

Pro-Chancellor,

Helena Conibear is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of a charity which empowers young people to make safer life choices relating to drugs and alcohol.

The Talk About Trust provides interactive workshops and online resources to 11–25-year-olds in schools, alternative settings and youth clubs, trains teachers and other professionals and provides parents and carers with advice and information. The charity was launched from Helena's kitchen table 14 years ago, and now employs a team of 11 who have reached over half a million young people across more than 1,200 settings over the last year.

Helena's own journey into understanding the importance of alcohol education came after a time working in the wine industry. The experience taught her that while alcohol can be pleasurable in moderation, it can also lead to addiction and damage health and relationships. Helena went on to co-found the International Scientific Forum on Alcohol Research and organised a conference exploring successful models of alcohol education. By the mid-2000s, Helena was working to persuade the then government to make health education (including drug and alcohol education) a compulsory part of teaching in schools. Unfortunately, the subsequent 2009 Education Bill did not take forward the recommendation and following a change in government Helena decided to be proactive by launching a small charity with a team of teachers and health specialists.

What started as an early intervention programme focused on alcohol has grown to include education on vaping, cannabis and other substances. The charity is also working with young adults around issues of spiking, a topic on which Helena gave evidence to The House of Commons Select Committee Inquiry to inform changes in police approaches and changes to the law.

Helena's approach is driven by the importance of partnership and evidence. The charity's Talk About Alcohol programme was evaluated among 4,000 children in 30 schools by the National Foundation for Education Research and in deprived areas by University College London. The charity is now working with BU academics to evaluate the impact of its Drug Education programme, commissioned by The Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner. Helena also champions the importance of engaging young people through immersive and interactive resources, including the use of gaming and story and picture-led activities for children with special educational needs.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Helena Conibear and I ask you to confer upon her an Honorary Doctorate of Education.