

QAADRANT

Spring 2018

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



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£2 or not £2... that is the question

Gambling has been a particularly ‘live’ issue for QAAD over the past three months. Friends will be aware that the government’s consultation on proposals for changes to gaming machines and social responsibility measures closed on 23rd January. At time of writing, no announcement has been made regarding the reduction of the maximum stake for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs). We remain hopeful that it will be set at £2.

In our response, QAAD also confirmed our support for retaining the current level of stakes and prizes and the number permitted per premises for other gaming machines; called for greater transparency in sharing industry data; and recommended that preventative and harm reduction measures need to be balanced. We supported the view that gambling should be treated as a public health issue, as it is in other countries, with closer links developed between gambling and health policy and practice.

Prior to the deadline, our Director attended several meetings and events arranged to discuss the proposals with politicians, civil servants and other interested parties. The first of these was at the Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) with its Gambling Policy Advisor. Although members of the ecumenical group raised concerns, which were acknowledged, it was stressed that responses

to the consultation would need to provide hard evidence in support of the maximum reduction to £2.

In January, GambleAware organised an informal ‘policy fair’ at the House of Commons for MPs and peers to meet and discuss the consultation with selected charities and organisations concerned about problem gambling. Over 30 politicians and peers attended and were interested not only in issues related to gaming machines but also wider issues, including the impact of advertising and promotions on children and young people.

Tracey Crouch, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society invited faith groups to a ministerial round table meeting in mid-January. This included a specific discussion about FOBTs, but was broadened to cover a wider range of related issues. It was apparent that the government’s focus following the consultation will be on online gambling and the risks linked to children and young people’s exposure to gambling advertising and promotions, particularly during live sport coverage.

Letters and articles for QAADRANT are always very welcome and should be sent to Alison Mather, QAAD, PO Box 3344, Bristol BS6 9NT t: 0117 924 6981 e: alison@qaad.org



‘God as we understand God’: The 12 Steps and Quaker worship

We are grateful to Kelly Palmer, who has written the following piece about the similarities and complementary experiences she has found in attending both Quaker Meetings for Worship and 12-Step meetings.

As a recovering addict for whom 12-Step groups were my main route out of addiction, my local Quaker Meeting felt like both a breath of fresh air and a way to put flesh on the Eleventh Step: *‘Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for His will for us and the power to carry that out’*. There is the explicit assumption that God is that experience of the sacred which cannot be defined and which can only begin to be known through personal experience. This seems to me to chime perfectly with the Quaker witness of the Inner Light, *‘that of God in everyone’*, and a refreshing lack of dogma or creed.

There has been an affinity between the Religious Society of Friends and 12-Step groups in the UK since the beginning, which may be why I felt immediately at home when I attended my first Quaker Meeting in Coventry. It is perhaps not surprising that, according to the Alcoholics Anonymous website, there are 156 AA meetings across the country currently being held at Quaker Meeting Houses. Back in the 1950s, British Friends were instrumental in helping AA get established in the UK, assisting with transport and the first telephone helpline.

The 12-Steps are a primarily spiritual approach to recovering from addiction, although certain Steps, such as Step 10 (*‘Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.’*), also foreshadow popular cognitive-behavioural techniques. Though they begin with the practical steps of acknowledging the problem and the need for abstinence, the ultimate aim of the Steps is to facilitate a spiritual awakening that transforms one’s life to the point that addiction may be transcended.

AA’s 12-Step programme was born after its founder, Bill W, had an intensely life-altering spiritual experience that removed his active alcoholism. A friend gave him a copy of William James’s *‘The Varieties of Religious Experience’* to help him understand what had happened to him. James’s book details the wide variety of such experiences. One example is that of George Fox and, whilst in some ways both men and their experiences could not be more different, both experienced a personal encounter with God that led to the formation of fellowships that made such encounters accessible to others, whatever their background.

I personally find some beautiful similarities between my experience of Quaker Meetings and my participation in 12-Step groups. Sitting in the gathered silence of a Quaker Meeting, I am often first reminded of my own humanity, just as the Steps first served to guide me towards a sense of true humility and interdependence. As the silence deepens, and I



find myself sitting in a sense of Presence, I am experiencing conscious contact with a God of my understanding, the only spiritual practice the Steps outline.

Yet it is not just the more overtly spiritual Steps that I find complementary with Quaker Faith and Practice. Steps 4 - 10 call for a programme of personal accountability, truth-telling and the attempt to apply spiritual principles, such as compassion and integrity, in a practical way to one's daily life; Step 12 is primarily centred around service to others. There are obvious parallels with Quaker testimonies of peace, truth and sustainability. For me, one gives me a framework to live out the other. The Steps are first and foremost a programme of practical action that seeks to answer the perennial question: *'How then should we live?'*

12-Step groups are governed by the 12 Traditions. These are guidelines (although they are also described as non-negotiable!) for the interactions between group members and with other 12-Step groups. Decisions are made democratically, yet are not a secular affair: Tradition 2 speaks of *'inviting a loving God to express Him/Herself in our group conscience'*. Although I have yet to experience a Quaker Yearly Meeting, the processes seem incredibly similar, and I believe Narcotics Anonymous meetings could well benefit from a Quaker silence.

Both fellowships are, at their heart, consistently and resolutely based on principles of love and equality, and it is these qualities that make me an enthusiastic attender of both.

'Signposts for the Soul – pathways through addictions': Woodbrooke conference 13th – 15th July 2018

Being lost in addiction can be one of the darkest nights of the soul, but we know that however dark, the Light can shine and help to illuminate pathways through. There are many paths, and not all are direct or easy to tread. To find a way, it can help to meet others who share and understand our journey and, together, to reflect on experiences, strengths, hopes and fears. A phrase, an idea, an insight – each can plant a seed of greater understanding and leave us to face the future with renewed energy.

Join us to explore and share what has helped you, and what you have to give that may in turn help others. All Friends and attenders are welcome, whether you have direct experience of addiction or none.

This year's conference will have a different tempo and focus, giving more time and space to participate and engage with each other. There will be a choice of workshops and activities on various kinds of action and spirituality, as well as informal opportunities for sharing and support.

We are grateful that the event has been accepted by Quaker Life as a nominating event, which means that Area Meetings should cover the cost of attendance. We hope that Area Meetings will consider nominating a representative. If you would like further details of the conference, please contact our Director, Alison Mather



The Uruguay Experiment

Decriminalisation of cannabis remains a controversial issue, both nationally and amongst Friends. QAAD trustee, Vernon Frost, reflects here on an ongoing experiment in South America, concluding that the outcome is by no means certain.

Those who wish to legalise and regulate cannabis in the UK are interested in what can be learned from the experience in Uruguay, which claims to be the first country in the world to try to legalise cannabis.

Cannabis had been illegal since the International Opium Convention (1925), which dealt with Indian hemp (hashish). Moving quickly through the years to 1970, Uruguay (current population 3.46m) legalised cannabis and a very odd legislative position it was: it was illegal to buy or sell cannabis, to grow or possess it. The International Narcotics Control Board must have thought it meant something, for it said that the new law violated the Single Convention of Narcotic Drugs, adopted in 1961 by nearly 200 countries, including Uruguay.

In practice, the 1970 law did not criminalise personal cannabis consumption. Traditionally there were always some feelings of sympathy for drug users, for example clean needles were introduced in 2004 to reduce HIV and Aids. However, in 2010 Uruguay elected President Mujica, who personally advocated a change in the law designed to nationalise the cannabis trade. This has been controversial: about two thirds of the population have opposed

legalisation in the polls. There are about 160 -200,000 cannabis users in Uruguay, and the President hoped nationalisation would undermine the black market, estimated at US\$50m. He argued that as the trade already existed it should be regulated, and that by transferring the trade to state licensed bodies he hoped ‘*to prevent the traffickers from buying cars, guns, and telephonic equipment*’. Cutting off their financial base, he believed, would also reduce theft and drug related violence.

President Mujica has said that his purpose was that Uruguay should not become like Mexico, where criminal drug gangs have killed tens of thousands of people. The health case, with which UK governments have been concerned, does not seem to have entered into it. When health has been raised, it has been dismissed with a reference to legal tobacco and alcohol being far more harmful.

The majority of the Uruguayan population who opposed legalisation had support from Senator Alfredo Scolari, who was concerned that it would lead young people to think there was no risk attached to drug use. Senator Scolari said that he was not happy that Uruguayans were being used as drug experiments for the rest of the world. Other Senators thought the new regulations were too restrictive. Alicia Castilla, an Argentinean marijuana rights activist living in Uruguay who was jailed for three months for growing cannabis at home, argued it was not up to the government to say how much cannabis a citizen might be permitted to consume.



President Mujica was replaced in 2015 by President Vazquez, who was not sympathetic to the new law. Vazquez said he would support the new measures only if they could be shown to be working, and he would apply the law to the letter. The new law was vague on many points, and a series of consultations developed many specific requirements for it to be administered. Important aspects of Mujica's legislation were that the price should be US\$1 per gram; that the people should be able to grow their own for personal use, within limits; that growers and pharmacists should be registered; and that VAT would not be charged. Excise duties were also proposed, with the proceeds going towards the costs of rehabilitation for all drugs.

The public were especially suspicious and slow to register, for they feared the state's use of the information. There were also fears for pharmacists' premises when criminals knew where stocks were being held. However, the attraction of eliminating the cannabis black market by price probably prevailed.

Permission to grow was put out to tender and five of 22 applicants were selected to supply about 20 tons of legal cannabis annually. Users can buy up to 40 grams per month from pharmacists, enough for 20 cannabis cigarettes. As an alternative, home users are allowed to grow up to six plants themselves or join growers' clubs, but users must be over the age of 18. The drug is sold in licensed shops at US\$1.30 per gram, and registered users are given cards with bar codes allowing them to buy up to this limit. Only Uruguayans are eligible for registration

in order to frustrate drug tourists from Brazil and Paraguay. If customers sell cigarettes, or smoke more than permitted, they are sent to a rehabilitation centre arranged by the Institute of Regulation and Control of Cannabis (IRCC).

Extensive consultations also provided many ideas which were not taken up. For example, it was proposed that cannabis plants (which vary considerably in their THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) and CPD (Cannabidiol) content), should be placed in six categories. There has also been discussion about the state producing genetically engineered cannabis plants and seeds so that 'official' cannabis can be distinguished from trafficked plants. The suggestion that leaves should be activated with radioactive glue has not found favour. The last pharmacist (of several thousands) registered in early 2017 and the revised laws became effective in July. Breaches of the law will be reported to the IRCC and it is anticipated that most wrongdoers will be sent for compulsory rehabilitation.

In September 2017, The Times reported that American banks are refusing to deal with Uruguayan banks who deposit drug-related takings on the grounds of money laundering. It seems that this might lead to a cash-only economy and, ultimately, Uruguayan overseas trade could be restricted.

All this is most absorbing. Will the low price cause hordes of stupefied cannabis users to stagger around Montevideo? Will Uruguay be blessed by a reduction in crime, violence, gang warfare - and corruption of officials and police? We must wait and see.



Minimum Unit Price for alcohol - Wales

In October, the Welsh Assembly tabled its Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) Bill, five years after it first considered its introduction. Wales Public Health Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Alcohol-related harm is a significant public health problem in Wales. The 463 alcohol-attributable deaths in 2015 were all avoidable, and each of these deaths would have had a devastating effect on the person’s family and friends.”

In December 2017, QAAD responded to the Welsh Assembly’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s call for evidence. The paper expressed strong support for a 50p MUP, stressing the benefits of linking price to the alcohol (ethanol) content of all types of drink, wherever they are sold. It also highlighted the importance of protecting children and young people and the potential harms associated with even moderate consumption.

The paper challenged frequently raised objections to MUP: the negative impact on responsible drinkers and those on low incomes; that problem drinkers would be unlikely to change their behaviour; that recent falls in consumption suggested an MUP is unnecessary; and that action tackling under-age sales is sufficient to protect young people.

The conclusion suggested that the impact of introducing MUP cannot be guaranteed, but can be anticipated on the basis of extensive research, and that a robust evaluation should be carried out. QAAD’s response emphasised the importance of increased investment in prevention and treatment and recommended

other measures e.g. banning promotions/ discounting which, if combined with MUP, could make a significant and positive difference for individuals, families and communities.

QAAD’s response was amongst those highlighted during a meeting of the Committee in January by Angela Burns (Assembly Member), who argued that it was essential to increase support for treatment services given that demand is likely to increase following MUP introduction:

‘Every single [response] that I’ve read... says that this will not work without having adequate support. I think it is vital...it’s about mental health support, it’s about the addiction behaviour. The health boards have all said that we need to have more support services in place: the primary care people...the doctors, the psychologists. And then we had Alcohol Focus Scotland, we had Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs - they talk about extra support services...’

Ministers in Wales have expressed the hope that MUP will become law by July 2019 and talks have been held already with local government about funding towards its initial introduction.

Copies of all QAAD responses to consultations can be found on the website. If you would prefer a printed copy, please contact Alison.



Have you looked at the QAAD website recently?

www.qaad.org

Please visit it for information about QAAD, news of events for Friends, and details of our public issues work.

We would like to hear from you

If you would like to respond to something you have read in this issue, or would like to contribute an article of your own - or a letter - about a personal experience, something you have read which has given you food for thought, or perhaps a local initiative tackling addiction which has caught your attention, QAAD would be pleased to hear from you. We only use writers' names with their permission. Please contact Alison: alison@qaad.org t: 0117 924 6981 PO Box 3344, Bristol BS6 9NT

Addiction is a massive problem, but QAAD makes a difference. QAAD continues to make contributions in the policy field, offers mutual support and advocacy, provides opportunities for networking, represents Friends' concerns, and works with other faith-based groups, for example on gambling.

Financial support from individuals, Meetings, and Trusts enables us to continue with our work.

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