



Diageo funds alcohol abuse study

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A €1.5 million research study on the health risk and behaviours of hazardous drinking in young adults will, for the first time, focus attention on why excessive drinking has become increasingly prevalent, according to researchers.

The three-year research programme will establish scientific evidence that can inform policy decisions and specific intervention responses for reducing alcohol consumption, according to Prof Colm Harmon, director of UCD's Geary Institute.

Profiling people who drink too much and assessing drinking determinants such as income, background, risk and alcohol preferences will be catalogued by a range of national and international academics including economists, social psychologists and sociologists. Drinkers will be characterised and benchmarked against each other, in an effort to establish intervention methods.

Fionnuala Sheehan, chief executive of Mature Enjoyment of Alcohol in Society (Meas), said there was a dearth of research on the reasons people drink excessively because previous research had tended to focus on how much people drink.

But the fact that Diageo Ireland, the company that sells Smirnoff, Baileys and Guinness, is providing the €1.5 million in funding to UCD for research on alcohol consumption has raised some concerns among experts.

Sinéad Shannon, policy and communications officer with Alcohol Action Ireland, said companies wishing to invest in alcohol research or preventative measures should ideally channel funding through the Government and one centralised body.

"The Government should be allowed to earmark this funding for preventative measures, intervention treatments or research... if a dedicated agency was established, there would be less likelihood of there being any influence," she said.

She added that while experts had established that there was an increasing number of young

people drinking and developing an alcohol dependency, there remained a lack of intervention facilities and prevention programmes.

Mary Cunningham of the National Youth Council said it was important to examine the drinking motivations of 18-25 year-olds. She said that while the Geary Institute was a reputable establishment which would obey all ethical standards in dealing with a drinks company such as Diageo, research such as this should ideally be independent.

Prof Colm Harmon, who will be one of the main researchers on the research programme, said the public need not have any concerns regarding the involvement of Diageo Ireland. He said the university required a significant amount of investment and welcomed Diageo's generous contribution. "We spent a lot of time working out the terms of the agreement. Diageo don't have any influence or any veto of course. They won't get to preview the results or outcomes," said Prof Harmon.