



MUP Local Q&A

'MUP will unfairly hit moderate drinkers'

- Moderate drinkers will barely notice the difference under MUP. The average moderate drinker will consume the equivalent of half a bottle of wine less a year.
- Moderate drinkers, including those on low incomes, buy fewer than 2 units per week under the 50p unit mark.¹
- Under a 50p MUP, the average moderate drinker would spend just £2.55 extra *per year* on alcohol. Of course, some would spend more, but many more would spend nothing extra at all because they buy all of their alcohol at more than 50p per unit.²

'MUP will unfairly hit the poor'

- Those from the poorest groups stand to gain the most from MUP. They are more likely to be abstainers and, if they do drink at risky levels, they are more likely to suffer harm than more affluent groups
- Previous studies have shown that 8 out of 10 lives saved under MUP would come from the poorest groups.³ This research shows a similar pattern.
- Previous studies have shown that, under a 50p MUP, moderate drinkers from the lowest socioeconomic group are estimated to spend just £1.32 more *per year* on alcohol.⁴
- This research shows that anyone drinking moderately will hardly be affected by MUP at 50p because the vast majority of cheap alcohol is consumed by risky drinkers

'We should 'wait and see' what happens in Scotland'

- We don't need to wait. The evidence is clear and recent figures show sales in Scotland in 2018 – when MUP was introduced - have fallen to a 24 year low. At the same time sales are increasing in England and Wales⁵
- There are some things we already know from Scotland. The implementation appears to have been relatively smooth and there are reports that sales of strong white cider typically consumed by heavy drinkers has fallen dramatically.

¹ University of Sheffield. FAQ – minimum unit pricing. Available at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/scharr/sections/ph/research/alpol/faq>

² *Ibid.*

³ Holmes, J. et. al. (2014). *Effects of minimum unit pricing for alcohol on different income and socioeconomic groups: a modelling study*. The Lancet. Available at [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)62417-4/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)62417-4/abstract)

⁴ University of Sheffield. FAQ – minimum unit pricing.

⁵ Giles L, Robinson M. Monitoring and Evaluating Scotland's Alcohol Strategy: Monitoring Report 2019. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2019.

- The implications of delay are clear – lives would be lost and people would be hospitalised or the victims of crime when that could easily have been avoided
- The evidence is already clear and compelling. MUP would save lives, reduce illness and cut crime with this study showing that the North has the most to gain. The Westminster government should implement now and, like Scotland, review its impact after 5 years.

‘The government could raise tax instead of introducing MUP’

- MUP is much better targeted at the cheapest, strongest drinks consumed by those who experience the worst harms.
- To replicate the benefits of MUP, tax levels would have to rise between 30% and 700%. Such increases are politically unlikely and would hit moderate drinkers harder than MUP.
- MUP and tax increases are complementary measures – we need both. Tax rises would address the fall in the real price of alcohol across all products, whilst MUP deals with the specific problem of the cheapest alcohol.

‘The modelling work done by Sheffield University is unreliable and untested’

- Sheffield’s model is internationally renowned: MUP has been endorsed by the WHO, OECD, NICE and the World Bank, and Sheffield has been commissioned by governments across the UK and in Canada to model the impacts of MUP.
- The Sheffield research has been published in well-respected journals such as *The Lancet* and *The BMJ*. These journals are peer-reviewed, meaning that work appearing in them has been examined by other academics. The same cannot be said for the criticisms levelled at the research.
- The Sheffield research is based on over 1,300 estimates from around 150-200 studies of the relationship between alcohol price changes, consumption and harm.
- It is of course impossible to predict the future with complete accuracy. Nevertheless, modelling is used extensively by the Treasury, and is a legitimate way to evaluate the potential benefits of policies.

‘MUP will damage the pub trade’

- Pub prices would be left virtually untouched by MUP – only about 1% of prices in the on-trade would be affected.⁶
- If pubs are affected at all, they are likely to see tiny reductions in income, the equivalent of something like the price of one pint per week

⁶ University of Sheffield (2013). [Modelled income group-specific impacts of alcohol minimum unit pricing in England 2014/15](#)

- This is perhaps why a survey of pub managers done by the Institute of Alcohol Studies found that they support MUP by a margin of 2 to 1.⁷
- MUP is aimed at the cheapest, strongest alcohol sold in supermarkets and corner shops, like super-strength cider and own-brand vodka.
- The pub trade could actually receive a boost under MUP. Pubs have been in decline partly due to falling alcohol prices in the off-trade, with two-thirds of alcohol currently being bought in shops and supermarkets.⁸ Reversing this fall in off-trade prices could bring people back into pubs.

‘MUP won’t work, because heavy drinkers won’t respond to price changes’

- This is a myth. Most heavy drinkers are not dependent drinkers, and they do respond to price changes on the whole.
- Under a 50p MUP, high risk drinkers in the North are expected to reduce their consumption by an average of 370 units per year, the equivalent of 37 bottles of wine or 14 bottles of vodka.
- Of course MUP isn’t a magic bullet. We still need access to treatment for those dependent on alcohol who need it and we need restrictions on the availability and marketing of alcohol products.

‘Under MUP, people dependent on alcohol might turn to drugs, illicit alcohol and crime’

- Research suggests there are a range of things dependent drinkers may do, both good and bad. They may reduce their consumption or seek help from a treatment service, for example.⁹
- This group of people is complex and so generalisations can’t be made. In addition, much of the harm caused by alcohol is not done by dependent drinkers, and MUP will be a key measure in preventing future lives being ruined by addiction to alcohol.
- This should be compared with the problems alcohol is already causing. 4 in 10 violent crimes are alcohol-related.¹⁰
- If people turned to drugs and crime in Canada where a version of minimum pricing has been implemented, it must have been on a small scale, otherwise the health gains that occurred there would not have been possible.

⁷ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2017). *Pubs Quizzed: what publicans think about policy, public health and the changing trade*. Available at <http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/IAS%20reports/rp26092017.pdf>

⁸ British Beer and Pub Association (2012). *Statistical Handbook 2012*. London: Brewing Publications Limited

⁹ For an overview of potential consequences see: Stockwell, T. and Thomas, G. (2013). *Is alcohol too cheap in the UK? The case for setting a Minimum Unit Price for alcohol*. Institute of Alcohol Studies. Available at <http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/News%20stories/iasreport-thomas-stockwell-april2013.pdf>

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics (2017). *Overview of violent crime and sexual offences*. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/compendium/focusonviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/yearendingmarch2016/overviewofviolentcrimeandsexualoffences/pdf>

‘The government has already taken action on cheap alcohol, with the ban on below-cost sales, and the increase in duty on high-strength cider’

- Neither of these measures will make a real difference.
- The ban on below cost sales is estimated to reduce alcohol sales by just 0.04% overall, and 0.08% among harmful drinkers. This is equal to about 3 units per drinker per year (and harmful drinkers each consume an average of 3,700 units per year).¹¹
- On cider duty, whereas a 3-litre bottle of 7.5% cider contains 22.5 units of alcohol, under the new regime a 3-litre bottle of 6.8% cider would avoid the higher rate of duty, yet still contain more than 20 units (the low-risk weekly guideline is 14 units).

‘Alcohol consumption in the UK is falling’

- Actually, it looks as though consumption levels in England have stopped falling and are on the rise again. While the latest figures show sales per adult in Scotland fell by 3 per cent in 2018 – the year MUP was introduced North of the border - they increased by 2 per cent in England and Wales over the same period¹²
- And consumption levels remain at historically high levels. We are drinking twice as much alcohol as we did in the 1950s.¹³
- Whilst there have been welcome falls in drinking levels amongst some groups, those who do drink are doing so more dangerously and health inequalities linked to alcohol are rising, with harm more concentrated amongst poor and vulnerable groups.

‘MUP will lead to a windfall for retailers’

- Potentially, but the intent of MUP is not anti-business, and retailer profits increasing is not a concern.
- News from Scotland seems to suggest that small retailers are seeing some benefit because they are now more able to compete with prices found in supermarkets
- In any case, as MUP is designed to reduce consumption of cheap alcohol, retailers may not stand to make much additional profit.
- Importantly, MUP will save the taxpayer money, as the costs linked with alcohol harm go down.

‘Countries like France have cheaper prices yet don’t have a problem with alcohol’

- The UK’s culture and drinking patterns are not the same as in France.

¹¹ Sheffield Alcohol Research Group (2013). *New research on impacts of minimum unit pricing and banning below cost selling*. Available at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/scharr/sections/ph/research/alpol/research/newresearch>

¹² NHS Health Scotland (2019). *Monitoring and Evaluating Scotland’s Alcohol Strategy (MESAS): Monitoring Report 2019*. Available at <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2587/mesas-monitoring-report-2019.pdf>

¹³ British Beer and Pub Association (2007). *Statistical Handbook 2007*.

- Alcohol has always been cheap in France. In the UK we have seen alcohol become very affordable over a relatively short time period, but our drinking culture has not responded by slowing down consumption.
- We tried to encourage a more continental style of drinking in the UK with the relaxation of licensing rules in the 2000s. This relaxation has not reduced harm.
- Almost 7 in 10 adults believe that the UK's relationship with alcohol is 'unhealthy'.¹⁴ We need to address our high levels of alcohol harm, and MUP is one of the best ways of doing this.

'We already have some of the highest alcohol duty rates in Europe'

- Over successive budgets, the government has given the alcohol industry tax breaks worth £9.1 billion up to the year 2024.¹⁵
- Alcohol is 64% more affordable than it was in 1987.¹⁶ The affordability of supermarket beer has increased 188% since 1987; the figure for wine and spirits is 131%.¹⁷ In England alone there are over 23,000 alcohol deaths and over a million alcohol-related hospital admissions each year¹⁸ (PHE stats on alcohol). We need to do something and reducing the affordability is the most effective and cost-effective thing we can do.

'MUP will reduce the tax take for government'

- The impact on revenue to the Treasury is estimated to be broadly neutral as falls in alcohol duty due to lower sales are estimated to be largely matched by increased VAT receipts due to the higher value of the remaining sales.¹⁹
- MUP will also save the government and the taxpayer money, due to the healthcare and policing savings which will follow from MUP.
- In addition, MUP is very cheap to implement and therefore will be very cheap for the taxpayer.

'MUP will affect jobs in the alcohol industry'

- If people spend less money on alcohol, they will spend it elsewhere. Any loss to the alcohol sector will be compensated for with a boost to other sectors.

¹⁴ Alcohol Health Alliance public opinion polling 2018.

¹⁵ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2017). Budget 2018 analysis. Available at <http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/IAS%20reports/sb24112018.pdf>

¹⁶ NHS Digital. *Statistics on Alcohol (2019)*. Available <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-alcohol/2019/part-7>

¹⁷ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2018). *Briefing: The rising affordability of alcohol*. Available at <http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/IAS%20reports/sb20022018.pdf>

¹⁸ Public Health England. Local Alcohol Profiles for England. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-alcohol-profiles-for-england-february-2018-update>

¹⁹ University of Sheffield (2013). *Modelled income group-specific impacts of alcohol minimum unit pricing in England 2014/15*. Available at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.291621%21/file/julyreport.pdf

- The overall impact of MUP on the economy is likely to be positive. This is because reducing alcohol harm will reduce the number of days off work due to alcohol.

‘MUP will place pressure on enforcement agencies’

- The implementation of MUP in Scotland has proceeded smoothly with no signs of significantly increased costs to enforcement agencies
- The police and local authorities are already seeing significant costs picking up the pieces from alcohol harm.
- Frontline police officers are already paying the price of cheap alcohol. In a recent survey of frontline officers, they reported spending more than half of their time dealing with alcohol-related incidents and more than 75% said they had been assaulted by someone who was drunk.²⁰

‘Products at the bottom of the market will be lost’

- Cheap, pocket money-priced products which are only consumed by dependent drinkers and children will be lost, and this is a good thing.
- Wide-ranging evidence suggests that MUP will save lives, reduce hospital admissions, cut crime and benefit the economy. These issues should be of primary concern.

‘Implementing MUP will be challenging for retailers’

- With the right support from government, retailers will not struggle to implement minimum pricing in their stores. The implementation seems to have proceeded smoothly in Scotland with few reported issues of non-compliance.
- Any pricing policy, including annual tax changes, imposes similar burdens. MUP should not be considered especially unusual.
- The Home Office estimated in 2012 that the cost of implementation for a 45p MUP would be minimal, and that retailers with Head Office support would have almost no costs.²¹

‘Other countries could put up retaliatory trade barriers if we introduce MUP’

- We are entitled to protect the health of our most vulnerable people through preventing the sale of high-strength alcohol at pocket-money prices.
- Alcohol is no ordinary commodity. It kills, and it wrecks lives, sometimes the lives of those who don’t consume the alcohol themselves. It is therefore right to seek to intervene to protect people from the negative impacts of alcohol.

²⁰ Institute of Alcohol Studies (2015). *Alcohol’s impact on the emergency services*. Available at http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/Alcohols_impact_on_emergency_services_full_report.pdf

²¹ Home Office (2012). A minimum unit price for alcohol: impact assessment. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/157763/ia-minimum-unit-pricing.pdf

'Minimum pricing in Canada cannot be compared to MUP as proposed in the UK'

- For all practical purposes they are comparable.
- The way minimum prices in Canada are calculated is slightly different, but in both countries we're talking about raising the price of the cheapest alcohol products through the setting of floor prices for alcohol.
- After the minimum price of products was increased in parts of Canada, alcohol-related deaths and crimes went down. The evidence suggests the same would happen in the UK.

'There is no clear relationship between the price of alcohol and consumption'

- Every time we walk into a supermarket we recognise that a product's price influences whether and how much we buy – and the same applies to alcohol.
- The relationship between the affordability of alcohol and levels of consumption is absolutely clear and has been accepted by the government. The alcohol industry recognises this – otherwise they would not discount their products.
- What is also clear is that the more we drink, the greater the risk of medical conditions such as liver disease and a number of cancers, including breast cancer.