

# YouGov / Portman Group Alcohol Alternatives Survey: The Low and No Alcohol Boom is Here to Stay



**John Timothy, Portman Group Chief Executive:** “It’s fantastic to see so many people embracing low alcohol alternatives as a way to continue to enjoy a drink whilst doing so responsibly. For many people there are significant benefits to having a drink with friends – but at the same time it’s important that people don’t drink too much. Our findings below are a reflection of the positive trends we are seeing when it comes to declining binge drinking levels and the cultural shift that is happening in the relationship between young people and alcohol. Many producers are already investing heavily in exciting low and no products. Given the importance of this sector to helping people make healthy choices about their drinking, more needs to be done to support its growth.”

The recent growth of the low and no alcohol category is an industry success story, as UK consumers increasingly practice responsible drinking as part of maintaining a healthier lifestyle. Industry innovation means consumers now have unprecedented access to a wide range of lower strength products as part of familiar long-established brands.

Whilst consumer enthusiasm for low and no products can be seen in increasing sales, there has been relatively little research into the attitudes of the British public towards these products. Therefore, the Portman Group commissioned YouGov to survey 2004 UK adults on their drinking habits and attitude to low and no alcoholic beverages, with polling conducted between 19 and 20 December 2018.

Our results show substantial interest in low and no products among UK drinkers, especially among the younger generation, and a desire to see these alternatives available in a wide array of settings.

However, more needs to be done to ensure the continued growth of the category, including ensuring wider availability in settings such as nightclubs and festivals and tackling outdated and confusing product descriptors.

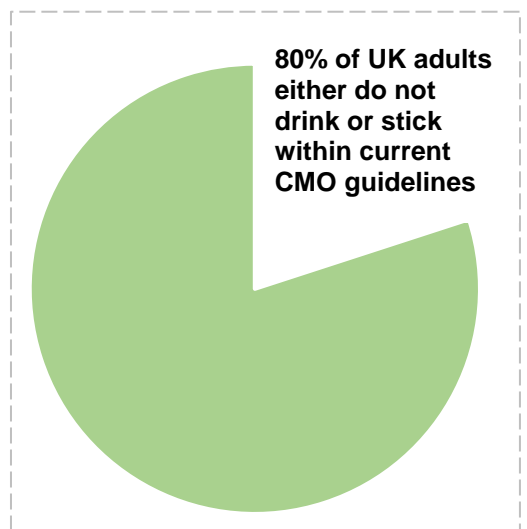
## Current UK alcohol consumption – The vast majority of the UK are responsible drinkers

In terms of current UK adult alcohol consumption, our survey results mirror wider UK drinking patterns, with the vast majority drinking below the UK Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines of 14 units a week and a small percentage drinking at the greatest level of harm.

76% of respondents either do not drink or drink below the guidelines, this rises to 80% if we exclude respondents who did not provide a figure, reflecting the latest figures from NHS Digital.

Our results also reinforce the rise of the so-called *Generation Sensible*, with 79% of 18-24 year olds saying they do not drink or drink below the guidelines (87% excluding non-responses).

Crucially, just 3% of the UK adult population admit to drinking more than 35 units in an average week. Higher risk levels are defined by the NHS as more than 35 units for women and 50 units for men per week.

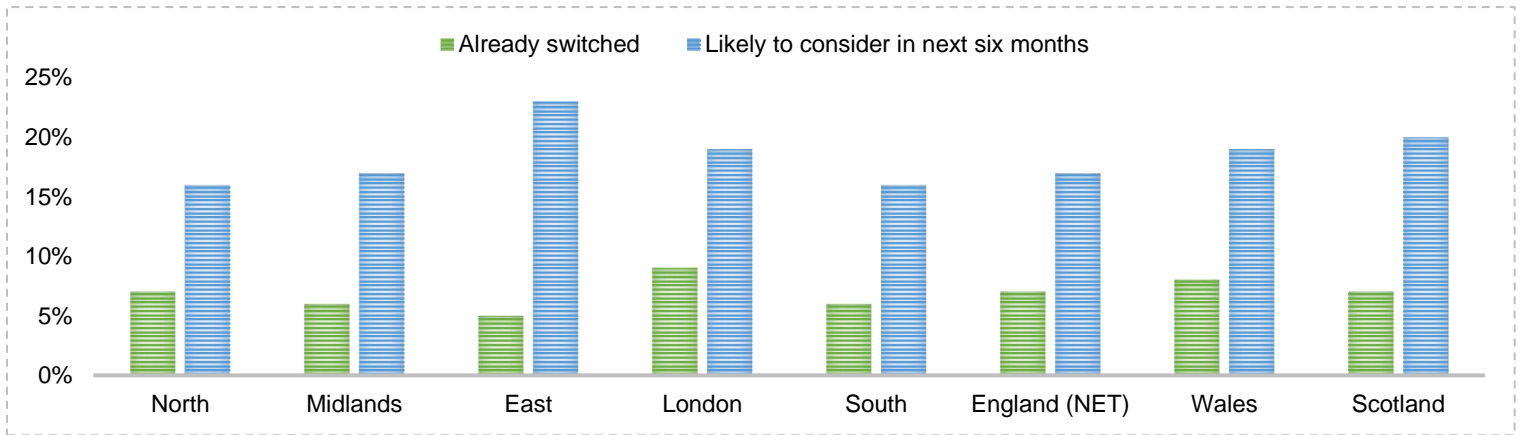
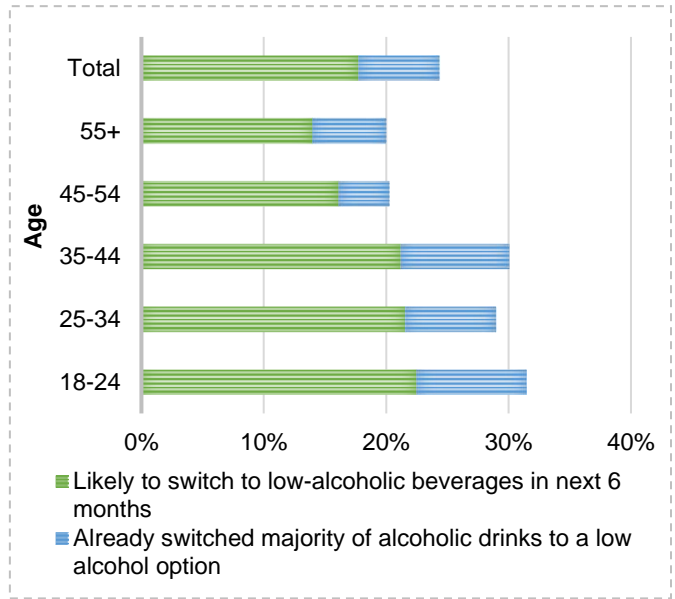


### How interested are UK drinkers in the low and no alcohol category?

Our results show that almost a quarter (24%) of UK adults said they had or were likely to consider switching the majority of their drinking to a lower alcohol option.

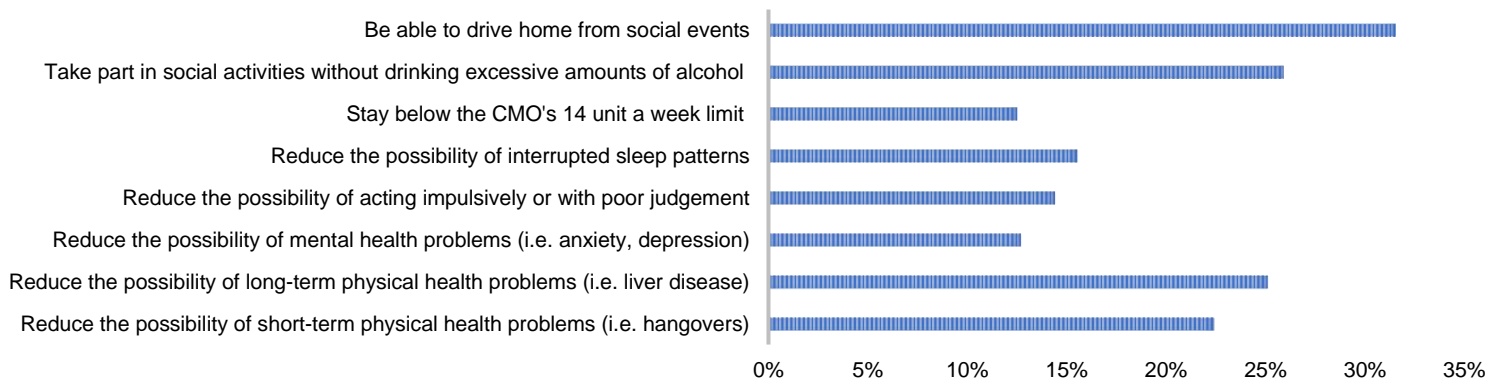
This switch is being led by *younger drinkers* with almost one in ten (9%) 18-24 year olds having already switched and 18-34 year olds being the most likely to consider switching (22%)

Appetite is also strong across the UK, with London leading the way in terms of UK drinkers who have already switched to low and no (9%), with great interest in switching in the next six months in the East of England (23%) and Scotland (20%).



### Why are consumers switching?

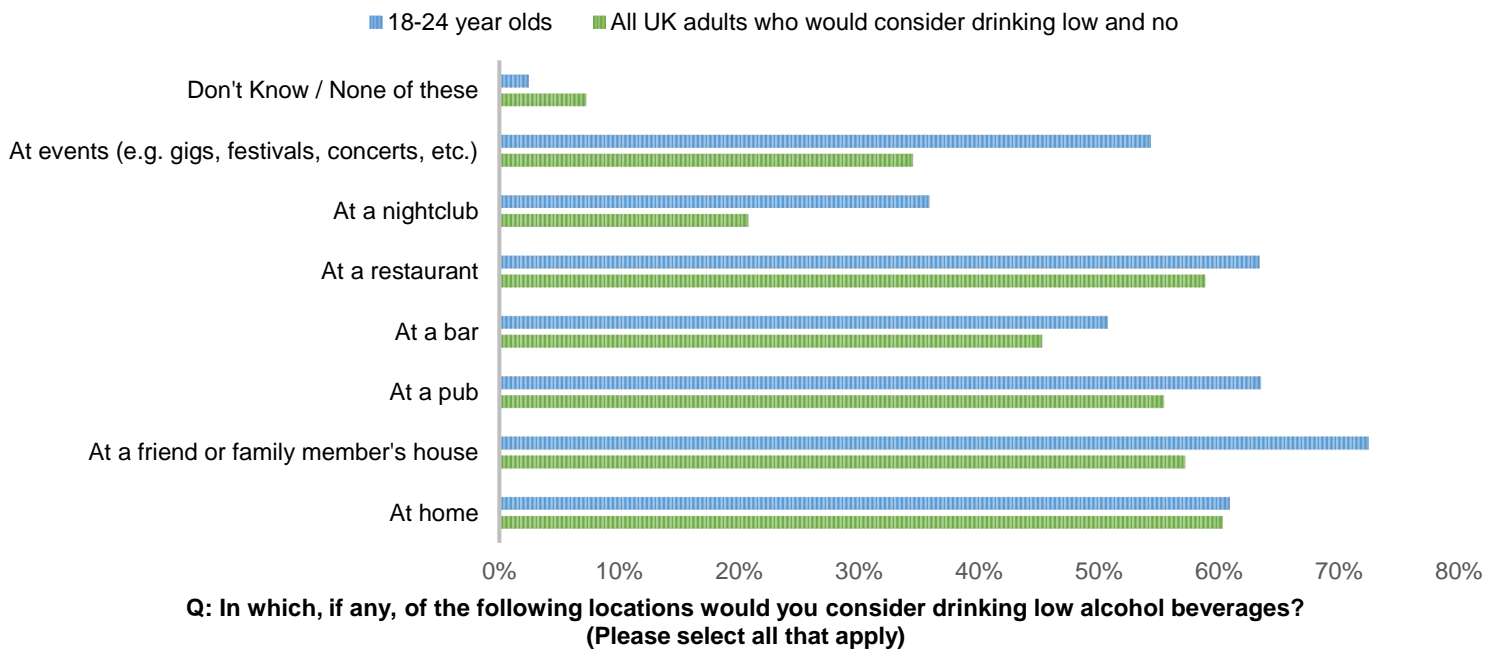
The reasons given for opting for low alcohol beverages reflect increasingly responsible attitudes to drinking across all age groups in the UK. Nearly a third of those surveyed (32%) said that being able to drive home from social events was the main reason for opting for low alcohol beverages, while over a quarter (26%) said being social without drinking excessively was a key factor. 13% said they would drink lower alcohol drinks to stay within the low risk drinking guidelines.



Q: Which, if any, of the following are reasons why low alcohol beverages would appeal to you in comparison to normal alcoholic beverages? (Please select all that apply)

## Where do consumers want to drink these products?

UK consumers exhibit a desire for the availability of low and no drinks in a wide array of settings, with 59% saying they would consider a low and no option in a restaurant, 55% in the pub and 35% at events (i.e. gigs, festivals, or concerts). Furthermore, younger drinkers are more interested in greater availability out of the home in pubs, bars, restaurants, nightclubs and events, compared to older generations.



## The way forward – how can we foster greater innovation?

The Portman Group is keen to support the future growth of the low and no category but believes for the opportunities to be fully realised there needs to be greater availability beyond supermarkets, restaurants and pubs, as well as clearer labelling to avoid consumer confusion around the various descriptions used in the category. Our research above shows consumer enthusiasm, especially among younger drinkers, for low and no alternatives to be available in a wider variety of settings. We call on all licensed outlets which have traditionally not had a non-alcoholic option beyond soft drinks (such as nightclubs, music venues and festivals) to stock low and no alternatives to broaden consumer choice. We also believe the Government should update the system of product descriptors, which contains outdated and confusing descriptors, to give consumers greater clarity and consistency around what they are buying.

Our specific asks include:

- **Alcohol free:** Raising the 'alcohol free' threshold from 0.05% ABV to 0.5% ABV to bring the UK in line with other European countries and the Licensing Act.
- **Low alcohol:** Introducing a minimum strength of above 0.5% ABV to the category of 'low alcohol', to go up to and include 1.2% ABV.
- **Removing the term 'de-alcoholised'**, as our previous research has shown that consumers find this confusing. Products should still communicate if alcohol has been extracted from the final product, but need not do so through the descriptor on the front label.
- The term **non-alcoholic** is already widely used and should be permitted broader use to apply to all products below 0.5% ABV.
- Products above 1.2% are required by law to display ABV. We would encourage all producers to include ABV for products below 1.2% to help consumers understand what they are purchasing.