



Policy Briefing - Alcohol Marketing: *Frequently Asked Questions*

How is alcohol marketing currently regulated in the UK?

Alcohol marketing is currently governed by a combination of statutory legislation and self-regulation within the drinks industry. Since 1996 the Portman Group has operated a voluntary code of practice with a particular focus on young people that is intended to ensure that drink brands are not promoted as having the power to improve social or sexual success, or making the drinker popular and attractive. Messages must also avoid encouraging irresponsible or dangerous behavior, such as drinking at work, or when driving¹. In 2004 the Advertising Standards Authority assumed responsibility for all advertising standards for both broadcast and non-broadcast advertising.

Why is the current debate around alcohol marketing?

The drinks industry and advertisers argue that as alcohol is a legal product it should be possible to advertise it and that a ban or restrictions on advertising would have a negative effect upon sales. They also insist that there is no link between advertising output and overall alcohol consumption and related harm. However there are a number of arguments which run counter to these claims:

- Alcohol advertising is almost solely designed to attract new groups of customers and to increase sales in groups that are already heavy consumers.
- Heavy marketing and promotion of alcohol is in effect normalising and in many cases glamorising the use of a substance which when consumed irresponsibly or excessively can cause damage to individuals, families and wider society
- Alcohol advertising is by definition one –sided and there is often no reference made to the negative effects of alcohol. The UK alcohol industry currently spends around £800 million on promotion – compared with the tiny sums spent on alcohol health messaging. To have no mandatory

¹ Alcohol Concern, 2007, ‘Alcohol Advertising Factsheet’, Alcohol Concern

warning or health messages within alcohol adverts is at odds with the harm alcohol could cause².

There is now clear evidence that alcohol advertising and promotion can influence consumption more than we first thought, in particular consistent evidence demonstrates an impact of alcohol advertising on the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers³. The arguments regarding alcohol advertising are similar in many respects to those that were made around tobacco advertising.

What is the evidence to show that advertising can have an impact on drinking behaviour?

There is growing evidence to show a link between exposure to advertising and increases in consumption. Behavioural studies show that the more aware and appreciative young people are of alcohol advertising; the more likely they are to drink now and in the future. The Academy of Medical Sciences report 'Calling Time' showed a significant correlation between consumption levels by 11-15 year olds and the amount spent on advertising⁴. A recent systematic review to assess the impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on future adolescent alcohol found that exposure to media and commercial communications on alcohol are linked to increased likelihood of drinking in adolescents and baseline drinkers⁵. The Science Group of the European Commission's Alcohol and Health Forum recently concluded that alcohol marketing increased the likelihood that non-drinking young people will start to drink, and the likelihood that existing young drinkers will drink in a more risky fashion⁶. A systematic review by Meier et al found that 'there was conclusive evidence of a small but consistent association of advertising and consumption at a population level. There is also evidence of small but consistent effects of advertising on consumption of alcohol by young people at an individual level⁷'

Do the current controls prevent the exposure of children to alcohol marketing?

Current controls supposedly limit the exposure of children to alcohol advertising, but when these controls are examined they are clearly failing to do so. For example in terms of UK TV advertising, a highly complex formula exists to determine when alcohol adverts can be shown; but when actual exposure was audited by OFCOM the data shows that for approximately

² Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2008 'Alcohol and Advertising Factsheet', Institute of Alcohol Studies

³ Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum. Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people? - a review of longitudinal studies. 2009.

⁴ Academy of Medical Sciences, 2004, 'Calling Time on the Nation's Drinking',

⁵ Anderson et al, 2009, 'Impact of Alcohol Advertising and Media Exposure on Adolescent Alcohol Use: A Systemic Review of Longitudinal Studies, Alcohol and Alcoholism, 1-15

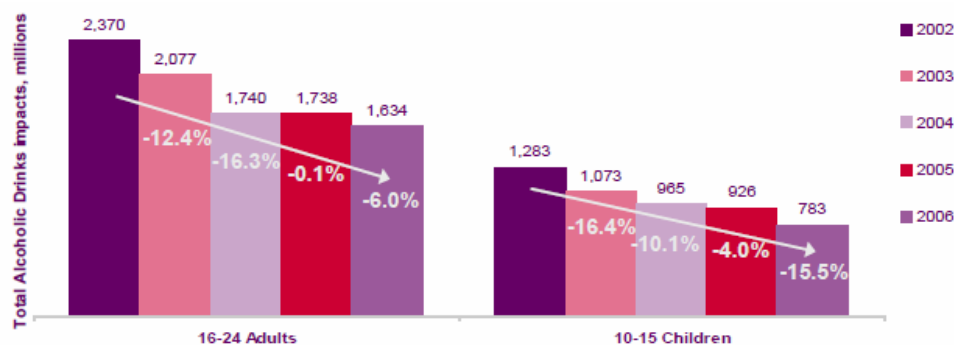
⁶ Anderson et al., 2009, 'Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people? - a review of longitudinal studies.

⁷ Meier P, et al. The independent review of the effects of alcohol pricing and promotion. Summary of evidence to accompany report on phase 1: Systematic Reviews. School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, UK June 2008; 2008.

every five 24 year olds, four 10 year olds saw the same TV alcohol advert⁸ - this does not protect children.

The situation with cinema advertising is even more complex and secretive, instead of a simple category 18 (or at the very least 15) rating for alcohol adverts, there is apparently a committee which assesses in advance if a PG film could appeal predominantly to an audience of adults, and if so alcohol adverts are allowed. We have been unable to obtain data of the actual exposure of children to cinema alcohol advertising.

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Source: Nielsen Media

Figures 17-19 show the breakdown of commercial impacts by sub-category for adults, adults aged 16-24 and children aged 10-15. Although the figures are different for each audience, the trends are similar. There has been an overall decline in impacts between 2005 and 2006. At a sub-category level, there has been an increase in the proportion of impacts represented by cider products and brands in the 'alcoholic drinks range' group and a decline in the share of impacts accounted for by alcopop brands.

The OFCOM data shows that overall levels of TV advertising are declining, normal advertising comprises only around £250 million of the total £800 million spend – the remainder goes on less visible forms of marketing such as sponsorship, promotions and viral and internet promotions where the potential exposure of children is even more problematic. The overall impact of alcohol advertising, just like tobacco, needs to be understood in the context of the overall marketing mix, and the controls on marketing need to cope with the normative effects of this mixture.

Do restrictions on advertising exist in other countries?

A study of 24 European countries found that they all had at least one regulation that covers alcohol advertising and marketing, with 49 statutory and 27 non statutory regulations overall. In all countries except the UK there was a

⁸ Ofcom, ASA, Neilson Media. Young People and Alcohol Advertising: An investigation of alcohol advertising following changes to the Advertising Code. London; 2006.

⁹ Ofcom, ASA, Neilson Media. Young People and Alcohol Advertising: An investigation of alcohol advertising following changes to the Advertising Code. London; 2006.

ban on at least one or more types of advertising¹⁰. There are clear differences between European countries' laws, regulations and administrative restrictions on alcohol advertising. In terms of EU-wide legislation, the Television Without Frontiers Directive (TWF) has been incorporated into national laws. This was designed to harmonise regulations so that cross border transmissions would not contravene national regulations

Example - The Loi Evin,

The Loi Evin came into operation in 1993. It bans the advertising of all alcoholic beverages over 1.2% abv on TV and in cinemas and also prohibits sponsorship of sport or cultural events by alcohol companies. Radio advertising of alcohol is not permitted between 5pm and midnight. As well as forbidding the targeting of minors the law also effectively outlaws 'lifestyle' advertising of alcohol products, advertisements only being allowed to refer to the actual characteristics of the product such as its brand name, ingredients, provenance, how to prepare and serve the drink. The laws have been legally challenged

Why self-regulation is not currently working?

Across Europe there is a strong reliance on self-regulation or voluntary systems often implemented by the drinks industry trade bodies. However these types of codes do not deal with the volume of marketing which is seen to be of major importance in influencing behaviour, and do not deal with what young people find appealing in advertisements, such as humour¹¹.

Is there support for tighter restrictions?

In 2006 a Eurobarometer survey found that 76% of the European Union population would approve the banning of alcohol advertising targeting young people in all Member States. Every second respondent (50%) said that they "agree totally" with this idea. In the UK 71% of people would support such a ban¹².

What are the policy options?

- A total ban on all alcohol marketing and promotion
- A UK version of the Loi Evin, with a ban on all TV advertising, certificate 18 cinema rating, and strict controls on what is permitted to be said in magazine and newspaper adverts as opposed to stating what is not allowed, with the loopholes this generates,
- The introduction of an 'end-frame' of alcohol health information comprising one-sixth of air time or press space attached to all alcohol advertising.

¹⁰ http://www.stap.nl/content/bestanden/elsa_2_r_on_regulation.pdf

¹¹ Anderson, P, 2009, 'Is it time to ban alcohol advertising?', Clinical Medicine,

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/documents/ebs272_en.pdf

- A ban on alcohol advertising (either branded or supermarket) from 6am through to 9pm regardless of the predicted age of audience of a programme.
- A major review of the voluntary broadcast advertising code to better protect young people.