Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

RoSPA Scotland welcomes the proposal to introduce a minimum price of alcohol below which alcohol must not be sold on licensed premises. It is well documented that we have a problem in Scotland with alcohol which includes irresponsible drinking and binge drinking and the knock on effects that has in the domestic and social setting and in the workplace and on our roads.

In terms of workplace safety RoSPA recognises that, the heaviest drinkers and thus those with the greatest likelihood of experiencing alcohol problems, tend to be concentrated in those of working age.(1) RoSPA workplace safety is also concerned that globally that 3-5% of the average work force are alcohol depend, and up to 25% drink heavily enough to be at risk of dependence (2). This is a global picture, within a Scottish context no research appears to have taken place in terms of alcohol in the workplace. The majority (77%) of employees interviewed in December 2007 by their employers Norwich Union healthcare identified alcohol as a major threat to employee wellbeing and a factor encouraging sickness absence (3)

Scotland has an ageing and declining population In the current economic climate our employee population needs to be engaged with the workplace, healthy and at work or in other words ‘Happy Healthy and Here’.

Alcohol influences the relationship between the employee and their workplace, is at the root of absenteeism and undermines productivity.

Setting a minimum unit price for alcohol will increase awareness of how much alcohol is contained within drinks, which will enhance understanding of the ‘daily allowance’. Alcohol users will become more aware of their excesses and modify behaviours as a consequence.

In road safety terms although the level of drinking and driving has dropped dramatically over the last three decades, In Scotland in 2009 around 30 fatalities (14 per cent of all reported fatalities) were estimated to be due to drink-drive accidents (this is a similar percentage to the GB as a whole). Despite 30 years of drink drive education and enforcement, in Scotland in 2009 around 920 people were still caught drink driving.

Often it is an innocent person who suffers, not the driver who is over the drink drive limit. Many innocent road users such as pedestrians, pedal cyclists, children and drivers are killed or seriously injuries as a result of drink driving.

During 2010 3.6 per cent of drivers involved in injury accidents who were asked for a breath test registered a positive reading or refused to take the test. Clearly, there is still much to do to prevent drink drive accidents, deaths and injuries.
In December 2011 Scotland launched its new drink drive Festive Campaign which aims to be tougher on drivers and there is no doubt that where education has failed, enforcement is the answer.

In terms of road safety it is recognised that the key to successful education is to change attitudes and RoSPA Scotland Road Safety department sees the minimum alcohol pricing as tremendous opportunity to change attitudes towards alcohol consumption.

It is the case also that many people are found to be over the alcohol limit the “morning after” simply because they are unaware of the numbers of units that have been consumed and/or they have not allowed sufficient time to recover from drinking alcohol. The minimum pricing being linked to units will have the potential to increase awareness of the concept of “Units” which has always presented challenges.

Karen McDonnell, Head of RoSPA Scotland
Kathleen Braidwood, Road Safety Officer, Scotland
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
12 December 2011

References
3. Findings from a report compiled from research carried out by Vanson Bourne and YouGov and commissioned by Norwich Union Healthcare in 2007