

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



STOP – WAIT – GO

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Alcohol: Minimum Unit Price in Scotland

The Scottish government held a public consultation in the autumn, inviting views on extending Minimum Unit Pricing for alcohol (MUP) beyond the initial five-year pilot which ends in April. It also proposed increasing the MUP rate from the current 50p. In response, QAAD supported continuing MUP and expressed a preference for an increase to 70p. This was based on research by The Sheffield Alcohol Research Group which projected 33% fewer alcohol-specific deaths over the next five years at 70p, compared with 22% at 65p. QAAD said that it would support an increase to 65p, but only if this was accompanied by an automatic mechanism to increase the rate to keep pace with inflation and affordability. In addition, we voiced our support for an Alcohol Harm Prevention Levy¹. This is based on a 'polluter pays' principle and would address concerns that additional revenue from MUP has increased retailers' profits.

Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison (SNP), announced in mid-February that MUP will continue beyond the end of April and rise to 65p from the end of September, subject to government approval. QAAD will report on the final outcome in the Summer issue. Separate primary legislation would be required to introduce an automatic uprating mechanism.

The Welsh government is due to assess the impact and consider the continuation of MUP in Wales in 2026. The current UK government maintains its position to leave alcohol unit pricing unchanged.

1. <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/news/support-for-a-public-health-levy-on-alcohol-sales/>

Gambling: New maximum stakes for online slot machines

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has announced the introduction of limits for online slot machine stakes for the first time, to take effect in September. This follows a consultation on proposals contained in the gambling White Paper which suggested limits of between £2 and £15 per spin. There will now be a £5 maximum stake for adults aged 25 and over, and £2 for those aged 18-25. The government expects that the change will cost the industry around £170m (1.5% of its annual £10.9bn income).

DCMS' press release stated: *'Easily accessible online slot games are one of the most addictive forms of gambling, and can be associated with large losses, long sessions, and binge play. Unlike land-based gaming machines, such as in casinos, they have no statutory stake limits. To counter the increased risk of significant harm and life-changing losses from online slot games, the Government will introduce a £5 stake limit for adults aged 25 and over'*.

Campaigners had hoped that limits would apply to all customers (as for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals since 2017). Charles Ritchie (Gambling with Lives) said: *'The £2 limit for under-25s is a step in the right direction, but £5 for over-25s is another missed opportunity to stop the harm to millions and the devastation caused by gambling suicides...the products are still highly addictive, so we also need much slower spin speeds, affordability checks, and proper public health information about the dangers.'*



SAVE THE DATE

QAAD 2024 Conference

4pm Friday 5th – 1pm Sunday 7th July

Launde Abbey, East Norton, Leicestershire LE7 9XB

The power of truth – breaking through stigma, letting in the Light



Dependent behaviours imprison people with their pain and despair through stigma, guilt and shame. Whether alcohol, other drugs or gambling, the effect on individuals and those close to them is the same. To the outside world, many people privately affected in this way can appear strong, productive, resilient. Behind closed doors, the prospect of breaking through the silence, even with friends and family, can feel insurmountable.

Our theme for this year's conference is the power of talking openly about our experiences. Trusting that if we can find the courage to speak honestly, we can help to overcome stigma, thereby helping others to do the same. It is also about the essential need to listen and respond without prejudice or judgement. To meet the darkness with the Light.

QAAD conferences provide a safe, confidential space to share our insights, inspiration and concerns. Over the course of the weekend, there

will be a choice of activities designed to develop our understanding and help us all to reflect on ways ahead. In particular, we will consider how, as Friends, we can respond with compassion – when and wherever we encounter these problems, including within our Meetings.

We hope you will join us, whatever your experience and interests. We are looking forward to seeing familiar faces once again, and to welcoming Friends who will be with us for the first time.

The cost of attendance is £270.00 which includes full board and accommodation.

The conference is a nominating event and Friends can contact their Area Meeting to request being funded as the Meeting's representative. If you would prefer to book independently, QAAD may partially fund your place, depending on circumstances, to ensure that every Friend who would like to attend can do so. Please contact Alison Mather who can advise you further.

A booking form can be found on the back page of this issue. The form is also available on our website: www.qaad.org/events

Please post or email the form to Alison Mather by **Friday 31st May**. We may be able to accept bookings after this date, depending on availability, and there will be a waiting list in case of cancellations.



STOP – WAIT – GO

the complexity of drug reform



STOP – Oregon: In 2021, Oregon was the first US state to decriminalise possession of small quantities of all drugs, following a public ballot when 58% of voters supported the changes. It was hoped that this would make it easier for drug dependent citizens to access treatment: people caught with small quantities are fined but this is waived if they contact a helpline for details of support and treatment.

However, an evaluation of these measures found a mixed picture. There was evidence that lives had been saved and fewer people were being jailed. However, the majority of drug users chose to pay a \$100 fine rather than enter treatment. There remain serious concerns about increased drug use and overdoses, and that insufficient funding has been made available to meet rising demand for treatment and support. It is reported that the relaxation of drug laws has attracted addicts from outside the state, and businesses are worried about a ‘significant rise in crime’ and street disorder. Last year, the city of Portland banned the public use of ‘hard’ drugs.

The result of a second public poll last year showed 56% of voters supported a repeal. Police chiefs, district attorneys and city officials have called for at least some of the measures to be reversed e.g. re-criminalising heroin and fentanyl, so that those arrested can be compelled to enter treatment. A recent national survey estimated that 19% of Oregonians (aged 12 and above) experienced ‘substance use disorder’ over the past year; only 17% of those needing treatment received it. Kimberly Sue (Assistant

Professor, Yale Medical School) observed: *‘So long as it’s easier to get fentanyl than it is to get treatment...we will continue to see a rise in overdose deaths.’* Those supporting decriminalisation argued that other factors, such as COVID, the exponential growth of fentanyl use, homelessness, and a lack of social services, were responsible for the increase in drug-related deaths.

In early March, the state Senate voted by 21-8 to re-criminalise small quantities of drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine, and to enable police to confiscate drugs and take action on their public use. The new law prioritises improving treatment options rather than custodial sentences however, and includes funding for mental health and substance abuse programs and policies making it easier for people to get access to withdrawal medication.

A new legislative committee, launched in February, will consider how to tackle the state’s growing addiction crisis, and it is anticipated that its work will take at least a year.

The reversal is likely to have implications for drug law reforms in other US states and, perhaps, internationally.



WAIT – Australia: Last August, Senator David Shoebridge introduced a bill proposing the legalisation of the recreational use, growth, sale and manufacture of cannabis. In its submission to the Senate inquiry on the bill, the Australia Medical Association (AMA) did not support these proposals, emphasising *‘the need to seriously consider the potential impacts of this bill on public health’*. It cited harm to mental health e.g. anxiety, memory loss



and increased incidence of schizophrenia, and to physical health e.g. cancers, cardiovascular damage, impaired reaction time and brain function. Professor Steve Robson (AMA President) said: *'Legalising cannabis for recreational purposes sends the wrong signal to the public, and especially young Australians, that cannabis use is not harmful'*. The AMA also suggested that Australia's current approach to cannabis regulation could be improved, and that the drug's use should be a public health rather than a criminal justice issue.

The views of other health experts differ widely. The Penington Institute, a public health organisation, strongly supported the bill:

'Cannabis prohibition doesn't work: it fails to control supply, leaves the market in the hands of criminals, and costs billions of dollars in enforcement, all while hindering a public health-led approach to managing the health harms that are associated with problematic cannabis use'. Dr Nicole Higgins (President of the Royal Australian College of GPs) said: *'There is strong evidence that recreational cannabis is harmful, particularly to susceptible groups such as people with mental health disorders, young people and the unborn child.'*

The Bill is currently awaiting its second reading and debate, to be held in early summer.



GO – Germany: In February, the long-delayed decision was made to go ahead with decriminalising recreational cannabis use, following strong opposition amongst lawmakers. After what was reported to be 'a stormy session' in the Bundestag, the vote was finally passed by 407 votes to 226 and the new law will take effect at the beginning of April.

Adults aged over 18 years will be permitted to use cannabis in public spaces and cultivate up to three plants for private consumption. People will be allowed to carry up to 25g,

and possess up to 50g in private homes. In addition, from July, non-profit cannabis social clubs with up to 500 members will be allowed to cultivate and distribute the drug among their members. Those aged 18-21 will only be able to buy up to 30g a month, with a maximum THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) content of 10%. However, in some areas e.g. near schools and sports grounds, smoking cannabis will still be illegal and original plans to allow its sale in licensed shops and pharmacies were halted due to EU concerns about increased drug exports.

Germany's Health Minister, Karl Lauterbach, said *'We are taking an important step away from a failed cannabis policy.'* He explained that the government hopes that the reforms will tackle drug-related crime, protect consumers from contaminated products, and curb the black market: *'The likelihood that the black market for cannabis will significantly shrink is very high.'*

One opposition member, Simone Borchardt, said that the government had gone ahead with a *'completely unnecessary, confused law'*, regardless of warnings from doctors, police and psychotherapists.



STOP – London: Sadiq Khan has confirmed that he has shelved the London Drugs Commission which he set up in 2023 to explore the potential benefits of decriminalising cannabis across the capital. The Commission, which met once last summer, was chaired by Lord Falconer, supported by an advisory panel of eight criminal justice, public health and academic experts. Controversial from the start, Khan admitted in an interview with the Spectator last autumn that the Commission is now *'a bit on the back burner.'*

'Among us': QAADNET meeting in Cardiff 10th February



It seems extraordinary that February's QAADNET meeting was the first that QAAD has held in Wales, and we are very grateful to Cardiff Local Meeting

for hosting and supporting the event.

Eighteen Friends, attenders and QAAD trustees spent the day listening and talking about our varied experiences and understanding of addiction. Andrew Misell (Cardiff LM and QAAD trustee) gave an opening talk to introduce our theme and stimulate our discussions.

During the day, several Friends spoke very movingly of how deeply they and family members had been affected, and also what had given them the strength and resilience they needed to recover. We considered how young people often find it very difficult to talk about such problems outside the home, leaving them trying to cope alone. We also shared our views on the complexities of drug decriminalisation, acknowledging that there were strong and varied opinions among us. Following the meeting, one Friend commented:

'What has stayed with me is my personal identification with the shame and guilt which you feel because of your own frailty and vulnerability. It's very difficult to accept one's condition and ask for help when you are fearful of the consequences affecting your career and relationships. Finding a way for society to break down that stigma so that help and support may be accessible to all who seek it would be one of the best legacies of our age.'

QAADNET meetings are safe, confidential spaces for Friends to discuss substance and gambling-related harm and to consider what might help lessen this in future. We hope to arrange further QAADNETs this year. If you would like to discuss the possibility of holding a QAADNET for your Area or Local Meeting, do contact our Director, who will be pleased to hear from you.

'No Blame, No Shame': Online QAADNET meeting 11th January

We began the year with our latest online QAADNET meeting and were very grateful to Patsy Staddon (Bristol Central LM) for agreeing to be our speaker. As before, the online format enabled Friends from across the country to attend, including several of our trustees. Patsy spoke openly about what she learned from her own recovery and her work supporting women in Bristol struggling with alcohol harm, through the Women's Alcohol Information Service (WAIS) charity. Patsy went on to describe her academic research into alcohol addiction, including her theory that this is a 'social construct', challenging the medical model i.e. that alcoholism is a disease, predominant in research and services over recent years. We followed her talk with an open discussion which gave Friends the opportunity to ask questions and contribute their own insights.

We had hoped to record Patsy's talk to post on our website. We are sorry that this was not possible due to technical difficulties. However, an audio recording, and Patsy's PowerPoint presentation, are available: www.qaad.org/events

If you would be interested in being a future speaker, or can recommend someone else, please contact Alison Mather. Details of all future events will be provided in QAADRANT and on our website.



The A Light exists in Spring

A Light exists in Spring

Not present on the Year

At any other period -

When March is scarcely here

A Color stands abroad

On Solitary Fields

That Science cannot overtake

But Human Nature feels.

It waits upon the Lawn,

It shows the furthest Tree

Upon the furthest Slope you know

It almost speaks to you.

Then as Horizons step

Or Noons report away

Without the Formula of sound

It passes and we stay --

A quality of loss

Affecting our Content

As Trade had suddenly encroached

Upon a Sacrament

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

QAAD events in 2024: We are planning to hold some more online meetings over the next few months. If you would like to be added to the events mailing list, please contact our Director, Alison. Details will also be posted on our website and in future issues of QAADRANT.

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.

All contact is held in strict confidence.

Your voice QAADRANT is enriched by different voices and ideas. We are always pleased and grateful to receive contributions of any length from Friends. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please email or write to our Director by **Friday 17th May**.

Thank You

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have received over the past year from individuals, Meetings and Trusts. In order to continue our work, we will need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited. Donations are significant in two ways – they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. 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.

BOOKING FORM

The power of truth – breaking through stigma, letting in the Light

QAAD 2024 Conference 4pm Friday 5th – 1pm Sunday 7th July

Launde Abbey, East Norton, Leicestershire LE7 9XB

Full name

Address

Contact number..... Email

Please send the invoice to:

As above

Or

Area Meeting.....

Contact name & role.....

Address

Contact number..... Email

Please return your form to Alison Mather by **Friday 31st May**. Bookings after this date may be accepted, depending on availability, or placed on a waiting list. Thank You.

