Influence of the alcohol industry on alcohol policy and research in the UK

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Alcohol policy UK: 1980-2003

• Policy vacuum
• 1982 Suppressed UK Alcohol policies in the UK report published in Sweden
• Concentration of drunk driving
• Big idea ‘Sensible drinking’ strongly supported by industry
• Health of the Nation targets 1992
• Loss of specialist alcohol services
• 1995, Portman group, a lobbying group funded by alcohol industry, pays researchers to criticise Alcohol Policy and the Public Good
• 1997 ‘Couldn’t give a XXXX for last orders’ – New Labour election pledge
Do you agree with binge drinking?

Oh yeah

But only in moderation
Strategy Unit Alcohol Harm Reduction project

Interim Analytical Report

This is an analytical report reviewing available data and evidence. It is not a statement of Government policy. Comments and views are invited and can be sent to the Strategy Unit on: su-alcohol@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk
So the issue is more complex than simply restricting price and availability for the whole population.
“Rising consumption over the last 25 years have been accompanied by an increase in availability”

- 68% increase in licensed hotels and restaurants
- 100% increase in off licences
- 145% increase in on licence applications
- Increased capacity of on licenses: “Super pubs” are now 20 times bigger than typical pubs
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MINISTRY OF SOUND

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MINISTRY
OF SOUND

WEDNESDAYS

WE'RE BACK!
WEDNESDAY
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The Licensing Act 2003 explained:

Flexible opening hours for premises, with the potential for up to 24 hour opening, seven days a week.

This will help to minimise public disorder resulting from fixed closing times.
DISCLAIMER:
NO EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES HAVE BEEN USED IN THE MAKING OF THIS DOCUMENT
Alcohol strategy options
Babor et al. (2003) Alcohol: No ordinary commodity

- **High impact**
  - Taxation & pricing
  - Restricting availability
  - Limiting density of outlets
  - Lower BAC limits
  - Graduated driving licences

- **Medium impact**
  - Brief interventions
  - Treatment
  - Safer drinking environment
  - Heavier enforcement

- **Low impact**
  - Unit labelling
  - “Sensible” drinking campaigns
  - Public education
  - School based education
  - Voluntary advertising restrictions
Some major problems

- No money
- No targets
- No consultation, selective evidence published
- No high impact strategies
- Licensing relaxation
- Voluntary codes for alcohol industry
- Less effective controls on alcohol consumption
- Focus on drunkenness rather than consumption
- Increased criminalisation
The growing influence of industry, UK

- 2004, AHRSE proposes industry levy, threatens legislation
- 2004, Diageo hosts meeting with PM
- 2004, CEO of Portman Group joins AERC, and is member of Better Regulation Commission, Scottish Ministerial Advisory Committee on Alcohol Problems, Director, Advertising Standards Agency, Trustee, Drinkaware Trust.
- 2004, Advertising industry threats to sue Academy of Medical Sciences over *Calling Time* report
The growing influence of industry, UK

- Nov 2004, Portman group named as agency responsible for delivering public health messages on alcohol in England, in *Choosing Health* White Paper
- 2005, DCMS sides with alcohol industry (BBPA) on implementation of Licensing Act
- 2006, Drinkaware trust, new incarnation of Portman Group, £5M p.a. budget, supported by a national producers fund, “independent” steering group
- 2005-6, EU alcohol policy roundtable for DG Sanco. Hosted by European Policy Centre. UK companies active in attempting to rubbish public health research.
Conclusions

• Ample evidence that the alcohol industry has managed to influence alcohol policy in UK
• The influence of the industry is increasing
• Alcohol strategies are industry friendly, low impact, and likely to promote increased drinking and harm
• The impact of the strategy needs to be independently monitored
• The industry’s stance and influence needs to be challenged