

HM Treasury – The new alcohol duty system consultation

Consultation questions:

What are your views on the proposed new structures of alcohol duty?

At the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH), we are concerned about the potential impact of the proposed new structures of alcohol duty on the health of young people aged 10-25. Adolescence is a key period in which young people engage in activities such as drinking and smoking for the first time. It is likely that health behaviours developed in this time form either healthy or unhealthy habits across the young person's life (e.g. "binge drinking"), with potential long term impacts upon their health and wellbeing. There are a number of potential negative health outcomes that can result from excessive alcohol consumption, including cancers, heart disease and liver disease. In our response to this consultation we urge the Government to adopt policies that take preventative steps that deter young people from engaging with unhealthy levels of alcohol use. We think that the promotion of positive drinking behaviours links to the Government's ambitions for 'levelling up'.

Our [Key Data report](#) provides a snapshot of young people's health every two years. Analysis of the latest data shows that there has been a steady and welcomed decline over time in the percentage of young people reporting having drunk alcohol in the last week (Figure 1).¹ Whilst this trend is welcomed, it may hide inequalities as some groups of young people may be more likely to drink than others. Public Health England have previously highlighted a number of risk factors for substance misuse:

- Living independently
- Boredom / lack of meaningful occupation
- Desire to be socially included / loneliness
- Limited social skills / low self-esteem
- Lack of family contact
- Impulsivity
- Negative life events (e.g. neglect, abuse, bereavement), unemployment and poverty²

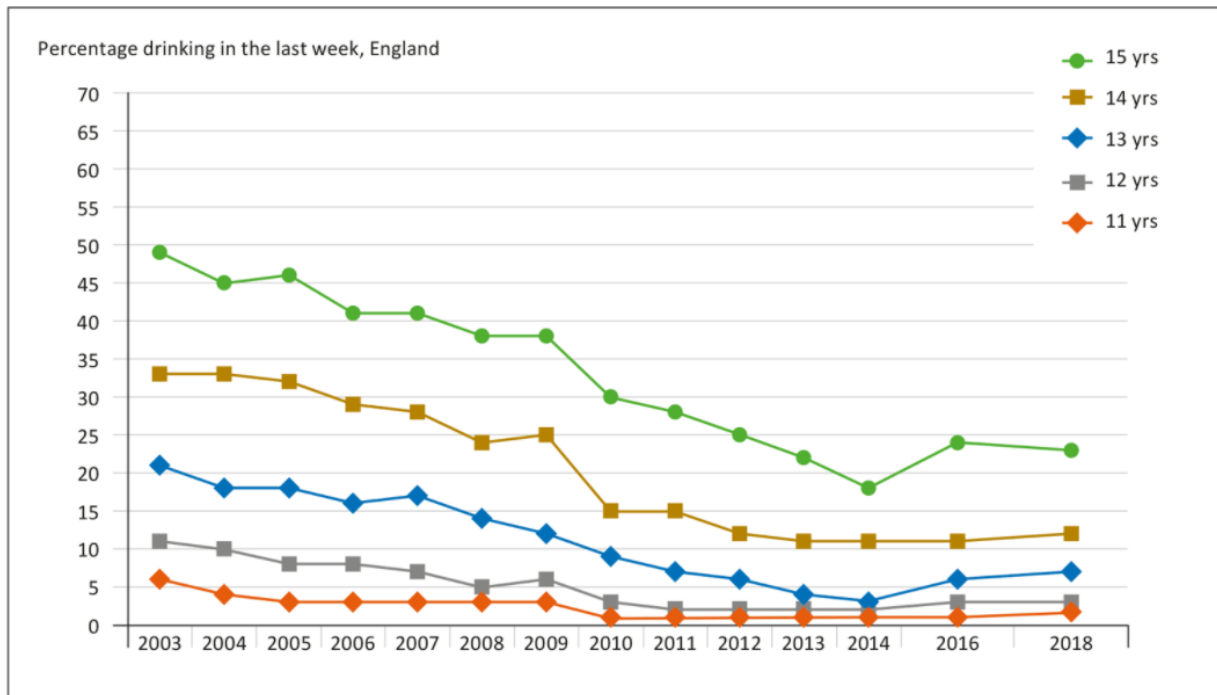
However, the most recent trend is less clear and there have slight rises, especially for 15 year olds (Figure 1). Looking at young people aged 16-24, we can see a gendered difference in the percentage drinking 14 or more units of alcohol each week, with young men typically drinking more (Figure 2).³ We support measures and appropriate alcohol duties that reduce alcohol consumption rates in young people.

¹ NHS Digital. 2018. Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England 2018.

² Public Health England. 2018. *Health inequalities: Substance misuse*. London: PHE.

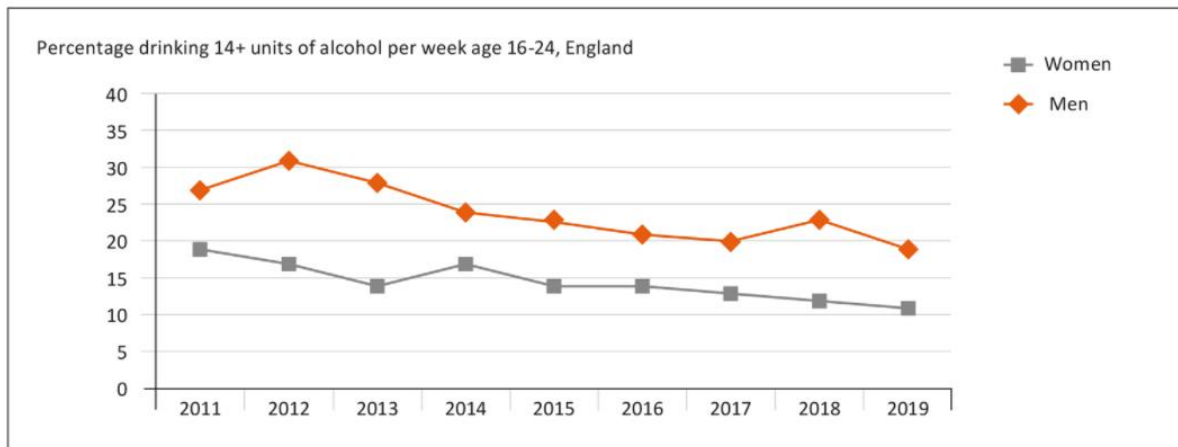
³ NHS Digital. 2019. Health Survey for England.

Figure 1:



Source: NHS Digital, Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England 2018

Figure 2:



Source: NHS Digital (2020). Health Survey for England 2019

Covid-19 and lockdown periods have had a mixed impact on young people’s relationship with alcohol and drinking. The loss of social events, such as nightclubs and festivals, has meant that many are drinking less. However there are concerns that drinking rates have increased for some young

people, particularly those with existing mental health problems (e.g. anxiety) and for women.⁴ This suggests that some young people used alcohol as a coping strategy for stress during this period; a risky behaviour pattern. There are concerns related to developing habits of drinking at home which may have emerged as a consequence of the pandemic, as drinking at home may be riskier than in social situations (due to less control over measures within public spaces and being supported by peers).

Taking preventative measures that reduce unhealthy alcohol use in young people will have long term savings for the NHS and wider society. For example, in 2018/19, 5,010 under 16s and 35,420 16-24 year olds were admitted to hospital for alcohol related reasons, which could be prevented.⁵ There are also links between alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour in adolescence⁶, which result in costs to local authority budgets. We recommend that revenue collected from alcohol duties should be reinvested into the prevention of unhealthy drinking behaviours in young people.

We are also concerned about drinking patterns of parents and the potential traumatic impact this can have upon the health and wellbeing of their children and young people. Family has a strong direct and indirect impact on the young person's likelihood to drink alcohol, especially if they have easy access to alcohol and regularly witness their family members being drunk.⁷ The young person might grow up in an unstable or violent environment, they may adopt a caring role for their parent, and they may mirror unhealthy relationships with alcohol.

Do you think the proposed duty rates are appropriate?

We support the proposed duty rates that make high percentage alcohol products more expensive. However, we do not believe that the proposals go far enough to deter young people from developing unhealthy relationships with alcohol, because they may make certain products cheaper.

We are concerned that the proposed duties make certain lower strength alcohol products cheaper and therefore more easily accessible to young people. All alcohol if consumed in large quantities has the potential to be harmful. We are concerned that lower strength alcohol products could be a gateway onto stronger alcoholic drinks once unhealthy behaviours have been developed in adolescence. We are particularly concerned by the proposed cut in duty for lower strength spirits, such as alcopops. The proposed new duty rates on cider remain substantially lower than other alcohol products at the same strength. Both cider and alcopops are drinks that are already popular among young people.

We do not support the proposed plans to freeze the alcohol duty rate for the upcoming year, as any freeze effectively makes all alcohol cheaper as wages rise. The rate has been frozen since 2012, which research shows has caused an additional 2,000 alcohol related deaths and 61,000

⁴ UCL. 2020. Analysis: Our survey shows many young people are drinking less alcohol in lockdown. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/sep/analysis-our-survey-shows-many-young-people-are-drinking-less-alcohol-lockdown>

⁵ Public Health England. 2020. Local Alcohol Profiles for England (LAPE) Statistical Tables

⁶ Hammerton et al. 2017. 'Effects of excessive alcohol use on antisocial behaviour across adolescence and early adulthood', *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 56(10), pp.857-865.

⁷ Bremner et al. 2011. *Young people, alcohol and influences*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

hospitalisations.⁸ Raising the duty would simultaneously protect people's health, save lives and provide more revenue for the Government and the NHS.

Are there any other changes that you think should be included in new structures?

There are a number of policies and measures that should be introduced to reduce rates of alcohol consumption and the development of unhealthy drinking behaviours among young people.

Our recommendations for Government:

- **Consult with young people** directly to hear their experiences of alcohol consumption. Work with them to develop interventions that they believe would work for reducing alcohol consumption in their communities.
- Follow actions taken within Scotland (2018) and Wales (2020) to introduce **minimum unit pricing** for all alcohol products. This measure would specifically target cheap, high strength alcohol. Scotland is the only UK nation that has had a reduction of alcohol related deaths in recent years. It is estimated that a 50p minimum unit price would save 525 lives in England, with 90% of lives saved within low income groups.⁹
- **Restrict the promotion and marketing of alcohol products** to children and young people by ending sports sponsorships, limiting alcohol advertising in TV and film and on posters close proximity to schools. Similar approaches have been adopted by the Government in relation to reducing the advertisement of unhealthy foods to children and young people. These measures would prevent young people from drinking at earlier ages.
- Increased **funding for the public health grant**, which provides resource for local authorities to provide services that support young people to develop positive health behaviours, including drug and alcohol reduction services and youth clubs.
- **Implementation in full of the prevention green paper** 'Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020's'. The green paper includes specific commitments to reduce rates of alcohol consumption, through increasing the availability of low percentage / alcohol free products.

⁸ Sheffield University. 2019. 'Cuts in alcohol duty linked to 2000 more alcohol-related deaths in England. <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/alcohol-duty-cuts-linked-2000-more-deaths-in-england-1.868255>

⁹ Alcohol Health Alliance. 2020. Written evidence submitted by the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA) (PEG0228)



About the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH)

The Association for Young People's Health is the UK's leading independent voice for youth health. We work to improve the health and wellbeing of 10-25 year olds. We do this by involving young people in our work and making sure their views are heard, working with healthcare providers to improve services for young people, sharing information, resources and innovations, promoting evidence-based practice, highlighting important data, and increasing communication between practitioners from different sectors. More information can be found on our [website](#).

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