

Written Evidence on the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

Executive Summary

- The Federation of Independent Retailers (NFRN) believes that introducing a minimum unit price (MUP) is the best course of action in combating anti-social behaviour and improving public health. However, it has concerns regarding two potential unintended consequences arising from the bill.
 1. MUP could drive crime rates as well as verbal and physical abuse of retailers working in public-facing roles.
 2. MUP could have a negative impact on the poor, vulnerable, and those with alcohol dependency.
- The NFRN calls on the Welsh Assembly to consider rising crime rates, police response times, and the sufficiency of social programmes capable of absorbing the sudden increase in people with alcohol dependency being hit by soaring prices caused by the MUP Bill.

Introduction

1. The NFRN was founded in 1919 and is one of Europe's largest employers' associations with over 15,000 independent retailers in membership throughout the UK and Ireland. The NFRN exists to help the independent retailer compete more effectively in today's highly competitive market. Membership of the NFRN consists of a variety of independent retailers, including newsagents, convenience stores, confectioners, florists, petrol forecourts, news deliverers, off-licences, post offices, coffee shops, and card and stationery shops.
2. Approximately 9 per cent of Welsh businesses are retailers, with the majority (around 90 per cent) being local multiples and small independents who increasingly deliver wider services to the public and present a fundamental part of local communities.¹ Retail contributes 6 per cent of Welsh gross value added (GVA) and currently provides 137,000 jobs.²

¹ Welsh Retail Consortium. (2017). [Shaping the Future of Welsh Retail](#). *Welsh Retail Consortium*, pp.1-14:2.

² Ibid.



The Impact of MUP for Alcohol on Human Health

1. A minimum price for the sale and supply of alcohol has great potential to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve the health and well-being of the population of Wales.
2. Dr Petra Meier's research for the Department of Health found that a minimum unit price set at 50p per unit would save 3,400 lives and reduce hospital admissions by a staggering 98,000 per year.³
3. Studies looking at countries where minimum unit pricing has already been implemented also offer promising results. A report by the Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) highlighted that data from Canadian provinces showed that a 10 per cent increase in the minimum unit price of alcohol would "result in the region of an 8 per cent reduction in consumption, a 9 per cent reduction in hospital admissions, and a 32 per cent reduction in wholly alcohol caused deaths – with further benefits accruing two years later".⁴ Furthermore, the report emphasised that a 10 percent increase in minimum unit price would also have the effect of reducing the impact of alcohol-related anti-social behaviour.⁵

The Impact of MUP for Alcohol on Independent Retailers and the Local Communities They Serve

1. In addition to the positive impact on human health, MUP will create a more levelled playing field for independent retailers. The growing presence of supermarket chains in local areas has led to a decline in the retail sector, as independents have to contend with unachievable price cuts driving them out of business. Current home-brand alcoholic drinks would have to increase their prices substantially. Sainsbury's 2-litre bottle of own-brand dry cider, for example, currently sits at £2.35. Under a MUP of 50p, however, the cost of the cider would need to be £5.
2. The MUP can help secure the future of the local shop. Independent retailers provide an invaluable service to local communities by providing more tailored services and promoting local causes. For example, several independent retailers in England have introduced a 5 pence charge on single-use carrier bags, with proceeds going to local charity projects.

³ UK Alcohol Alert (2009). [Cheap Alcohol Issue 2](#). *Institute of Alcoholic Studies*, pp.1-22:2.

⁴ Thomas, G. and Stockwell, T. (2013). [Is Alcohol Too Cheap in the UK? The Case for Setting a Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol](#). *Institute for Alcoholic Studies*, pp.1-22:2.

⁵ *Ibid*:3.



Unintended Consequences Arising from the Bill

Crime Rates and Abuse

1. Statistics by the British Retail Consortium show that one shop worker is attacked or threatened every minute of the shopping day.⁶ In comparison to the previous year, violence and assault have increased by a staggering 40 per cent, with over 51 incidents of violence and abuse per 1,000 staff.⁷ USDAW's latest Freedom from Fear survey found that violence remains an unacceptable threat to retail employees in public facing roles, with an average of 241 retail staff being assaulted every single day. Furthermore, 33 per cent of shop workers surveyed stated that they were threatened by customers, and over half were verbally abused in 2014.⁸
2. In South Wales, the number of retail crime incidents has increased by 464 per cent to 70,727 recorded incidents of retail crime.⁹ An element of this threat can be linked to alcohol, with it fuelling crime and anti-social behaviour.
3. Independent retailers do not have the same level of security as supermarkets, although independent retailers are continuing to invest heavily in loss prevention measures, including CCTV, mirrors, panic alarms, and shutters, as well as placing high-value items in a secure location. They cannot, however, afford physical security. Micro businesses and local independent retailers do not have the financial capability to invest the same as large national chains, who have a physical security presence.
4. The introduction of the MUP might contribute to the ever-rising number of violent incidents. Independent retailers, in particular, are vulnerable to anti-social behaviour due to their late opening times and lack of security measures. There is a real concern that without physical protection and funds for further security measures, the independent retailer will be the main target of costumers angered by the MUP. As one of Wales' biggest employment sectors, retailers need to have the confidence that they will be protected in their place of work.
5. Additionally, the NFRN is concerned that police in Wales may be prioritising responses to supermarkets rather than a balanced approach in responding to retail crime by risk. Responses received from several police forces in Wales and around the UK reveal that a higher percentage of incidents occurring in supermarkets or hypermarkets are dealt with by an "immediate response" or a "prompt response". Incidents occurring at independent retailers, on the other hand, tend to receive more "prompt responses" followed by "scheduled appointment visits" following a retail crime incident.¹⁰ These

⁶ SkyGuard. (2017). [The Retail Sector – How to Avoid Danger at the Workplace](#). SkyGuard. (27th of September).

⁷ Retail Risk. (2017). [UK Retail Crime Survey Shows Rise in Cyber Fraud and Abuse of Staff](#). Retail Risk. (3rd of February).

⁸ Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. (2015). [Violence, Threats and Abuse Against Shopworkers Is Still A Big Problem Says USDAW](#). Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. (19th of January).

⁹ NFRN. (2017). [Independent Retail Report 2017](#). NFRN, pp.1-33:14.

¹⁰ NFRN. (2017). [Independent Retail Report for Wales 2017](#). NFRN, pp.1-19:12.



trends are worrying in light of the introduction of the MUP. Retailers need to have confidence that retail crimes are taken seriously.

Negative Impact on the Poor, Vulnerable, and Those with Alcohol Dependency

1. In 2016-17, there were 6,518 hospital admissions related to illicit drugs in Wales and 15,165 alcohol-specific admissions.¹¹ Furthermore, in 2016, ONS registered 504 alcohol-related deaths in Wales in 2016, an increase of 8.9 per cent on the previous year. 336 of those deaths were men, and 168 were women.¹² These statistics show that alcohol dependency remains a real public health issue in Wales.
2. The NFRN is concerned that the introduction of MUP will negatively impact on the poor, vulnerable, and individuals with an already existing alcohol dependency. A 2008 study by the University of Sheffield found that heavy and problem drinkers were more likely to select cheaper alcohol products, arguing that “it follows that raising floor prices will have a disproportionate effect on those drinkers at most risk of harm”¹³
3. Programmes will be needed that help individuals with alcohol dependency suddenly finding themselves in a position of financial inability regarding alcohol purchases. Otherwise, there is a high risk that they would either steal, turn to other substances that will satisfy their needs at a lower financial cost, or obtain alcohol through illegal means, thus fuelling the already growing illicit alcohol trade.

¹¹ Public Health Wales. (2017). [Data Mining Wales: The Annual Profile for Substance Misuse 2016-17](#). *Public Health Wales*, pp.1-89:10.

¹² Office for National Statistics. (2017). [Alcohol-Specific Deaths in the UK: Registered in 2016](#). *Office for National Statistics*. (7th of November).

¹³ Meier, P. (2008). [Independent Review of the Effects of Alcohol Pricing and Promotion](#). *The University of Sheffield*, pp.1-243:34.



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