

ADDICTION RECOVERY TRAINING SERVICES

(ARTS) A not-for-profit community support organisation.

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**Dr Richard Simpson, MSP.,
The Scottish Parliament,
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**By e-mail to:
jake.mcleod@scottish.parliament.uk**

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Dear Dr Simpson,

SHIFTING THE CULTURE

Thank you for your undated letter received earlier this week, to which I am happy to respond as requested.

When it comes to handling modern alcohol problems, you are of course totally right that a culture shift is essential. However, whilst both your “Health” and “Justice” lists of items may have minor relevance, none of them independently - or even when taken together - can possibly provide enough of a culture change to have sufficient impact on the majority of consumers and their habits, because of (amongst other factors) the unintended consequences they may well generate.

As we all seem to agree, when you lower the retail cost per unit by any means, you encourage purchase and consumption.

But, unfortunately, when you increase the retail price per unit by any method, you create a bigger opportunity for more profitable higher priced sales of smuggled, stolen or illicitly produced booze – products of huge danger to health, and especially devastating when consumed by the young.

However, two vital policy changes will start the culture shifting in the right direction, and keep it progressing as the years go by – because we must recognise from history that “Culture Shift” is never a “quick-fix”, but always an evolution rather than a revolution.

ONE: `Drinking any form of alcohol is not a natural activity. Except in a very few cases, it is an acquired taste, learned by practice.

(2)

And for a majority of our youngsters, that practice takes anything from one to 3 or even 5 years, and our current laws have arranged for that training and practice to be legally carried out in the home of every Scottish family.

The full details of this are set out in the A4 booklet I am sending you by Royal Mail entitled: "**HOW OUR ANCIENT, BUT STILL CURRENT, UK ALCOHOL LAWS CAUSE OUR YOUTH BINGE DRINKING PROBLEMS, ENCOURAGE EARLIER EXPERIMENTATION WITH DRUGS, AND RUIN OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE PROSPECTS**".

TWO: In order to raise retail prices to a level unreachable by children and low income families without helping to expand the market for illicit alcohol, it is essential that we separate the collection of duty / tax on alcoholic beverages from their retail selling price.

The full details of this are set out in the second and third of the documents I am forwarding by Royal Mail: "**KEEPING BOOZY BRITAIN GREAT – Reducing Alcohol Problems, Whilst Increasing Drinks Business and Tax Revenue**", and "**EVIDENCE IN RESPECT OF: *THE ALCOHOL (MINIMUM PRICING) (SCOTLAND) BILL***".

I shall also send you other items currently in preparation, which together with the above provide a proposal for a comprehensive change of government policy in the direction of alcohol consumption reduction.

Much more evidence can be submitted of the numerous benefits and advantages of the above – but not within the compass of so few pages. As a result, if required, the author is prepared to attend meetings for interactive discussion with political decision-makers and / or the drinks trade.

I trust my items will be of assistance and wish you luck in your endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

E. Kenneth Eckersley,
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Former Magistrate and Retired Justice of the Peace,
C.E.O. Addiction Recovery Training Services (ARTS)