One too many…?

A briefing on alcohol misuse, the Licensing Act, and what you can do

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Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. Whilst most of the population enjoy a drink, the excessive consumption of alcohol causes many problems.

Drunkenness impacts on the individual and on society, through health problems, dependency, family breakdown and homelessness, an increase in crime – especially violent crime – and deaths through drunk driving. Alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour can make town centres unpleasant and dangerous places.

This briefing is designed for people, particularly Christians, who are interested in or concerned about alcohol misuse as a public policy issue. It outlines the current situation and goes on to summarise the measures that are being taken in response. It also encourages churches and church members to think about how they can play their part in tackling problems associated with alcohol.

Baptist Union of Great Britain
Encouraging Missionary Disciples
The Methodist Church
The United Reformed Church

1. ALCOHOL – THE FACTS

The costs of alcohol misuse, including to the health service and the criminal justice system, as well as the personal cost of alcohol are increasing.

Drinking Habits

People in Britain are drinking greater quantities than ever before. The average alcohol consumption for men has increased from 15.7 in 1992 to 18.9 units per week in 2007. The increase among women was from 5.6 to 9.2 units per week over the same period.[1]

In 2006/2007, according to the latest NHS alcohol statistics survey, the number of people drink over the recommended limit of 4 units a day for men and 3 units a day for women. 40% of men reported drinking over 4 units on at least one day in the week prior to interview. Women, however, were less likely to drink over the recommended daily guideline, with a third of women drinking over 3 units on at least one day in the week prior to interview.[1]

In England in 2006/07, 73% of men and 57% of women reported drinking an alcoholic drink on at least one day in the week prior to interview.

Gender

In general in 2006/07, men drank more frequently and in greater volumes than women. Men were also more likely to exceed the daily and weekly recommendations on drinking than women. However, the proportion of men drinking more than the recommended daily guidelines has fallen in recent years. There has been no comparable fall for women.

Young people

Young people aged 16-24 are among the heaviest drinkers and binge drinking is a normal mode of consumption. For instance, in 2006/70, the proportion of adults reporting binge drinking behaviour was greatest amongst younger age groups. Around 30% of men aged 16 to 44 reported drinking over 8 units. For women, 26% of those aged 16 to 24 reported drinking over 6 units.

Children

Over the past decade alcohol use among younger children (11-15 years) has been rising steadily. However, recent NHS statistics show positive trends. The percentage of pupils drinking alcohol weekly has been decreasing since 2001. Also, the proportion of pupils who have never drunk alcohol has risen from 39% in 2001 to 45% in 2006. In contrast to the recent decrease in drinking prevalence, the average consumption among pupils who drink alcohol has risen from 3.5 units in 1990 to 12.7 units weekly in 2006, the highest ever recorded. [2]

[1] Statistics on alcohol: England, NHS, 2009
[2] NHS (2008) Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2007

Binge drinking

In 2006/07, 23% of men and 15% of women had binge drunk in the week prior to the survey[3]. This is usually defined as drinking more than half of your recommended weekly limit in a single session, such as an evening out. This means drinking more than 10.5 units for men or 7 units for women. The proportion of adults reporting binge drinking behaviour is greatest amongst younger age groups.

According to an Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) 2007 Factsheet, the prevalence of binge drinking reached a peak around 2002 and has declined from 2003 onwards.[4] This reduction in binge drinking has been especially experienced among men. There has been no real reduction in binge drinking amongst women

The effect of binge drinking can also be seen from hospital admissions which now include illness and injuries indirectly caused by excessive drinking. In 2006/07 more than 860,000 people needed hospital care for problems and conditions caused by having drunk too much – an increase from 510,000 in 2002/03.

Crime

Alcohol-related violent crime fell by a third, from about 1.5 million incidents in 1997 to fewer than 1 million in 2007/08.[5] Despite this positive trend, alcohol-related crime is a matter of great public concern. According to research by the Institute of Alcohol Studies, alcohol is present in half of all crime.[6]

The British Crime Survey 2005/06 revealed that overall 46% of victims described their assailant as being under the influence of alcohol.

It is especially concerning that much youth violence is alcohol-related, most of it occurring in and around pubs and nightclubs. Amongst young people there are more alcohol related than non-alcohol related assaults. This is reflected in the NHS statistics as high level of victims presenting to Accident and Emergency are between 16-24.

Approximately three-quarters of incidents of partner violence occur when the perpetrator has been drinking prior to the offence[7].

Health

The NHS calculated that 14,982 deaths in 2005 were estimated to be attributable to alcohol consumption, representing 3.1% of all deaths in England. Men are more at risk of harm from their alcohol consumption than women[8]

The North West Public Health Observatory (NWPHO) said that in 2006/07 there were 811,443 hospital admissions that were directly related and attributable to alcohol. This is an increase from

[3] Statistics on alcohol: England, NHS, 2009
[4] Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2007
[5] Crime in England and Wales 2007/08, Home Office Statistical Bulletin
[6] Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2007
[7] IAS Alcohol and Crime factsheet 2007
[8] Alcohol Attributable Fractions for England, Jones et al. 2007

473,529 in 2002/03 – and the figure is still rising by around 80,000 admissions every year. This is a huge number, comprising 6% of all NHS hospital admissions.[9]

As well as the harm to an individual's health, alcohol misuse can also cause great costs to society. Recent work by the Department of Health suggests that alcohol misuse costs the NHS in England £2.7 billion per year, in terms of inpatient stays, A&E visits, ambulance journeys and more.[10]

Public Attitudes to Drinking

In 2006/07, 68% of men and 61% of women agreed that drinking is a major part of British life.[11] In the same survey, 84% of men and 86% of women said that they did not want to drink less.

[9] Hospital admissions for alcohol-related harm, NWPHO, July 2008
[10] Department of Health (2008), *The Cost of Alcohol Harm to the NHS in England*
[11] Statistics on Alcohol: England, The NHS, 2009

2. ALCOHOL POLICY

A Devolution and the European Union

Devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland means that alcohol policy varies across the UK, with different Governments taking responsibility for reducing alcohol-related harm. The European Union also has an alcohol strategy, which has an impact across 27 European countries.

England

In England all alcohol policies are set by the UK Government and Parliament.

The NHS has a 'Know Your Limits' campaign – **www.units.nhs.uk**

The Department of Health launched its most recent strategy '**Safe. Sensible. Social.**' in June 2007 - **www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Alcoholmisuse/DH_085386**

Licensing (the responsibility of local authorities), is part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport - **www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/alcohol_and_entertainment/default.aspx**

2005 saw a big change in licensing policy. The 2003 Licensing Act was implemented. This brought, amongst other things, a move towards more flexible drinking hours.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Government Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has a drug and alcohol misuse team. Further information is available at **www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/public_health/statistics_and_research-drugs_alcohol-2.htm**

Scotland

Alcohol policy is a devolved issue in Scotland.

Healthier Scotland's alcohol site is **www.infoscotland.com/alcohol/CCC_FirstPage.jsp**

The Scottish Government website on alcohol and public health is **www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/Alcohol**

The 'Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems' was published by the Scottish Government in January 2002. The key priorities in the Plan are to reduce binge drinking, because of the harmful social and individual consequences and to reduce harmful drinking by children and young people because of the particular health and social risks.

www.alcoholinformation.isdscotland.org includes helpful links to the wealth of research published by the Scottish Government.

Wales

In Wales, alcohol harm reduction strategies are the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government, though alcohol licensing is set by the Westminster Parliament.

In October 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government adopted a new 10-year plan to reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs – **www.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/strategy0818/?lang=en**

Licensing details for Wales are the same as for England - **www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/alcohol_and_entertainment/default.aspx**

Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man

Alcohol licensing and alcohol misuse services are the responsibility of the Crown Dependency authorities.

Guernsey: the States of Guernsey Bailiwick Alcohol Strategy consultation document (2005) - **www.gov.gg/ccm/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=512084**

Jersey: the States of Jersey Health and Social Services Department - **www.gov.je/Health/**

Isle of Man: The Chief Secretary's Office has a Joint Drug and Alcohol Strategy - **www.gov.im/cso/drugsalcohol/welcome.xml**

European Union

The European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers is responsible for taking forward a joint strategy across the EU on alcohol related harm.

Their work includes an overview of what action is taking place in each member country, regular meetings of public health ministers and a sharing of information about alcohol misuse strategies.

The aims of the strategy were agreed in 2006 and are to:

- protect young people and children and the unborn child
- reduce injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road accidents
- prevent harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the workplace
- raise awareness of the impact on health of harmful alcohol consumption
- Develop a common evidence base at EU level

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_en.htm

B Licensing

The Licensing Act 2003 (England and Wales)

Alcohol licensing was fundamentally changed by the Licensing Act 2003. It means that:

- **Licensing authorities created** – This significant change took licensing alcohol out of the magistrates' courts and put it into the hands of the local authority. The licensing authorities are, in principle, self-financing with central government setting fees for licenses paid by applicants and funding the administration. Licensing authorities must publish licensing policy statements - these are critical as they show how authorities will apply the objectives in their area.

- **Licence applications** – A single premises license can be applied for from a licensing authority, and a new system of personal licenses relating to the supply of alcohol has been introduced. There must always be a personal license holder on the premises when alcohol is being sold.

- **License applications are assessed against four licensing objectives.**
  These are:
  - the prevention of crime and disorder;
  - public safety;
  - the prevention of public nuisance; and
  - the protection of children from harm.

  A licensing authority may only restrict licensable activities where it is necessary for the promotion of these licensing objectives.

- **Licensing hours changed –** The Act allows licensed venues to vary their opening hours and theoretically to open 24 hours. This, the Government argues, will make policing easier (there will not be one fixed closing time when everyone arrives on the street at once) and will discourage concentrated drinking prior to closing time.

- **Alcohol related disorder –** The police have powers to close licensed premises immediately in the event of disorder occurring or being anticipated. The police, local residents and other bodies may ask licensing authorities to review particular licences if the four licensing objectives are flouted.

- **Children** – Licensed venues are required to set out how they will ensure the protection of children. It is now an offence to allow a child under 16 into premises which are used solely or primarily for the sale of alcohol unless they are accompanied by an adult. It is an offence to supply alcohol to children, or for children to buy or consume alcohol.

Criticism of the Licensing Act 2003, and the Government response

The Government has been criticised because despite these changes, perceptions about alcohol misuse and nuisance have not changed significantly. In some places levels of binge drinking and anti-social behaviour have increased, and the policing of town centres now that closing times are staggered through the evening have increased costs. In response to this, the Government have started a number of initiatives:

- Local Authorities have the power to establish new 'Alcohol-disorder zones' where there have been problems with binge drinking. In these areas people handed on the spot fines for drink related disorder can be banned from pubs and bars in an area for a specified time. Bar staff will be fined for serving people who are drunk. Children will be fined if they try to buy alcohol.

- Venues that have seen persistent problems with binge drinking will be given an eight week warning. If they fail to improve they will be forced to contribute towards the cost of policing.
- Since 2007 the national alcohol strategy 'Safe. Sensible. Social' has been in place to try to tackle the problems associated with drunkenness.
- In September 2009 the Government introduced Drinking Banning Orders, which allows the courts to ban any individuals from drinking in a certain premises or area, in addition to a fine of up to £2,500

Concerns have been expressed that 24 hour opening may exacerbate rather than modify the existing culture of binge drinking in Britain.

- Professor Ian Gilmore head of the Royal College of Physicians said: "The College believes reducing the availability of alcohol and increasing the price is the way forward but this is unpalatable for politicians." He went on to criticise the plans to extend licensing hours saying that it was fanciful to think that Britain would become "a Mediterranean-style wine sipping, non-binge drinking culture, by licensing regulations". The BMA has called for post-change research to be undertaken on the health effects following the change in licensing hours.

- The Police Federation has voiced its support for greater flexibility in closing times but says that it "strongly opposes any move to permit 24/7 drinking which would place a strain on police resources".

- Alcohol Concern has specifically criticised the fact that local authorities when granting licenses are not further encouraged to take account of the number of premises but instead must assess the application only on its own merits in reference to the objectives. Licensing authorities can state that an area is overburdened or "saturated" and that they will not be encouraging more applications but it is emphasised that any applications must be assessed on individual merit.

- Alcohol Concern has also argued that although the aims of the Act – reducing binge drinking and tackling alcohol-related crime – are admirable, the essentially deregulatory nature of the Act will make it harder for local residents and local authorities to object to licenses.

- As of June 2009, no Alcohol Disorder Zones had been established by local authorities.

- The Magistrates' Association has criticised Drinking Banning Orders as a gimmick. It says that 'alcohol-ASBOs' do not significantly change the powers the courts already have, and will not do anything to address the shortage of alcohol treatment courses available.

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005

In 2005 the Scottish Parliament passed a new Licensing Act, which updated the previous legislation, which dated back to the 1970s.

The aims of the Act are to:

- Simplify the alcohol licensing regime
- Balance the rights of the majority of people who drink sensibly with the need to protect local communities from crime and nuisance
- Strengthen monitoring and enforcement powers

Further information can be found at **www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/Licensing/Alcohol-licensing**

C Call for Change

There are clearly many policies, plans, initiatives and strategies in place designed to tackle alcohol abuse and alcohol related crime. From local Alcohol Disorder Zones to international co-operation through the European Union, alcohol misuse is being treated seriously. But how well are all these schemes working, and what more can be done to tackle alcohol abuse?

The Methodist Church, with partners in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church, are calling for a number of policy changes with regard to alcohol:

- Introduce a minimum price for alcoholic drinks, based on a similar scheme in Canada, and end loss-leading sales in supermarkets and happy hour promotions.
- Make it compulsory to put unit information and recommended limits on bottles
- Review the Licensing Act 2003 and see what further measures are required to tackle binge drinking, including allowing licensing authorities to take into account the impact on public health and the number of licensed premises already in the area.
- Provide more resources for general and targeted public education campaigns on alcohol misuse
- Introduce a mandatory code of conduct for alcohol retailers, with penalties for breaches

Keep up to date with the latest church statements, campaign action and information on alcohol at **www.methodist.org.uk/alcohol**

3. INDUSTRY RESPONSE

A The Portman Group

The Portman Group is an industry body made up of drink producers which supports social responsibility issues surrounding alcohol. It aims to:

- encourage and challenge drinks producers to promote their products responsibly, through a Code of Practice on the Naming, Packaging and Promotion of Alcoholic Drinks
- show leadership on best practice in the area of alcohol social responsibility through the actions of member companies; and
- speak on behalf of members on these issues to inform public opinion and policy.

Before 2006 the Portman Group was involved in a number of campaigns and public awareness raising initiatives designed to curb alcohol misuse. These included the "I'll be Des" (aimed at encouraging people to think about agreeing a designated driver who would not drink) and "If you do drink, don't do drunk" (aimed at students) campaigns. In 2004 the Portman Group set up the drink-aware website (**www.drinkaware.co.uk**).

Since 2006, these activities have been carried out by the Drink Aware Trust.

For more information see **www.portman-group.org.uk**

B The Drink Aware Trust

In 2006 a charity – the Drink Aware Trust – was set up to continue the awareness raising work previously carried out by the Portman Group.

The Drink Aware Trust is funded by the alcohol industry.

Its activities include the drink-aware website – **www.drinkaware.co.uk** - as well running other public campaigns designed to raise awareness about alcohol misuse.

C Other Industry Involvement

Some drinks companies have signed up to a voluntary code of conduct prepared by the Portman Group to make ensure some minimum standards of social responsibility. This particularly affects the naming, packaging and marketing of alcoholic drinks. This includes advice to include information about the number of units in the drink, to include information about the Drinkaware website, and to have some sort of responsible drinking message, such as "please drink X responsibly".

D Advertising

The communications regulator, Ofcom, has rules on advertising alcohol, particularly to protect under-18s. These include the requirement that adverts for alcoholic drinks on television must not be likely to appeal strongly to people under 18, in particular by reflecting or being associated with youth culture. Adverts must not link alcohol with sexual activity or imply that alcohol increases

attractiveness. Nor must television advertising show or refer to behaviour that it daring, aggressive or irresponsible.

E Retailers

People who sell alcohol – either in supermarkets and off-licences, or in bars, pubs and restaurants – have an important role to play in making sure that alcohol is served responsibly.

Code of conduct

Alcohol retailers have a voluntary code of conduct covering areas of social responsibility. As a voluntary measure, with no penalty for breaches, the code has been heavily criticised as ineffective.

The Methodist Church, Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church have called for a mandatory alcohol retail code as one way to tackle alcohol misuse. Alcohol Concern have also called for a mandatory code. The possibility of a code is being investigated by the Home Office. A code would outline best practice in a number of areas, including underage sales, cheap availability of alcohol, running promotions, and serving people who are already drunk.

Underage Sales

Retailers must not sell alcohol to those who are under age. Licensees risk losing their licence if they are caught repeatedly selling alcohol to people they should not.

Age limits and alcohol are complicated:

5 years and up	May consume alcohol at home under adult supervision.
Under 14	Can go into a pub with a family certificate, but must be with an adult and stay in the family room or garden. Cannot drink alcohol.
Under 16	Can go into a restaurant where alcohol is served, and at the licensee's discretion can consume alcohol bought for them by a parent or guardian as long as it is with a meal.
16-17	May order beer, port, cider or perry (and in Scotland, wine) in an eating area in a licensed premises as long as it is with a meal.
Over 18	May purchase alcohol without restriction.
Any age	Attempting to buy alcohol at a bar illegally for someone under 18 carries a maximum fine of £1,000.

Cheap alcohol

Supermarkets have been strongly criticised for making alcohol cheaply available. They may sell alcohol at a loss in order to encourage customers into their stores, where they hope they will buy other products. Loss-leading promotions have been blamed for keeping levels of binge drinking

and alcohol abuse high. Research has shown that making cheap alcohol less easily available would affect under-18s and the heaviest drinkers most.

Pubs, bars and restaurants sometimes hold happy hours, where two drinks are served for the price of one. These practices have also been condemned by alcohol misuse campaigns, and the Methodist Church has called for an introduction of a minimum price for alcohol. A minimum alcohol price policy operates in parts of Canada, where a bottle of beer cannot be cheaper than about the equivalent of £1.50.

Irresponsible promotions

Some bars and clubs have offered promotions such as all you can drink for £10, or ladies' nights, were women get free or discounted drinks. Disc Jockeys in clubs have also been known to encourage rapid drinking, such as insisting clubbers finish their drink by the end of the song.

Serving people who are already drunk

Serving someone who is drunk is an offence, and it could mean a fine or other penalty for the licensee. However, it is often very difficult for someone working in a bar to know how drunk their customers are. Of course, they will have no idea about how much their customers have had to drink before they arrived. Retailers do have a responsibility however to do all they reasonably can, and a new code of conduct should encourage further action and initiatives to prevent this from happening.

4. DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DRINKING?

A unit of alcohol is 10ml of pure alcohol.

Counting units of alcohol can help us to keep track of the amount we're drinking.

The recommended limits are to drink no more than 3-4 units per day for men, or 2-3 units for women. It is also recommended that men don't drink more than 21 units in a week, and women don't drink more than 14.

Many bottle and can labels now carry information about how many units of alcohol they contain. The Methodist Church has called for this practice to be made mandatory.

The NHS-supported 'Know your Limits' publicity campaign aims to raise awareness about the recommended limits through TV, radio and the web:

http://units.nhs.uk/

The Methodist Church has produced a Mocktails website – with ideas and recipes for non-alcoholic cocktails and information about unit limits and other interesting facts:

www.mocktails.org.uk

Beer and cider
A pint of ordinary strength (4%) beer or cider is 2.3 units.
A 440ml can of ordinary strength (4%) beer or cider is 2.0 units

A pint of strong (5%) beer or cider is 2.8 units.
A 440ml can of strong (4%) beer or cider is 2.2 units

Wine

A bottle of wine (11%) is 8.3 units
A bottle of wine (12%) is 9.0 units
A bottle of wine (13%) is 9.8 units

A small 125 ml glass of wine (12%) is 1.5 units
A medium 175 ml glass of wine (12%) is 2.1 units
A large 250 ml glass of wine (12%) is 3.0 units

A standard 50 ml glass of fortified wine, such as port or sherry is 1.0 unit

Spirits

A standard 25 ml measure of spirits, such as gin, whisky, rum or vodka is 1.0 unit.
A large 35 ml measure of spirits is 1.4 units
A double 50 ml measure of spirits is 2.0 units

Alcopop

A 275 ml bottle of alcopop (e.g. Smirnoff Ice, WKD, Bacardi Breezer, Reef) is 1.4 units

To calculate the number of units multiply the strength of the alcohol (as a %) by the volume, and divide the total by 10. For example, for a medium glass of 12% wine, (0.12 x 175) ÷ 10 = 2.1

Binge Drinking

One of the biggest problems in the UK relates to binge drinking. This is when someone drinks more than 50% of their recommended weekly limit in a single session. In some mainland European countries, the average alcohol intake is actually higher than in the UK, but they have fewer alcohol-related problems because the consumption of alcohol is spread out over the week, and binge drinking is less common.

5. CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS ON ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol misuse is an important issue for many Christians.

Some churches, such as the Salvation Army, require their members to abstain from all alcohol.

Methodist communion wine is non-alcoholic, and alcohol is not normally allowed to be provided on Methodist premises (though there are some exceptions). This is also true for many Baptist Churches. Some Methodists, Baptists and others choose to be teetotal from religious convictions.

Other Christians, including many Methodists, do drink.

Christians will agree that alcohol misuse is a blight on our society. Town and city centres are often unpleasant and dangerous places on Friday and Saturday nights. A significant proportion of police arrests, dangerous driving incidents and admissions to hospital accident and emergency units can be linked to excessive alcohol consumption.

Through a Glass Darkly is the name of a Methodist report on alcohol, that made number of recommendations. It invited all Christians:

- To consider seriously the claims of total abstinence;
- To make a personal commitment either to total abstinence or to responsible drinking;
- To give support wherever possible and by appropriate means to those who suffer directly or indirectly from alcohol misuse;
- To unite to support pressure on government and public opinion for a programme designed to control consumption and reduce harm;
- To recognise the importance of example and education in family life;
- Where they practise total abstinence to take special care to avoid authoritarian attitudes which may be counter-productive;
- Where they practice responsible drinking to take special care to demonstrate that this also involves self-control.

Through a Glass Darkly also called for the Church to engage actively in the promotion of responsible attitudes to alcohol and in the support (whether directly or indirectly) of those suffering the harmful consequences of their own alcohol misuse, or that of others.

6. WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

NHS

The National Health Service and the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish departments of health have a central role in co-ordinating nationwide strategies around awareness raising and education, as well as providing treatment to those who have suffered because of alcohol misuse.

Police, Home Office and Magistrates

The Police and law enforcement bodies have to deal with the problems that alcohol misuse contributes to, including anti-social behaviour and violent crime.

Licensing Authorities

Local councils are responsible for licensing premises and establishing a policy on local alcohol strategy for their area.

Alcoholics Anonymous and other support groups

Alcoholics Anonymous is a 12-step support group for recovering alcoholics. There are other similar support groups, for instance Al-Anon, which is for the friends and relatives of alcoholics, and Alateen, for teenage friends or relatives of alcoholics.

Find out more from their webistes:

Alcoholics Anonymous	**www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk**
Al-Anon / Alateen	**www.al-anonuk.org.uk**

Advertising Standards Authority

The Advertising Standards Authority is in charge of ensuring that all advertisements comply with a code, which includes a section on marketing alcohol responsibly. Further information is available in section 7 D (below)

Researchers

Many University Departments of social science or public health have research programmes in the area of alcohol. The Institute of Alcohol Studies is one of the UK's leading research organisations in this area of policy. **www.ias.org.uk**

Campaigners

Alcohol Concern is the name of a charitable national agency bringing together people working in the field, providing resources and calling for political change. **www.alcoholconcern.org.uk**

7. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are actions that you can take at a national, local and personal level to help tackle alcohol misuse. You might want to challenge the granting of a particular licence in your local area. Or you might feel that not enough is done to inform people of the harm that alcohol misuse can do. There may also be opportunities to help alcohol treatment services in your area.

A Personal Conduct

Your attitude to alcohol can be an important way in showing your friends, family and colleagues that you think alcohol misuse is a serious issue. By demonstrating that you have thought carefully about alcohol, they may follow your example and think again about what they are drinking. This can be especially important if you live with children or young people and want to teach them about responsible approaches to alcohol.

Abstinence is a clear way of showing that you have taken an active decision for yourself, and can be a significant example that others follow. You may decide to be completely teetotal, or to give up alcohol for a period of time, such as Lent. If people ask you why you are not drinking, think about a way to engage them and to encourage them to think about what they drink – though take care not to assume a superior or judgemental attitude!

If you do drink, know what effect alcohol has on your body. Don't drink and drive. Know what the recommended daily and weekly limits are for alcohol, and know how many units are in different kinds of drinks. Show that you can drink in moderation and responsibly, and avoid drunkenness.

A Mori poll found that just 7% of men and 22% of women were aware of the recommended allowances for alcohol consumption. Research shows that people often under-estimate the amount of alcohol they drink. If you choose to drink alcohol, think about it!

The UK Department of Health advises that men should not drink more than 3 - 4 units of alcohol per day, and not more than 21 in a week, and women should drink no more than 2 - 3 units of alcohol per day, or 14 in a week.

For more information see the NHS website	**www.units.nhs.uk**
The Alcohol Concern website Down Your Drink	**www.downyourdrink.org.uk**
The Drink Aware website	**www.drinkaware.co.uk**

B Education

Alcohol consumption amongst children and young people is worrying. British children are among the drunkest in the world, according to research done by the Institute for Alcohol Studies. If you work with children or young people – or even adults who perhaps could benefit from learning more about alcohol misuse – there are a range of resources and materials available.

Parents

If you are responsible for children or young people then you will know the importance of example and encouragement in family life. You have a central role in influencing how your children encounter alcohol, and the issues associated with alcohol consumption and misuse.

Youth Workers and Teachers

You may know young people who drink alcohol. You may see or hear how alcohol is misused. You might know families who are affected by a dependency on alcohol.

Hope UK and Tacade are two charities which focus on providing support and education materials for young people on these issues.

Hope UK is focused on alcohol and drugs, and has a Christian basis, and gives specific advice for churches and church workers, as well as general advice for teachers and youth workers (who may not necessarily be connected to a church).
Website: **www.hopeuk.org**
Telephone: 020 7928 0848

Tacade promotes personal, social, health and citizenship education for children and young people.
Website: **www.tacade.com**
Telephone: 0161 836 6850

Preachers

If you are a church leader or have the opportunity to lead worship or preach, why not consider exploring a theme of alcohol consumption and alcohol misuse in a sermon, or article in your newsletter or church website.

C Licensing

If you live in England or Wales and would like information or guidance on Licence applications, please see **www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi_alcohollicenceguidelines_0106.pdf**

If you would like a paper copy, or information or advice if you live in Scotland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, please contact the Joint Public Issues Team, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR – 020 7486 5502 – **enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk**

D Advertising

The alcohol industry uses advertising to sell its products, but are these advertisements responsible? Do they glamorise what alcohol can do for people, or how it can make people behave?

Ofcom, the Government's communications regulator, has introduced rules that alcohol adverts broadcast on TV or the radio have to abide by a code of conduct. A similar code applies to non-broadcast adverts (such as billboards or in magazines), and for web-based advertisements.

- The self-regulatory watchdog the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) enforces Ofcom advertising rules. If you want to make a complaint about an alcohol advertisement you can do so to the ASA (**www.asa.org.uk** tel. 020 7492 2222).

To summarise briefly the ASA rules state that advertisements must not:

- Suggest alcohol can contribute to a person's confidence or personal qualities making them more attractive, popular or improve physical performance.
- Suggest alcohol has a therapeutic effect, is a mood changer or stimulant.
- Appeal strongly to under-18s through using youth culture references or using children to play significant roles.
- Appear to encourage immoderate drinking through showing or implying immoderate consumption.
- Must not link drinking with behaviour unsafe after drinking such as swimming.
- Must not link alcohol with anti-social behaviour or aggression.

- For example you might see an advertisement showing a room full of people sitting in embarrassed silence, a bottle of the branded alcohol is produced and the party is transformed, the host surrounded by attractive admirers. Here, you might refer to the ASA rules that:

  11.3 a) Advertisements must not imply that drinking is essential to social success or acceptance, or that refusal is a sign of weakness. Nor must they imply that the successful outcome of a social occasion is dependent on the consumption of alcohol;

  b) Advertisements must neither claim nor suggest that any drink can contribute towards sexual success or that drinking can enhance sexual attractiveness;

- Remember to say where and when you saw the advertisement. Describe the advertisement and what you think is objectionable about it.

- Your complaint will be more likely to succeed if it is clearly set out and relates to the rules on alcohol advertising.

For more information on how to complain and a copy of the rules contact the ASA:
Advertising Standards Authority
Mid City Place
71 High Holborn
London WC1V 6QT
Tel: 020 7492 2222

Visit **www.asa.org.uk/asa/how_to_complain/** for the complaints form and **www.asa.org.uk/asa/codes/** for the codes of conduct.

E Encourage local support services

There are a wide variety of organisations helping those with alcohol misuse problems. You may be able to help support their work.

- Would your church be willing to host meetings of self help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous?

- Check out volunteer opportunities locally. You might feel you could offer support as a volunteer alcohol counsellor or in the office. Call your local Volunteer Bureau or visit **www.do-it.org.uk** for information about volunteer organisations and opportunities in your area.

You or your church might want to make a financial contribution to a local treatment service

F Get alcohol misuse on the political agenda

If you are worried or concerned about alcohol misuse then let your elected representatives know how you feel.

If it is about a local licensing issue, contact your local councillor.

If it is about crime, disorder or general nuisance, or the public health impact of alcohol misuse, you might want to write to your local councillor and your MP, MSP, AM or MEP.

You can find out who your representatives are on the following websites:

Member of Parliament **http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/l/**

Member of the Scottish Parliament
www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm
(English)
www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/language/gaelic/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder-g.htm
(Gàidhlig)

Member of the Welsh Assembly
www.assemblywales.org/index.htm (English)
www.cynulliadcymru.org/index.htm (Cymraeg)

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, together with other churches and Christian organisations, are calling for a new mandatory code of practice for alcohol retailers, which would include clear labelling of bottles, a ban on 'loss-leading' promotions by off-licences and supermarkets

When writing to politicians be clear about what your concerns are. If possible link your argument to your own experience (perhaps as a relative of a victim of alcohol misuse) or of your local area (anti-social behaviour in your town centre linked to alcohol).

Ask your MP, MSP or AM to take up your concerns with the Government minister responsible for alcohol misuse. This means that your concerns will be passed on directly to the Government. Your MP, MSP or AM should also then write back to you.

If you think more should be done to protect children, young people and other vulnerable groups from being harmed by alcohol misuse, why not set up a petition, blog or write a letter to your local or national newspaper?

Keep an eye on the websites of government departments and agencies, as there are often opportunities for individuals and organisations to feed in their views into policy development through a consultation process.

At election times, try to arrange a hustings meeting at your local church, and think about whether to ask the candidates about alcohol policy and how they will deal with the problem of alcohol misuse.

G Pray

Why not see if your local church or prayer group could pray for those involved in support for people who are affected by the misuse of alcohol, including for;

- Guidance and help for **people who are dependent on alcohol, their families and friends** so that they might find a route out of their problems and recover from their dependency.
- Support and encouragement for **counsellors and treatment service providers** so that they can feel a sense of worth and fulfilment especially at difficult times.
- Wisdom for the licensing **authorities, the police and the government** so that the right decisions can be made to minimise the harm caused by alcohol and to protect vulnerable people.
- Compassion **for alcohol retailers, bar staff and other people employed in the alcohol sector** so that they will do their utmost to protect their customers and help prevent further problems.

Baptist Union of Great Britain
Encouraging Missionary Disciples

The Methodist Church

The United Reformed Church

Prepared by the Joint Public Issues Team for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

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joint public issues team
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