

Antoinette Bowen
Clerical Supervisor
Committee for Communities

Via email

8 March 2021

Dear Antoinette,

Re: Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill Committee session, 18 February 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral evidence in support of our consultation submission, at the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill Committee session.

Following my appearance I wanted to write to Committee members with additional information (including research findings) on the statement that 'No evidence has been provided showing that there is a link between alcohol advertising and increased consumption', which was contained in our submission. This comment was in response to Clause 16: Restrictions on off-sales drinks promotions in supermarkets etc.

The International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to reducing harmful drinking and promoting the understanding of responsible drinking. The [IARD review of marketing evidence](#) summarises the evidence on marketing communications for alcoholic beverages and their regulation. Within this summary they suggest:

- There is no association, or a modest link, between marketing and alcohol consumption for the wider population.
- There is a lack of evidence about the effect of alcohol marketing communications on drinking patterns among adults.
- For young people, it is difficult to separate the impact that marketing has on the effect of drinking from several other factors that have also been identified as having an important effect on drinking. These other factors being the impact of family, peer groups, drinking culture, and individual-level factors.

On advertising bans IARD refers to a recent evaluation of regulatory interventions that reported that alcohol advertising bans were cost-effective in reducing alcohol-related burden of disease but noted that there was little empirical evidence about their effect on health.

A [2014 Cochrane review](#) into whether banning or restricting advertising for alcohol resulted in less consumption found 'a lack of robust evidence for or against recommending the implementation of alcohol advertising restrictions.' The review concluded that 'Governments considering implementing alcohol advertising bans would be advised to implement the ban in a research environment and monitor the effects over time to build the evidence base'.

I hope that this additional information on advertising and consumption is helpful for the Committee and confirms the comments provided in our submission. If you have further question on this then please let me know.

In addition to the information on alcohol advertising, I wanted to offer the Committee feedback from the WSTA's retailer members on the effect of the relaxation of the rules on licensed checkouts over Christmas and New Year in December 2020.

For background, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 20) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 temporarily amended the terms of an Article 5(1)(1)(b) license allowing supermarkets in Northern Ireland to use any checkout, for the sale of alcohol for consumption off the premises, from 16th December 2020 until 22.30 on 31st December 2021.

This is something that our retailer members which operate in Northern Ireland have been asking for years and so we sought feedback from them on the effect that this relaxation had on stores, staff and customers. The issue of licensed tills was the main focus of my opening comments at the Committee hearing and remains the most significant issue in Northern Ireland licensing legislation currently. We continue to believe the fact that it was not addressed in this amendment Bill, or the topic of any other public consultation to date, is a significant oversight.

The feedback from retailer members regarding the temporary arrangements over Christmas was 100% positive. Stores found this relaxation easy to implement, with no software or hardware changes being needed. No additional staff training was needed as all staff are trained to same level regardless of what checkout they go on.

Customer frustration and anxiety was reduced due to reduced queuing times and overall ease of their shopping experience. Staff satisfaction was similarly increased due to reduced interaction with frustrated customers.

Retailers believe that this temporary relaxation was a huge improvement operationally and one that - if permanent - would benefit both customers and colleagues throughout Northern Ireland. I would like to reiterate that for the improved service and safety of both customers and staff, we would like to request formally that the requirement to have licensed checkouts be removed permanently.

If the Committee would like any further information regarding retailer responses, the WSTA would be more than happy to coordinate.

Yours sincerely



Miles Beale
Chief Executive