Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill
Perth and Kinross Alcohol & Drugs Partnership

Abstract

This report is based on the evidence from Alcohol Focus Scotland. The report sets out the advantages of a “Minimum Pricing Policy” for Scotland. This, as one of the real options available, should be explored further by the Scottish Government and it is a welcome opportunity to put forward a case.

A Social Responsibility Levy would have to be based on fairness that would not overburden the small independent trader. The Government should explore the possibility of bringing the off-trade into this system.

Many health professionals have argued that a minimum purchase age be raised for young people from 18 to 21 years old in the off-sales purchasing. This should be explored further.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this advice is looked at within the context that there are several ways to effect the consumption of alcohol, Professor T Babor et al have described pricing and availability as the best mechanism for a nationwide approach to reducing alcohol consumption. He has argued that alcohol is no ordinary commodity in his, often sited, work to the World Health Organisation. In 2003, he states that as an effective measure in reducing consumption pricing and availability are the most effective measures. Below are some of his main arguments. The issues raised go beyond the Scottish Government’s legal powers, for example the Scottish Government cannot set alcohol taxes as this power is not devolved.

- Minimum legal purchase age
- Government monopoly of retail sales
- Restrictions on days and hours of sale
- Outlet density restrictions
- Alcohol taxes
- Random Breath Testing
- Lowered BAC (blood alcohol concentration) limits
- Administrative license suspension
- Graduated licensing for novice drivers
- Brief interventions for hazardous drinkers in the video presentation

The Meier Report from Sheffield University states that minimum pricing would be the most effect policy option for the Scottish Government. The debate is at what level minimum pricing should be set.

Most co-ordinators of ADPs and health professionals would agree that there is an urgent need to bring in some activity that would reduce Scotland’s
relationship with alcohol, and it is widely believed that minimum pricing would be the most effective measure which the present devolved powers of the Scottish Government would allow.

The pricing mechanism would and should be debated but it is believed that this should sit somewhere at 40p per unit of alcohol, as this would effect most of the cheap marketable drinks within the off-trade and not effect the on-trade price.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide advice that can be used to define a Perth & Kinross Council response to the Scottish Government’s request for consultation to its ideas for a “Minimum Price for Alcohol”

Alcohol consumption in the UK has more than doubled in the last 40 years. As consumption has increased, so has alcohol-related harm. Such harm impacts on individuals, their families, friends and communities and wider society, costing Scotland over £2.25billion a year.

2. BACKGROUND

- Scotland’s drink problem is now significantly worse than the rest of the UK and the trends are worrying.
- The impact on our health is clear - around 1 in 20 Scots die an alcohol attributable death, from causes ranging from cancer to car accidents.
- The impact on our communities is evident for all to see – in violence, vomit and vandalism.
- The impact on our families and our children is less visible but equally damaging.
- This misuse of alcohol costs the Scottish economy around £2.25bn each year. That’s a cost of around £500 per year, or £10 a week, to every tax payer
- Alcohol is now 69% more affordable than in 1980 and consumption has increased by around 20% over the same period.
- Up to 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women in Scotland are drinking more than the recommended daily drinking limit.

1.2: Recommendations:

- That introducing a social responsibility levy on pubs and clubs could be deemed by many people in the industry to be unfair as the trend will move to home drinking. It could be argued therefore that off-sales premises like the large supermarket chains should be included in this system.
- Issues that would have to be explored are:-
  - who would pay the levy?
  - who would collect this levy?
  - would this be viewed as de-facto taxation by members of the on-trade?
- what would its effect be on the small independent trader?

• Further exploration of this system should be undertaken, with a view to bringing the off-trade into any proposed system.

1.3 Recommendations:
• That the raising of the age of purchase of off-sales from 18 years to 21 years should be explored further with the Council Licensing Boards, Police, Health and the CPP

2.1 Research Investigation:
Recent research\(^1\) into differing price policy options concluded that a minimum price is the most effective of a range of policy options. Modelling work undertaken by the University of Sheffield for the Scottish Government has quantified the effect of a range of minimum prices in improving health, reducing crime and improving productivity. Minimum pricing would increase the price of drinks which are sold at an unacceptably low price such as own-brand spirits and white cider. It would not increase the price of all drinks.

Minimum pricing will affect heavy drinkers the most. Moderate drinkers (those who drink within the sensible drinking guidelines) will hardly be affected. Everybody in Scotland will feel the economic and social benefits of minimum pricing through healthier, happier, safer families and communities. (AFS, Nov 2009).

There has also been evidence from the Police and the latest SALSUS that young people under the legal age are managing to purchase alcohol from off-sales premises. This in many cases is not the underage person themself buying the alcohol, but getting an adult to purchase it for them. This, in many cases, is an “older young person” from the ages of 18-21 years old who may know the young person or who has a sibling that knows the young person.

It is therefore believed that if we raise the age of off-sales purchases it should significantly reduce these occurrences. Thus, this should be explored further with the relevant partners in the Licensing Boards, Police, ADPs and trade representation.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There exist a few mechanisms that can be used to effect the nation’s consumption of alcohol. It is believed by many professionals, that a whole nation approach to this issue should be adopted in Scotland.

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The difficulty the issue raises is one of political will rather than health economics. As alcohol is a legally available drug many people assume that they are using it risk free. It can create some difficulty taking the general public along with this issue. We are in an economic downturn and people might believe that they are being punished by a price rise for the actions of others. However the evidence does show that the whole nation is drinking more than it should and that this has a variety of impacts from the social health to the economic wellbeing of the nation.

The health professionals are already in agreement that the need to change our relationship with alcohol is a must.

Many options have been put forward but, within a purely Scottish context, minimum pricing would seem the most expedient to create.

Thus it is recommended that this is explored further.

Liam McLaughlin
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