

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



The stronger the drink, the higher the rate

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JOIN US! QAADNET MEETING:

Saturday 4th December 10.30am – 12.30pm

We would like to invite you to join us for our next online QAADNET meeting on 4th December.



We are very pleased that Dr Andrew Williams (Senior Lecturer in Human Geography, Cardiff University) will be giving the introductory talk, based on his research into faith-based alcohol treatment. This was the subject of Andrew Misell's article 'What's faith got to do with it', in QAADRANT Winter 2019.

There will be time for us to discuss the issues this raises as well as our current concerns and ideas. QAADNET meetings are free to attend and open to those with direct experience and Friends who wish to deepen their understanding of addiction.

We plan to limit the meeting to twenty Friends, so that everyone can participate. There are still places available, so please contact our Director, Alison, if you would like to attend by *Wednesday 1st December*.

First, lay down your head
then one by one
let go of all distractions
Embrace the light and let it guide you
beyond the winds of desire.
There you will find a spring and
nourished by its sweet waters
like a tree you will bear fruit forever.

Rumi, from *'The Hidden Music'*

Talking things through

Although we do not offer a counselling service, please call or email our Director, Alison Mather, if it would help to talk things through with someone who understands and can provide details of specialist sources of support. All contact is held in strict confidence.



Alcohol duty: a step in the right direction

In October, the Chancellor announced ‘*the biggest overhaul of alcohol duty for 140 years*’ in his budget speech. Based on the principle ‘*the stronger the drink, the higher the rate*’, this included removing the anomaly of beer and spirits being taxed by liquid volume rather than ABV¹ and:

- the streamlining of the UK’s complex main duty rates from 15 to six
- a small rise in duty for higher strength drinks: stronger red wines, ‘white ciders’ and fortified wines
- a duty reduction for rosé wine, fruit ciders, liqueurs, and lower strength beers and wines
- a reduction in sparkling wine duty (28%) to that of still wine of equivalent strength
- duty on spirits remains at its current rate

Rishi Sunak also announced ‘draft relief’, a 5% duty cut for beers and ciders served by pump, meaning that a pint of draft beer could fall by 3p, and ‘small producer relief’ for small cider makers and producers of drinks with less than 8.5% ABV. Both are designed to support community pubs and small producers which were hit particularly hard during lockdown. Nevertheless, some pub chains have warned that beer prices could rise by as much as 30p due to the combination of increases in employers’ National Insurance contributions and the National Living Wage, higher utility and food costs.

Changes to duty will come into force in February 2023, whilst the planned immediate rise for spirits, wine, cider and beer was cancelled – equivalent to a £3bn tax cut.

Linking duty to ABV is certainly a positive step and, overall, response to the announcements has been supportive. The chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA),

Sir Ian Gilmour, welcomed the reforms whilst sounding a note of caution:

‘For years, alcohol duty has been cut or frozen in the Budget. This has cost the Treasury £1.8 billion annually – money that is desperately needed elsewhere to aid the COVID-19 recovery. Revenue generated from alcohol tax doesn’t even begin to cover the costs to society of alcohol harm.’

In an article earlier this year², the AHA recommended reinstating the alcohol duty escalator (2% above inflation) which was scrapped in 2013, despite proving a highly effective public health measure when applied to tobacco products.

Until full details of the changes are available, it is difficult to compare the relative impact of these changes with a potential UK-wide Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP). In Scotland and Wales, they will work in tandem with MUP. Ultimately, duty reforms remain a decision for the Treasury and therefore subject to future changes, unlike MUP which requires primary legislation. Meanwhile, QAAD understands that campaigners are planning to call for Scotland’s MUP to increase from 50p to 65p, and the Republic of Ireland will introduce MUP in January.

¹ Alcohol by volume (ABV) is the unit to measure how much pure ethanol (alcohol) is in 100 units of the liquid.

² <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/03/01/uk-budget-why-is-public-health-being-left-solely-in-the-hands-of-our-chancellor/>



NEWS: DRUGS

Scotland's Lord Advocate announcement on Class A possession

In September, Scotland's Lord Advocate, Dorothy Bain QC announced a significant change to Scotland's drugs policy in response to the continued crisis of drug-related deaths in the country. It extends existing police discretion in handing out warnings to those caught in possession of Class B and C drugs to Class A drugs including heroin, cocaine, MDMA (Ecstasy) and LSD. She said that the changes 'do not represent decriminalisation of an offence' and 'would not dilute criminal interventions against drug dealers'. Recorded warnings are kept on the criminal history system for two years and can be taken into account if the individual comes to the police's attention again. It will mean that those found in possession could also be referred to treatment and support.

David Liddell, Chief Executive of Scottish Drugs Forum welcomed the announcement, saying: *'The extension of diversion from prosecution... takes us closer to having a criminal justice system that can deal more effectively with supporting people away from criminal activity'*.

The Chief Executive of Faces and Voices of Recovery Scotland, Annemarie Ward, also welcomed the changes, whilst sounding a note of caution: *'We have to be very careful not to view this as a silver bullet. This move will help but ultimately, it*

will not help people to get well on its own. It will not save lives on its own. It has to be accompanied by increasing access to treatment and rehabilitation or nothing will change.'

Political response has been mixed, with support from the Scottish Greens and strong criticism from the Scottish Conservatives who described it as *'de-facto decriminalisation by the back door'*.

Home Secretary considers criminalising Nitrous Oxide ('laughing gas')

In September, Priti Patel asked the independent Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to review harms related to recreational use of nitrous oxide. She has said that she is prepared to take 'tough action', including possible criminalising possession (supply as a psychoactive drug is already illegal). The 2018/2019 Crime Survey for England and Wales confirmed that around 500,000 16-24 year olds reported using the drug in the past year – second only to cannabis. The Home Office referred to the health risks e.g. Vitamin B12 deficiency and anaemia, and anti-social behaviour and littering affecting many communities.

Drug charities and campaigners have responded critically, with many stressing the relatively low risks associated with the drug. Release was one of several expressing concerns about the impact young people's lives, saying that criminalisation 'will affect their employment and educational opportunities, something that seriously outweighs the harms of nitrous oxide.

Drink, Drugs and Gambling – a retired footballer reveals how addiction changed his life

In a recent BBC documentary, 'Gambling, Football and Me', former Arsenal and England player, Paul Merson, spoke candidly about his decades of gambling, alcohol and cocaine addictions. He is clear that gambling was *'by far the most destructive'* of these and points out that, unlike substance use, *'it's in there, constantly waiting, all the time'*. Merson estimates that he lost £7m over 35 years and relapsed during the first lockdown. He found himself rapidly sucked back in to chasing losses, using online apps to

bet on multiple sporting events and losing all the money the family was saving towards a deposit for a house.

Particularly fascinating is Merson's visit to Imperial College where researchers use a CAT scan to show him how his brain responds differently to images of gambling and to food, nature and family. The results illustrate clearly how the reward centres in a gambler's brain are rewired to respond to gambling imagery. Lead researcher Dr David Erritzoe suggests that the



research’s early findings may provide further evidence that addiction is a brain disease.

Later, Merson meets Matt Zarb-Cousin, a leading campaigner for gambling reform, who demonstrates how the industry uses customer data to deliberately target addicts with personalised advertising. Reflecting on these meetings afterwards, he wonders how the industry can get away with this and suggests that it is *‘bordering on evil’*.

Perhaps the most powerful part of the programme is a meeting with Gambling with Lives, the charity which campaigns to raise awareness about gambling-related suicide when families speak about the impact of losing their loved ones. One, Annie, gives a deeply moving account of her husband’s gambling trajectory and recent suicide – *‘he felt he had let us all down and we would be better off without him’* After he died, she had found emails from betting companies saying he had not paid enough into his account that month and so would not get his customer rewards. The charity’s co-founder, Charles Ritchie, says

‘We challenge the responsible gambling model which puts all the blame on an individual. It’s what abusers do the world over - they blame the victim... It’s the products, the industry – the lie that has been sold is that it is you, you are the faulty bit in this. It’s a model which operates on addiction.’

Merson concludes that there is no easy cure for gambling addiction and that the biggest hope is prevention.

Football, gambling and me is available on BBC iPlayer until late next year: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0010143

Merson gave an interview to the Times to coincide with the programme: www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paul-merson-how-drink-drugs-and-gambling-made-me-suicidal-96hj60vzp His book, *Hooked*, was published in September. Former England goalkeeper Peter Shilton has also published a book, co-authored with his wife Steph: *Saved: Overcoming a 45-year Gambling Addiction*.

NEWS: GAMBLING

Gambling Act review - update

The consultation on Act’s review suggested that a White Paper would be launched in late 2021. This is now likely to be in early 2022 at the earliest.

New Minister appointed

In the September reshuffle, Chris Philp (MP Croydon South) was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Tech and the Digital Economy at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). He assumes responsibility for gambling and lotteries, digital and tech policy, and online safety.

National Lottery

- In April, Camelot increased the age purchasers of any National Lottery products must be in-store, online and on the app to 18 years, six months ahead of its legal requirement.
- The Gambling Related Harm All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) has called for

ministerial action against Camelot in the light of the significant growth in ‘instant win’ games over the past year, mostly bought online. The APPG argues that increased use of app-based products could increase risks of problem gambling and pointed out that they contribute just 9% to ‘good causes’ (compared with 31% of sales of draw-based products). In 2020/21, Camelot donated just £425,000 to GambleAware, the charity which distributes voluntary industry contributions towards education, treatment and research.

- The Gambling Commission extended Camelot’s 10-year licence to run the National Lottery by four years in 2012 and twice more recently, due to the pandemic and in response to the APPG’s concerns. It has received four bids in the competition for the new licence, which will begin in 2023.

Radio 4’s programme *The Bottom Line* (November 4th) discussed the National Lottery and society (charity) lotteries: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00114nm>



Alcohol Change UK Conference 2021

In September, Alcohol Change UK (ACUK) held its annual conference - *Rebuild and Recover: reducing alcohol harm and remaking connections in the post-pandemic world*. This aimed to reflect on the past year to illustrate the challenges of the lockdown on those affected. It highlighted the often extraordinary ways in which services and individuals swiftly adapted to refocus their work and explored new approaches to reaching out to individuals and families. Speakers described their projects and ideas with great enthusiasm and insight, some of which are summarised here:

Stay home, stay safe? Supporting the families of drinkers through lockdown and beyond

Justina Murray, Chief Executive, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD)

Justina began by reflecting on the findings from a 2020 SFAD report, *Constantly Just Holding It Up and Together*¹, which featured the experiences of families coping with a close other's addiction. Pre-COVID families were already struggling, but lockdown exacerbated these difficulties when more people relapsed after periods of recovery and families became more aware of the extent of problems as drinking shifted indoors. Some talked about the loss of respite time, such as outside work or social activities, which had previously helped them to cope. SFAD noticed an increase in younger people leaving home to escape stress and risks. Its helpline saw a 66% increase in calls and Justina wondered why statutory services have not set up similar freephone support. There was also a significant increase in people calling to discuss their own alcohol use, many worried about the risks of withdrawal. Justine suggested that non-voice contact had helped people to contact SFAD confidentially despite the constant presence of family members.

Moving On in my Recovery (MOIMR)

Dr Lee Hogan: Senior Lecturer, Clinical Psychology, Bangor University

www.thebangoraye.com/praise-health-boards-life-changing-drug-alcohol-recovery-programme

MOIMR is an innovative recovery programme in North Wales for people in early recovery when they are most vulnerable to relapse. With Welsh government funding, it was co-designed and is co-facilitated by people in recovery themselves, some of whom took part in the presentation. Groups meet for 12 weekly sessions and participants are encouraged to 'lean in' to anxiety and difficulties to develop 'psychological flexibility' and resilience. MOIMR is based on the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy model, which combines mindfulness skills with the practice of self-acceptance. A recent evaluation² showed that over two thirds of participants had remained abstinent for three months after completing the programme. During lockdown, they built an outdoor shelter so that they could continue to meet in person and meetings were also held online. This blended approach will continue, and MOIMR also plans to record some sessions for a wider audience.

Everyone In! What we can learn about alcohol harm reduction from the hotel-based emergency housing programme?

Dr Emmert Roberts: Clinical Lead, Homeless Hotel Drug and Alcohol Support Service, London

<https://nhssmpa.org/blog/hdas-london-during-covid-19>

Around 5,000 homeless people were accommodated in London's hotels during lockdown. Emmert described the lessons learned might inform future improvements for supporting



this highly vulnerable group. Providing harm reduction materials e.g. clean needles, e-cigarettes and alcohol doses (to prevent unplanned withdrawals) was critical in reducing substance related risks. Dedicated phone/email advice and support from psychologists; specialist training for homeless services; and securing the Greater London Authority's agreement to allow smoking and drinking inside hotels also made a positive difference. The myth that treatment is only available for those with ID, registered with a GP or with secure immigration status can be a powerful barrier to seeking support. Practitioners reassured residents and talked about wider issues such as benefits and housing during hotel visits. Although experiences were mixed, many people registered with GPs and some found accommodation, increased family contact and/or entered treatment.

Sober Millennials: changing how we think about not drinking

Millie Gooch, author of 'The Sober Girl Society Handbook' www.sobergirlsociety.com/about

Millie spoke about her personal drinking experiences, which began in earnest at university and became a serious problem during her early career as a journalist. Alcohol gave her confidence and helped her to bond with her 'ladette' friends who normalised getting drunk. As time went by, however, she noticed many friends reduced their drinking whilst she found she could not. She tried Dry January, assuming that sobriety could only be negative, and was surprised how much better she felt. She tried AA and Club Sober online but when she could not find anything which felt suitable for younger women, she set up 'The Sober Girl Society' in 2018. This offers tips, resources and events such as a Saturday morning 'Wake Up Club', and now has 153,000 Twitter followers. Millie argues that it is not necessary to develop a serious problem

before looking at our drinking habits. The Society welcomes anyone who wants to practice socialising without alcohol, including 'the sober curious'. She observed that some older contacts have being rather negative ('another snowflake'), but is determined 'to glamorise not drinking!'

Drinking undercover: facing up to alcohol issues in communities where drinking is taboo

Sohan Sahota, Managing Director of BAC-IN, Nottingham www.bac-in.org

Sohan is in recovery himself and used mainstream treatment services in the past but found that they did not meet his needs. He described the deeply rooted beliefs and taboos within Sikh and Muslim communities, leading to addiction remaining a largely hidden harm and presenting serious challenges for those who need help. Sohan and the other founders of BAC-IN set up a 'culturally responsive' self-help group in the 1990s, meeting at Nottingham Friends Meeting House. It is a peer-led charity which delivers recovery and rehabilitation services within Black, South Asian and Minoritised Communities. Sohan stressed the importance of BAME services being valued by the mainstream and for the two to work together. The role of faith is very significant and although individuals can be ostracised by their communities, some find the time and space offered by recovery leads them to explore other faiths.

1 www.sfad.org.uk/constantly-just-holding-it-up-and-together

2 www.alcoholchange.org.uk/publication/a-feasibility-study-of-moving-on-in-my-recovery



Contacting QAAD

If you would like to contact QAAD for any reason, please write to our Director, Alison Mather, by post: PO Box 34, Bristol BS6 5AS or email: alison@qaad.org You are also welcome to call her: 0117 9246981

We would like to hear from you

We are always very pleased to receive letters and longer articles from Friends about their experiences and reflections on substance use and gambling. QAADRANT is enriched by different voices and ideas. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please email or write to our Director **7th February**.

Thank you for your support

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have continued to receive from individuals, Meetings and Trusts during this difficult year. Donations are significant in two ways – they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. In order to continue our work, we need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited. Please send your donation to: **Ron Barden, Treasurer, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 6JQ**. Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate using a BACS transfer, our banks details are:

Account Name: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs

A/C No: 31452673 Sort code: 400327.

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