

Early experiences of the Licensing Act 2003 in the East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber regions

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Context

The implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 in November 2005 changed the licensing laws for late night refreshment and regulated entertainment across England and Wales.

The impact of these changes on levels of crime and disorder has been examined in the Home Office's national evaluation of the Licensing Act (Hough *et al.*, 2008). However, in addition, two smaller regional studies were commissioned by the Home Office Regional Deputy Directors in the Government Offices for the East of England and for Yorkshire and the Humber, to provide an early indication of the changes in those areas. This report summarises the results of those two studies (published here as a Summary Report).

The specific objectives of the two studies were to:

- explore the opinions and experiences of key stakeholders (police; pub and club licensees; licensing officers; and crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP) representatives);
- examine the extent to which the extended hours applied for were being used by licensed premises in the regions; and
- examine the patterns of alcohol-related crime and disorder following the introduction of new licensing hours.

In the East of England region, six market towns across the region were examined. In the Yorkshire and the Humber region, four locations (two market towns, a city and an industrial town) were included. The locations were purposively selected to reflect the particular interests of the Government Offices involved and were not intended to be nationally or regionally representative.

Approach

The two studies used slightly different methodologies, tailored to meet the demands of the two Government Offices.¹ In both regions, a mixed-methods approach was used, involving:

¹ The differences in methodology are described in Appendix A. It should be noted that due to the studies being commissioned post-implementation, all interviews were carried out after the changes in the Licensing Act had occurred, and so were retrospective.

- qualitative interviews with police, licensing officers, licensees and also CDRP representatives in Yorkshire and the Humber (29 interviews were carried out in the East of England and 30 in Yorkshire and the Humber²);
- examination of the licensing applications for the pubs and clubs; and
- quantitative data analysis of police recorded crime figures for the first six months after the implementation of the Act.

Results

Take-up and use of extended hours

In the East of England, 16 of the 19 licensees interviewed had applied for extended licensing hours, whilst in Yorkshire and the Humber applying for extended hours was a condition for being included in the study. Of the pubs and clubs included in the two studies, none had applied for 24-hour licences. Furthermore, none of the licensees said that they made full use of the extra opening hours through the week, but most used at least some of their extended hours at the weekends. When using their extended hours, most pub licensees said that they would stay open until 1am or 1.30am, and the club licensees would stay open until 3am or 4am, so mostly extending hours by an extra two or two and a half hours at weekends. A number of the pubs explained that they would often 'play it by ear' as to whether they remained open or not towards the end of the night.

Changes in workloads and working practices

The majority of licensees had not taken on extra staff to manage the extra opening hours, but had instead been able to extend the hours worked by existing staff. This reflected variable and limited use of the extended hours by licensees. For the licensing officers, changes included working extra hours to deal with the initial large volume of licensing applications, and potentially the longer-lasting impact of Temporary Event Notices for extended hours. For the police, changes and increases in their shift patterns had also been noted, with some concern around the potential impact on officers.

² further breakdown of interviews by interviewee category is shown in Tables A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

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Change in drinking behaviour

None of the interviewees reported increased sales of alcohol despite the extended opening hours, but both studies identified a potential knock-on effect of the extra pub hours on local clubs, with people choosing to stay drinking in pubs with extended hours rather than move on to clubs when the pubs close.

Changes in the levels of crime and disorder

Analysis of recorded crime data revealed a mixed picture across the two regions, with some towns experiencing decreases in levels of crime and disorder post-implementation and others experiencing increases, as well as some with no clear change overall.³ The largest numerical change observed was in the city included in the Yorkshire and the Humber study, where violent crime fell by a third, although as with all the locations studied these changes cannot be directly attributed to the implementation of the Licensing Act. Other caveats surrounding these data – that they only looked at certain crime types as a proxy for alcohol-related crime, that the numbers of offences concerned were relatively small, and that recorded crime data of this type can be influenced by levels of police activity⁴ – mean that in any event, these results must be interpreted with caution.

The lack of any clear and consistent picture was also reflected in the interviews with stakeholders, who presented a range of different opinions regarding whether levels of crime and disorder had changed, with opinions and experiences sometimes differing between licensees within the same town.

³ The changes in the levels of recorded crime in the ten locations are shown in Table B1 in Appendix B.

⁴ Less serious violence against the person is particularly sensitive to police activity, where an increased police presence is often associated with the police recording crimes that might otherwise have gone unreported and so not feature in the recorded crime figures.

Change in timing of offences

In some towns, offences were clearly more spread out in the evening in the six months after the implementation of the Act. Other towns showed a shift, with the peak times of offences occurring later in the evening (see Appendix B for more detail). These changes probably reflected the later closing times of the licensed premises as they extended their opening hours. Changes in the patterns of crime were found in six of the nine towns for which data were available, with three of the towns showing little or no change in the timing of offences.⁵ These findings were mirrored in the experiences of the licensees and police staff interviewed.

Conclusion

The regional studies of experiences in the East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber in the first six months following implementation of the Licensing Act suggest a limited impact from the change. In particular, there was no clear evidence of the increase in alcohol-related crime and disorder that had been feared in some places. Feedback from key stakeholders indicated that the perceived changes experienced in terms of workloads, the sale of alcohol, and levels of crime and disorder had been smaller than perhaps expected. The main change experienced in some towns was the shift in the patterns of alcohol-related crime, with the peak periods either flattening or moving to later in the night. Overall, the findings from the two regional studies strongly echoed the findings from the national evaluation of the Licensing Act 2003.

⁵ Localised town-centre crime figures were not available for one of the four locations in Yorkshire and the Humber.

References

Hough, M., Hunter, G., Jacobson, J. and Cossalter, S. (2008) *The impact of the Licensing Act 2003 on levels of crime and disorder: an evaluation*, Home Office Research Report 04. London: Home Office.

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