

Candidate 2 evidence

Memo

To: Jeremy Hunt (secretary of state for health and social care)

From: _____

Re: Underage drinking in the UK

Options

Option one- Increase the legal drinking age to 21

Option two- Keep the age the same

Option three- Decrease the drinking age to 16

Introduction

The phrase underage drinking refers to the illegal consumption of alcohol by a person under 18 years old in the UK. Binge drinking is commonly associated young people and is defined as the excessive consumption of alcohol over a short period of time. This is 18 units for men and 6 units for women (BK). Underage drinking is clearly a problem as 70% of Scottish 15 year olds have drunk alcohol before (BK). Of the 70% a further 70% have been drunk at least once. This means that almost half (49%) of all Scottish 15 year olds have been drunk before. In 2012, the Scottish government introduced the policy of MUP which was eventually introduced in 2018 after a long court battle and was set currently at 50p per unit (BK).

Scots on average drink around 10 litres of pure alcohol per year. This means that we drink far more than is safe, on average. Given that many people don't drink at all this means that Scottish drinkers are seriously damaging their health (BK). Almost half of all the drink sold in Scotland in 2017 cost less than 50p per unit so the government's policy should deter many from drinking too much as they will simply not be able to afford the new higher prices. A bottle of spirits increased by approximately £3 and teenagers favourite Frosty Jacks more than doubles to around £11 (BK).

The NHS is under pressure and it is a known fact that 22 deaths a week in Scotland are caused by alcohol. The poorest people are far more likely to die as a result than the richest people. (BK) This problem has trebled since the early 1990's and is now a matter of great urgency. The government must do something to stop teenagers from adding to these terrible statistics.

The three options above all have advantages and disadvantages which will be discussed in this report.

Option One

Increasing the legal drinking age to 21 could prove extremely successful in reducing underage alcohol consumption as source one says "If the age is 18 it is much easier for a 16 or 17 year old to get away with drinking alcohol." This shows that having a higher age would make it more difficult for young people to drink illegally and get away with it. In addition, an older drinking age may have some serious health benefits because the female liver is not fully developed until the age of 21 (BK) and therefore is not as able to break down the toxins in alcohol, this makes drinking

dangerous for these people and therefore it would be much safer to increase the age required to drink alcohol. In 1984, the US legislature passed "the national Drinking Age Act." This act is what led to the increase in drinking age to 21 in all 50 states. Only 20% of 12-20-year olds in America drink alcohol (BK). Which is significantly lower than in Scotland where 70% of 15 year olds have drunk alcohol before. (according to source 2) only 10 % of 15-year olds in the USA report their first drunkenness at age 13, which is less than half of the figures for Scotland, England and Wales who are all in excess of 20%. This is likely to be because the drinking age is 21 in America, and only 18 in the UK, so it is more difficult for fifteen year olds to get away with drinking alcohol as source one shows. (Source 3) according to a survey completed for this report approximately 70% of people question answered "NO" when asked "do you want the legal drinking age to be increased to 21". This shows an overwhelming lack of public support for this option which makes it impractical as even if the law is changed if people don't support it then the law will continue to be broken. Furthermore, even though the USA has a legal drinking age of 21 it is still a massive problem as binge drinking is responsible for 4300 deaths among underage drinkers each year (BK). Additionally it costs the US economy \$24 billion each year (BK). Which is equivalent to everyone aged 12-17 in the USA (25 million) costing the economy almost \$1000 dollars each from their illegal drinking habits. (Source 4) When asked how much they agree with the statement "Increasing the legal drinking age to 21 would increase underage drinking as more people would be underage." Over 70% of people broadly agreed with this statement. This is interesting as although underage drinking may not decrease overall it may reduce drinking in the target group 11-17 year olds. It is crucially important that this groups drinking habits are changed as they are the most susceptible to the adverse effects of alcohol. (Source 5) says "this policy doesn't address the underlying problem of why people drink to excess". This links to (source 6) which show that almost a fifth of 12th graders binged on alcohol in the past 2 weeks, and it is binge drinking which leads to the health implications like alcohol poisoning. (Source 7) argues that increasing the age to 21 would be unjust for young people as "they can vote at 18" which shows that if people are trusted with the future of the country then they should be trusted to make decision about if they want to drink alcohol or not. Moreover (Source 8)

Option 2

According to (Source 9) more a significant majority of people said that they thought current alcohol laws were "Not strict enough", this shows that changes do need to be made in order to resolve this issue however changing the purchase age may not be required to do so. A contributing factor to this enormous issue could be that the affordability of alcohol has increased by 131% since 2000 (BK). However in England the number of boys who were weekly drinkers has fallen by 40 % between 2002 and 2012 (BK). In addition, (source 11) say that drinking among boys in "Wales saw the second largest drop ... down from 47.6% to 11.8%" this shows that the UK is making great steps towards reducing this issue already and that underage drinking may not be as big of a problem as it was in the past. Furthermore, drinking among teenage girls in England dropped by 35% which was the highest decrease across the 36 countries studied (BK) this shows that the UK is actually a leading nation when it comes to reducing underage drinking. This is further backed up by (source 12) which shows that the number of 11-15 year olds who have had an alcoholic drink has decreased by over 20%, which shows a trend that underage alcohol consumption is decreasing. Another reason to keep drinking laws the same is initiative\legislation

has already been introduced in Scotland to tackle this issue. For example the Challenge 25 program has been adopted by off licenses and supermarkets e.g. Tesco which means anyone who looks under 25 must provide valid ID when purchasing age restricted products like alcohol. This makes it extremely difficult for young people to get access to alcohol as it is nearly impossible for a 16 year old to look over 25. This is significant as in 2016 29% of underage drinkers bought their alcohol from off licences while a further 27 % bought it from supermarkets (BK). Furthermore, due to MUP the price of cheap high strength cider's which was the choice drink off many youths has massively increased in price. For instance, the average price of a bottle of Frosty Jacks 3L cider before MUP was £4.22 (BK). However, based on (Source 13) the new minimum price of this drink is £11.25 which is nearly triple its original price. This makes it much more difficult for teenagers to drink on a regular basis as only 20% of teenagers in the UK have jobs (BK) so making alcohol more expensive heavily restricts their ability to buy alcohol.(Source 14) that 5 out of every 6 people surveyed think that underage drinking is a massive problem in the UK. This shows that the issue is massive however, based on the evidence provided changing the age is not the best option so the age should be kept the same.

Option 3

One argument for decreasing the legal drinking age to 16 is the vast majority of people do it anyway which is backed up by (source 15) which show almost 95% of people question first tried alcohol before turning 18 and of those a further 88% tried it before 16. Which shows that people aren't afraid of breaking the law so reducing the age would just reduce the number of people breaking the law. This is backed up by (source 16) which shows that a significant majority agreed to some extent with the statement "decreasing the legal drinking age to 16 would reduce underage drinking as less people would be underage." Although underage drinking may technically decrease it wouldn't reduce the massive health issues associated with teenage alcohol consumption. This is because the number of 16-17 year olds drinking would stay the same or increase, they just would no longer be classed as underage. There are already significant issues to do with alcohol related health issues in this target group as 873 under 18's were hospitalised with alcohol related illnesses in 2013/2014. Furthermore, the male liver doesn't fully develop until 18 and 21 from women so it will not be ready to break down excessive volumes of alcohol. Additionally, 17 under 18's are hospitalised each week in Scotland with an alcohol related illness or injury (BK). In France the legal drinking age was increased from 16 to 18 in 2009 and (Source 17) shows that this age change has actually had an adverse effect as drinking among 16 and 17 year olds in France has actually increased. This could mean a couple of things that changing the age to buy won't necessarily be successful and that the drinking age may not be the biggest factor which affect underage alcohol consumption.

Evaluation of Sources

One of the sources used to produce this report was a public opinion survey. They survey was completed by 18 people and asked them about their thoughts on to what extent underage drinking is a problem and whether they think the legal purchase age for alcohol should be increased, decreased or kept the same. The sample size was quite small and therefore some of the data provided may be unreliable. In addition, almost 95% of respondents were in the age bracket 16-25, the survey could have

been improved if the age of respondents was more widespread. Furthermore, only 6% of respondents were in full time employment while the other 94% were all students, having a more diverse sample for survey would have improved it reliability of the survey. However, the survey was carried out in November 2018 and therefore all of the information gathered is completely up to date. Another source I used was a fact sheet produced by alcohol focus Scotland. The article was produced in February 2015 and therefore some of the statistics it provides may not be up to date. In addition, it is a charity campaign to reduce harm caused by alcohol so the document may show some bias. Furthermore, it receives funding in the form of grants from the Scottish government which means they are less likely to criticise the government's current policies on alcohol. Alcohol focus Scotland also works alongside other organisations like the BMA Scotland (a pressure group made up of doctors) this give them direct access to medical statistics relating to alcohol e.g. hospitalisations as a result of alcohol abuse.

Conclusion

In conclusion my recommendation is that the age requirement to buy alcohol should be kept the same. The key reasons for choosing this option were that underage alcohol consumption has already decreased by 40% among 15 year old boys and 35% among 15 year old girls in England. The key reason that I didn't chose option 1 was that it is still am massive issue in the USA who have a drinking age of 21 as there are 4300 deaths related to underage alcohol consumption each year in the US. The key reason I didn't chose option 3 (decrease the legal drinking age to 16) was that it would to health issues as 17 teenager a week in Scotland are admitted to hospital with an alcohol related condition.

So, the recommendation to the minster is to keep the legal drinking age the same (18 years old). However, the minister should also consider other options to reduce underage alcohol consumption, like educating child more thoroughly on the dangers and consequences associated with underage drinking as I feel they maybe be more effective when trying to tackle this issue. In addition, good progress is being made and the Challenge 25 as well as MUP which should be given more time to work, before any decision about changing the age is made as legislation is always the answer. Furthermore, if these initiatives prove successful then they should be rolled out across the whole of the UK (as MUP is only in Scotland).

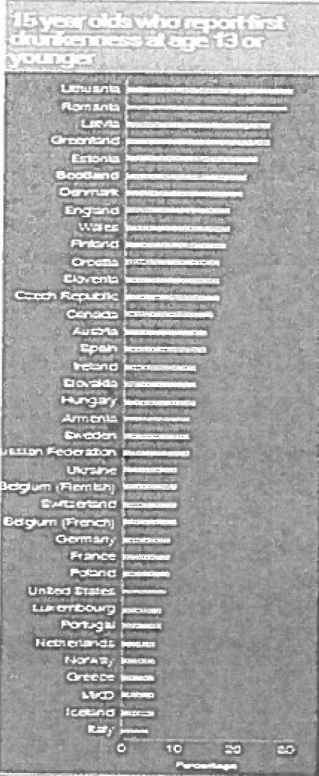
Source One and Five-

Arguments against raising the drinking age to 21

- At 18, people can vote and are considered adults, so we should allow them to have a personal decision on whether to consume alcohol.
- Alcohol in moderation isn't necessarily harmful. Rather than a blanket ban, the government could focus on tackling binge drinking through making alcohol more expensive and tackling the drinking culture.
- Drinking alcohol is so embedded in the culture, raising the legal age to 21, will make the majority of young people break the law.
- It will encourage people to find ways to circumnavigate the law. Black market alcohol supplies, which may be harder to monitor.
 - Will raising the drinking age to 21 be effective?
 - Raising the drinking age to 21 will reduce consumption amongst young people because it will be harder to buy alcohol. Also, young people are the most likely group to misuse alcohol; e.g. drinking to excess, which causes accidents, death and health problems. If people start drinking later in life, they may be more likely to drink in moderation and not get addicted at an early age.
 - However, it will still be possible for young people to drink at home. People will find ways to avoid the legislation e.g. asking older people to buy alcohol for them. Nevertheless, it will be more difficult. For example, a 16-year-old may not be able to get away with drinking in a pub any more
 - Author- Tejvan Pettinger Date-9th May 2017

<https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/36/society/legal-drinking-age/>

Source Two-



Source 11-
<https://www.alcohol-focus.scotland.org.uk/media/60109/Alcohol-and-young-people-factsheet.pdf>
 written by
 Alcohol Focus
 Scotland in
 February 2015

Sources 3,9,14,15 and 16

Survey completed by _____ ; on 10th December 2018 with 18 participants.

Survey

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age? 16-25 26-45 46-64 65+
3. Occupation?
4. Have you drunk alcohol before? Yes No
- If you answered no skip question 5
5. How old were you when you first tried alcohol?
 Under 16 16-17 18 and over
6. How much do you agree with the following statement (circle answer):
 "Underage drinking is a massive problem in the UK"
 Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly disagree 6
7. Explain your answer to question 6.
8. Do you think the legal drinking age should be increased to 21?
 Yes No
9. Do you think current alcohol laws are strict enough to prevent underage drinking? Strict enough not strict enough Too strict
10. Would you be in favour of reducing the legal drinking age to 16?
 Yes No
11. "Increasing the legal drinking age to 21 would increase underage alcohol consumption because more people would be underage."
 Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 strongly disagree
12. "Decreasing the legal drinking age to 16 would reduce underage consumption because less people would be underage"
 Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 strongly disagree
13. "Underage drinking is already decreasing due to minimum unit pricing so there is no point in making any changes."
 Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 strongly disagree

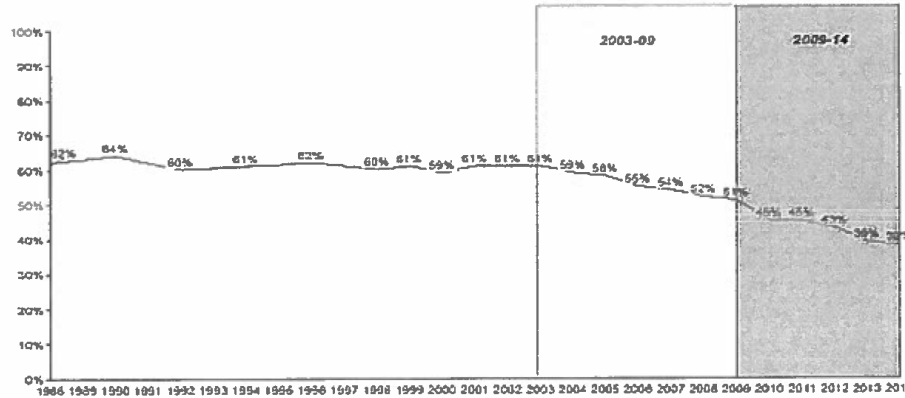
Source 6-
<https://www.responsibility.org/alcohol-statistics/underage-drinking-statistics>

Source 12-

<http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Underage-drinking/Factsheets/Prevalence-of-underage-drinking.aspx>

Reported Drinking Patterns Among 8th, 10th and 12th Grade Students: 2017

Figure 1: Proportion of 11–15-year-olds in England ever to have had an alcoholic drink



Source: HSCIC (2015), Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use, Table 5.1

Source 13-

Example minimum unit prices

Product	Volume	Strength (% abv)	Number of units	Minimum selling price		
				40p	48p	50p
Vodka	70cl	37.50%	28.25	£10.50	£11.81	£13.13
Whisky	70cl	40%	28	£11.82	£12.60	£14
Cider (high strength)	2 litres	7.50%	15	£8	£8.75	£7.50
Cider	2 litres	5.30%	10.6	£4.24	£4.77	£5.30
Perry	750ml	7.50%	5.625	£2.25	£2.83	£2.81
Liqueur	700ml	17%	11.9	£4.78	£5.38	£5.95
Alcopop	700ml	4%	2.8	£1.12	£1.28	£1.40
Lager (4 pack)	440ml (x 4)	5%	2.2	£3.52	£3.98	£4.40
Red wine	750ml	13%	9.75	£3.80	£4.38	£4.88
White wine	750ml	12%	9	£3.60	£4.05	£4.50
Champagne	750ml	12.50%	9.375	£3.75	£4.22	£4.69
Sherry	750ml	17.50%	13.125	£5.25	£5.91	£6.56

<http://www.ias.org.uk/Alcohol-knowledge-centre/Price/Factsheets/Minimum-unit-pricing.aspx>
 the new MUP for frosty Jack's 3L cider is 1.50 times 7.50= £11.25

Source 17-

<https://www.thelocal.fr/20131003/france-drinking-smoking-alcohol-cigarettes-alcoholism>

Source-8

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/data/uk-underage-consumption/>