

Measure for Measure

Briefing on minimum unit pricing following the Supreme Court ruling on 15 November 2017

The UK Supreme Court has ruled it legal for Scotland to introduce minimum unit pricing (MUP), a policy which targets harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption. As the National Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland make progress towards introducing similar policies, England is being left behind.

This briefing explains why minimum unit pricing is necessary and encourages individuals and churches to encourage England to follow suit.

This resource has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team (the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church). For more information and resources, visit: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The cost to the NHS of alcohol misuse is an estimated £3.5bn per year

- The UK has an alcohol problem. There are one million admissions to hospital related to alcohol each year in England alone.
- Alcohol is linked to more than 60 different medical conditions, and 10 million people in England are increasing the risk of damaging their health because of their drinking levels.
- For 15 to 49 year olds, the leading cause of death is alcohol.
- The cost to the NHS of alcohol misuse is an estimated £3.5 billion per year, and the cost to law enforcement in England and Wales is an estimated £13 billion.
- It has been calculated that of all child social care costs, 34% are related to alcohol

SCOTLAND'S SOLUTION

The Scottish Government can now introduce MUP

- Scottish Parliament voted in 2012 to introduce minimum unit pricing, a measure that targets harmful drinking.
- However, the drinks industry reacted with a legal challenge, delaying this important legislation.
- The legal battle (Scotch Whisky Association v The Lord Advocate) reached the UK Supreme Court this year. The Court

has finally ruled that minimum unit pricing is legal (ruling on 15/11/2017 in favour of The Lord Advocate). Implementation will follow.

IS THIS REALLY NECESSARY?

Why minimum unit pricing is needed

- Alcohol is 60% more affordable than it was in 1980. The relaxation of licensing hours means that it is more accessible, and £800million is spent on marketing alcohol in the UK each year.
- A recent study from the Alcohol Health Alliance UK found that 3-litre bottles of 7.5% ABV cider are being sold for or 16p per unit. This it is possible to pay as little as £3.50 for the equivalent alcohol content of 22 shots of vodka.
- Numerous studies have shown that as drink becomes more affordable, people drink more, and levels of problem drinking rise. This trend is exacerbated by the increased availability and strength of alcohol.
- Deaths from liver disease have increased by 450% over the last 30 years
- Although drinking in 11-15 year olds is dropping, new research shows that an estimated 300,000 11-15 year olds drink on a weekly basis. 200,000 of those surveyed this year had been drunk in the previous four weeks before the survey.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Minimum pricing targets the excessively cheap drinks preferred by hazardous and harmful drinkers

its strength and target the excessively cheap price of certain drinks preferred by hazardous and harmful drinkers.

- Minimum unit pricing will go ahead in Scotland. This means a floor price will be set per unit of alcohol.
- The floor price per unit is yet to be decided in Scotland, but setting a minimum of 50p per unit of alcohol would mean minimum prices of around £1 for a typical can of lager, £1.50 for a pint of larger in a pub, £4.50 for a bottle of wine, and £14 for a 700ml bottle of whisky.
- This would only affect a small proportion of the alcohol sold in the UK. Harmful drinkers currently pay less per unit of alcohol than moderate drinkers because of their drinking preferences. Minimum pricing would link the cost of alcohol to

TARGETING HAZARDOUS DRINKING

Saving 525 lives a year

- Research suggests that a minimum price of 50p would save 525 lives a year, reduce hospital admissions by 22,000 and alcohol related costs to wider society will be cut by £3.7 billion over the next two decades.
- Minimum pricing will have the greatest benefit for groups who are poorest. 90% of those whose lives are saved will come from the lowest income groups.
- A study at Sheffield University estimated the cost of the 50p minimum price at around £5.95 per week to harmful drinkers and £28p to moderate drinkers if they maintain their current drinking patterns. If they modified their

choices, the study calculated the additional cost as £3.13 to harmful drinkers and 23p to moderate drinkers.

- Importantly, it would also target under-age drinkers, particularly those drinking hazariously, who tend to drink cheap but high strength alcohol.
- Minimum pricing would cost responsible drinkers just a few pence a week, but save lives and a huge cost to society.

THE GOVT HAS FAILED TO ACT

England is being left behind.

- In January 2011 the Coalition Government committed itself to a ban of “below cost sales”, defining cost as duty + VAT. A can of lager could still be bought for around 38p, a bottle of wine for £2 and a bottle of spirits for £8.
- These prices make little difference to pubs or off-licences, which cannot sell much alcohol this cheaply; but they are too low to limit more than a fraction of cheap alcohol sold in supermarkets.
- The liver specialist Sir Ian Gilmore said the government’s measures would have little impact on the nation’s health.
- The rest of the UK has recognised that this is not enough. The Welsh Government is currently holding a consultation on minimum unit pricing, and the previous Northern Ireland government was making progress toward introducing the policy.
- With these developments and the new ruling in Scotland, England is being left behind. It is time for the government to implement minimum unit pricing in England.

MUP: WHO IS IN FAVOUR?

The drinks industry has argued against minimum pricing, but medical professionals are in favour

- The drinks industry has been vocal in its opposition to MUP. They have argued that European Competition Law would make the introduction of minimum pricing legally impossible. However, this week’s ruling in the Supreme Court shows the minimum unit pricing is legal
- Medical bodies have expressed concern that the alcohol industry has too great an influence over the government’s policy on alcohol, placing commercial interests before the public good
- The British Medical Association, the former Chief Medical Officer, National Institute of Clinical Excellence, the Royal College of Physicians, the House of Commons Select committee and others endorse the minimum unit price
- Charities such as Alcohol Concern and the Alcohol Health Alliance, and church groups including the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs have long been supportive of the policy
- Now that Scotland is able to implement minimum unit pricing, it is time to **remind the UK Government not to leave England behind.**

Why not:

- **Tweet your local MP** saying you want to see minimum unit pricing using **#mupsaveslives**
- Write to your local MP or arrange to meet them to discuss alcohol pricing (find out who your MP is and their contact details at www.theyworkforyou.com)
- Write to the letters page of your local newspaper, pointing out the cost of alcohol misuse in your local area and describing the difference that minimum pricing would make

You may also wish to:

- start conversations in your church; talk to those who work in alcohol counselling, members of your communities and churches with first-hand experience of the cost of harmful drinking
- Use this briefing and keep up to date through the websites below:

www.ahauk.org/ –The Alcohol Health Alliance brings together more than 40 organisations that have a shared interest in reducing the damage caused to health by alcohol.

www.qaad.org – Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs

Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

To give feedback or ask any questions on this resource please email

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The Church of Scotland

