Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill

Hugh Donnelly

The advantages and disadvantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol;

By increasing prices it should result in less consumption. However the minimum price needed to achieve this would need to be very much more than the 40p per unit that is proposed. We then get into a price scale that penalises sensible drinkers. This issue can be connected with other issues. Scotland has a big problem with obesity. Should we tax high fat foods? I don’t think price is the appropriate mechanism as it affects sensible people as well as those that are causing the problem.

The level at which such a proposed minimum price should be set and the justification for that level;

I think that no matter what price is set people the abusers of alcohol will opt for whatever is cheapest. Even worse it may lead to increased drug abuse if that is the cheaper option. Bans in the past have resulted in illicit production of alcohol. It is very easy to produce alcohol at home. The ingredients are readily available.

The rationale behind the use of minimum pricing as an effective tool to address all types of problem drinking;

As I said above there are many things that are taken to excess. As I mentioned food is one. Do we propose taxing food? What harm to addicts cause? This is what we need to address. If they break the law then penalise them. If they place a burden on health services then we need to be sure that they have contributed to that care by taking money off their benefits. Penalise the guilty not the innocents.

Possible alternatives to the introduction of a minimum alcohol sales price as an effective means of addressing the public health issues surrounding levels of alcohol consumption in Scotland;

A price of 40p per unit is proposed. This still means that a person so willing can get drunk for £10. Alternatives are to penalise the bad behaviour that drink and drugs cause. If this means building more prisons then do that. Get these people locked away so that they can’t affect decent people. If you lock them up you break their habit and can then start to educate them into a sensible lifestyle.

The advantages and disadvantages of introducing a social responsibility levy on pubs and clubs in Scotland;
The same argument can be used for food outlets. Placing a tax on the behaviour of abusers is unfair on those who live a responsible life. French restaurants serve meals with much more fat content than the fast food outlets. But we target the fast food shops. An outlet serves a product that is legal. The outlet cannot be responsible for the abuse of that product. The consumer must be held responsible.

The justification for empowering licensing boards to raise the legal alcohol purchase age in their area to 21;

In Scotland we let people get married at 16. One of the highest responsibilities. If we let them get married and have babies then I think we have to let them choose whether to drink or not.

The role of promotional offers and promotional material in encouraging people to purchase more alcohol than they intended; and

I drink alcohol. I eat food. I buy all manner of things. Yes if I can buy a certain whisky at a reduced price of course I will buy. As I say above where are we going here? Do we tax doughnuts or pizzas or fish suppers because they are unhealthy?

Any other aspects of the Bill

The approach has to be containment of any problem caused by abuse. Drink or drugs. Isolate the person in custody and then address that persons reasons for the abuse. We should not impose a levy or tax that penalises all. Penalise the abuser only. That is the correct way forward.

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