



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. Return to committee.communities@niassembly.gov.uk by Wednesday 19 October 2016.

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Date: 18th October 2016

Addiction NI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the enquiry on the Licencing and the Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. Addiction NI have over 38 years' experience in developing and delivering a range of services to support people affected by theirs' or someone else's alcohol and/or drug use.

We believe that individuals need to be provided with the appropriate information in order that they may make informed choices about their drinking habits. Unfortunately, in Northern Ireland, we have long recognised that a dominant trend, within our culture, is one of excessive drinking. Alcohol is of course a legal drug, and so in large measure it has become normalised across society. However such normalisation, we would suggest, should in no sense detract from the pernicious and far reaching effects that such a potent and widely available drug can, and undoubtedly does, have.

Within Northern Ireland 73% of the adult population consume alcohol. It is estimated that somewhere in the region of 217,000 people drink at harmful to hazardous levels in Northern Ireland, that 40,000 children are impacted by their parents drinking, and that alcohol alone costs the local economy in the region of £900m across health, justice, policing and business. This cost is equivalent to one tenth of the block grant allocated to Northern Ireland by the Westminster Treasury. Drinking patterns have a significant impact on hospital

admission especially at weekends. In 2013/14 there were 10,486 alcohol related emergency hospital admissions. Alcohol can, in addition, have a significant negative impact on individuals overall mental health and wellbeing when not used appropriately. Alcohol is also an established contributory factor in a high percentage of suicides (Appleby et. al., 1997).

We recognise that legislation plays an important part in the control and supply of alcohol, but also appreciate that it is not the only solution to the multiplicity of issues which are raised, in the broader debate concerning the place of alcohol within our society. Licensing legislation is simply another tool in dealing with these issues. We now have a culture of increased drinking at home, where there may be no management of measuring actual alcohol consumption. Drinking in the home environment thus poses such risks as heavier consumption which may be extended over longer time periods and facilitates the habit of so-called pre-loading (Foster and Ferguson, 2014), prior to going out to pubs and clubs. One must also then be cognisant of an added factor: namely bar or club staff not being aware of the level of alcohol consumed by individuals, prior to them entering licensed premises. Drinking within licensed premises can, potentially at least, provide a safer drinking environment. For this to occur it is important that staff are appropriately trained in customer care/relations, understand the legislation and know what the limits are for an individual, in terms of advisable consumption. In this regard a code of conduct and/or charter mark may be of assistance both for the licensing industry and as a buttress against further incidents of increased alcohol related harm for both individuals and at the societal level, more generally.

Clause 1: Additional hours at Easter

We support the relaxation and extension of Easter licensing times. We now live within a diverse community setting. Restricted opening times at Easter can lead to increased home drinking with minimal monitoring/measures, as referred to above, with the consequent potential to produce negative impacts on individual's mental health and wellbeing.

It is important to acknowledge that for some people the local pub is their main source of social interaction, particularly in rural areas, and reduced opening hours may lead to a sense of increased social isolation for individuals with a commensurate elevation of alcohol consumption within the home environment.

Easter is also a time that typically sees a higher level of visitors and tourists accessing both our rural areas and our major cities across Northern Ireland. The licensing restrictions that have traditionally been applied in the past may, if they were to remain unchanged, tend to reduce the opportunities for such

visitors to experience the full range of world class hospitality on offer across the province, and in addition, unnecessarily restrict and impede economic performance across significant sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry.

Clause 2: Additional hours: applications to court

We appreciate the importance of having opportunity on occasions to extend opening hours. However we would contend that any increase in licensing laws will need to be closely monitored and managed to ensure that there is not a glut of openings on the same nights, within certain areas. This may be an issue around holiday periods, Fresher weeks within university areas, and during other culturally designated special occasions. Additional considerations include: impact on local communities, ensuring that extensions are spread over the course of the year and that appropriate policing and health and safety resources are made available to manage incidents should the need arise.

Extension of opening hours could also lead to stockpiling of drink at the end of the evening. As closing times approach this could potentially encourage an increase in the amount of alcohol being consumed, in a relatively short time period. To manage this, it will be important that clubs and pubs, as far as is possible, judiciously monitor and control the amount of alcohol which individuals can purchase, as closing times approach. One recommendation for consideration here is that prescribed and set amounts of alcoholic beverages be only made available, on a countdown basis to “calling time.”

It will be important that staff are trained in customer care, are aware of individual limits and when and how to say no to, at times, insistent and possibly aggressive customers. It is important that appropriate protocols are in place to manage the sale of alcohol to individuals who have been drinking to excess. It may be worth considering a charter mark/code of conduct for managing alcohol sales and consumption, as previously mentioned above.

Clause 3- Section 2: consequential provision etc.

We have no comment on this clause.

Clause 4: Additional hours: police authorisations

Please see our comments in clause 2 with regard to the provision of appropriate policing and health and safety resourcing.

Clause 5: Extension of ‘drinking up time’

Extension to drinking up time may lead to an increase in drinking, especially if there is no management of alcohol sales throughout the night, particularly in

the last hour. Stockpiling of drinks could lead to additional issues and have a detrimental impact on both the physical and mental health of individuals and lead to an increased risk of incidents, outside licensed venues. There is a trend, with males in particular, that towards the end of the evening they tend to consume high alcohol by volume drinks (shorts, shots), thus increasing the risk of rapid intoxication/alcohol poisoning, and the potential for both aggressivity and sexually disinhibited behaviours. Such risks should, in our opinion, inform the structures and procedures that must necessarily underscore any extensions to “drinking up time.”

On the other hand we recognise that if the sale of alcohol prior to last orders is appropriately managed then providing additional time for drinking up may actually reduce a range of problematic issues. This area, more generally, will require further detailed epidemiological research, as it is unclear as to how individuals are likely to self-manage with the extensions to drinking time, proposed under the draft bill (for a helpful review of issues here see Measham, F and Brain, K: 2005 as cited in the references below).

Clause 6: Alignment of liquor, entertainment and refreshment provision etc.

We support this.

Clause 7: Removal of requirement for children’s certificate, etc.

We have no objection to this provided the appropriate child protection safeguards are in place, are monitored and include Access NI for staff.

Protocols should be displayed for the public to see.

Clause 8: Underage functions

We support the use of pubs and clubs for alcohol free underage functions, provided the appropriate management and safe guards are in place.

It is important for young people to have safe environments to go to and that pubs and clubs are seen as a place that you can have fun without alcohol or drinking to access. If alcohol were to be accessed under such circumstances we would also however highlight the increased risk to certain vulnerable groups of young people within society, in terms of those who have experienced early disturbances of attachment to caregivers and/or those with low levels of so-called “social capital” (see Sweet 2013: 2014). We feel strongly that pubs and hotels need to not only ensure that alcohol is not served at underage functions but also need to ensure that teenagers are not admitted to the premises having preloaded before attending a birthday party, school formal, school disco or other such events.

We agree that access to gaming machines etc be not available.

Clause 9 : Delivery of intoxicating liquor to young persons

We support this, as there appears to be an increase in the purchasing of alcohol online for home delivery. The important element here will be the enforcement of this legislation. Despite regulation being in place for taxi home deliveries for alcohol, it would appear there is little enforcement of this.

Clause 10: Restaurants and guest houses: notice displaying licensing conditions

We welcome the introduction of displaying a notice advising of licensing conditions in restaurants and guest houses so that customers understand the environment they are in.

We would respectfully ask that specific consideration be given to unlicensed venues where individuals can bring their own alcoholic beverages (the so-called BYO outlets). It would appear there is little or no regulation governing such premises. It important that all parties operating outlets where alcohol is made available exercise an appropriate duty of care towards those both consuming alcohol and to those who may be subsequently affected by the results of such consumption.

Clause 11: Prohibition on self-service and sales by vending machines

We agree that the unsupervised sale of alcohol through vending machines should be prohibited to reduce the risk of under 18's having access to alcohol.

Clause 12: Restrictions on off-sales drinks promotions in supermarkets etc.

We support appropriate restrictions of drink promotions around/in supermarkets and other licensed premises. It is important to acknowledge that this is only one means of promotion by supermarkets/others. They also use mail drops, on line marketing etc. which tends to reach a broader audience than simply those patrons visiting supermarkets. So the overall benefit of restricting drinks promotions in/around a supermarket may not have the desired impact.

Cause 13: Code of practice

We support the introduction of code of practice. The introduction of challenge 21 and then 25 (British Beer and Pubs Association) has had, in the main, a positive influence. It is important to look at the key areas which require further management, i.e. responsible sales, when enough is enough. It is important

that it promotes a safe, responsible drinking environment. An appropriate code of practice should, we feel, provide a consistency of approach across a range of venues and outlets.

Clause 14: Removal of exemption for angostura bitters

We have no objection to this.

Clause 15: Sporting clubs: extension of premises

We have no objection to this provided appropriate safeguards are in place.

Clause 16: Additional hours at Easter

We have no objection to this.

Clause 17: Extension of 'drinking up time'

Our position is same as outlined to clause 5.

Clause 18: Removal of requirement for children's certificate, etc

Our position is same as outlined to clause 7.

Clause 19: Underage functions

Our position is same as outlined to clause 8.

Clause 20: Young people in sporting club premises

We have no objection to this, our query is why is it restricted to a set time of the year and how precisely is a young person defined.

Clause 21: Prohibition on self-service and sales by vending machines

We agree with this clause.

Clause 22: Restrictions relating to advertisement

We have no objection to this clause.

Clause 23: Code of practice

We agree with this.

Clause 26: Ancillary provision

We have no comment on this clause.

References:

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Sweet, A.D. (2013) Aspects of internal self and object representations in disorganised attachment: Clinical considerations in the assessment and treatment of chronic and relapsing substance misusers. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 29:2, 154-167.

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