Introduction/ Background

University can be a time when young people begin to experiment more with both drugs and alcohol. It is important that during this time young people are educated sufficiently about recreational drugs in order to reduce harm and misuse, for many reasons including:

• Most students that are going into university do not have extensive knowledge or experience with drugs.
• The British Crime survey (2010) estimates that 40.7% of young adults aged 16-24 have ever used illicit drugs.
• With regards to alcohol 69% of men and 55% of women aged 16 or more reported drinking an alcoholic drink on at least one day in the week (NHS, 2011). 10% of men and 6% of women reported drinking everyday in the previous week. Average weekly alcohol consumption was 16.4 units for men and 8.0 units for women.
• Due to the nature of university (freedom, being away from home) these percentages and units could be seen to increase during time at university.

A study conducted by Slym, Day and Mc Cambridge (2006), looked at drug and alcohol provision within further education colleges in England. 154 colleges participated in the research. They found that within this sample referral and general support were the most common drug and alcohol provisions, 94% identifying that these services were provided by the colleges. 99% of the colleges provided or were scheduled to provide at least one drug and alcohol activity or service, this included 85% providing drug and alcohol tutorials. The most common concern of the colleges surveyed (39%) was that further information and awareness in regard to side effects and risks involved with drugs and alcohol needed to be provided.

Aim

The aim of this study is to gain an insight into the types of provisions that are provided about drugs and alcohol in UK universities. As we have seen from the previous surveys and studies that have been mentioned, it is very important to know what kind of information is provided and what information is working best for the students to try to avoid any issues with drugs and alcohol within the student population. The information gained by this study will lay the groundwork for possible follow-up studies such as student focus groups and/or questionnaires.

Method

In order to conduct the study, a list of all the higher education institutes in the country had to be complied. Higher education institutes were identified using a list provided on Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website. It was then necessary to go to each individual HE institution’s website to find suitable contact details for the study. This consisted mostly of student services and students’ unions across the institutions. Once the contact details had been collected for 311 HE Institutions, an email containing a survey link was sent out for completion (see example page below).

Results

Although the study aimed to reach as many institutions as possible, only a limited number of replies were received. To date there are seven responses provided after two rounds of the survey email being sent to the HE institutions. There are many things that may have affected the lack of response to the email. As the study was being conducted during the summer, when universities would not be in full working order the way they are during the year. As this was an Olympic year and it was being held in the London, this could have contributed to a lack of response from the universities situated in London. When calling some the institutions, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge as to who was in charge or would know about provision of drugs information. However this may be due to not having the correct number for the different services within the university.

Conclusion

This study did not reach the numbers that had been hoped at the beginning of the project. There are many things that could have contributed to this but it cannot be known for sure. In future the study could take a few different directions to increase the number of responses; these include more phone calls, more email circulars and postal survey. These methods would hopefully lead to a greater response level. Overall the research internship was a great opportunity and showed that not all research is as straightforward as it may seem at the beginning.