

About the Institute of Alcohol Studies

The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) is an independent institute bringing together evidence, policy and practice from home and abroad to promote an informed debate on alcohol's impact on society. Our purpose is to advance the use of the best available evidence in public policy decisions on alcohol.

Consultation Response

Overview

The Institute of Alcohol Studies welcomes the introduction of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in Scotland, and the opportunity to comment on the level at which the minimum price is set. We have long argued that MUP represents a proportionate, effective and evidence-based response to alcohol harm, and so we endorse the Scottish Government's legislation.

The Government's consultation document clearly and succinctly lays out the need for action, given the terrible toll cheap alcohol continues to take on Scotland. It references most of the key sources of evidence in favour of MUP, and so we do not feel it is necessary to comment further on the principle of MUP, especially as this is beyond the scope of the consultation. While we believe that raising alcohol taxes is an important tool in addressing alcohol-related harm, and continue to argue for higher taxes, we agree that MUP is better targeted at the cheapest alcohol consumed by the most harmful drinkers and so taxes should be raised in conjunction with an MUP.

Level at which to set the Scottish minimum unit price

We note that the Scottish Government's preferred level for the minimum price of 50p per unit is the same as the one envisaged in the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Act of 2012, even though the price of many alcoholic products has increased with inflation in the five subsequent years. Nevertheless, **we accept that the proposed 50p level is appropriate for now**, since this has been the basis for debate in Scotland, and so it could be deemed that this is the level on which consensus has been reached, with a majority of healthcare professionals, politicians and the public being in favour of an MUP at that level. Importantly, a 50p MUP would still require a substantial increase in the price of the very cheapest drinks, such as 'white' ciders and vodka and produce a significant positive effect for the most harmful drinkers.

However, we do believe that **once the policy has been rigorously evaluated, the level of the MUP should be re-evaluated and procedures put in place to uprate it**, based on modelled likely impacts. In many countries, the effectiveness of alcohol tax in reducing harm has been undermined because they have failed to keep up with inflation and income growth – it is imperative that the same does not happen to the MUP in Scotland.

For more information please contact:

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