

Shifting the Culture

A proposal for a bill to bring forward measures to help change culture in relation to alcohol in Scotland

Responses from Professor Steve Wigmore, Professor of Transplantation Surgery, University of Edinburgh and Clinical Director General Surgery and Transplantation, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

Q1. Do you think the further restriction on quantity discounting proposed would be beneficial? What disadvantages might there be? Do you think there is a case for going further?

I think the proposed restrictions on quantity discounting sound entirely reasonable.

I cannot see any disadvantages based on current proposals.

I think there is a case for going further and specifically for targeting the “drink to get drunk” products. I have yet to meet a person who was not an alcoholic (or on the way to becoming one) who drinks 9% alcohol by volume so called super lager. This drink to my mind only exists to support people who have an alcohol dependency. Other examples are less clear such as cheap fortified wines, alcopops and strong cider. Clearly Scotland has an unhealthy relationship with Buckfast Tonic wine. The alcohol minimum pricing bill (Scotland) will I hope make these kind of products too expensive to be attractive to purchase but I would like to see manufacturers particularly of the super lagers to be encouraged to stop making them.

I believe that as part of the process to reform behaviours related to alcohol in Scotland it would be appropriate to engage with the major retailers. This may seem like a naïve proposition but I think they should be consulted to get their viewpoint and also to try to engage them in taking some responsibility for what is a health problem. There have already been potential loop holes described for on line alcohol ordering being delivered from across the border in England and therefore being exempt to some of the proposed restrictions in Scotland but this type of loophole will only be open if the retailers choose to exploit it.

. Q2. Yes I think that Ministers should be required to issue guidance on these two licensing objectives? I think this is a positive idea and that licensing boards should have an ongoing requirement to consider these two questions.

. Q3. There needs to be some kind of report on this issue otherwise it will be toothless and will not have a measured outcome or influence change. Whether this should be to Parliament or not I don't really know.

. Q4) Do you believe that the proposed restrictions on advertising are proportionate or necessary?

. I think the proposed restrictions are adequate and not overbearing.

. Q5) Are there further measures you feel should be introduced?

. I think adverts that clearly target young people or glamorize alcohol to young people should be particularly targeted.

Q6) Do you believe that there should be restrictions on pre-mixed caffeinated alcohol products? If so do you believe the proposed caffeine limit of 150mg/litre on pre-mixed products is appropriate?

Yes I think this is a sensible suggestion but of course it will not stop people mixing these drinks themselves or being served mixed drinks such as vodka and Red Bull in a pub or bar.

. Q7) Is there a role for further alcohol education and public information campaigns in changing alcohol culture?

Definitely, this needs to be an ongoing priority for the Scottish Government. I think this particularly needs to be targeted at schools.

. Q8) Would it be beneficial for Ministers to be made directly accountable to the Parliament for their policy in this area, as proposed?

. Yes it needs to be something that individuals are accountable for in terms of adequate delivery, equity of access to educational material, measurement of effectiveness and reporting of outcomes. I really believe that this needs to be at the core of social policy on changing alcohol behavior in Scotland.

. Q9) Do you support a ban on Licensing Boards requiring off-licences to restrict sales on age-grounds alone, or are there circumstances where this could be justifiable?

Age is always contentious and I am not certain that there is sufficient evidence to support a difference between 18 or 21. The requirement for ID checking should be there but I am not convinced the age limit for purchasing alcohol should be increased to 21.

What I think could happen would be to put greater burden of responsibility on the retailer. The removal of a license to sell alcohol for being proven to sell alcohol to under 18's may already exist but this could be enforced to a much greater extent. What I mean by this is more expedient removal and longer time

to be eligible to reapply for a licence. I would imagine that the consequence of losing such a licence to the licence holder would far outweigh any benefit they might make from selling alcohol to underaged clients.

. Q10) Do you believe that community neighbours should be consulted and their views taken into account when licences are being renewed or extended or when special licences are being issued?

. Yes I think this sounds like a sensible proposal.

. Q11) Do you believe that the New Zealand model is an appropriate one to emulate, if not what, changes should be made?

. Yes it sounds appropriate.

. Q12)

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. Do you believe that there is a role for a statutory National Licensing Forum in addition to the existing local forums?

. Yes otherwise I don't see who they would report to unless this responsibility were devolved to local councils.

. If so:

. Should it be funded through licensing fees or central Scottish Government funding? The former

. What would its membership be, and who would appoint them? Not really sure about this

. To whom would it be accountable? Ideally a cross-party committee representing legal, health, public health, industry and culture sectors. Probably good to have some non MSP's too!

. What would its functions be?

Governance of regulation of alcohol licensing across Scotland and ensuring appropriate reporting and integration with social welfare and health policies.

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