

# **National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy**

## **Consultation Document**

Please find below responses for the questions raised in the above document :

### **The principles that should underpin then strategy**

Q1. The Government has a responsibility to reduce any harm that may be caused to its citizens by the misuse of alcohol, particularly as its sale generates a significant revenue for the exchequer. The intervention becomes justified when the misuse has a detrimental impact on individuals, groups, services, communities and society in general.

Q2. Alcohol misuse is a matter of individual responsibility, up to the point where it has an adverse affect on others.

Q3. Ensuring that full consultation takes place between opposing groups – Achieving the balance of Respect (towards those who don't wish to drink) and Tolerance.( to those who do).

Q4. Consumers: To be kept fully informed and educated of the dangers of misuse. To be given clear and unambiguous legislation and guidance. To act responsibly and respect the rights of others.

Voluntary Groups: To identify vulnerable groups and provide advice, guidance, support to those in need.

Commercial Interests: To ensure young persons are not drawn into alcohol misuse. To be aware of the strong influence of advertising. To make a contribution towards misuse education and treatment.

Q5. The protection of young persons and vulnerable adults.

### **The cultural and behavioural issues around alcohol use and misuse**

Q6. When alcohol is the main or significant factor in a course of behaviour that has a negative impact on any other person(s), community or society. Would this behaviour have occurred if alcohol was not such a factor? Was the misuse voluntary? How long/often does this occur?

Q7. Promote - Family environment. Alcohol should be ancillary. If regular, small quantities.

Prevention - 'Binge' drinking, under age drinkers, 'Bootleg' (cheap imports from Europe) alcohol sold from private addresses. 'Alco-Pop' style drinks (targeted at the young).

Q8. Trends – More leisure time and disposable income. Larger student population (living away from home). Holidays abroad (Ibiza Factor). Liberal minded parents. Advertising targeted at the young.

Focus – Parents presenting a more responsible role model. Public Entertainment Licenses (PEL's) – tighter control when linked to Alcohol Licenses.

Q9. Apart from young men, I have no knowledge of any particular minority ethnic attitudes to alcohol.

Q10. Alcohol can be the common factor that provides links within organisations which allows social contact in a leisure environment i.e. Sports & Social Clubs – bringing the players and supporters together. Factory & Office Socials – colleagues meeting outside the workplace. Many long lasting personal relationships have stemmed from this type of interaction.

I would suggest that without alcohol many public and personal celebrations (Christmas, New Year, Anniversaries) and sporting events would change dramatically. (weather for the worst is a matter of opinion!)

Q11. The completely negative view of the ‘English Drinking Culture’ is usually portrayed as the ‘Lager Lout’ – young people in towns and cities of an evening, or after a football match, or on holiday, drinking to excess and causing havoc.

I’m not particularly aware of any regional differences.

Age groups? 16 to 25 and then 26 to 32 would usually be seen as the worst offenders. Less so as the age range increases.

Q12. Drinking is seen as the ‘grown up’ thing to do. Drinking to excess is demonstrating to your peers that are grown up. It is a rite of passage.

It can be an escape – from pressure of exams, parents, family, work etc.

‘Closing time’ is important factor – stacking up drinks near the end of Licensing Hours, then gulping them down in a short space of time. This is the main factor that could be easy to exert influence: by staggering end of hours.

Q13. I do not believe that attitudes to risk have much affect on the use of alcohol – with the exception of Drink/Driving – The risk of being arrested, losing your license or being in a collision.

### **Health: prevention, treatment and the impact on the NHS**

Q14 to Q22 – Require NHS response.

### **Crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour: the effects on our surroundings and community**

Q23. There are a variety of sources of evidence showing links between alcohol and crime and disorder.

The British Medical Association has reported that alcohol is a factor in:

60-70% of murders

75% of stabbing

70% of assaults

50% of fights and domestic assaults

The Police Superintendents Association claims that alcohol, as a contributing factor, is present in half of all crime.

The National Probation Service reports that 30% of offenders on probation and 58% of prisoners have severe alcohol problems and that alcohol is a factor in their offending.

The British Crime Survey revealed that 40% of victims of violence reported that the assailant was under the influence of alcohol.

The Government report ‘Action on Alcohol Misuse’ summarised that between 20-30% of all disorderly behaviour occurs in or near licensed premises.

Q24. In my experience, alcohol is a factor in habitual re-offending and leads to offences of disorder, assault, and domestic violence. Alcohol can lead to 'One off' offences such as theft – making off without payment.

Q25. To convincingly demonstrate to what extent alcohol is a factor in criminal and disorderly behaviour we must agree on a standard definition of 'Alcohol Related' offences. There is a clear divide between a person who commits an offence of theft because they were drunk and a thief who just happens to have been drinking. The perception is that if drink is present then the offence is Alcohol Related.

Q26. As mentioned in the question - lack of availability of transport out of Town Centres. (Train/Bus/Taxi). This is exacerbated by the mass exodus from pubs/clubs at closing times which leads to disorder at bus queues etc. This could be alleviated by a 'staggered' end to licensing hours to spread the volume of people leaving licensed premises.

Q27. I have no experience of rural environments.

Q28. Examples of good practice in Merseyside include 'Alcohol Free' zones in the City Centre. Local by-laws prohibiting drinking in public areas. 'Operation Crystal Clear' reducing glass related injuries by prohibiting glassware and bottles from being taken out of licensed premises. Requires adequate glass disposal bins to be made available, and to be regularly emptied.

Q29. Examples of inhibitors include - data sharing/confidentiality i.e. The reluctance of hospitals to divulge details of persons (victims of crime) attending A & E depts.  
The Commercial Sector. Their prime purpose is income generation and profitability.

Q30. Yes. Young people are victims of crime and disorder as well as the perpetrators

Q31. Yes. Greater flexibility of licensing hours would encourage different drinking patterns, and may reduce binge drinking.

Q32. Arrests for Drunkenness offences usually result in the offender receiving a Caution. It is very rare for an offender to be charged and appear at Court. Does this affect re-offending?

No Drinking Zones are effective. (See Q 28.)

Q33. Proximity of residential premises is a key factor. The mix of residential and licensed premises must be a prime consideration to ensure the balance of rights and responsibilities.

Q34. Drink/Drive is now accepted as a social evil and the laws are generally supported by the public. The Drink/Drive message has always been clear – Death and injury are the result. Heavy fine, loss of license.

Q35. It can be the case that both partners have alcohol problems that manifest in violence towards the weaker partner. Domestic Violence agencies should refer offenders/victims to Alcohol Referral/Treatment agencies as a matter of course. The Courts should be able to attach Alcohol Treatment Orders, as part of sentencing.

### **The implications for vulnerable groups**

Q36. The most vulnerable children and young people are those already on the edge – involved with the criminal justice system, social services, dysfunctional families etc.

Q37. Persons living alone or away from home. The Homeless. Unemployed people, with little or no prospects of being employed. Chaotic Drug Users.

Q38. Until all the social factors can be addressed, which are the cause, only then can you tackle the effect, the alcohol misuse.

Q39. An example of a joined up approach is the ‘Merseyside Joint Agency Group’ (JAG). The group was originally formed as part of the Street Crime Initiative, but has evolved. This group is represented by up to 22 different partner agencies who highlight ‘problem’ individuals or groups that impact across many of the agencies – Criminal justice, Housing, Education, Local Authority etc. This approach still encounters the usual problems – Data sharing protocols, although they do share a database of clients.

Q40. From the Criminal Justice point of view, these vulnerable groups can be dealt with, in the main, by mainstream services.

### **Education and communication**

Q41. Successful campaigns tend to be the short/shock type i.e. the pre-Christmas Drink/Drive campaign. Graphic images on the devastating impact on families etc. Similarly, Crimestoppers are presently running a poster campaign in Liverpool showing glass related injuries caused through excess drinking etc., again using the short/shock technique. However, they lose the impact in time.

Q42. Campaigns effectiveness can be measured by the statistical difference before and after, but being aware of other factors that may skew the results ie a reduction caused by particularly bad weather.

Q43. The sensible drinking message is reaching the majority of its audience and is clear. I have seen a complete culture change within the police service over the attitude to Drink/Driving. The message is not reaching the hardened, persistent Drink Driver, who continues to take the risk.

Q44. The main effect of scientific research into alcohol education is effectively incorporated into health issues – how many units per week etc. and how small quantities can still adversely affect your reflexes when driving.

Q45. Other than young people, the other group to be targeted are drivers who drink.

Q46. Sensible, responsible drinking should be taught at an early age, at primary level, ideally backed up with similar attitudes at home. It is pointless to teach these lessons at school if there is alcohol misuse at home. We need to develop a more continental attitude to drinking.

Q47. Families/parents should be a role model in alcohol education.

Q48. Consideration should be given to a restriction on alcohol advertising, similar to that which applies to tobacco. Remove the 'glamour' from drinking. Only the Government is well placed to make this happen. Don't rely on a voluntary self regulation agreement.

Q49. Before we learn lessons from educational initiatives in the field of illegal drugs, we should examine how effective has this education been in that field? Are we now a drug free society?

Q50. See Q48.

### **The shape of the market and market-based solutions**

Q51. Established drinkers are unlikely to drastically change their drinking habits in line with fashion trends. The alcohol industry can only evolve/expand by attracting new customers – new first time drinkers: the young.

Q52. 'Alco-Pops' was a fashion trend aimed directly at young drinkers. They disguised the taste of the alcohol and appealed to non-drinkers. Many young drinkers who were happy to drink soft drinks moved over to this type of drink.

Q53. Not very far. There is no profit in reducing the consumption of alcohol.

Q54. The only way I can see the alcohol industry working with the Government is by compulsion. For example, insisting that a percentage of its profits are directed to harm reduction projects etc. with evidence of results.  
The types of approaches that have been ineffective are prohibition and restriction.

Q55. The entertainment industry and any other interest that profits from the sale of alcohol – sports stadia, clubs, restaurants, etc.

### **The economic costs and benefits of alcohol**

Q56 to Q61 – Require details of nation economic data.

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