

# alcohol

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**ALERT**



Scottish National  
Alcohol Strategy

calls time on binge drinking

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Editor in Chief Derek Rutherford

Editor Andrew McNeill

Assistant Editor Andrew Varley

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# Death warnin

**D**eaths from cirrhosis of the liver are increasing sharply in women after growing in number among men for some time. The Government's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Liam Donaldson, has pointed to heavy drinking by young people as the cause of the alarming rise in cirrhosis cases and adds that females are showing signs of permanent liver damage at an earlier age.

In his annual report, a summary of "neglected" areas of the nation's health, Professor Donaldson also highlights the need to identify and treat cases of high blood pressure and to give more help to patients with epilepsy. It is, however, the rise in the number of cirrhosis deaths which is a "particular concern", he says.

Cirrhosis, which causes permanent scarring and damage to the liver, is irreversible, although treatment can prevent further degeneration.

The report appears at a time when double the number of 18 to 24-year-old women as men are drinking at or beyond the danger levels. Among 35 to 44-year-olds, there has been an eight-fold increase in cirrhosis deaths among men and seven-fold among women. "In 2000," Says Professor Donaldson, "[cirrhosis] killed more men than Parkinson's disease and more women than cancer of the cervix."

While some of this increase can be blamed on the side effects of long-term

infection with hepatitis B and C, Professor Donaldson says that the most "convincing explanation" is alcohol. He says: "There is a clear need for a comprehensive approach, across and beyond government, to address the consequences of problematic drinking.

"Public awareness needs to be raised that certain patterns of heavy drinking are potentially dangerous in producing cumulative damage to the liver."

The government is still working on its long-promised alcohol strategy, which is now expected to be published in 2004.

Jean Coussins, director of the drinks industry-funded Portman Group, said: "The Portman Group's own research shows that up to a million young men and women in that age group regularly drink deliberately to get drunk. Too many young adults see sensible drinking and having a good time as mutually exclusive pursuits." The solution, at least in part, lies in the hands of the Portman Group's paymasters who aggressively

## Douglas Acres DL JP

**A memorial service for Dr Douglas Acres was held in Westcliffe-on-Sea in January 2002. Doug was a member of the Institute of Alcohol Studies Advisory Board from its inception in 1982. He was also a past chairman of the Magistrates Association, and a member of the Parole Board and the Government Advisory Committee on Alcoholism 1975 – 78. Doug somehow found the time to devote himself to a wide range of public service as well as running a busy general practice and a lay pastorate in the Congregational Church. Doug was a most genial spirit whose like will be hard to replace.**

# g to young drinkers



market their produce at the younger age groups.

The Vice-President of the British Liver Trust, Professor Peter Scheuer, said he was not surprised by the increasing incidence of cirrhosis, though he added that alcohol was not the only cause. The increase in Hepatitis C had also contributed to the problem.

Professor Scheuer said that the increase in cirrhosis amongst women was a “sociological” phenomenon rather than a

medical one. “Women are thought to be more susceptible and they get problems with alcohol earlier and quicker so they are more likely to develop cirrhosis of the liver for relatively small amounts of alcohol.”

In the context of the rise in cirrhosis deaths, the report expresses concern at the upsurge of binge drinking, saying that “there is evidence of substantial numbers drinking heavily and in a binge drinking pattern”:

Men reporting a maximum

daily amount consumed in the last week of more than eight units of alcohol:

All ages: 21 per cent

16–24 years: 37 per cent

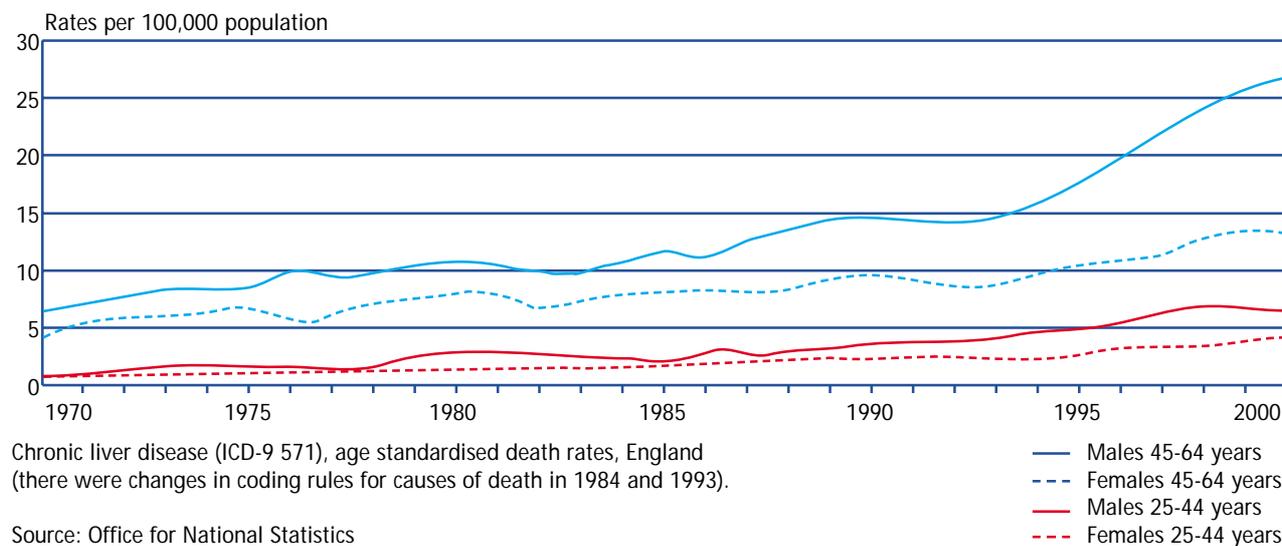
Women reporting a maximum daily amount consumed in the last week of more than six units of alcohol:

All ages: 8 per cent

16–24 years: 23 per cent

(Source: General Household Survey 1998, Office for National Statistics.) ■

FIGURE 1: RISING TREND IN DEATHS FROM CHRONIC LIVER DISEASE



# The '24 hour city condition crit

**A**lthough many '24-hour city' strategies have been economically successful, they have often failed to meet the social needs and aspirations of local communities. Phil Hadfield, Stuart Lister, Dick Hobbs and Simon Winlow look at the problems now facing these night-time economies and examine some of the latest proposals for addressing them.

The concept of the '24-hour city' is not in good health. It's 2.15 on Saturday morning in an English city centre and the 'Mass Volume Vertical Drinker' has assaulted the concept and all its good intentions, leaving it for dead in streets splattered with blood, vomit, urine, and the sodden remains of take-aways.

In the May 1999 issue of T&CP, Peter Jones et al. challenged the 'popular and perhaps prejudiced' view that the '24-hour city' concept represents little more than a

'late-night pub/club drinking and dancing culture dominated by young people'.<sup>1</sup> Without wishing to deny that the '24-hour city' concept encompasses much more than this, our own research, which has focused upon the situational outcomes of local '24-hour city' strategies, would suggest that all too often such 'narrow' interpretations do indeed have factual justification.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we would suggest that the gulf between the initial visions of a vibrant, urbane, and inclusive marriage of culture and commerce and the subsequent reality of almost exclusively alcohol- and youth-centred 'leisure zones' is so great that the concept is now facing something of a credibility crisis.

While the prophets of 'cultural regeneration' foresaw post-modern 'playgrounds', the market forces unleashed by the deregulation of alcohol-based night-time leisure have contributed to the creation of

scenes more akin to the pre-modern battleground.

Jane Jacobs's famous arguments regarding the social and economic benefits of the populous after-dark street have been important theoretical cornerstones of the '24-hour city' concept, and also of official crime prevention policy guidance.<sup>3</sup> However, the subsequent strategies of deregulation which have permitted the growth of a market-led monoculture of licensed premises and fast-food outlets are a corruption of Jacob's vision. Alcohol-based leisure now dominates the nightlife of our urban centres, and its expansion has become the gauge of post-industrial prosperity, yet Jacobs specifically warned against what she called this 'duplication of the most profitable use'.<sup>4</sup>

Although the relationship between alcohol outlet density/proliferation and alcohol-related violence is complex, evidence from deregulated leisure markets such as Manchester and Hull suggests that increases in the number of licensed premises are often accompanied by a rise in the number of assaults. For example, in Manchester city centre the



# ty' – ical?

capacity of licensed premises has increased by 240 per cent since 1998, while the number of assaults reported to the police has increased by 225 per cent since 1997.

Approximately 70 per cent of the local crime audits published in 1998 and 1999 identified alcohol as a public order issue. The majority of hot-spots for violence (in public spaces) were located in areas containing high concentrations of licensed premises, with the number of incidents peaking between 9.00pm and 3.00am on Friday nights/Saturday mornings and Saturday nights/Sunday mornings. Moreover, as the Home Office recently acknowledged, officially recorded incidents of alcohol-related crime and disorder represent merely the tip of the iceberg.

Young drinkers now 'own' many town and city centres at night. When such ownership is established, these areas become even more attractive to young people seeking a permissive leisure environment free from the supervision or censure of the older citizens with whom they share these spaces at other times.<sup>5</sup> This 'honey-pot' effect produces social environments in

which aggressive hedonism and disorder become the norm, creating nuisance and noise pollution for residents and generating fear, avoidance behaviour, and a loss of amenity for the majority of citizens and potential visitors.

The police are constantly juggling resources in an attempt to cope with the situation on the streets, and control duties within licensed premises continue to be performed by ineffectively regulated teams of bouncers. Yet since such central leisure zones now attract unprecedented numbers of young consumers they have become highly attractive locations for licensed trade investment.

The current path of night-time leisure development is also having adverse effects upon residential amenity. In addition to crime and disorder and the fear of crime, residents may face an almost intolerable range of problems, including late-night noise, vandalism of property, litter, and the fowling of pavements and doorsteps. These unpleasant experiences sit uneasily with the vision of 'urban renaissance' contained in the recent Urban White Paper, which seeks to encourage people to remain in, and return to, a 'compact' central core. As the deregulation of alcohol licensing continues, there is now an urgent need to reconcile these competing interests.

The Sunday Licensing Deregulation Order, recently passed by the House of Lords, has amended the 1964 Licensing Act to permit special hours certificates to be granted for late-night Sunday opening. More significantly, Time for Reform, the Home Office

White Paper on alcohol licensing<sup>6</sup>, has proposed radical changes to the existing system of control. Time for Reform has put forward plans to transfer the jurisdiction for liquor licensing from the magistracy to local authorities. The document also proposes that statutory trading hours be abolished and replaced by a more flexible system, with individual conditions imposed by local authority licensing committees. The new flexibility would, in principle, permit licensed premises to remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Time for Reform aims to balance its deregulatory stance with proposals to introduce a range of sanctions, including temporary restrictions on trading hours and the use of personal licences for licensees which could be endorsed and eventually forfeited (after three endorsements). It has long been argued that the introduction of variable trading hours will, in itself, serve to reduce crime and disorder on the streets by facilitating the dispersal of customers over a longer period. However, businesses trading in suburban or rural locations are unlikely to seek or obtain such operating terms, while in urban centres commercial pressures may force each outlet to





maintain opening hours congruent with those of its neighbouring competitors, with large numbers of venues trading into the early hours of the morning.

It had been anticipated that a licensing bill, to implement the Time for Reform proposals, would be included in the 20 June 2001 Queen's Speech. However, the bill was dropped a matter of days before its scheduled launch, and responsibility for liquor licensing was transferred from the Home Office to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

The political reasoning behind these decisions can only be speculated, however, mounting criticism from within the licensed trade itself, together with the pressing need to conduct a more thorough evaluation of the legislation's likely impact may well have exerted some influence. Indeed, the strength of feeling among town and city centre residents' associations and other community groups was illustrated at the recent 'Open all hours?' conference, organised by the Marylebone Association and the Soho Society in association with the Central Cities Institute and the Civic Trust. Over 100 delegates from across Britain travelled to the University of

Westminster to voice their concerns regarding the impact of licensing reform upon residential areas.

At a local level, the attempts by councils and other stakeholders to stretch the 'vitality' and 'viability' of urban centres into the evening and night, via deregulation, environmental improvement, place marketing and other forms of facilitation, have also been accompanied by new forms of control. A wide range of 'managerial' interventions are now employed, such as door supervisor (bouncer) registration schemes, 'pub and club watch' organisations, bylaws prohibiting the consumption of alcohol in public places, exclusion orders, CCTV (sometimes used in conjunction with on-street emergency 'help points'), and radio-link systems. These various, mostly 'multi-agency' initiatives and proposals should be understood as attempts to set rules and impose a degree of order within an often 'lawless' environment.

However, for the following reasons, many of these initiatives are having little effect:

- Alcohol-related crime and disorder is by nature spontaneous and expressive rather than premeditated and acquisitive, participants often being oblivious to the presence of CCTV, for example.
- The resources available for enforcement by the police and other agencies are often limited.
- Although many of the initiatives seek to crack down on licensed trade 'bad apples', they do little to improve the problems in public space, thus leaving a

'rotten barrel' on the streets.

- In many towns and cities, late-night transport services continue to be minimal or non-existent.
- Survey upon survey has shown that despite the implementation of such measures, people who fall outside the 'target consumer group', particularly older people (i.e. those over the age of 30!) and women, regard these leisure zones as threatening and therefore seek to avoid them. The absence of these groups not only undermines informal processes of social control but also raises issues of social exclusion.
- The initiatives have done little to improve the plight of central area residents, the poorer of whom are denied even the option of avoidance.

While the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 has increased police powers to order the immediate closure of licensed premises in the case of criminal activity and disorder, the pressures being placed upon police resources are also beginning to be acknowledged.

Some of the more recent initiatives and proposals are based upon the 'polluter pays' principle, with preventative measures being funded by the local licensed trade. In Westminster these include plans to introduce 'guardian angel' style private security patrols, and in Manchester there is a pilot scheme to provide two additional police officers in the Peter Street area during peak times. However, ingenious as such managerial initiatives may be, they should still be understood as little more than

narrow attempts to ease the symptoms of the problems now faced by local '24-hour city' strategies, while offering little by way of a cure.

Perhaps the primary reason for such failure has been a willingness among 'civic entrepreneurs' to allow the direction of night-time leisure development to be determined almost entirely by market forces. In cities such as Manchester and Nottingham, licensed trade investment has created many new employment opportunities and played a crucial role in the regeneration of the built environment. However, as PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments and the Urban White Paper have shown, economic development is only one of many material considerations to be taken into account by planners and other municipal regulators. If the '24-hour city' vision of a high-density, mixed-use urban core featuring both a varied and economically prosperous nightlife and excellent residential amenities is ever to become a reality, a much more integrated and interventionist approach to municipal regulation will need to be adopted.

Licensed premises are subject to three forms of municipal control – planning, public entertainment licensing, and liquor licensing – yet there is often little co-ordination or consistency of practice between the various regulatory bodies. If, however, as seems likely, alcohol licensing powers are transferred to local authorities, councils will gain jurisdiction over all three forms of control, allowing, in principle, much greater scope for 'joined-up'

thinking and integrated policy.

Under the Time for Reform proposals, each local authority would be given powers to develop a comprehensive licensing policy for its area, thus providing a framework within which the licensing committee's decisions on individual applications could be assessed. Applicants would be required to submit a proposed operating plan, setting out how the premises would be run. Applications would be considered on their individual merit and on their potential impact upon the locality.

Other issues surround planning regulation – specifically planning permission for changes of use and use classes. Owing to processes of decentralisation and rationalisation, many urban centres have experienced a loss of retail and financial service investment. This has had a profound effect upon the distribution of land uses, as successful applications to convert empty shops and offices into leisure-related businesses have begun to transform the commercial character of many central areas. As PPG6 notes, such changes of use can:

'...create new concentrations of single uses, such as restaurants and take-away food outlets, where the cumulative effects can cause local problems. Such proposals should be assessed not only on their positive contribution to diversification, but also on the cumulative effects on such matters as loss of retail outlets, traffic, parking and residential amenity. These issues should be resolved when making planning decisions, rather than permissions being un-implementable when licences are refused.' (para. 2.25)

Despite this policy guidance, planning permission for new 'food and drink' developments continues to be granted in areas where the major activity, particularly at night, has already become drinking alcohol and eating fast food. Other problems surround the issue of use classes.

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 allocated a standard (A3) land use classification to all types of business selling food or drink for consumption on the premises or hot food for consumption off the premises. This has had a considerable deregulatory impact, as changes of use to other purposes within this category are no longer taken to involve development. Thus cafes and take-aways can turn into restaurants and then into wine bars and pubs (often with public entertainment licenses), without requiring further planning consent.

Special conditions with regard to issues such as 'trading hours' and 'the adverse effects of concentration' can be imposed upon the use class as a whole in the form of supplementary planning guidance or through changes to the local or unitary development plan. Yet although such measures provide a degree





of flexibility, given the breadth of class A3 and also that of class D2 (which incorporates nightclubs), planners are still left with a very blunt instrument with which to control the environmental impact and cumulative effects of a market-led 'destruction of diversity'.

In response to such problems, the London Borough of Ealing made representations to the National Planning Forum (NPF) in 1996 urging a review of class A3. The Ealing submissions were subsequently reflected in the final report by the Forum, which is being considered by Government. The NPF report recommends that class A3 be divided into three subclasses:

- A3(i) – sale of food for consumption on the premises;
- A3(ii) – sale of hot food for consumption off the premises, including mixed



uses where part of the premises is for consumption of food on the premises; and

- A3(iii) – public house, wine bar, and other establishment for the consumption of drink on the premises.

The report also suggests revised wording to control changes of use within A3:

'Where permission is given for use as a restaurant, specific consent will be required for any other future use, including bar use and the sale of hot food for consumption off the premises, if this may adversely affect the amenity of residential and any other uses in the local area.' (section 18)

These recommendations for planning policy, together with the aforementioned government proposals for alcohol licensing suggest that opportunities are finally being created for strategic liaison in the realm of municipal regulation. The co-ordination of planning and licensing policy is now of the utmost importance to public safety and to the preservation and promotion of economic diversity and residential and visitor amenity. More specifically, there is an urgent need to develop new holistic frameworks for local municipal regulation within which both planning and licensing decisions can be made.

These processes will need to be accountable to local stakeholders, reflecting the wishes, concerns, and needs of residents, the licensed trade, visitors, the police, and other interested parties. Only then might the '24-hour city' concept begin to recover from its existing credibility crisis.

**Phil Hadfield is a Research Fellow and Dick Hobbs is Professor of**

**Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Durham. Stuart Lister is a Research Officer in the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Leeds, and Simon Winlow is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Teesside.**

### Notes

- 1 P. Jones, D. Hillier, and D. Turner: 'Towards the '24 hour city'.' *Town & Country Planning*, 1999, 68, May, pp.164-165
- 2 This article draws upon the findings of a two-year research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (award no L133251050), involving interviews with a range of city-centre stakeholders and extensive periods of observation
- 3 See *Planning Out Crime*. Circular 1994/5. Department of the Environment and Welsh Office. HMSO, London, 1994
- 4 J. Jacobs: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jonathan Cape/Penguin, London, 1962, p.259
- 5 D. Hobbs, S. Lister, P. Hadfield, S. Winlow, and S. Hall: 'Receiving shadows: governance and liminality in the night-time economy'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 2000, 51 (4), pp.701-717
- 6 *Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws*. Cm 4696. Home Office. The Stationery Office, London, Apr. 2000

**This article first appeared in the November 2001 issue of *Town & Country Planning* ■**

# Scottish National Alcohol Strategy calls time on binge drinking

Concerted action to tackle Scotland's 'lad' and 'ladette' culture is at the heart of a new Scottish Executive plan for action on alcohol problems launched in January.

The plan was drawn up in partnership with health groups, the police, the drinks industry and other stakeholders, mainly through the Scottish Advisory Committee on Alcohol Misuse (SACAM). Advice was sought from experts and wide-ranging public consultations were carried out and their results fed into the development of the plan.

Its immediate aim is "to kick start the cultural shift needed if Scotland is to turn away from the unsavoury drinking practices that cost the country £1 billion a year."

Launching the plan, Scottish Assembly Deputy Health Minister Mary Mulligan said:

"It used to be said that Scotland had a 'hard man' drinking culture. Those days are gone. Now women are involved in the 'lad' and 'ladette' binge-drinking culture too. And it is not just young

people. Scots of every generation have drinking problems. That much is clear.

"Chronic heavy drinking and binge drinking is not only a problem for the individual concerned. It affects friends, families, neighbours, and colleagues. It impacts on all our health and social services. It contributes to public safety worries and crime problems. And it leads to problems for industry through loss of productivity.

"This plan is not 'anti-alcohol'. Alcohol is part of Western culture. Demonising alcohol would be pointless and potentially counterproductive. But we have to recognise the damage that too much drink can do. In Scotland alone, problem drinking is costing at least £1 billion in health costs, sick days and lost productivity – enough to build 10 new hospitals every year.

"Shifting to a culture of more sensible drinking cannot be achieved overnight, nor can central government be expected to achieve it in isolation. We do not intend to dictate how people live their lives. But we can and will work to encourage and support a change in behaviour.

"That means raising awareness of the effects and dangers of alcohol, for all ages. At home, in schools, in the workplace, in the community, and in the pub. Encouraging people to use that information and take greater responsibility for their own actions. And more widespread training for managers and staff of licensed premises on their responsibilities to promote sensible drinking.

"The key to the success of this plan will be partnership working, involving all the education, industry, service provider and enforcement bodies. Working together, we can begin to take the first steps towards reversing Scotland's drinking problems."

Action over the next 12

months includes:

- a new £1.5 million national campaign, involving TV advertising, to change attitudes to binge drinking
- better and more widespread training for bar staff and licensees on their responsibility to encourage sensible drinking
- specific action targeted at children and young people, including new resources for parents to discuss alcohol issues with their children, better education in schools, promotion of healthy alternatives to drinking, and better early support when problems arise
- better support for local alcohol action teams – doubling funding to £1 million, publishing a framework for alcohol support and treatment services, and appointing a National Alcohol Liaison Officer to support their work
- better information on patterns of problem drinking to help develop future policy – including more consistent recording of problems by GPs, consultants and other health professionals to get a better picture of the extent of the problem
- raising with the UK Government concerns over the advertising and marketing of drinks

Investment through the NHS and social work services to tackle the problems and effects of drinking is estimated at around £182 million for 2001-02. GP consultations, A&E attendances, community psychiatric visits and other health services come to £96 million, while social work

services, including work with children and families and community based rehab and treatment services, comes to £86 million.

Scottish Assembly Deputy Minister for Justice Richard Simpson said:

"Scotland has a serious problem with drunken and disorderly behaviour. This much is obvious to anyone walking down one of the main streets in Scotland's towns and cities late at night.

"Public safety demands that we take action to address this problem. That is why we have backed police campaigns to crack-down on drink-related violence and set up a committee to review licensing laws in relation to public health and public order. But it is also important that we tackle the problem at root and that is where this action plan comes in."

The director of The Portman Group, Jean Coussins, a SACAM member, also welcomed the plan:

"The Executive are to be congratulated for delivering a strategy that provides both direction and resources for the efforts to educate people in Scotland about the effects of alcohol misuse.

"We must encourage the three key factors of personal responsibility, consistent law enforcement and responsible marketing practices by the industry to achieve a culture where sensible drinking is the norm amongst those who choose to drink."

Paul Waterson, Scottish Licensed Trade Association spokesman and another member of SACAM commented:

"Although most Scots drink

alcohol sensibly, there can be no doubt that excess drinking is on the increase, especially amongst young people and women.

"The consequences of alcohol misuse to the health services, in terms of stretching resources; to the police, in terms of controlling violence and so on; and to society generally, in terms of anti-social behaviour, should not be under-estimated. The implications for health and public order are clear.

"This report, which we welcome and fully support, commits us and all other interested parties to work together in the promotion of sensible, responsible drinking. This heralds the beginning of Scotland's determination to rid itself of its binge drinking culture and the Scottish Licensed Trade Association is ready to play its part."

The Action Plan will develop in stages up to 2005 and beyond.

### Targets and Strategies

While it is emphasised repeatedly that the purpose of the Plan is to reduce alcohol-related harm and that it is not a crusade against alcohol per se, it is clear that, however discretely it is written, and however many references it contains to promoting responsible drinking, it is a Plan for reducing the total amount of alcohol consumed in Scotland.

The principal targets are to reduce the proportion of men exceeding the weekly 'sensible limits' from 33 per cent to 29 per cent, and the proportion of women exceeding the limits from 13 per cent to 11 per cent in both cases by 2010. Because the minority of the population who exceed the weekly sensible

limits account for such a high proportion of the total amount of alcohol consumed, a reduction in their numbers will necessarily result in significantly less alcohol being sold and consumed in Scotland. This has led some commentators to wonder how long alcohol industry organisations such as the Portman Group will be able to continue to support the Plan.

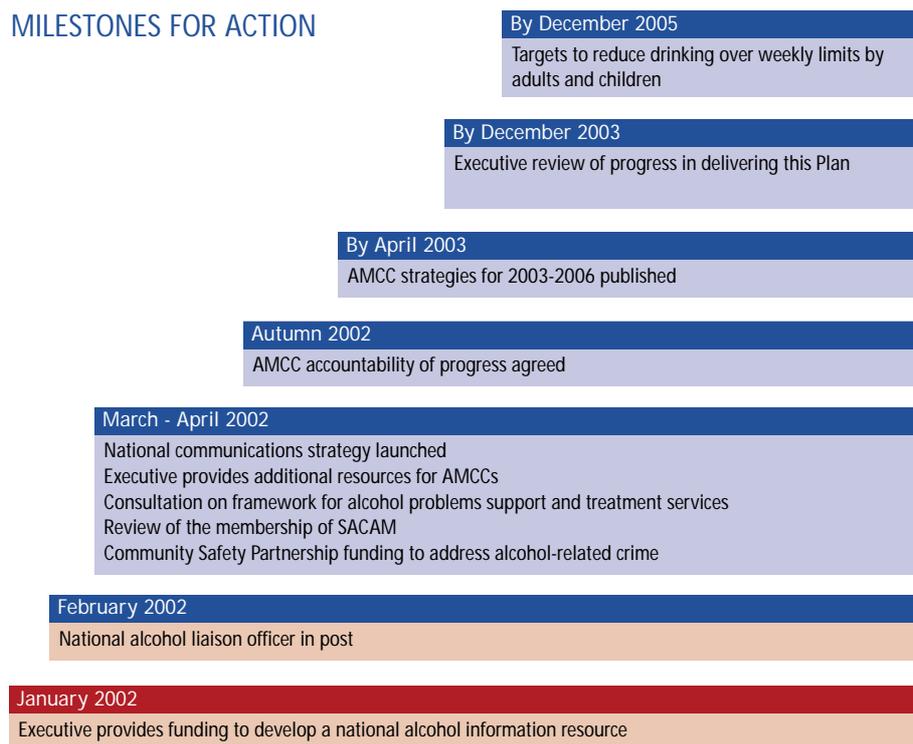
There is also the issue of the means proposed to achieve the Plan's aims and objectives. These are principally to do with various programmes of education and training, but the questions of alcohol availability, advertising and promotion are also raised.

Critics have commented on the Plan's lack of a clear commitment in regard to alcohol taxation. On this the Plan states that there is a lack of evidence that tax and price increases would assist in reducing harmful patterns of alcohol consumption. This is a view likely to be challenged by virtually all alcohol policy advocates, who no doubt will be happy to explain to the Scottish Executive that there is in fact very good evidence that tax and price increases reduce alcohol-related harm – rather superior evidence, indeed, than there is for the efficacy of the educational measures the Plan proposes to employ.

The more plausible reason given by the Executive for not using tax policy is simply that it is unable to do so because it is outside its jurisdiction, being reserved to Westminster.

Alcohol advertising is another matter on which the powers of the Scottish Executive are limited and which need to be addressed at UK

## MILESTONES FOR ACTION



level. The Plan also states that here too evidence about the effects of advertising on alcohol consumption and harm is equivocal. It was however a subject which was raised frequently in the public consultation, and the Plan commits the Scottish Executive to raising issues surrounding alcohol advertising with the UK Government and the alcohol industry.

On liquor licensing, the Scottish Executive had already announced a review of the licensing law and its implications for health and public order, and the review is complementary to the Action Plan.

The Plan details a list of specific aims for both the short term and the longer term.

The short term aims are:

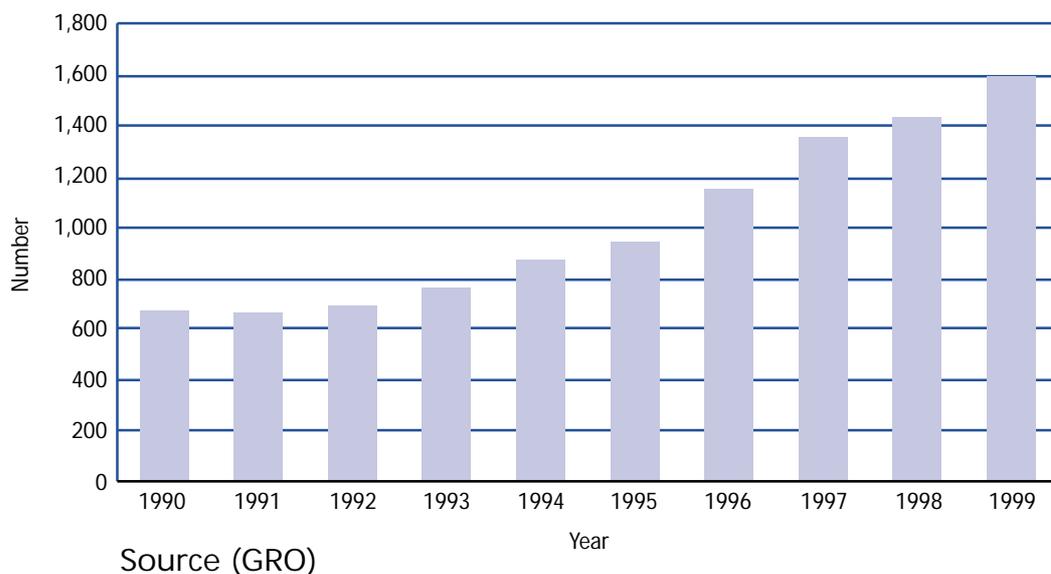
- to raise awareness of alcohol problems in Scotland
- to promote a social environment, policy context, and legislative

framework which will support the overall purpose of the plan

- to recognise the links to other areas of work and encourage initiatives which will tackle the causes and effects of alcohol problems
- to start to change unhelpful perceptions of and attitudes to alcohol, offering realistic options and alternatives
- to promote clear and consistent messages relating to alcohol problems
- to improve awareness of sources of help and support with alcohol problems
- to provide equitable, accessible and inclusive services to address the needs of those who experience alcohol problems and those affected by others use of alcohol
- to develop an appropriate structure to deliver the plan locally
- to foster accountability for

The action in this plan will roll-out over different timescales. The key dates are set out above

### ALCOHOL-RELATED DEATHS IN SCOTLAND 1990-1999



- achieving results
- to develop training and support for those involved in implementing the plan.

Longer term aims include:

- reducing the consumption of alcohol by some groups in the population whose drinking gives cause for concern
- reducing harmful patterns of alcohol consumption
- reducing specific risks relating to alcohol consumption such as hazards through work or sports
- reducing crime, nuisance and fear of crime relating to alcohol.

The priorities are to reduce binge drinking, because of its harmful social and individual consequences, and to reduce harmful drinking by children and young people because of the particular health and social risks.

#### The Alcohol Problem in Scotland

Binge drinking is even more common in Scotland than it is south of the border, and alcohol places a huge burden on health

and other public services. In 2000, there were almost 33,000 admissions to acute hospitals in Scotland with an alcohol-related diagnosis, representing more than 3 per cent of all acute admissions. The number of alcohol-related deaths has risen steeply in the last decade, from one in a 100 deaths in 1990 to one in 40 in 1999.

To aid development of the plan, the Scottish Executive commissioned a special study of the trends and costs of alcohol misuse. It estimated that alcohol misuse costs Scotland at least £1 billion each year, equivalent to over 1.5 per cent of Scotland's GDP. The costs of alcohol problems to the health, social service, and criminal justice systems exceed those caused by drug misuse, Alzheimer's Disease, schizophrenia and stroke.

Whether or not the appearance of the Scottish alcohol strategy will prompt the Government finally to launch the strategy for England and Wales remains to be seen. This has been promised for years but

has not materialised.

When she was Minister for Public Health, Tessa Jowell formally announced that the strategy would be published in the summer of 1999. However, in a debate in the autumn of 2001, Hazel Blears M.P., the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, assured Mrs Marion Roe M.P., the vice-chairman of the all party parliamentary group on alcohol misuse, that the Government was on course to implement the English and Welsh strategy by 2004. Ms Blears explained that the original timescale for launching the strategy had been ambitious and that priority had been given to early action relating to coronary heart disease, mental health and cancer. ■

Many towns and cities, including Manchester, Cardiff, and Nottingham, have schemes, funded by the Home Office, to deal with the problems of drunken violence in their centres at night. One such programme operates in Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria where it has met with considerable success. Here Alison Crewdson, describes how it works...

## Project Hammered - safer drinking safer streets

Think of Cumbria and sleepy mountains and beautiful lakes may spring to mind. The county is overwhelmingly rural, with a population of just under half a million. Violent crime seems out of place.

Project Hammered has been established since January 2001 and is concerned solely with the reduction of alcohol related violent crime. The strong links between violence and the use of alcohol, drugs, or both is well documented. We have received funding from the Home Office

to implement a partnership approach to tackling the problems associated with alcohol related violence throughout the county. The partners include Cumbria Constabulary, local authorities, the Probation Service, Victim Support, and Turning Point.

My rôle in the team has been to assist in the implementation of preventative measures in the south of the county as well as provide education on safe drinking to local schools. The emphasis has

been on establishing self-sustaining projects which will continue after the project has finished later this year. Our aim is to secure funding or ensure other agencies maintain the initiatives at the end of the project.

One of the project's main successes to date has been to reduce violence associated with licensed premises. Barrow in Furness, where 14.4 per cent of the county's population live, enjoys a lively nighttime economy with around 3.000





The Bar Committee

people visiting the town's many pubs, clubs, and café bars. This generates as much revenue as the daytime economy. During the evening activities, the streets are managed by bouncers and local police.

Project Hammered funded the establishment of a Bar Watch scheme which allows all establishments to communicate with each other via a radio link. Potential troublemakers are identified early in the evening and this information is shared with all members and the police through the CCTV control room. The scheme, which now has seventy members, also involves members agreeing to ban individuals who commit violence or drug related crimes from all their premises. There is a clear message amongst the towns' licensees: BEHAVE OR BE BANNED.

The prospect of having a ban placed on you is a powerful deterrent and the town has seen a significant reduction in the number of violent incidents



associated with alcohol. Whereas Barrow's streets such as Cornwallis Street, locally known as the Gaza strip, were once featured in documentaries depicting scenes of dreadful violence, they now feature in crime prevention documentaries.

We have established a sound partnership between the police, local authority, and licensees in the Bar Watch scheme. The scheme is self-regulatory, which avoids some of the complications caused by the Human Rights Act. We have so far successfully excluded nearly twenty people for incidents of violence and suspicion of drugs.

The scheme has received additional funding from the Community Safety Partnership to combat drugs in licensed premises. The £8,000 has been used to employ a private drug sniffer dog which patrols the pubs, clubs, and café bars on busy evenings. If the dog indicates that anyone has used or been in contact with illegal drugs, they are refused entry for that night only. Each weekend approximately twenty five people are identified by the dog as potential drug carriers and subsequently refused entrance. The police will follow up some of the individuals and they recently recovered heroin from one individual.

The scheme has been so successful that it is used as a model of good practice for other schemes around the county. By the end of the project, every town in Cumbria will have a Bar Watch scheme. We have also been chosen to receive an award from the Laurel pub company for social responsibility and will find out whether we have gold, silver, or bronze at a

ceremony to be held at the Savoy Hotel in March, 2002.

We also piloted a nighttime warden scheme for six months. Former licensees were employed to assess the nighttime environment and highlight any hot spots which might trigger violence. They were employed by the Environmental Health Department and acted as eyes and ears for the licensing department. They worked in close liaison with the police to gather intelligence on any bad practices which they observed. These wardens also provided a vital link for the Bar Watch scheme distributing information where necessary.

Another key factor in the project has been to consider the benefits of research. Margaret Cooper, of High Row Research, is employed by the project to co-ordinate research with target groups. The research within Project Hammered has been designed to explore the relationship between perpetrators and victims of violent crime. She examines how the outcome of any event can be affected by the presence and beliefs of bystanders at the location of the incident. Margaret works closely with Dr Mark Levine from Lancaster University to examine possible triggers for violence. Their findings have already been instrumental in changing the way the towns policing is organised.

Elements of the research include:

- Questionnaire survey and in depth interviews referred through Turning Point.
- Interviews with individuals excluded under Bar Watch Schemes.
- Questionnaire survey and in depth interviews with individuals referred through

**Victim Support**

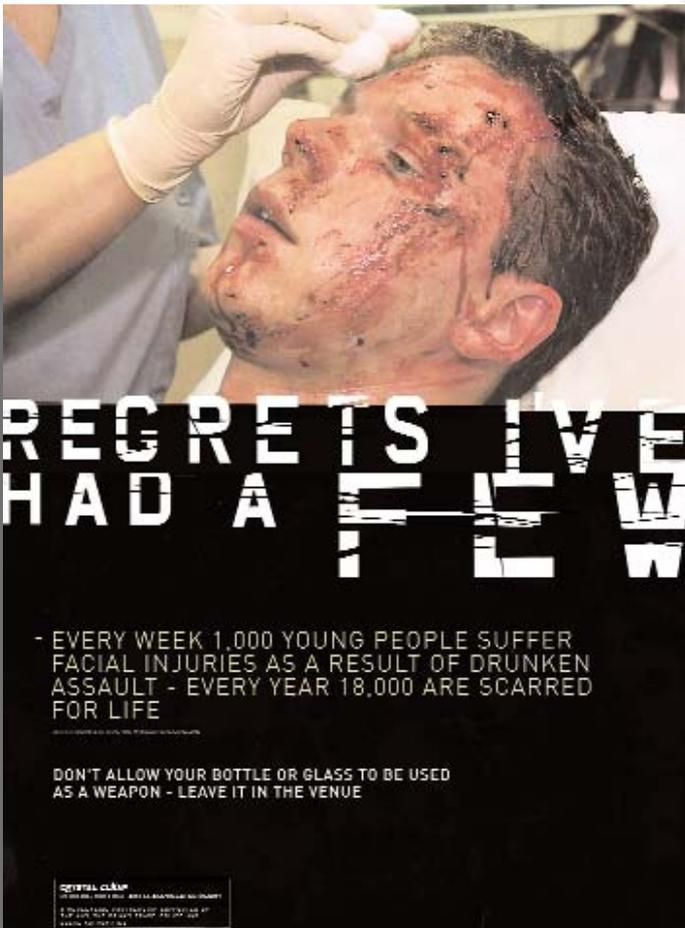
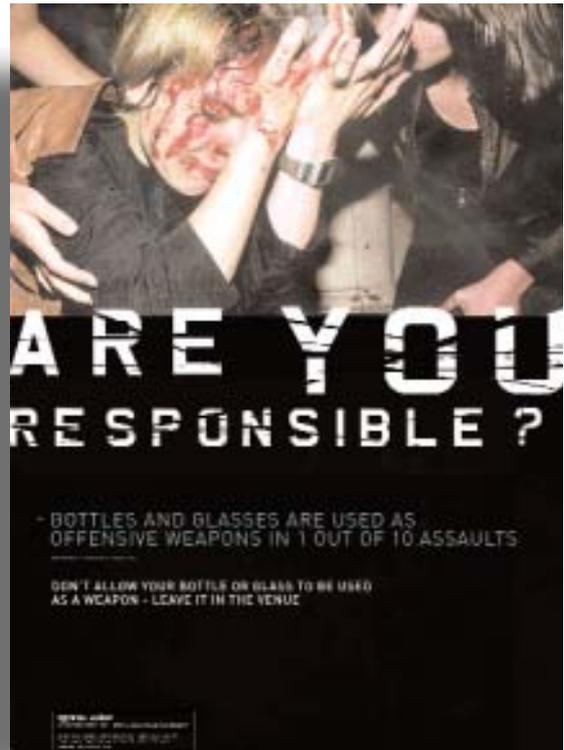
- Questionnaire survey with taxi drivers as witnesses of violent crime.
- Interviews with police officers.
- Newspaper study examining reporting of violent crime.
- Observations of licensed premises.

Margaret is keen to talk to people about their experiences of violence and can be contacted on 01434 382381.

Domestic violence is a more difficult area to address. We know that the violence seen in the public arena is being mirrored in the home. The under reporting of domestic violence is well known. On average a female will have been abused over thirty times before

reporting what may be happening to her. Many of these cases are never heard in court and the majority of females return home to their violent partner. This group of victims are denying themselves access to counselling and support and continue to live in difficult circumstances. Whilst we already have safe havens in place and a dedicated team of trained police officers, we need to encourage and empower victims of domestic violence to seek help.

During the past year another police initiative has been running alongside Project Hammered. Operation Regulate is a local police initiative which has four extra



officers on the streets during the busy nighttime period in the town centre. Over a dozen successful police operations have been run and they have contributed to a reduction in the number of violent incidents in the town centre. Barrow Borough Council assists in funding this initiative.

Project Hammered has already achieved many successes and our aim is to ensure that they continue when the project has long finished. The sharing of good practice and information is vital if we are to continue to improve standards. The success of Project Hammered is a result of partnership approach and of the willingness of all those involved to break from tradition and develop new approaches, learning from others on the way.

If anyone requires further information then you can view our website on [www.t-p-i.org.uk](http://www.t-p-i.org.uk)

The posters shown on this page are part of the 'Crystal Clear' campaign on Merseyside to reduce violence and glass-related injury. The initiative is supported by the NHS, drinks trade, police and local authorities

# Drink drive rehabilitation

As part of the campaign against drinking and driving, in 1993 the Government introduced experimental educational courses for drink/drive offenders. These have since become an accepted part of the legal process and anyone convicted of drink driving in the United Kingdom may be offered the opportunity to reduce the length of their disqualification by up to 25 per cent if they complete a sixteen hour alcohol awareness course approved by the Department for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions.

The courses have been evaluated and the results are encouraging. The main points of the report, drawn up by TRL Ltd (formerly the Transport Research Laboratory), are:

- Most course attendees were disqualified for less than two years, the majority for one sentence only which was related to driving or attempting to drive whilst over the limit or unfit to drive through alcohol.
- Nearly 30 per cent were high-risk offenders but most were not and therefore the courses appeared to be reaching those for whom they were intended. Under the DTLR scheme a driver becomes a high-risk offender by either providing an evidential specimen with an alcohol level at least 2.5 times the legal limit, or by

providing an evidential sample with an alcohol level between 1 and 2.5 times the legal limit, having been convicted of a drink/driving offence in the previous ten years, or by refusing to supply an evidential sample.

- Research found that 36 months after their original conviction, only 3.4 per cent of offenders who had attended the course had been convicted of a subsequent drink/drive offence, compared with 9.6 per cent of those who had not. After 60 months, the reconviction rates still showed a marked reduction for those who had attended a course over those who had not.
- The reduction in reconviction rates was observed even when the data were controlled for

differences in social group, sex, age, and length of disqualification. Although the courses were not originally intended for high-risk offenders, this group of offenders also benefited from the courses.

- Offenders aged between 30 and 39 years tended to benefit more than older or younger offenders.
- Those attending the courses who subsequently did reoffend tended to wait until their licences had been returned whereas non-course attendees did not.
- Immediately after attending the course, offenders' reported attitudes to drinking and driving had changed positively.
- Knowledge about alcohol improved.

**The full text of the report is available on [www.trl.co.uk](http://www.trl.co.uk) under publications, DTLR safety reports.**

Here Roger Singer gives his personal view on the operation of drink/drive rehabilitation courses:

# Time to call time on the government's drink-drive strategy



Roger Singer

The generally poor response to the latest Christmas and New Year Drink-Drive campaign suggests it is time for the government to rethink its strategy in trying to reduce drink-driving convictions. The 'scary' tactics are not working. Brake, the road safety organisation, says we need to find out which sections of society are offending and target messages to suit them.

As Brake says, we need to see drink-drivers as more than one single homogeneous group. There are sub-groups, each of which has a different profile and therefore needs a different approach in order to change

their behaviour.

As an organiser of the DTLR's Drink-Driver Rehabilitation scheme I meet around 600 convicted drink-drivers a year. They fall, broadly, into 3 groups:-

## 1. The Ill-informed Majority

The first, and largest group are the most easily influenced. Indeed we know of no one who has completed our course and subsequently re-offended. The sad thing is that we believe, in most cases, if they had done the course a month before conviction, the offence would never have happened.

As a rule when they are breathalysed they feel sober, are only just over the limit – but don't think they are – or if they do, take a chance! They mostly feel OK to drive and have probably done it before, many more times than they realise. They are – in the main – sensible, law-abiding, tax-paying and employed. They are accountants, zoologists, solicitors, police officers, surgeons, and postal workers, people from 17 to 83 years of age – everybody and anybody. They drink, on average, 36 units

a week. Most would agree that drink-driving is dangerous and socially un-acceptable.

These people have no accurate idea of units. They think a unit might be a glass of wine, a pint of bitter, a Scotch or a bottle of Becks. One out of four is a start! When we do the bar (a selection of alcoholic beverages from Alcopops to Vodka via beer, lager and wine) they are amazed at the variety. They have not noticed that in twenty years beer and wine have grown in strength, that measures have changed. They don't know how little it takes to go over the current drink-drive limit or how long it takes to return to zero. They soak up the knowledge, ask endless questions and have a thirst to learn.

## 2. The Heavy Mob

These are the drivers who are three to four times over the limit, on their second or even third conviction in ten years. These are particularly dangerous drivers. The trouble is they are not at home to see the Government's adverts, they're in the pub! Even if they did see them they would not acknowledge that it is they who

are being portrayed – denial is prevalent in this group. Whilst they are the smallest group, they are, individually, the most likely to cause crashes, and may be thought to be the most difficult to change. They can drink up to 186 units per week, the highest single drink diary entry on a DTLR course. The only effective action is via Crime Stoppers, to get them off the road as soon as possible and on to a rehabilitation course. The Road Transport Laboratory's research suggests that the higher the blood

alcohol level, the more successful a course will be. This is partly due to the skill of course tutors but also because the driver wants to avoid another drink-drive conviction at all costs because the likely outcome of a repeat offence is custody.

### 3. Morning After

The number of 'morning after' convictions is rising. I would contend this is partly due to

- the Police being increasingly aware of the possibility that drivers may still have alcohol

- in their system next day,
- the propensity to breathalyse all drivers at the scene of a road traffic accident, and,
- with the rising strength of beers and wines, the greater likelihood of residual alcohol next day.

This group are the 'innocent offenders' - the drivers who had no idea they still had alcohol in their system. Early starters do not realise that a bottle of wine the night before may still be there next morning, as could three pints of Stella or 3 'home pour' Scotches.

# Almost half of road deaths drink or drug related

Alcohol or other drugs are detected in almost half – 48.8 per cent – of road users fatally injured in road traffic accidents. Alcohol is detected in 31.5 per cent of deaths, and at least one other drug, medicinal or illicit, in 24.1 per cent.

The figures were discovered in a three year study of road accident fatalities carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory for the Government\*. The study investigated deaths of all kinds of road user, drivers, riders, passengers and pedestrians. The report concludes that while there has been a small drop in the incidence of alcohol in road fatalities over the last 10 years, - down from 35 per cent, - drink driving remains a major road safety issue and that innovative new approaches to the problem will be needed to maintain the downward trend.

In contrast, the incidence of other drugs in road fatalities has increased almost threefold in the last ten years. In the study, 11.7 per cent of fatalities tested positive for a single drug and 6.3 per cent for multiple drug presence. Both alcohol and other drugs were detected in 6.8 per cent of fatalities.

In regard to drug use, in males the majority was in those aged under 40, in females in those aged 40 and over. This reflected a difference in the types of drugs consumed. A higher incidence of illicit drugs was found in men, and of medicinal drugs in women. Drug use was highest (38.5 per cent) in fatalities reported as having been unemployed, this group having a particularly high incidence of cannabis and multiple drug use. Because of the length of time cannabis remains traceable in the blood stream after its consumption, its presence does not necessarily mean that the road user was under its influence at the time of death.

## Alcohol and Drug Use in Fatal Casualties

	Per Cent
Illicit or medicinal drugs only	17.2
Drugs & alcohol (over the legal limit)	4.1
Drugs & alcohol (under the legal limit)	2.7
Alcohol only (over the legal limit)	17.4
Alcohol only (under the legal limit)	7.3
No drugs and no alcohol	51.2

\*The incidence of drugs and alcohol in road accident fatalities. TRL Report 495. Transport Research Laboratory for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. 2002.

## What to do?

Action needs to be taken on a number of fronts. We need to inform and educate, to treat people who drink and drive and who sometimes mix the two, as sensible, intelligent, responsible members of society, not mindless idiots. We need to get alongside and influence, not be so 'in-your-face'! The last TV campaign did nothing to tell people how to avoid drink driving, just that they could cause havoc if they did - most already know this. Previous campaigns have been just as ineffective.

There seems to be reluctance on the Government's part to talk units. The 'Dying for a Drink' leaflet (T/inf/535 issued July 2000) is typical of many. It talks about 'mg/100ml' of blood. No one knows what that is! It needs to say units. It is as if the government are afraid of saying we burn up 'one unit an hour'. We need to count them up, and then count them down.

## Labelling

The unit facts we need to get across are –

- An average glass of pub 'house red' will be 2 units but it could be 3 or even 4.
- An average bottle of pub 'house red' will be 9 units
- A pint of premium lager (Stella or similar) will be 3 units
- A pint of 'ordinary' (4 per cent abv) will be 2 units
- A bottle of Bud/Becks or similar will be 1.5 units

This means that containers, price lists and pumps need to show how many units per drink. Another place where improvements could be made is in the driving test theory questions.

## People also need to know:

- Being caught driving over the limit is only one way of getting convicted. People do not know that they can also be convicted of attempting to drive or being in charge while unfit through drink
- That they will be arrested, searched, finger printed, photographed, have a DNA sample taken, spend some time in a cell and, in a few days, go to court.
- That they will definitely be banned from driving for a minimum of 12 months if convicted of drink-driving, not probably or maybe but definitely.
- That if they are a 'High Risk Offender' they will need to satisfy the authorities that they are fit to drive, via a medical, before they can regain their licence. 10 per cent never get to drive again.

## So, we need -

- better labelling on containers, price lists and pumps, showing units
  - adverts that tell us how many units are in a given drink
  - to know it takes an hour to burn up a unit
  - clearer facts on what will happen if convicted
  - a clearer message that zero is now the only limit
  - more drink-drive avoidance courses
  - better driving test questions – more about units, both in drinks and burn up
- We know how to reduce drink driving – if it doesn't happen now, we need to ask why?

## Drink-Driver Avoidance

We have developed these one-day courses as a response to the pleas from participants on

DTLR courses - 'Why wasn't I told this while I was driving? Why wait till I'm banned?'

The strong demand for these courses from companies with vehicle fleets suggests that forward thinking organisations are keen to ensure that all drivers are alcohol free when in charge of a company vehicle. Whilst reducing drink-drive convictions it also protects directors of the company from possible corporate manslaughter charges if the worst should happen, as well as reducing accidents and repair bills.

**Roger Singer, the Head of dde and Avoidd, was a Probation Officer for twenty years before being appointed a Course Organiser for the DTLR. He also leads the 'Addictive Behaviours' module on the MSW course at Reading University**

*drink driver education*

**organises DTLR approved courses throughout Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, and Middlesex, providing for around 600 drink-drivers a year. Through Avoidd Ltd they are also involved in drink-drive avoidance training, drug and alcohol awareness training for safety critical staff in the passenger and infrastructure industry as well as broader alcohol awareness programmes.**

**Further details from Roger Singer on 0118 972 3688, or e-mail:**

**roger@drinkdrive.co.uk**

**80 Peppard Rd, Sonning Common, Reading, RG4 9RP. web:**

**www.drinkdrive.org.uk ■**

# Waiving the rules

Life is to be made easier for alcohol advertisers, if the Independent Television Commission has its way.

According to the Institute of Alcohol Studies, proposed changes to the Codes of Advertising Standards and Practice will remove restrictions which have sought to prevent various exaggerated claims being made. Out goes the rule which says that it must not be “implied that the successful outcome of a social occasion is dependent on the consumption of alcohol”.

In response to this the IAS says that in view of the “frequency with which advertisements now imply that alcohol consumption will transform social occasions from being stuffy and boring to being wild and exiting, there is a better case for giving this rule added prominence rather than dropping it”.

Another rule which is regarded as redundant is that which says:

“Alcoholic drinks must not be seen to be consumed in a working environment unless it is clearly established that the working day has ended.”

The IAS says that, “prompted by concerns over productivity as well as a number of disastrous accidents,” the trend of recent years has been to discourage drinking during working hours and to remove alcohol from work environments, in a substantial number of which it is an offence to consume or to be under the influence of alcohol during working hours. It is claimed that dropping this rule would clearly be a retrograde step

for which it is difficult to see any justification at all.

Also heading for the scrap heap is the prohibition on humour, acceptable in a general sense, being used “so as to circumvent the intention of these rules”. It could be argued that this rule should be dropped on grounds of superfluity – the rules must be complied with and it is therefore otiose to state that they should not be circumvented by the use of humour or any other device. However, the IAS says that, in this case, “why was it thought necessary to introduce this rule in the first place? Our concern is that its removal will facilitate non-compliance with the other rules by giving greater scope to the cynical ‘no one could possibly think that was meant seriously’ defence.”

As no other explanation is given, the IAS argues that it is a reasonable inference that the alcohol and advertising industries now wish the freedom to imply that the successful outcomes of social occasions are dependent on the consumption of alcohol; that drinking is appropriate during the working day, and that the industries should not be limited in their use of humour as a way of circumventing the other rules. “If this is the thinking behind the changes, it is in our view entirely self-serving and against the public interest,” said an IAS spokesman.

In its response to the proposals the IAS highlights the dangers the original rules were

designed to help minimise:

“Alcohol abuse is a major and still growing problem in all the countries of the UK. There are particular concerns about the degree to which youth culture is awash with alcohol, the growing problem of youth binge drinking and the ways in which alcohol is marketed to the young.”

As part of the exercise in responding to the intention to scrap these rules, the IAS decided to test the reactions of a class of Year 13s at a local comprehensive school. Virtually all the class saw the proposed changes as a way of weakening the code which, it was universally agreed, is not complied with in any case.

Numerous current advertisements were identified spontaneously which, in the view of the young people, do associate alcohol with social and sexual success, attractiveness and masculinity or which have a particular appeal to children. Advertisements for Baileys, Boddingtons, and pre-mixed spirits drinks were immediately identified as breaching the existing code.

“We make no claims for the scientific standing of this exercise,” says the IAS, “but it is nevertheless of some interest. There is no reason to think that the reactions of this class were in any way unusual.”

The Independent Television Commission proposals to relax the rules on alcohol advertising come at a time when Scotland has just published a national strategy against alcohol problems, prompted by those very concerns highlighted by the students’

comments, and a similar strategy is being prepared for England and Wales. The Scottish Plan for Action on Alcohol Problems says:

“Alcohol advertising was...raised frequently in the public consultation, with many people identifying effects of

advertising on drinking cultures and pointing to perceived gaps in controls. Limits on advertising were suggested through, for example, the use of an independent regulator; the replacement of voluntary controls with statutory measures;

a watershed for alcohol advertising; a ban or more controls on advertising/sponsorship in sport.”

The ITC should perhaps take a wider view and consider the public good rather than the convenience of advertisers. ■

## Don't blame genes for alcoholism, says top brain scientist

**A**lcohol dependence is not caused by a special gene found in a minority of problem drinkers.

This was one of the messages of Baroness Susan Greenfield, the UK's best known neuroscientist addressing an audience at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in central London. There was some irony in Baroness Greenfield's dismissal of the idea of a gene for alcoholism, as she was lecturing to an invited audience on behalf of the alcohol industry's Portman Group. Traditionally, the industry has been rather attracted to the idea that alcohol dependence 'comes in people' – in genes – rather than in bottles.

Baroness Greenfield, while accepting that there may be a genetic predisposition to alcoholism, explained that such a simplistic view must be mistaken.

“Alcoholism can't be locked into the structure of DNA any more than good housekeeping or being witty can.” she said. “Genes are as important to brain function as sparking plugs are to car engines... (but) a sparking plug does not have 'movement' trapped inside it. Its potential is only realised when it is placed in

an engine, the engine into a car and the car has a driver.”

Similarly, Baroness Greenfield continued, with genes. They may be necessary for some behaviour to occur but they are not sufficient. This, she said, could hardly be otherwise given that the human body contains only 30,000 genes whereas there are 1,000,000,000,000,000 brain connections. Genes merely make proteins. The expression of a protein, even in the correct micro-environment has in addition to be nested in the hierarchy of integrated brain circuits and overlapping brain regions and placed within a whole body in order for the effects, the final behaviour, to appear. Only if a gene is defective does an impairment such as predisposition to alcoholism become apparent.

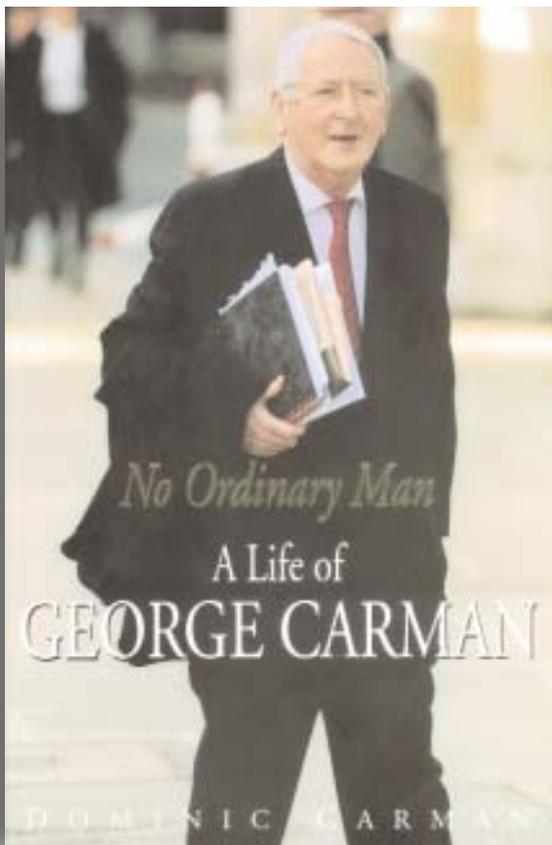
Baroness Greenfield also took the opportunity to attack currently fashionable arguments for the legalisation of cannabis. She rejected in particular the idea that cannabis and alcohol are equivalent in their adverse

effects. In the first place, she explained, cannabis and alcohol act on the brain in a fundamentally different way. Although alcohol enters the brain easily, it requires at least 7,000mg (slightly less than one standard unit) to have a perceived effect on consciousness. In contrast, cannabis has a harder time gaining access to brain cells, yet can have an effect as low as 0.3mgs. Moreover, while one unit of alcohol can be cleared from the body in an hour, THC, the active ingredient of cannabis, can remain in the body for 120 hours.

The more concentrated effects of cannabis on the brain help to explain why even low, 'social' levels of consumption can have a range of adverse effects that low consumption of alcohol does not. Cannabis, unlike alcohol enhances the risk of psychotic episodes and schizophrenic side-effects, even at low levels of consumption and in individuals who have never exhibited such symptoms before. Also, with cannabis but not with alcohol, even when the drug is no longer used long-term effects on cognition and attention can persist. The risk of dependence is also greater with cannabis. Ten percent of cannabis users who want to stop have problems doing so, and there are withdrawal effects after only three days of very moderate use of cannabis. ■

# The Law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent

Andrew Varley reviews  
*No Ordinary Man,  
 A Life of George Carman*  
 by Dominic Carman,  
 Hodder and Stoughton.



Like F.E. Smith's judge, after reading Dominic Carman's biography of his father, the famous lawyer, George, we are better informed but none the wiser. The title of the book, *No Ordinary Man*, tells us what the

author hoped to establish. The implication is that George Carman, QC, was utterly extraordinary, but the picture we are left with is of a sad, inadequate, if exceptionally clever man, who furnished his house with books by the yard, who judged colleagues by their income and class of degree, who often preferred rhetoric to forensic diligence in a way which would have made Cicero blush, who spent all of a holiday in Venice next to the Cipriani swimming pool, and who gambled and drank right up to the point of disaster. No doubt this combination is not ordinary in the sense of commonplace, but that is not what the author meant. What he really did mean by the phrase, *No Ordinary Man*, takes us into the difficult area of his relationship with his father. That was not ordinary. Not many sons pinion the arms of the suspected lover of their step-mother whilst their barrister father beats him up.

Similar, if not quite so bizarre, incidents occurred throughout their time together. Dominic, from a very early age,

was left in Carman's care. His mother was driven out of the home and bullied into surrendering custody (her lover was another alcoholic George, the footballer Best). The son's duties included putting Carman to bed when drunk, listening to his developing thoughts on the case in hand (one shared with whoever happened to be in the pub that evening), and dressing him when the shakes prevented his doing this himself. There are no doubt those who would argue that this book is an extension of the co-dependency which seems to have been a major feature of Dominic's life. Not long before he died, Carman laid the mantle of biographer on him. This last obligation blights the book because Dominic feels he has to be fair to his father, perhaps even rein in his feelings, or at least leave them unexamined. It would have been a better book had Carman not wanted his son to write it.

The basic attachment to professional standards, the common humanity, the dispassionate preference for truth over falsehood, which one would like to think co-exist in all lawyers, are elevated to exceptional virtues, but expressed in the hurried tones of afterthought. The descriptions of Carman's most famous – or perhaps, infamous – cases carry with them the obligation towards admiration under which the author labours. His ambivalent attitude to his father, perhaps a repressed desire to debunk, leave these forensic triumphs sounding more like the cheap successes of a fairground hustler. George Carman's career often reads like the legal equivalent of Vinnie

Jones' video on great footballing fouls. In this, Dominic Carman does poor service to the law in general.

The description we are given of George Carman's preparation for a case leaves the impression that oratorical tricks, bullying, and theatrical effects were more important than a detailed knowledge of the brief. His powerful intellect and his ability to spot the telling points allowed Carman to skip through the papers and his juniors described being led by him as "a white knuckle ride". If genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains, then perhaps a mere first-class mind allows short cuts. He spent a great deal of time preparing his speeches with a view, not so much as to their containing all the best arguments – though they usually did – as to their making a profound effect on the jury. He tried things out on his drinking companions in clubs and pubs. Their reactions often gave him an idea he subsequently used: their comments, after all, might well be a guide to the jury's attitude. On a slightly more exalted level, the most significant research he did for his cross-examination of Arthur Scargill, was a lunch in the Garrick with Robin Day, who had years of experience in trying to catch out the miners' leader during interviews.

Carman was a consummate bully. His wives discovered this and so did any woman who came up against him in the witness box, notably the actress Gillian Taylforth and the athlete Tessa Sanderson, both of whose evidence he had to discredit and whom he chose, with considerable relish, to humiliate. As Dominic Carman recounts

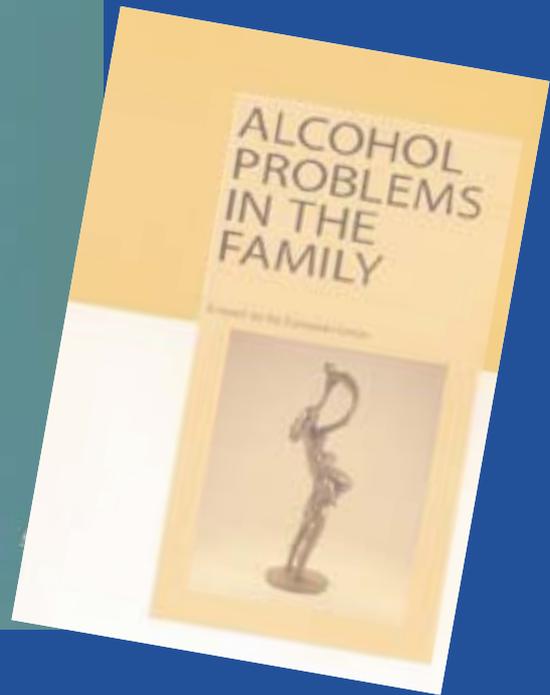
these events, it is impossible not to wish for a psychologist's insight into his father. It is all there: the suggestion of bisexuality, the impotence, the desire to be surrounded by attractive women (from rather brassy employees of Manchester escort agencies to sophisticated female silks), the extreme verbal cruelty, the physical violence. No one can fail to see the connexion between Carman's treatment of these courtroom victims and his offering a wife the choice of which kitchen knife was stuck in her first.

Dominic Carman makes an interesting comment about his father's demeanour in court. He compares it to the way in which he gambled, standing quite still, displaying no emotion. Carman liked to play blackjack, a game in which skill and judgement are reduced to the minimum: the thrill is entirely concentrated on the winning or losing. The implication is inescapable: the verdict of a jury is equated with the turn of a card. Like most gamblers, Carman lost vastly more than he won – in the casinos, at least. His wife's engagement ring goes missing, houses have to be sold, circumstances are driven to the very edge of catastrophe. The same can be said of his addiction to alcohol. From an early age George Carman drank to excess. His junior's anxiety at his seat-of-the-pants advocacy was compounded by the uncertainty as to how drunk he was. Like most drunks, Carman found a willing band of enablers – Dominic, obviously, each wife for a time, journalists, whom, unlike most lawyers, he assiduously cultivated, colleagues. There were plenty around to say that he performed

better drunk or, indeed, when he had just had a substantial loss at the tables. This is not an original point of view, if no less absurd for that. Alcoholics of Carman's variety do not lie in the gutter singing "Sweet Adeline" when it is necessary to perform. They have the control to manage circumstances so as to pass muster and sometimes to impress. There will always be someone to insist that Old George was better with a bottle of scotch inside him. How do they know?

In his preface, Dominic Carman makes self-deprecatory noises about not being a writer. In fact he writes very well, during the earlier chapters at least. Later he lapses into journalese – too many things are "legendary" or "famed", for example; the opening of Chapter 7 reads like a Private Eye parody – and references and quotations are shaky. Was there no-one at Hodder and Stoughton to point out that the remark that "the world consists of men, women, and Herveys" was made by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who died in 1762, and not by "a nineteenth century wit" about the eminently respectable 4th Marquess of Bristol? No, of course not.

The interest of the book lies, not so much in the achievements of George Carman, real as they were, but in the implied horrors of the relationship between a self-obsessed alcoholic and his dutiful son. There has been a deal of comment on the appropriateness of Mr Carman's writing frankly about his father's darker side. I suspect he has shown exceptional restraint. ■



## Further publications available from the Institute of Alcohol Studies

### Counterbalancing the Drinks Industry

Counterbalancing the Drinks Industry: A Report to the European Union on Alcohol Policy

A response to a report published by the European drinks industry and a defence of the WHO Alcohol Action Plan for Europe.

### Alcohol Policy and The Public Good

Alcohol Policy and the Public Good: A Guide for Action

An easy-to-read summary of the book written by an international team of researchers to present the scientific evidence underpinning the WHO Alcohol Action Plan for Europe

### Medical Education

Medical Education in Alcohol and Alcohol Problems: A European Perspective

A review of educational programmes on alcohol and alcohol problems in European medical schools, identifying gaps in provision and proposing guidelines for a minimal educational level within the normal curriculum of under- and post-graduate medical students.

### Alcohol Problems in the Family

Alcohol Problems in the Family: A Report to the European Union

A report produced with the financial support of the European Commission describing the nature and extent of family alcohol problems in the Member Countries, giving examples of good practice in policy and service provision, and making recommendations to the European Union and Member Governments.



### Marketing Alcohol to Young People

Children are growing up in an environment where they are bombarded with positive images of alcohol. The youth sector is a key target of the marketing practices of the alcohol industry. The booklet depicts the marketing strategies of the industry and shows how advertising codes of practice are being breached.

