

# Consumption controversies: Alcohol policies in the UK

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● RGS-IBG Policy Briefing Launch, 8 December 2010,  
4.00-5.30pm, House of Commons, Committee Room 10

## Event Structure

- 4.00-4.10pm: Welcome and Introduction: Kevin Barron MP (Chair) (Former Health Select Committee Chair 2005-10)
- 4.10-4.20pm: Dr Nicola Shelton, University College London (UCL): "Geographical dimensions of drinking"
- 4.20-4.30pm: Professor Marion Roberts, University of Westminster "Planning for drinking (or not)"
- 4.30-4.40pm: Professor Gill Valentine, University of Leeds and Dr Mark Jayne, University of Manchester: "Drinking at home and by children"
- 4.40-5.30pm: Questions and Discussion: contributors included –
- Kelvin Hopkins MP, Luton North
  - Susan Fleisher, Executive Director, National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome-UK
  - James Morris, AERC Alcohol Academy
  - Dr Rita Gardner, Director, RGS-IBG
  - Ian Davidson MP, Glasgow South West
  - Sarah Davis, Public Affairs Executive, The Wine and Spirit Trade Association
  - Dr James Kneale, University College London
  - Chris Sorek, CEO Drinkaware Trust
  - Alistair Turnham, MAKE associates
  - Dr Rachel Herring, Middlesex University

*The discussion covered a diverse range of issues around alcohol policy, including the role and importance of education and awareness raising; how to prevent excessive alcohol consumption when women are pregnant or looking to conceive; the elasticity of pricing and demand; issues around historical trends of alcohol consumption; discussion of new research funded by the Drinkaware Trust linked to primary and secondary schools children and alcohol due to be published shortly; problems around cases in city centres when late licences were being ignored and establishments were staying open much later and how this can be managed; why some young people don't drink, and why this is more common place than some would assume; how some town centres, such as Dewsbury, are working to promote themselves as "low alcohol night time economies" and whether new possibilities for this will arise from the localism bill.*



## Speaker Biographies

### **Dr Mark Jayne**, *Geography, University of Manchester*

Dr Mark Jayne has worked on a research project entitled '*Family Life and Alcohol Consumption: a Study of the Transmission of Drinking Practices*', funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (with Prof Gill Valentine and Dr Myles Gould, both of the University of Leeds). He has published a number of papers on his research, including a special edition of the high profile alcohol studies journal *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* published in 2008. The project represented the first attempt to develop a research agenda for studies of geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness and has featured in the UK Government's *Youth Alcohol Action Plan* [www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/geography/staff/jayne\\_mark.htm](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/geography/staff/jayne_mark.htm)

### **Professor Marion Roberts**, *School of Architecture and the Built Environment (SABE), University of Westminster*

Professor Marion Roberts started her career as an architect and moved into urban design whilst researching her PhD. Her research interests are focused on socio-spatial relations in urban design. She has been awarded a number of research grants, consultancy and advisory roles from leading charities and government departments on the topic of the night-time economy. Professor Roberts has recently completed a book entitled *Planning the Night-time City* with Dr Adam Eldridge. She is currently leading a Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded project with Tim Townshend of Newcastle University and Dr Adam Eldridge, Dr Ilaria Pappalepore and Budhi Mulwayan of the University of Westminster entitled '*From Park to Club: Youth, Alcohol and Place*' <http://tinyurl.com/y89fuax>

### **Dr Nicola Shelton**, *Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London (UCL)*

Head of the Health and Social Surveys Research Group, Dr Shelton's interests lie in population health and well-being taken from a geographical perspective. She is currently working on a secondary analysis of the Scottish Health Survey and Health Survey for England. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology/people/sheltonn.htm>

### **Professor Gill Valentine**, *School of Geography, University of Leeds*

Professor of Human Geography, and Director of the Leeds Social Science Institute (LSSI), Professor Valentine has an international reputation for theoretically-informed empirical work that is methodologically innovative and has popular and policy impacts. Her research interests include: social identities and belonging, children and parenting, consumption cultures (especially in relation to food, drink and gambling) and research methods. She has been awarded grants and contracts from UK Research Councils, charities, government departments, and non-governmental organisations to the value of more than £2 million. Professor Valentine also acts as a Trustee of the Drinkaware Trust. She has led, with Dr Sarah Holloway, and working alongside Dr Mark Jayne, a Joseph Rowntree funded project entitled '*Drinking Places: Social Geographies of Consumption*.' <http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/g.valentine/>



## Background

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) works to demonstrate and champion the role which geographical knowledge, expertise and research contributes to policy and the economy, doing this by facilitating the transfer of knowledge between researchers, practitioners and policymakers.

The Society's latest policy publication presents an overview of research against a series of controversial questions and debates: from whether the UK actually does have a 'drinking problem' through to assessing the positive role that the British pub still plays in the economy, communities and people's lives.

Drinking alcohol, and associated negative impacts, has probably never had such a high profile within public and policy debates. Tabloid headlines scream outrage on a frequent basis about the ills of Britain's 'binge drinking' culture. Some estimates suggest 100,000 people in the UK could die over the next decade directly because of their drinking, and that the death rate over the last 25 years has trebled to nearly 9,000 per annum.

Yet drinking is big business. Some estimates suggest it is worth around £40bn every year to the economy. Consumption of alcohol emerged as a major political issue in the early 2000s. Since then the government has steered a careful course between twin policy objectives of protecting public health and pursuing urban regeneration through promotion of the night-time economy.

In 2004 the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England set out the government's strategy for tackling the harms and costs of alcohol misuse in England. Delivery has been framed around Government targets which aim to reduce harms caused by alcohol to:

- the community as a result of associated crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour (alcohol is also a significant contributory factor to violent crime: 44% of victims of violence in England and Wales believed their attacker was under its influence. Alcohol is also thought to be a factor in at least half of all domestic violence incidents).
- the health and well-being of those who drink excessively (the total cost to the health service has been estimated by some to be more than £2bn each year); and development, achievement and wellbeing of young people and families.

Policies cut across departments including the department of Culture Media and Sport who deal with licensing and were responsible for the Licensing Act of 2003, Home Office, Communities and Local Government, and the Department of Health. The lead up to the 2010 United Kingdom General Election, including the campaign, saw political parties of all colours announcing a stream of measures to tackle what is framed as 'the problem'.

These strategies were mainly associated with increasing the price of alcohol, clamping down on so-called '24-hour drinking' and reducing associated public disorder. The new government has indicated it will be looking to implement this approach.

This briefing paper from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) presents an overview of research relating to the current debate, presenting evidence relating to a number of controversial questions. This paper sets out to separate the facts from fiction in these debates, with evidence presented against a series of controversial questions and debates, from whether

the UK actually does have a 'drinking problem' right through to assessing the positive role that the British pub still plays in the economy, communities and people's lives.

## **Recent policy developments**

The Queen's Speech following the formation of the coalition government in May 2010 brought forward proposals for policies with relevance to alcohol. Details of three of these have just been published.

### **Home Office: Policing Bill**

The Home Office have published (1 December 2010) their "Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill". The overall purpose of the Bill is to "*make the police service more accountable to local people and to tackle alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour*" with "*Stronger powers to tackle alcohol-fuelled crime and disorder.*"

*The Bill proposes:*

- Overhauling the Licensing Act (2003) to give more powers to local authorities and police to tackle any premises that are causing problems
- Doubling the maximum fine for persistent underage sales (to £20000) and permitting local authorities to charge more for late-night licences to contribute towards the cost of policing the late-night economy
- Banning the sale of alcohol below cost price: this received considerable media attention on 30<sup>th</sup> November, with the publication by HM Treasury of their review of alcohol taxation

Further details:

Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/legislation/police-reform-bill/>

Parliament: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/policeformandsocialresponsibility.html>

### **Department of Health: Public Health White Paper**

Published on 30<sup>th</sup> November, the Department of Health "White Paper on Public Health, a draft of intended health legislation, includes a raft of proposals which Health Secretary Andrew Lansley has said will be about changes in "behaviour not just introducing laws". The main proposals of the White Paper, on which the Department will be consulting up until 8 March 2011, are as follows:

- Launching, in early 2011, a Public Health Responsibility Bill, which will include the 'promotion of more socially responsible retailing and consumption of alcohol', working with business and the voluntary sector;
- Developing the Change4Life campaign, for example a voucher scheme to help "nudge" people towards healthier lifestyle choices;
- Widening this programme to take a more holistic approach to childhood issues, for example strategies to help parents talk to their children about health issues and behaviour, such as alcohol;

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- Aligning funding streams on drugs and alcohol treatment services across the community and in criminal justice settings [with it critical] where appropriate people are diverted from the criminal justice to health services;
  - Local public health directors will work for local authorities instead of the NHS under the proposals.

The White Paper also refers to the Home Office plans to reform the Licensing Act 2003 and proposals to “ban sales of alcohol at 'below cost'”, expected to be defined as duty + VAT (as announced in the Treasury review of taxation the same day – see below)

Further details: Department of Health  
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthyliveshealthypeople/index.htm>

### **HM Treasury: Review of Alcohol Taxation**

Third, HM Treasury has also consulted on measures for alcohol taxation, with the coalition Programme for Government, and published in the June 2010 Budget, outlining “the intention to review alcohol taxation to tackle problem drinking without unfairly penalising responsible drinkers, pubs and important local industries.”

The Treasury held an informal consultation over the summer, with a number of workshops and written submissions from industry, health and other groups helping to inform the review. Published on 30 November, the “Review of alcohol taxation” provides details of potential tax measures, including the intention to introduce a new additional duty on beers over 7.5% abv in strength and a reduced rate of duty on beers at a strength of 2.8% abv or below, adding to a change to the definition of cider which “has already been made to increase the duty on cheap, strong ciders strongly associated with public health concerns.”

These measures will continue to be developed with a final announcement made at Budget 2011, with draft Finance Bill clauses will be published alongside other Finance Bill measures (tomorrow) on the 9 December 2011.

There are no further changes to the structure of duty on alcohol as a result of this review, and decisions about duty rates remain a matter for the Chancellor at the Budget but Prime Minister David Cameron's spokesman has said “it was intended to be large enough to influence drinkers' behaviour.”

Further details: HM Treasury  
[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/alcohol\\_taxation.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/alcohol_taxation.htm)