

Dear Sir / Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above.

Whilst we do not claim that schools and colleges can solve the ills of society, and indeed resist such a notion when it too frequently results in further burden on the education system, the document does not give much attention to the work already under way there. For young people it is in education that they will first be able to challenge the habits and assumptions of their peers and families over such matters. Clearly, any attempt directly to lead young people away from alcohol is liable to be counter-productive, and lessons from the approach taken to illegal drugs would only enforce that. It would be helpful, perhaps, if young people in secondary schools towards the end of compulsory schooling could be exposed more to alcohol in the context of its sensible and careful use. This becomes more appropriate still for students at college or in the sixth forms of schools. There is a tendency in that context to adopt a prohibitionist stance that is not in step with society as a whole and which has unhelpful effects.

It is clear that advertising has great power and that it is particularly effective when applied to young people, many of whom have not developed the defences and cynicism of their elders. Current regulation of advertising allows alcoholic products to be marketed very specifically at the young, and a number of recent products have evidently been introduced to exploit that market. At present it is quite easy for young people under the age of 18 to circumvent the regulations restricting their access to alcohol, which are widely flouted not least because they are poorly targeted and enforced. A seventeen year old drinking a half pint of beer with his father in a pub may be learning useful lessons on control of drinking and its value in a social context. A fourteen year old who has managed to buy a bottle of strong cider from a local shop is only likely to be at risk. So we would not wish to see regulation of the sale of alcohol tightened, but better enforced where necessary and perhaps reframed to allow learning in other contexts. But the regulation of alcohol advertising would certainly repay careful attention with a view to restricting its effectiveness, especially as applied to the young.

I hope that the above is of some value in your consultation.

Best wishes

Martin Ward
Deputy General Secretary
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