



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Environment

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill: TTC 2000

11 September 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Ian Milne
Lord Morrow
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Eddie Phair	TTC 2000
Ms Jenny Wynn	TTC 2000

The Chairperson: I welcome Jenny Wynn and Eddie Phair from TTC 2000. Is it right that you have come all the way from England?

Mr Eddie Phair (TTC 2000): I am local.

The Chairperson: So Jenny is from England. You are most welcome to Northern Ireland.

Ms Jenny Wynn (TTC 2000): Thank you.

The Chairperson: We have your tabled paper. Will you talk us through it for five or 10 minutes? I am sure that members will be interested to hear your presentation, maybe try out some of your samples and then ask questions.

Ms Wynn: Thank you for your invitation to present to you today. In line with TTC's mission statement, I will say that we advocate that you never drink and drive. We say that at the start of every course, and there is a big fat zero on the flip chart. We do not advocate that you drink and drive.

We will briefly cover the three alcohol limits of 80 milligrams (mg), 50 mg and 20 mg and what they look like in beer, spirits, fortified wines and wines, which are the four main categories of alcohol. We will touch briefly on foodstuffs with alcohol and over-the-counter medicines. We will briefly mention the zero limit and the issues with that approach.

The current UK-wide limit is 35 micrograms in breath, 80 mg in blood or 107 mg in urine. For the purposes of today's discussion and for speed and simplicity, we will concentrate just on blood because that is how limits are set internationally. That is where the 80 mg comes from. That equates to around five units of alcohol for an average man and three units for a female. Eddie will show you what 80 mg looks like.

Mr Phair: These glasses of red drinks represent 80 mg, but that does not include all the red drinks.

We have assumed that some members do not have any knowledge of alcohol, perhaps do not drink and do not have any knowledge of percentages, volumes or units. This glass represents 80 mg in beer: it is two and a half pints of weak 3-5% beer. This glass represents 80 mg in whisky. It takes three and a half whiskies to put an average male on the drink-drive limit.

Mr Eastwood: Is that a 25 ml or a 35 ml measure?

Mr Phair: It is 35 ml. In Northern Ireland —

Mr Weir: You will maybe get a bit of expert opinion from one side.

The Chairperson: This is one measure if you go to a pub.

Mr Phair: This is a 35 ml pub or restaurant measure.

The Chairperson: If you ask for a whisky.

Mr Phair: People are quite surprised that it takes three and a half whiskies for the average male to reach the drink-drive limit. Most people assume that it is probably two whiskies, but it is actually three.

These glasses represent fortified wines, which are sherry and port. An average male could drink about five of those before he reaches the drink-drive limit. This wine is 12%; most wines are 13% or 14%. This is a 175 ml glass, so about two and a half glasses of 12% wine represents the 80 mg drink-drive limit.

The Chairperson: That is for men: what about women?

Mr Phair: For a female, it takes three units to reach the drink-drive limit, so the number is reduced from five to three. Typically, for a female, it is a pint and a half, two whiskies, three ports or one and a half glasses of wine. There are three units in this 250 ml glass. The idea is to give the Committee a visual representation of the units involved.

Ms Wynn: Whatever a person's size, any food that he or she consumes does not act as a sponge but delays the absorption because the liver cannot cope with food and alcohol at the same time. It can have an effect, but it is relatively marginal. The variable for gender and size is known as the Widmark factor, and our paper has the website link in case anybody wants to look at that in more detail. One unit of alcohol produces a reading in a man of about 16 mg in blood, so 16 multiplied by five is 80 mg, which is your five units. For a woman, it is, as Eddie said, three units. One unit is the amount of alcohol in a half pint of ordinary beer or a 50 ml measure for a man. One unit is also a single whisky at 25 ml — that is smaller than the measure in Ireland — or 80 ml of 12% wine, which is a very small amount.

In practical terms, we have tried to concentrate on Northern Ireland. One pint of Guinness contains 2-3 units. That tells you that two pints of Guinness on the 80 mg limit would keep a man just under the drink-drive limit. One pint would keep a woman under the drink-drive limit, so it is approximately one pint for a woman and two pints for a man. A double whisky would keep a woman just under the drink-drive limit. If, however, the limit was set at 50 mg, the number of units would reduce: it would be three units for a male and two units for a woman.

Mr Phair: We have represented the 50 mg limit in these yellow drinks. It is just coloured water, in case anybody is interested. *[Laughter.]* You can see that, compared with what a male can currently drink to the drink-drive limit, there is a dramatic reduction to about a pint and a half. We are then down to three little glasses of port or sherry, two whiskies or one 250 ml glass of 12% wine.

Ms Wynn: That is for males. It is two units for females, so a female could drink two of these glasses and very little more than one normal measure of spirits because a single measure of whisky in Northern Ireland is 1.4 units.

If the limit were set at 20 mg — I know that that limit is being considered and is used in many places in Europe for professional and novice drivers — the number of units to get to the legal limit would be much lower. It would be 1.25 units for a man and about 0.75 units for a female.

Mr Phair: The 20 mg limit is represented by these blue drinks. Again, compared with what we currently have — two and a half pints — a male is straight down to half a pint of beer on average, one and a half 50 ml glasses of port or sherry, just over half a glass of wine and slightly over one 35 ml measure of whisky. That is a dramatic reduction.

Ms Wynn: For a female, that would reduce even further to just 0.75 units. I will touch on why it is different for males and females. Women are made up differently from men. I know that that is stating the obvious, but women have more fat in their body make-up, in their breasts and hips etc, which holds on to alcohol. Unfortunately, another of those things that is unfair in life is that women can drink less than men before hitting the drink-drive limit.

For those of you who might be interested, the safe or low-risk limits for health are three units for a male per day and two units for a female. Three units is one and a half pints of 3.5% ordinary strength beer. That does not cover Guinness; the limit would be just over a pint of Guinness for a male. In order for a female to stay at a low health risk, the maximum would be two units or a small pub glass of wine. I know that I am going off track a bit, but people are interested in that. It gives you a graphic example of where the limits are set.

There are other ways in which alcohol can get into your system, such as through foodstuffs. If you cook with alcohol and heat the food, the alcohol is cooked away, so you get the taste but do not register on a breathalyser, for instance. If you like beef stroganoff and put in lots of brandy, you have no worries as long as you cook it fully and cook out the alcohol.

The Chairperson: What about cold food? Lord Morrow is fond of sherry trifle. *[Laughter.]*

Lord Morrow: I must answer that. I asked, "What about sherry trifle?", and everyone made an assumption.

Ms Wynn: I love sherry trifle, so you would not be on your own. Christmas cake and pudding pose slightly more difficulties, because they are often made in October. I do not think that this happens in restaurants and hotels, but home cooks will prick the top and add more alcohol, which obviously will not be cooked away. That has to come with a bit of a health warning.

On the face of it, you could say that sherry trifle is a difficult one. However, in a commercial establishment — a restaurant or a hotel — they do not make the kind of sherry trifle you might make at home. I have given you an example using a BBC Food recipe, which uses 150 ml of sweet sherry. I want you to pretend that you are having a dinner party for six people and put in that amount of sweet sherry, which represents three units of alcohol. If the trifle is divided up equally and everybody has one sixth, they will have had half a unit of alcohol, so, even at the 20 mg limit, you would not have to worry about that.

Mr Boylan: You can eat half the trifle and drive home. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Do not eat too much of it.

Ms Wynn: To be fair, as I tried to say, that is commercial. If you felt that more sherry had been put in, you would have to be aware that you were taking it. However, I have rarely been in a commercial establishment that puts in lots of decent 20% sherry. Sherries have different alcohols by volume (ABVs). Even bottles with a Harveys label can vary and have different ABV strengths, depending on the type of Harveys you choose. The paper has a link, in case you are interested in studying sherries or the like.

Medicines are another issue. Many people do not realise that they can contain alcohol. Over 100 over-the-counter medicines can make you drowsy, but not all medicines contain alcohol. Some make

you drowsy through other drugs, and alcohol, of course, is a drug. I have concentrated on some of the more obvious medicines that contain alcohol, because it is alcohol that could produce a false reading. I have looked at things like Benylin, which is a cough mixture, Covonia, which is for a chesty cough, and Meltus. Even non-drowsy medicines contain 9% ABV. Probably the worst one is Beechams All in One. There is no issue with the tablets, but there is with the linctus syrup. A 20 ml dose of Beechams All in One — four small 5 ml teaspoons — is one third of a unit.

I have highlighted those to try to address why a zero limit has never been considered. There are two reasons. With medicines, you could have one or maybe even two doses of Beechams, say, without there being a problem with a breathalyser, particularly for a male. Another key issue is naturally occurring alcohol. Many of us produce alcohol naturally in our gut. I have seen the seven-year-old daughter of an employee managing to register 7 mg in blood on a breathalyser, but that is still some way from 20.

Mr Weir: Was that her parents' excuse? *[Laughter.]*

Ms Wynn: I have done thousands of breathalysers over the years, and, in blood, 7 mg is the highest I have seen. If the limit were set at zero, there would be a lot of false positives. Diabetics can create alcohol in the gut. There is no hard and fast "You do, you don't" rule, but it is only a very small amount. As I said, the maximum I have seen in blood is 7 mg, so setting the limit at 20 — half a pint — is still low, but it allows that margin for naturally occurring alcohol or a dose of cough mixture.

I have probably taken a bit longer than my allowed time. We are happy to take questions, because we teach all that on courses using bottles of whisky, wine etc so that people can relate to their drinks and work out what they have normally been drinking.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. That is very interesting. You do the training: are people sent to you by the courts?

Mr Phair: We are the current providers for drink-driving courses in Northern Ireland. People are referred by the Magistrates' Court. Not all people are referred. In Northern Ireland, we put approximately 700 people a year through the courses.

The Chairperson: Is it compulsory for people to take a course, or is it voluntary?

Ms Wynn: They are not compulsory. The Bill has a proposal to make a referral not quite compulsory but automatic, so that a lot more people are referred on the basis that all the research and evidence show that, if people do a course, they are between two and three times less likely to reoffend. Interestingly, people on the courses say that there should be a zero limit, but what they mean is that there should be a very low limit of, for example, 20 mg. With the limit at 20, I do not think that people would risk having any alcohol at all in their bloodstream. It would not be worth the risk because it is such a small amount.

The Chairperson: How long are the courses?

Mr Phair: A course runs for two and a half days and is usually based over 14 days. Some courses run for three days in a row. It is quite a commitment, but by having a course over two and a half days, as opposed to, say, a short four-hour session, you make a connection with the people attending. I am not using the speed awareness course as an example, but maybe you do not connect with people in the classroom in a short session. Over the two and a half days, you build up a rapport and connection, and there is no doubt that everyone takes something from the course.

The Chairperson: Is there some kind of stigma? You go to a class, you have been sent by the court and —

Mr Phair: Yes.

The Chairperson: Everyone is in the same boat, I suppose.

Mr Phair: Yes. On the first day, people are embarrassed or ashamed. As you say, there is a stigma associated with being arrested for any offence, but drink-driving is worse than most. It has a great

impact on family life and on social, professional and working life. It has a huge impact on some people's lives.

The Chairperson: The main thing is that it endangers them and others.

Mr Phair: Of course.

Mr Weir: I found that very useful. I have three issues. If you are directed by a court to attend a course or someone volunteers for a course, is there the potential for a reduced tariff in the length of disqualification?

Mr Phair: Yes. There is the carrot of a reduced disqualification. Typically, on a 12-month disqualification, a person would get three months off that and be able to apply for a provisional licence at nine months.

Mr Weir: That is very useful because a lot of us maybe do not have a 100% understanding of the issue. You talked about the physical differences between men and women and the impact of alcohol. You said that one factor — it is clearly a lesser factor — is size. Is size purely to do with the impact of the number of units, or is it to do with the speed of absorption?

Ms Wynn: It is the amount of alcohol. The levels that we talked about are cited as being for a male of 11 stone to 11.5 stone and a female of 9.5 stone. I am about a stone lighter than that so I could probably drink less, if I did drink and drive, before hitting that limit. However, it is not very much; they are marginal differences. It is not that somebody who is 25 stone could drink twice that amount.

Mr Weir: Some issues are less scientific. Alcohol will impact on two people of identical weight in different ways.

Mr Phair: Absolutely. There is a tolerance to alcohol. People build up a certain tolerance if they have been drinking for years. Take two identical people, one of whom had never drunk before: the alcohol would have less effect on the person with greater tolerance.

Mr Weir: This is my final question, and I hope that I am not taking you into territory in which you are not comfortable answering. Part of the legislation involves changes to drink-drive limits and consideration of different limits for certain categories of driver. Can you comment on what you believe to be appropriate limits — for example, for drivers of heavy goods vehicles and newly qualified drivers? Have you any advice on the categories of driver? Do you feel that it is appropriate that there is some differentiation? If so, do you feel that the legislation has that about right?

Mr Phair: It is not a new concept. France and Spain have had the higher limit of 50 mg for everyday drivers and lower limits for professional drivers for some time. The Republic of Ireland introduced such limits around two years ago, and they work to 50 mg and 20 mg. We support the two levels.

Ms Wynn: The 50 mg limit has been the standard across Europe. First, I know all the arguments that not every country enforces it etc. I am small and cannot drink very much without feeling a bit tipsy, but I think that most people would ask, "Why would you want to allow somebody to drink and drive?". We talked earlier about road safety. In many respects, it is quite criminal to allow somebody to do that, particularly when you know that there is a graph that shows that you can have one drink and feel OK to drive but, once you have had a second drink, your confidence level goes up and your ability and skill level go down. The more you drink, the more confident you feel that you are OK. That is borne out by thousands of people on courses. Moving to a 50 mg limit brings us in line with the rest of Europe.

Secondly, this is a major issue. We show videos on our courses about how alcohol changes people's skill level after one drink, followed by a double whisky etc. We have a video that shows a bus driver going through cones. You watch his ability deteriorate, and he is not even at the 80 limit.

Sweden is one of the best examples for road safety, and it has had the lower limits for years. It believes in them very strongly. It has Alco-Sensors fitted in vehicles. Where we sit is that, for professional drivers such as taxi and bus drivers, who have to consider not only their own life but the lives of their passengers, and with the impact of the size of some HGVs on the road —

Mr Weir: The international experience is that the 50 mg limit has worked well.

Ms Wynn: On the 20 mg limit for young people, we know that inexperience is the biggest issue for young drivers and for novice drivers, whatever their age. If you combine a lack of experience with the overconfidence brought on by a couple of drinks, that says that the limit should be 20 mg because people will know that they cannot drink anything. If you are a young male, that is all you could drink without breaking the 20 mg limit. If you are a female, you could have less than two thirds of that. It will just not be worth their while having a drink. I hope that the value of their driving licence would —

Mr Weir: This is a slightly separate issue, and one should not stereotype people, but novice drivers are quite likely, probably disproportionately, to have a car full of friends if they are the first in their peer group to get a car and drive. We have too many road deaths and, sadly, have seen many instances of car crashes late at night in which two or three people have lost their life.

Mr Phair: It is very sad. I have 17-year-olds coming on my courses who have just passed their test, are still on their R-plates and have been convicted. They could not go to the Magistrates' Court. They had to go to the family court because they are so young. You have to be 18 years of age to go to the Magistrates' Court.

Mr Weir: Legally, they should not be drinking.

Mr Phair: They might not have been that far over the drink-drive limit, but they are starting their driving career with a conviction and a criminal record.

Mr Weir: I commend you on the visual display of the different alcohol levels. I have to say that it surprised me. I did not realise that the limit was so high for some of them. Most people would assume that, if you drank two full pints, that would probably put you over the limit, but you say that the limit is around two and a half pints for a man. Thank you.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for the presentation. I suppose, for those who indulge in a pint now and again, that you have spoil their day.

Your display was very effective. I am certainly supportive of that message getting out, and it needs to be displayed more often. From what you have demonstrated, the clear message is that we should be looking at 20 mg. To be honest, it is not worth even having one drink. That is the message that, as a road safety spokesperson, I would like to see getting out.

I have a couple of points. I am mindful that that is the message that the Committee might want to get out as part of the whole process on road safety. We are talking about two and a half pints. You talked about the likes of whisky and all, but it involves even some of the stronger beers. Let us be realistic.

Mr Phair: This is a very weak beer.

Mr Boylan: Like a pint of Carlsberg or something?

Mr Phair: If it were Carlsberg, it would be two pints. If it were Budweiser or another premium lager, such as Stella or Heineken, you are talking about one and two thirds. The higher the percentage, the less it takes to put you on the drink-drive limit. This is a 3.5% beer, so it is pretty weak.

Mr Boylan: I do not really have questions. I made observations during your presentation. It is sad that young people are directed to you. I know that it is a good programme, but, at the end of the day, it is sad that your message is not getting out. On the whole issue of drink-driving being the cause of road deaths and everything else, as you have moved through the programme and as the message has got out, that number has reduced. However, what more can we do, in the light of this today? It was a good presentation, and we as a Committee can certainly take it on board to try to —

Ms Wynn: One of the things that we were asked to do, which Eddie is doing, is with Queen's University. It is doing some work around alcohol. I am not against alcohol per se; rather, I am against mixing alcohol with driving. The universities quite often see alcohol-related behaviours that cause children to be excluded, and, as a last chance, they can do a course that Eddie is running. Shropshire, the area that I live in, is a very rural county. We have a lot of colleges, and virtually every college, in the past five to 10 years, has had somebody killed as a result of drink-driving. We provide

courses to those colleges to give some teaching about alcohol and how quickly you reach the drink-drive limit. Students are a key group for us — lots of youngsters are in college — and it is a way for us to target and educate them, because there are so many myths around. Your colleague talked about how they egg one another on when they are in a group. For me, it is about education and how to get that education into schools and colleges.

Mr Boylan: Finally, we have seen the advertisement out recently. Some people cannot watch it, but it is very effective. I do not know whether you talked to departmental officials, but something like this demonstration should go out to the public. I know that you should not say, "Two and a half pints and you're OK", because that looks bad. However, if the idea is to reduce the limit to 50 mg in 100 ml, your visual demonstration, as part of an advertising campaign, might be more effective. Have you talked to anybody about that?

Ms Wynn: We have four representatives from the Department here observing.

Mr Phair: On the education aspect, something that comes out of our courses is that clients often ask, "Why is this information not included as part of the driving theory test?" They say that young drivers should receive some sort of information or education on drink-drive limits, the effects of alcohol and how long it stays in your system for. That is what we do on the course. At the end of the course, they ask, "Why is this not done in schools? Why is this not part of the theory test?" That is coming from the drivers themselves.

The Chairperson: It is a very good idea to put it into induction programmes at uni for freshers. It could be their first time away from home, living with lots of other young people. They tend to go to pubs, etc. There is a myth, too, that Peter mentioned. Bigger people seem to think that they can take more. There is always that myth, where people think, "The average unit does not apply to me because I am 18 stone", or whatever. People think that, but I am thinking the other way: I am only seven and a half stone.

Mrs Cameron: Thank you for the presentation. It was very interesting, and I can see why you started your presentation, Jenny, by saying not to drink and drive. It is so complicated, and there are so many factors involved that you take a risk if you drink anything.

We have not talked about the morning after. Can you give us any examples of what kind of consumption from the night before —

Ms Wynn: Yes. That is a very good question. When I first started doing this, back in the early 1990s, the Department for Transport in England said that we must not teach about units, because that implies that it is OK to drink and drive, or teach what the limit is. However, the reality is that you are quite right. We always say, "Do not drink and drive at all", but for lots of people, who may think, for example, "My son is absolutely responsible and does not drink and drive", they need to know about units because of the next day. I would say that within 30 minutes the first 80% of a unit is absorbed into the system. Thereafter, you lose about one unit an hour.

This is the large glass in a pub. That amount of liquid would probably be served in a larger glass in a pub, but that is a 250 ml measure. With 12% wine, that is three units. That would take between three and four hours to leave the body. So, take a bottle of 12% wine that contains between eight and nine units. If you drank it between 9.00 pm and 11.00 pm, it would take about 10 hours to get that whole bottle completely out of your system. That is why an awful lot of people are caught the next day. Sadly, I know people who can drink two bottles of wine a night, so you are looking at 18 hours-plus to get that amount completely out of the system, or, if you want to be below the drink-drive limit and are male, you looking at between 13 hours and 14 hours to be just under the limit. On the 50 mg limit, you would be looking at 15 hours-plus to be under the limit.

Mr Phair: I think that about 19% of convicted drink-drivers are caught the following day or more than six hours after they have finished drinking. Combine that with binge drinking — I do not like the term "binge drinking", but it is a fact — and the activities of younger drinkers. They are taking so much alcohol into their system in an evening that it could take up to a day and a half to get it out of the system. They are taking on 30 units of alcohol easily. It takes well over a day to get that out of your system, at one unit an hour.

Ms Wynn: The worst that I have ever encountered was a girl on a course one Saturday. She was talking about the number of units that she had had. She was a student. Although this was in England, her favourite drink was Guinness. We worked out that she would not be safe to drive — I talk about "safe" as meaning no alcohol in the blood — until the Thursday afternoon. That is how much drink she had had. Part of the problem with students — not just students — is topping up. They do not get the body completely clear of alcohol. The other point, of course, is that when you start drinking very young, your liver is not fully formed. Your liver is not fully grown. Lots of youngsters seem to be drinking at 14 and 15 years of age, when the liver is not mature. That is the damage that they are doing. When we talked today about the number of units needed to take to reach the drink-drive limit, we are assuming a well-functioning liver. Of course, you do not know whether your liver is functioning well unless you have enzyme blood tests. Most of us cannot see our livers.

Mrs Cameron: There are really two main issues here. There is the actual limit at the time that you are drinking, and then the morning after. We were all aware that it takes a certain length of time for alcohol to leave the body, but I do not think that most of us were aware that it took as long as you have just demonstrated to us.

Ms Wynn: Yes. There are lots of myths around such as drinking black coffee and doing loads of exercise. A load of exercise has a marginal effect on getting rid. Lots of people think that, having gone to bed, when you wake up it is a new day. Well, it is, but not to your liver. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: A new day to drive to work.

Ms Wynn: That is the issue. I did a tribunal for a policeman in Leicestershire a few years ago. He had done everything right on the night. He had been out to a leaving meal for a colleague and had five pints of Stella, which is three units a pint. It takes 15 hours to get rid of it. He had gone home at 11.00 pm and gone on duty at 6.00 am the next morning. A milk float had run into his car. In an accident with a police officer, everyone is breathalysed, and he was still over the drink-drive limit, because it would have taken 15 or 16 hours to get rid of all the alcohol.

Mrs Cameron: That would have been over the 80 mg in 100 ml, yes?

Ms Wynn: Yes, 80 ml, not 50 ml.

Mr I McCrea: It may be because I am sitting close to you, but I can see the breathalyser. I just happened to google it while I was waiting to be called. It says on the website that, in France, it is compulsory to carry your breathalyser. Obviously, that is quite a good marketing thing for a company.

Ms Wynn: Very dangerous.

Mr I McCrea: It is very dangerous to carry one?

Ms Wynn: Unless you are going to use it only the next day. If any of you have been to America I am sure you will know that some restrooms in America have breathalysers that you can blow into. They are no good at all, on the basis that, first, we have the psychological thing of drinking up to the limit. It is not a target that you have to aspire to. That is what you should not do. Alcohol is absorbed quite slowly, with beer being the quickest to be absorbed, because there is more water in it. In Northern Ireland I could drink a double whisky and still be under the drink-drive limit, you might think, but the problem is that I would breath into the breathalyser and think, "Oh, I am under the limit, so I can have another drink", without understanding that you need to absorb the alcohol to get the proper reading. That is why, yes, we sell them, but we sell them only for the next day. They are absolutely no good on the night, because the alcohol can still be being absorbed. Although you get a correct reading, it is not actually the true reading once you have taken account of absorption. So, you would have to wait hours before using one of those.

Mr I McCrea: That is what I was coming to. Is there a prescribed time limit? Is it a couple of hours after you have had your last drink or preferably the next morning?

Ms Wynn: Preferably the next morning, depending on how much you have had to drink. If you have had loads and loads, there is no point in going to test yourself within a couple of hours, because you would still be absorbing that alcohol. Basically, if you as a male had just a couple of small glasses of wine and left it a couple of hours, you would probably be OK to test, but some people drink 10 pints of

Guinness. There is no point at all in testing yourself in two hours because the alcohol will still be being absorbed.

Mr Phair: On the course we do sell these, but, first and foremost, we teach clients how to count units, then work back and find out when they are down to zero before they drive their car. This is a backup to that system. We will not stand over that system unless the breathalyser is serviced regularly by the manufacturer and sent back to be recalibrated, etc. Initially, clients are taught in class about counting units and working out how many drinks they have had.

Mr I McCrea: I think that the important part of it for anybody who drinks is understanding that countback time rather than counting on one of those types of devices. It is also —

Mr Phair: This is the lazy option.

Mr I McCrea: Yes, it is the lazy option, but it is important for people, regardless of whether they are a leisure drinker or someone who consumes a large amount of alcohol, to be aware of how much they can drink and still be within the legal limit to drive.

Ms Wynn: We have had those at home, because, even though our children do not drink and drive, we want to make sure that they are always OK to drive the next day.

Mr Phair: They are a useful tool.

Mr I McCrea: I do not think that this was mentioned, but a lot of young people go towards alcopop-type drinks. How many units do they contain?

Mr Phair: The strength of an alcopop usually runs at between 4.5% and 5%. At 4.5%, it is the same strength as a pint of Magners, but, because it is blue, red or various other colours, it is not seen as such. Technically, the advertising companies are not allowed to target very young drinkers. If you look at the current adverts for WKD, they do not feature very young drinkers; rather, they all involve young males in the pub having a bit of fun. They are trying to target young males and to encourage them to drink WKD. Obviously, alcopops come in bright colours, and there are flavours like bubblegum, so who else will be attracted to them? They are as strong as a standard cider.

Ms Wynn: I thought that you were going to mention shots.

Mr I McCrea: I was going to mention them.

Ms Wynn: The glasses on the table are like shot glasses.

Mr Phair: Those actually are shot glasses. I could not find my port glasses, sorry.

Ms Wynn: The scary bit is that they tip them back one after the other.

Mr I McCrea: Someone once told me that it is illegal to sell more than a certain number of shots.

Mr Phair: The trouble with shots is that they come in such a range of strengths. You are probably getting served a 35 ml measure, which I am showing you. They are lined up, and people do not know what is in them or how to calculate afterwards. Cocktails are a problem drink as well, because generally people do not know how much alcohol is in a cocktail.

The Chairperson: There is a mixture of spirits as well in them.

The Chairperson: Yes, and there is a difficulty with those types of drinks. If I go into a pub, I know that I am going to get a pint, which is 568 ml, and I know exactly how to work out how many units is in it. If I go in and drink shots, things become a bit difficult to calculate.

Mr I McCrea: Some people think that drinking water alongside their pint, glass of wine or whatever dilutes it. Is that a myth?

Ms Wynn: It is a myth. However, if you put water into whisky — I know that is terrible, because who would want to water down —

Mr Boylan: Why would you want to spoil it?

Ms Wynn: Exactly. Do you remember what I said about the body finding it easier to absorb a beer because there is more water in it, and ditto wine but less so? If you put water into whisky or something with bubbles — so Canada Dry ginger ale, or something like that — the bubbles help the alcohol to be absorbed. So, you are helping your body to absorb it quicker. If you take a double whisky, the first thing that happens is that your body shuts down and says "Wow, this is too hot to handle". It then has to dilute it with gastric juices, such as saliva. So, adding water or a liquid with bubbles speeds up slightly the absorption and puts it nearer to having a drink of beer than a neat whisky.

Mrs Cameron: Do you have any kinds of apps for phones and other technology, or are you aware of anybody who has produced any, that would help teach us?

Mr Phair: Yes, the National Health Service has apps out, as have Drinkaware and any of the major drink-related training or information companies. You can count your units as you go along and put in the type of drink that you have. There is also a tracker so that you can keep a track of what you drink during the week, because by Thursday you may have forgotten that you had a glass of wine at lunchtime on Monday. There are quite a few apps out there.

Mrs Cameron: Would you recommend them?

Mr Phair: Drinkaware has a very good one, and the National Health Service has its own apps. They are both extremely good. Maybe the issue is understanding units, but, as Jenny said, for a female the limit is a couple of units a day only, which is 14 units a week, according to the National Health Service.

Ms Wynn: This is 175 ml, which is what pubs here sell as a small glass of wine.

Lord Morrow: It was interested to hear you say that even you had difficulty in trying to work out the different measurements. You are at the cutting edge of this, so how much more difficult is it for the ordinary drinker to do this? Do you think that we are losing the education war on "Don't drink and drive"?

Mr Phair: There are difficulties with working out units, but, if you stick to the main types and stick to drinking in pubs and clubs, where you get measured drinks, it is fairly easy to keep track. The problems come with, as I mentioned, cocktails and drinking at home, where we do not pour a 35 ml measure. So, there are some issues, but, generally speaking, if we know what the measure is, we can work out what is in the drink. On the bigger question of whether we are losing the education war with young drivers, I do not think that we are. A lot of people who come on our courses do know a lot about alcohol, but there are circumstances to their night out and why they are drinking. Some people have emotional issues around alcohol. There are very many and varied reasons that people drink in the first place.

Lord Morrow: You say that a lot of the people who come on your courses know about alcohol. Are you meeting those people after?

Mr Phair: Yes, there is post-course analysis.

Lord Morrow: So, it is too late then.

Ms Wynn: The question was this: do they know about alcohol before they come on the course?

Mr Phair: They do know about alcohol, but they do not know how to calculate units, strengths and volumes. That is what the course teaches them.

Lord Morrow: That is the point that I am trying to make. They are not educated.

Mr Phair: No.

Lord Morrow: Do they even want to be educated?

Mr Phair: Yes.

Lord Morrow: I am not sure what you mean when you say yes. Do they want to be educated after they have got their fingers burnt or before?

Mr Phair: Once their fingers have been burnt, they are keen to learn.

Lord Morrow: It is too late then. Someone has potentially been killed on the road by that stage.

Mr Phair: Yes, I appreciate what you are saying.

Lord Morrow: It is too late.

Mr Phair: If you put it like that, yes, it would be too late.

Ms Wynn: Obviously, we get tens of thousands of evaluations back, and people keep saying that it should be a zero limit, or what they contend to be a zero limit. The vast majority of people will say, "I will not drink and drive again" and, "I should never have been in that position", etc. To be fair, the thing that worries me is just how high the readings are in Northern Ireland. An awful lot of people whom we see are not just over the drink-drive limit but way, way over it.

Lord Morrow: Some people say, "I don't drink and drive", and I am one of those people. I am for zero tolerance on such an issue, because I think that it is of such magnitude and seriousness that it has to be done that way. The experts tell us that you cannot do that, and you have cited some points in your paper, which is useful. We get the ad that says, "Never ever drink and drive", but, really, there is a little bit of a contradiction there, because that is not basically correct. The public image that is going out concerns me.

Ms Wynn: The contradiction is in where the law is set, which is at 80 mg in 100 ml. You say, "Don't drink and drive", but the law permits you to drink up to that limit. That is where the difficulty lies, because people know that they will be all right if they have just one or two. I think that moving to the much lower limits, particularly around 20 mg, would make drinking and driving just not worth it. You are right in as much as education is important, and marketing campaigns include a reminder that things such as over-the-counter medicine contain alcohol. These mouthwashes contain alcohol, but it goes out of your system extremely quickly — within a few seconds.

Lord Morrow: That is why the Chair misrepresented me and said that I am fond of certain types of food. I am not. I simply raised the point.

Ms Wynn: I brought these sprays because — Eddie is a former policeman — over the years, many people have said that, when they saw the blue light in their mirror, they grabbed their spray and did this and that gave them a false reading. It does give a false reading, but, of course, a second reading is done 20 minutes or half an hour later, and that registers the true alcohol level.

Mr Boylan: I have a quick point to make. We need to get a message out. Most people's perception is that they can go down to the bar, have one drink and that is OK. Ultimately, we have to get down to the 20 mg limit and say, "Look, we are under the pint level, so it is not worth having a drink at all". That is the message to get out. That is my perception when people say to me that they are going out for one pint. It should not be that at all.

Ms Wynn: That is the mixed message.

Mrs Overend: Most of my questions have been asked and answered at this stage, but should there be an obligation on servers in restaurants or bars to tell the customer how many units are in, for instance, a cocktail? You were talking about cocktails earlier.

Mr Phair: That is an interesting point. Putting the responsibility on to the server may be too much, but why not have it advertised on the pouring pumps or on bottles? Units are contained on most bottles

nowadays. If you buy alcohol from any supermarket, it will give you the number of units per bottle. If you go looking for the information, it is there, but I appreciate what you are saying.

The Chairperson: You could put it on beer mats in pubs as well.

Ms Wynn: Yes, we have done that.

Mrs Overend: The other thing that I was thinking about is cyclists. Sorry, I am new to this Committee. How is all of this impacting on cyclists? The limits for them will obviously be the same. Are they coming to your courses as well?

Ms Wynn: Do you mean cyclists or motorcyclists?

Mrs Overend: I mean cyclists.

Mr Phair: We have a law here against riding a bicycle while under the influence of alcohol. However, you cannot be breathalysed for it, and you cannot lose your licence for it, but it is an offence to ride a bicycle under the influence of alcohol, as it is to ride a horse or to drive a horse and cart.

Mrs Overend: Did you say that cyclists cannot be breathalysed?

Mr Phair: No, the prosecution would proceed on the officer's observations at the scene.

Mrs Overend: OK.

Ms Wynn: More worrying is that people use their bicycle to go to the pub because they cannot be done for drink-driving. They then drink a lot and get into a collision.

Mrs Overend: Exactly. People complain about cyclists on pavements and things like that. That is not good.

The Chairperson: How can they be prosecuted if they are not obliged to give you a breathalyser reading? How do you determine the amount of alcohol that they have had?

Mr Phair: It is done on the police officer's observations. Currently, we have an offence of driving while unfit, where the police officer does not have to perform a roadside breath test. If the officer believes that the person is over the limit, he can proceed on the unfit charge, but at the police station, the driver will give a breath test. With a cyclist, however, it is done on the observation of the police officer. His evidence is accepted in court.

The Chairperson: That has provided a lot of interest for members. Thank you very much for coming all the way, Jenny. Thank you, Eddie.