

**THE MAGISTRATES ASSOCIATION**  
**CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM COMMITTEE**  
**National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy**

With reference to the consultation on the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, members of our Criminal Justice System Committee have considered the section of most relevance to their work as magistrates, ie questions 23 - 35 on crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, and have made the following comments based on their personal experience and perception rather than on statistical evidence.

23. Members are not aware of what studies or pieces of evidence are available, but believe it would be helpful for magistrates to be made aware of them.
24. From the experience of our members, a large majority of offences, possibly 70%, are alcohol related: offences of disruptive behaviour, and of violence are often repeat offences. Cases of domestic violence are of great concern as they are nearly always drink-related, but the increase in domestic violence programmes for offenders will hopefully help to reduce the number of such offences. Offences of drink driving tend to be one off which suggests that drink-driving policies and publicity are proving successful.
- 26 – 27 Town/city centres have a large number of clubs/bars and the culture seems to be club/pub crawl. In these areas the trouble often flares up towards the end of the evening when crowds gather around fast food outlets or taxi ranks. Perhaps it would help the situation if these facilities were more spread out and there were more of them. In rural areas the culture is rather different as people tend to drive to these areas, or locals gather for just one or two drinks, and the consumption is not at the same level.
- 30 We agree that anti-social behaviour initiatives, at least, should be targeted on young people – not because they are more prone to such behaviour but because there seems more chance of changing their behaviour if targeted whilst they are young. This would fit in with the general approach in the Youth Court.
34. It seems probable that the effectiveness of drink-drive policies is a result of the universal rigidity and severity of the penalty – losing a driving licence for at least a year has enormous consequences that are clearly understood and the consequences of drink driving in terms of crashing/killing people are the reason society accepts such penalties. It is unlikely that similarly severe penalties for other forms of drunken behaviour would win public acceptance.

General comments

It seems that the general view of society is that alcohol is acceptable but drugs are not. In the Youth Courts there are children as young as 11/12 being charged with alcohol related offences. The ease with which children acquire alcohol is of concern. There

should be more action taken when it can be proved they have bought it themselves. A policy of no consumption of alcohol in the street works in some states in the US – this could be further experimented with in this country.

Young people are given a great deal of advice and warning about the danger of drugs but far less about the problems relating to the consumption of alcohol. We believe that equal emphasis should be given to both.

14 January 2003