



YouthLink Scotland's Response to Scottish Government consultation on restricting alcohol advertising and promotion

Overview

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector. We are an organisation with a sharp focus on the needs of young people. Our approach is founded upon being ethical, equitable and non-discriminatory. We are an organisation that promotes learning, innovation and progressive thinking and are committed to the highest standards of protection and safety for young people.

Vision

Our vision is for a nation that values its young people and their contribution to society, supported through critical relationships with youth workers to achieve their potential. As the collective voice of the youth work sector, we represent their interests, policy and practice needs. We achieve this by supporting the sector to demonstrate the impact and value of their work and by promoting a positive image of young people and youth work.

Restricting alcohol advertising and promotion

YouthLink Scotland supports the overarching principle of the consultation to restrict alcohol advertising and promotion. We know that promoting alcohol in private/public places/spaces and events and increasingly via online platforms, increases exposure to vulnerable groups, including children and young people and those in recovery to intrusive alcohol adverts. Currently, advertising and promoting alcohol normalises alcohol consumption and helps sustain high population consumption levels. We believe restrictions on alcohol advertising and promotion would reduce the volume of alcohol marketing messages experienced by everyone. We know that advertising restrictions in public spaces have successfully reduced the consumption of other unhealthy

products. For example, a ban on the advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt on the London transport network was associated with significant reductions in energy, sugar and fat purchased from such products¹. This is supported by the long-standing recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO)². They advise comprehensive restrictions on alcohol marketing. According to WHO, as an impactful and cost-effective approach, helping protect children, adolescents, people in recovery and abstainers from the pressure to drink. As well as disrupting the drink industry's ability to create and maintain social norms that encourage high levels of alcohol use in the population more generally³.

This supports what we know from youth workers who tell us that getting drunk is deemed a rite of passage for many young Scots. We also know that being around alcohol and those who are consuming alcohol can increase the risk of exposure to aggressive behaviour which can escalate into violence.

Facts and figures

- 46% of violent crime is alcohol-related⁴
- In relation to all incidents of violent crime in 2017/18, victims reported having consumed alcohol immediately before the incident in 25% of cases⁵
- 15 of the 77 (19%) persons accused in homicide cases in 2016-17 were under the influence of alcohol⁶
- In the past 10 years, 42% of those accused of murder were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the murder⁷
- Two in five (41%) of prisoners reg drunk at the time of their offence⁸
- 60% of young of young offenders were drunk at the time of their offence⁹

It is apparent that alcohol use is highly culturally prevalent in Scotland and closely linked to violence, meaning that prevention strategies should seek to:

¹ Yau, A. et al (2022). Changes in household food and drink purchases following restrictions on the advertisement of high fat, salt, and sugar products across the Transport for London network: A controlled interrupted time series analysis. *PLoS Medicine*, 19(2), e1003915

² [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](https://www.who.int/)

³ World Health Organization (2019). *The SAFER technical package: five areas of intervention at national and subnational levels*.

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2017-18-main-findings/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-justice-survey-2017-18-main-findings/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homicide-scotland-2016-17-9781788512367/>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publication-4565.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publication-3908.aspx>

1. Challenge the prevailing drinking culture in Scotland.
2. Provide information for young people to make informed decisions.
3. Support a bystander approach to empower young people to look after each other.
4. Utilise youth work practitioners to achieve the aims of 1-3 above.

As one example, in 2020, No Knives Better Lives (NKBL)¹⁰ developed a Your Choice Toolkit¹¹ for exploring the cultural and social norms around Scotland's relationship with alcohol. It contains discussion sets and activities which can be adapted for in-person or online usage. Activities like these and similar programmes allow youth workers and other groups working alongside young people to create space to talk through the issue of alcohol and its relationship to ill health and violence in Scotland. It is not about saying to young people *"don't drink!"* or *"never go out"* or *"avoid certain crowds"* because we know from experience and evidence that Just Say No approaches have little impact on young people's behaviour. It is crucial therefore to empower young people to deal with situations more effectively by having information which can help them understand certain situations and by equipping them to understand the risks and help each other be safe and secure.

We note a downtrend in alcohol consumption among young people¹². As part of this consultation process, we advise taking a universal approach to gaining a breadth of viewpoints. In our Imagine a Man year 1 report, we found that 72% of boys and young men did not feel pressured to get drunk by their friends¹³. This contrasts somewhat with the literature suggesting that young men drink as a symbol of masculinity. If this is true, our research would suggest that the pressure for men in particular is coming from elsewhere – media, events, marketing etc. This compounds the need to take a closer look at the pressures coming from advertising and promotion and highlights why we should be restricting its regularity and prevalence in mainstream culture.

We would welcome further more specific consultation with the youth work sector to gather views from young people. This would help us explore cultural norms regarding alcohol advertising and promotion and in particular alcohol

¹⁰ [Home - NKBL \(noknivesbetterlives.com\)](https://noknivesbetterlives.com)

¹¹ https://noknivesbetterlives.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NKBL_AlcoholToolkit_Adult-21.pdf

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-45645295#:~:text=Teenage%20drinking%20in%20Scotland%20has%20dropped%20%22dramatically%22%20in,teenagers%20are%20consuming%20far%20less%20alcohol%20than%20previously.>

¹³ https://noknivesbetterlives.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NKBL_ImagineAMan_Report_FINAL-1.pdf, main information about alcohol contained on pages 6, 7, 13, 15, 16 and 18.

intake as a driver of violence. Youth workers are primed to have nuanced discussions with young people. They are based in schools and the heart of Scotland's communities, meeting young people where they are and working alongside those who come into contact with alcohol and some of the country's most marginalised and vulnerable young people. Youth workers have existing solid and trusted relationships. This is significant on topics like alcohol consumption and other substance abuse. As the non-formal youth work approach can be more effective at creating meaningful dialogue and in turn the culture and behavioural shifts required to break the unhealthy pattern of binge drinking and the interpersonal and inter-community violence that often results. Together we can break this cycle. We believe restricting the promotion and advertising of alcohol would go some way to realising this aim and creating a healthier and safer Scotland for all.

ENDS

Contacts:

YouthLink Scotland Policy and Research Manager, Kevin Kane, kkane@youthlinkscotland.org

No Knives Better Lives Team:

Vicki Ridley, vr Ridley@youthlinkscotland.org

Emily Beever, ebeever@youthlinkscotland.org

Orielle Taylor, otaylor@youthlinkscotland.org

YouthLink Scotland membership organisation leading around this consultation [Alcohol Focus Scotland \(AFS\)](#)

Many other community youth work groups play a crucial role in supporting the health and well-being of young people in Scotland.

EDITOR'S NOTES

[Restricting alcohol advertising and promotion: consultation - gov.scot](#)
(www.gov.scot)