them, and they must not forget those on furlough.

“It's important that line managers are trained to feel capable and confident to manage and support employees in the new remote way of working.

“They should have regular catch ups with their staff, asking open-ended questions to genuinely enquire about an individual's wellbeing. Keeping the lines of communication open and encouraging employees to ask for support if they are struggling is essential, as is signposting to available support such as employee assistance programmes and information on healthy lifestyles.

“Our guidance on managing and preventing drug and alcohol misuse at work will provide more practical advice for employers on this issue. We would like to thank Drinkaware, who, among others, contributed valuable evidence and support in the production of our guide.”

## Next steps for Drinkaware

Drinkaware offers support to organisations through our training programme, Drinkaware at Work. The education modules are offered in-person or by e-learning and support employers to include alcohol alongside other health and wellbeing, or health and safety programmes for employees. The impact of the pandemic resulted in us having to pause all Drinkaware at Work activity. However, we have used the opportunity to rework the programme and training modules to adapt to new working environments. Drinkaware at Work will be a vital resource for any employer concerned with the physical and mental wellbeing of its teams in 2021.

We are grateful for permission to share lockdown stories from some of our user panel that give first-hand examples of Drinkaware's impact in 2020.

## Laura

### Leeds

**Laura lives with her two teenage children (14 and 16) and husband in Leeds. The 47-year-old communications consultant, who works part-time, likes to have a couple of drinks when out with her husband or friends and has the occasional glass of red wine in front of the TV. But she has always been mindful of taking breaks from alcohol during the week.**

But, as the country locked down, Laura's alcohol consumption started to gradually creep up.

"It was a solid six months before I took a rain check. Juggling work, children, home schooling, family life, I really started looking forward to an early evening glass of wine or two.

"With no formal separation from work – no leaving the office and turning off the computer for the night – my switch-off instead became pouring a glass of wine at 6pm. And sometimes earlier. In some strange way, it sort of felt needed and justified by the unique situation we were all in."

She added that there was also a sense of camaraderie – almost humour – talking to other mums about timing a glass of wine to coincide with the daily COVID-19 briefings.

"It became my quiet moment, when the kids were fed, and work finished for the day. Before I knew it, a wine or two became part of my daily routine.

"I had never previously been a daily drinker. But, by the end of the summer,

I realised I could probably count on one hand the number of days I hadn't had a glass of wine. It wasn't the case of having a hangover or headache. But I felt sluggish and, more importantly, I was pouring a glass without stopping to think about it."

Laura consciously decided that she wanted to get back to only drinking wine at the weekend, and on rare occasions in the week. So, as the new school term started in September, she began a new routine of taking the dog for a walk at 6pm instead – providing separation from her working day.

"Looking back, I can see how it became a bit of a coping mechanism at the time. I'm back to enjoying a weekend wine or two and feeling much more energetic and optimistic for it!"



# Reaching people through campaigns





## Reaching people through campaigns

# Encouraging the nation

### Starting 2020 with 'No Alcohol days'

In January 2020 our campaign to encourage the nation to take more drink-free days continued to build on the success of our 'No Alcohol days' messaging. We designed it to encourage people to substitute drinking with positive alternative activities and to promote healthier lifestyles.

The campaign was designed to engage men and women aged 45 to 64, who drink more than the low-risk drinking guidelines, who drink at home rather than in pubs or restaurants, and who live in regions of the UK with higher-than-average rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions. The campaign ran on radio and digital channels.

From January to February 2020, almost 24,000 people made a commitment to take more drink-free days. More than 117,000 completed the DrinkCompare Calculator of which over 60,000 were users from regions of the UK which experience disproportionate health harms from alcohol.

### Introducing 'No More Excuses'

As the pandemic progressed over 2020, we became increasingly concerned that harmful drinking habits developed during lockdown, could continue long term. Our research revealed that many people found themselves drinking more than they usually would.<sup>74</sup> And some displayed worrying patterns, such as drinking earlier in the day, drinking to cope with stress or anxiety and drinking on more

days of the week. And one of the top reasons for drinking more, according to our research, was boredom – with 'more time on our hands it can be easy to find an excuse to drink'.

In response, we introduced No More Excuses a campaign that moved our drink-free days messaging to reflect the new normal of the pandemic, which for many included a change in drinking habits. No More Excuses urged people to take charge of their health by having more drink-free days each week.

Our primary audience remained midlife drinkers aged 45 to 64 who are drinking routinely in the home and over the low-risk drinking guidelines. In addition, this campaign (which ran in the autumn) targeted drinkers aged from 35, because our research told us that younger adults drank more over the first national lockdown.

We designed the campaign's messages and imagery to reflect our insights about which audience groups were drinking more than usual and why. For example, our research showed that parents with children under 18 had been drinking more during the lockdown so we made sure to include relevant messages for that group.

“

On average, increasing or higher risk drinkers pledged they would take 2.7 more drink-free days each week.

”

The call to action encouraged people to take the DrinkCompare Calculator to find out more about how much they were drinking and how that might be affecting their health.

The campaign generated more than 200,000 unique visitors to our website through our advertising, leading to over 88,000<sup>75</sup> unique DrinkCompare Calculator tool completions.

The campaign impacted those at most risk of alcohol harm, with 60% of those completions coming from increasing and higher risk weekly drinkers,<sup>76</sup> aged between 35 to 65 years old.

On average, increasing or higher risk drinkers pledged they would take 2.7 more drink-free days each week.

# Reaching people through the media



## Reaching people through the media

# Extending our reach

The volume of media coverage for Drinkaware in 2020 reached its highest levels in the months of January, May, August, November and December.

In January this was driven by a number of stories, including our research into the popularity of low alcohol products among midlife drinkers, our partnership with Asda supermarkets and Dry January features. In addition, the media continued to report on the developing EastEnders storyline – Drinkaware collaborated with the programme’s scriptwriters to support the portrayal of the struggles with alcohol of one of its popular characters, Linda Carter.

As the pandemic began, the main driver for media coverage was our regularly published research into drinking behaviours during lockdown. Print, online and broadcast titles showed continued interest in Drinkaware’s research and perspective on alcohol consumption during the tightening and loosening of restrictions on people’s lives. Overall, in 2020, more than 4,000 pieces of media coverage were generated; 51% included a call to action for readers, pointing them towards support from Drinkaware by sharing information about our website, helpline and online tools like our free app, or by encouraging readers to take more drink-free days.

We are grateful for permission to share lockdown stories from some of our user panel that give first-hand examples of Drinkaware’s impact in 2020.

## Simon

### Stoke on Trent



Simon has lived with his girlfriend for three years near Stoke on Trent and noticed his drinking habits change considerably over 2020.

Simon works in retail and his consumption of alcohol is very much tied into his working routine. Prior to the pandemic Simon would not drink if he had work the next day and he would regularly drive to the venues that his band played at on weekends, therefore not drinking on these nights either.

From March, due to the closure of non-essential retail, Simon was no longer able to work. This significant disruption to his working life and regular social responsibilities meant that he fell into the habit of drinking every day. Simon’s partner doesn’t drink at home, so it has been more of an individual change, rather than a household-wide one.

“I noticed the difference in my drinking when I went shopping. Usually a litre of vodka would last me two weeks but now I buy a bottle every week.”

Overall, Simon has used his time on furlough to do more exercise and feels that he is fitter than he has been for a while. However, he has also noticed it is harder to naturally wake up in the morning and he puts this down to drinking.

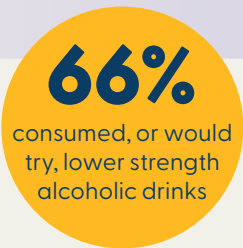
Although Simon recognises that he is drinking much more than he was prior to the pandemic, as retail opened up in mid-April, he is keen to try and get back to his previous routine of no drinking on work nights – as well as when he can eventually play concerts again with his band.



## Reaching people through the media

# Our year at-a-glance

January  
2020



**The Daily Telegraph**  
January

### Midlife drinkers ditching booze for low-alcohol tipples

“Of 2,000 middle-aged people surveyed, 66 per cent said they had consumed, or would try, lower strength alcoholic drinks, according to Drinkaware, up 15 per cent in two years.”



**The Edinburgh Reporter**  
January

### Lothians MSP backs Drink Free Days campaign

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative Lothian MSP, said: “It was great to see Asda take a lead in promoting the need for responsible alcohol consumption. Drinkaware’s advice provides people with an easy and achievable way to cut back and reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm to their health.”

**Birmingham Mail**  
February

### Alcohol hospital admissions hit record high

Elaine Hindal, CEO of Drinkaware, said: “The figures released by NHS Digital demonstrate the devastating impact that alcohol can have on people’s health.

“Drinkaware’s research shows that one in four people drink more than the recommended guideline of 14 units per week, and almost one in seven are defined as high risk or possibly dependent. This means that literally millions of UK drinkers are at risk of damaging their health in the long-term unless they cut down.”



**Morning Advertiser**  
March

### Drinkaware calls on pubs to encourage drivers to avoid alcohol

Drinkaware’s new campaign Home and Dry offers point-of-sale materials to pubs so they can encourage customers to try alternatives to alcohol if they are driving.

**UNILAD**  
April

### Top tips for those drinking more than usual in isolation



**Evening Standard**  
April

### What to do if you’re worried you’re drinking too much during lockdown



**ITV’s This Morning**  
May

### Deidre Sanders recommends Drinkaware to viewers concerned about loved ones’ drinking patterns during the pandemic



June  
2020

**The Sunday Times**  
June

### Adam Kay on how to survive your 40s

“You should aim to have as many drink-free days as possible and not to drink more than 14 units a week. The excellent free Drinkaware app makes it very simple to keep an eye on what your liver is going through.”

## Reaching people through the media

# Our year at-a-glance

Continued...

July  
2020

55+

one in five aged over 55 feel pressured to drink more

Mailonline  
July

### One in five people aged over 55 admit to feeling peer pressured into drinking MORE alcohol, study finds

The investigation by independent alcohol education charity Drinkaware found that peer pressure is felt by all ages – but impacts older generations in different ways. While they may think they are ‘older and wiser’ and immune to such influence, seniors are still vulnerable but less likely to identify peer pressure as being overt.



Metro  
August

### Increased boozing in lockdown could be a tough habit to break

Research from Drinkaware found that 22% of adults admit they’ve been drinking more alcohol in lockdown, but that this tendency is even stronger among teenagers under 18 and young people in their 20s.



The Sun  
September

### Are you boozing too much? Take this test to find out if you’ve got an alcohol problem

Juggling careers, childcare and home schooling, as well as worries about job security, have seen more of us hit the bottle and addiction services are struggling to cope. Drinkaware said there are some actions you can take now:

- Stick to drinking within low-risk guidelines – no more than 14 units each week
- Have at least three drink-free days each week and replace drinking with an activity
- Take the pressure off calculating units by keeping track of your drinking with our app
- Experiment with alcohol-free drinks, there is an increasing variety on offer in the shops
- Use smaller glass sizes for drinks and use a bottle stop to save wine for another day.



Derry Journal  
September

### 8.5 million people in the UK are now high risk drinkers

If you’re concerned that you may be showing signs of becoming alcohol dependent or are concerned about someone else’s drinking, Drinkaware has put together these four warning signs and symptoms:

- Worrying about where your next drink is coming from and planning social, family and work events around alcohol
- Finding you have a compulsive need to drink and finding it hard to stop once you start
- Waking up and drinking – or feeling the need to have a drink in the morning
- Suffering from withdrawal symptoms, such as sweating, shaking and nausea, which stop once you drink alcohol.

September  
2020

22%

of adults admit they’ve been drinking more in lockdown

## Reaching people through the media

# Our year at-a-glance

Continued...

October 2020



**Cosmopolitan**  
October

### How much do you really know about your boobs?

“Breast cancer has many causes, and some are out of our control. Alcohol is one of the few causes we do have some control over. No matter how much we drink, cutting down will help reduce our risk of breast cancer,” notes Elaine Hindal, Chief Executive at Drinkaware.

**Women’s Health**  
October

### How The Pandemic Has Changed The Way We Drink

“Having alcohol available in homes, for many people, can be a source of temptation and lead to drinking without thinking,” says Elaine Hindal, CEO of alcohol awareness charity Drinkaware. “Small things can quickly turn into habits, like opening a bottle of wine in the afternoon when you normally wouldn’t, sitting with a beer while you work, or drinking out of boredom.”



**The Scotsman**  
November

### One in ten Scots drinking more than normal in lockdown

One in 10 adult drinkers in Scotland consumed more alcohol than normal during lockdown, according to new figures. Drinkaware’s Monitor 2020 found the equivalent of 370,000 people drank more than their usual amount in the overall lockdown period from March to August, even as restrictions eased.

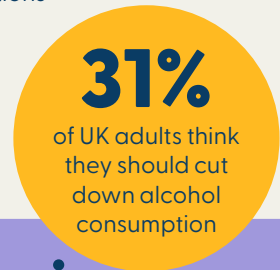
**Vogue**  
December

### Has 2020 Changed Our Drinking Habits As Well As Everything Else?

A study carried out by the charity Drinkaware backs this up, revealing a quarter of people confessed to drinking more from March to June this year, with women in particular more likely to have increased their alcohol intake when restrictions were first imposed.



December 2020



**South Wales Argus**  
December

### Motorists told not to end ‘incredibly difficult’ year by drink-driving

Police forces launched their annual Christmas drink and drug-driving crackdown on Tuesday. A study by the charity Drinkaware suggested 26% of people in the UK increased their alcohol consumption between March and June, which coincided with the first coronavirus lockdown.

**Belfast Telegraph**  
December

### 31% of drinkers boozing at high-risk levels

More than a quarter of UK adults think they should cut down on their alcohol consumption, a Drinkaware survey has found.



# 2021 and beyond



## 2021 and beyond

# Looking to the future

2020, more than any other year, has highlighted the need for Drinkaware. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought substantial challenge and change to our lives.

With the commencement of full lockdown restrictions on March 23, the nation was asked to stay at home, businesses and sectors were closed, children were home-schooled, millions of workers had to work from home for the first time, and more than one-quarter of the workforce (approximately nine million people) were furloughed at the peak of the Job Retention Scheme in May.

Our research in 2020 has shown a consistent, and worrying, change in drinking behaviour among some key groups. Now midway through 2021, with the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic continuing, we are concerned that behaviours that began during lockdown could become habitual, with significant long-term impacts on the nation's health and wellbeing.

2021 is an important one for Drinkaware. It marks the final year of our five-year strategy. Our goals remain the same as when we began on that ambitious journey back in 2017, to:

- Reach more people
- Engage them with our information and advice, to help them formulate personal strategies to reduce their drinking; and
- Support them to make a change.

We have a clear focus on reducing alcohol-related harm by supporting people to make better choices about their drinking. We will do this by providing impartial, evidence-based information, advice and practical resources, and working collaboratively with others.

However, given the challenges and unprecedented change that Drinkaware experienced in 2020, we have had to focus still further. That is why, for 2021, Drinkaware will be prioritising its work in three key strategic areas:



**Reaching audiences (Alcohol Plus+)**

Using communication key issues – mental health, workplace wellbeing, obesity, others – to attract people to Drinkaware.



**Digital health**

Use our digital tools and data insights to support more people to change harmful drinking habits.



**Translational research and insight**

Understanding drinking behaviour and how to change it through intervention design and campaigning. Translating research into actionable insights and recommendation to influence policy and practice.

# Drinkaware in numbers





## Drinkaware in numbers

# The story of our year

In 2020, we reached a large audience with our digital channels:



### 6 million+

Our website was visited by more than six million users [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) <sup>78,79</sup>



### 200,000+

website sessions came via our social media channels. <sup>80</sup>



We ended the year with over **146,700** views on YouTube and over **82,000** followers across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

And significant numbers of people took action:



### 800,000+

Over 800,000 people used our tools to better understand the impact of alcohol on their lives. <sup>77</sup>

This includes:



### 271,150

Completed the DrinkCompare Calculator and **257,200** people completed the Drinkaware Unit and Calorie Calculator.



### 208,250

People completed our alcohol Self-Assessment, an online test based on the World Health Organization's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test.



### 5,800

Personalised conversations about alcohol were handled by our online alcohol support service Drinkchat.



### 3,600

We also interacted with more than 3,600 people in supermarkets. <sup>81</sup>



### 60,000

Downloaded the Drinkaware app.



# About Drinkaware



## About Drinkaware

# Change starts with us all

Having a drink is part of many of our lives. But over time it gets harder to ignore the downsides. How drinking can change a person's health, behaviour, relationships.

When someone is ready to start drinking less, Drinkaware is ready to support them. We give the full picture of what drinking does to their mind and body. We offer information and advice to help people decide which practical changes are right for them and give tips and advice to form new habits and make those changes stick.

And because we want people to be protected from alcohol harm, we take what we've learned about helping people cut back and use the evidence to promote a world where it's easier to drink less.

We're already showing that drinking less can make life feel brighter in all kinds of ways and can better protect people from more serious problems ahead. By joining forces with others, we can make an even bigger difference. Change starts with us all.

The Drinkaware Trust is a charity, registered with the Charity Commission and the Scottish Charity Regulator, and governed by a board of independent Trustees, chaired by Sir Leigh Lewis KCB, in accordance with its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Board of Trustees each bring relevant expertise to the operations of Drinkaware and act with full independence. The Board directs the work of the charity, and delegates authority to three sub-committees covering Finance and Human Resources, chaired by the Treasurer; Risk and Audit chaired by a trustee (currently by David Ward), and Research and Impact, chaired by a trustee (currently by Dr Timothy Walker).



The Board of Trustees each bring relevant expertise to the operations of Drinkaware and act with full independence.





The Research and Impact Committee provides support and guidance for Drinkaware's work and ensures that our activity is based on the best available evidence. The Committee oversees robust evaluation and determines whether our resources and efforts are being effectively applied. This impact report has been reviewed and approved by the Research and Impact Committee, comprising:

**Dr Timothy Walker**

Chair of the Committee and Drinkaware Trustee, former Director General of Health and Safety Executive

**Professor Patrick Barwise**

Emeritus Professor of Management and Marketing, London Business School

**Dr Colin M Hunter OBE FRCPEd FRCGP**

Former Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners, former GP, Drinkaware Trustee

**Dr Jacquie Lavin**

Head of Research and Scientific Affairs at Slimming World

**Observer:**

**Dr Fiona Sim OBE MRCGP, FFPH, FRCP**

Independent Chief Medical Advisor to Drinkaware, Public Health Consultant, former Chair, Royal Society for Public Health, former GP

We are grateful for permission to share lockdown stories from some of our user panel that give first-hand examples of Drinkaware's impact in 2020.

## Grace Edinburgh

**Grace lives in Edinburgh with her husband and three children. At the end of 2019, Grace was made redundant and when the pandemic hit, she made supporting her three children's home-schooling her priority. She has not been able to look for a job again due to the uncertainty surrounding school closures or the pandemic.**

As someone who socialised and spent her evenings out four times a week, as well as taking her children to their respective clubs and activities, Grace felt the pandemic upended her life. The monotony left Grace feeling regularly low and she recognised that she used alcohol to relax at the end of a day or for stress relief.



"I thought oh well, there is nothing to do so I'd better put a bottle of wine in the trolley, when shopping, to break up the tedium of the evening."

As someone who enjoys exercising in the gym, Grace struggled to replace the benefits she got from the gym at home and online exercise classes did not work for Grace.

"In the last year, I feel like my life has gone inwards and rather than think about my needs, making sure the lives of my family are as good as they can be, became the priority."

It was baking every day with her kids that partially led her to think about reducing her alcohol consumption. These daily treats, as well as alcohol, made her feel like the calories were adding up. Rather than stop baking she decided to reduce her alcohol intake.

Another way in which she found herself reassessing her drinking habits was by taking part in Drinkaware's survey, which she was directed to via Instagram. After taking the survey, Grace was surprised at the amount she was drinking. This helped her stick to her decision to cut down.

Grace also added boundaries to her evenings, choosing to have an alcoholic drink after a certain time and only on certain occasions. She feels that these steps will continue as things begin to get back to some kind of normality. Grace is also keen to get back to a time when she can restart her career, see her friends, and go to the gym again.

# Drinkaware's donors



## Drinkaware's donors

### As of December 2020

1. Accolade Wines Limited
2. Admiral Taverns Ltd
3. Adnams PLC
4. Aldi UK
5. Asahi UK
6. ASDA Stores Ltd
7. Aston Manor
8. Bacardi
9. Bancroft Wines Limited
10. Brown-Forman Brands
11. Beam Suntory
12. Berry Brothers & Rudd
13. Blue Tree Limited
14. Bourne Leisure
15. Broadland Wineries
16. Brothers Drinks Co
17. Budweiser Brewing Group UK&I
18. Budweiser Budvar UK Ltd
19. C&C group plc
20. Campari UK
21. Carlsberg UK Ltd
22. Casella Family Brands (Europe) Ltd
23. Cellar Trends
24. Celtic Marches Beverages Ltd
25. Champagne Nicolas Feuillatte
26. Cider of Sweden (Kopparberg)
27. Concha y Toro
28. Continental Wine & Food
29. Corinthian Brands Limited
30. Costco Wholesale (UK) Ltd
31. Daniel Thwaites plc
32. Diageo Great Britain Ltd
33. Distell International
34. E & J Gallo Winery Europe
35. Edrington Group
36. Ei Group plc
37. England & Wales Cricket Board
38. Enotria Wine Cellars Ltd
39. Everards Brewery Ltd
40. Frederic Robinson Ltd
41. Freedom Brewery
42. Fuller Smith & Turner plc
43. Gen!us Brewing
44. Glen Turner Company Ltd
45. Global Brands
46. Goedhuis & Co Ltd
47. Gordon & MacPhail
48. H Weston & Sons
49. Halewood
50. Hallgarten & Novum Wines
51. Harrods
52. Harvey & Sons
53. Hatch Mansfield
54. Heineken UK
55. Hippodrome Casino Ltd
56. Hi-Spirits
57. Hook Norton
58. Ian Macleod Distillers
59. Ideal Wine Company
60. Inver House Distillers Ltd
61. J Chandler (Buckfast) & Co
62. JD Wetherspoon plc
63. JW Lees & Co (Brewers)
64. Kato Enterprises
65. Kingsland Wines
66. Laithwaite's Wine (Direct Wines)
67. Laurent-Perrier
68. Lidl
69. Lion-Beer, Spirits & Wine (UK) Ltd
70. Loch Lomond Group
71. Louis Latour Agencies
72. Maisons Marques et Domaines Ltd
73. Majestic Wine Warehouses Ltd
74. Marks & Spencer PLC
75. Marston's PLC
76. Marques de la Concordia Family of Wines
77. Masons of Yorkshire Ltd
78. Mast-Jägermeister UK
79. Masters of Malt
80. McQueen Gin
81. Mitchells & Butlers plc
82. Moet Hennessy UK Ltd
83. Molson Coors Beverage Company
84. Morrison & Mackay Ltd
85. Oakham Ales
86. Origin Wine Ltd
87. OSA Fine Spirits Ltd



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## As of December 2020 continued

- |                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 88. Parkdean Resorts UK Ltd         | 110. The Deltic Group             |
| 89. Pernod Ricard UK                | 111. The Drinks Company           |
| 90. Pinnacle Drinks                 | 112. The Reformed Spirits Company |
| 91. Pol Roger                       | 113. The Restaurant Group         |
| 92. Proximo Spirits UK Ltd          | 114. The Wine Society             |
| 93. Punch Taverns plc               | 115. T&R Theakston Ltd            |
| 94. Quintessential Brands           | 116. Treasury Wine Estates        |
| 95. QVC                             | 117. Trolle Trading Ltd           |
| 96. Racecourse Association          | 118. Two Tribes Brewing           |
| 97. Ramsbury Single Estate Spirits  | 119. Waitrose Ltd                 |
| 98. Remy-Cointreau                  | 120. Warner's Distillery Ltd      |
| 99. Sainsbury's                     | 121. Wells & Co                   |
| 100. Shepherd Neame Ltd             | 122. Whitbread                    |
| 101. SHS Drinks Division            | 123. Whyte and Mackay Ltd         |
| 102. Southwestern Distillery        | 124. William Grant & Sons         |
| 103. Spar (UK) Ltd                  | 125. Wilkin & Son Ltd             |
| 104. Spendrups Bryggeri AB          | 126. Woodforde's Brewery          |
| 105. St Austell Brewery Company Ltd | 127. WM Morrison Supermarkets plc |
| 106. Tesco plc                      | 128. Young and Co Brewery P.L.C   |
| 107. TGI Friday's                   |                                   |
| 108. Thatchers                      |                                   |
| 109. The Co-operative Group         |                                   |

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- 77 The cumulative number of completions for the Drinkaware Unit and Calorie Calculator, the DrinkCompare Calculator, the Self-Assessment Tool, Drinkchat ‘conversations’, and installations of the Drinkaware app. Based on Unique Events in Google Analytics. Some duplication due to users potentially using multiple tools.
- 78 Number of Unique Visitors calculated via Google Analytics. The total in 2020 was 6,139,330 users.
- 79 Note that this figure includes international visitors. In 2020, around 65% of traffic to our website was from the UK.
- 80 This figure refers to the total number of sessions during 2020 for the following channels: Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, Instagram Stories and LinkedIn.
- 81 This includes the number of ASDA shoppers who completed a scratch card based on the World Health Organization’s Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test and participants in Drinkaware At Work group or online training.

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Publication date: July 2021

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