

Minimum Unit Pricing in Scotland: The inside story and prospects for renewal

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How does MUP work?

- It establishes a 'floor' price for a unit of alcohol (10ml / 8g)
- Minimum price for a product = Price per unit x Strength of alcohol x Volume (litres)
- Actual price is set in secondary legislation
- Approved unopposed by Parliament in 2012
- Implemented at 50p per unit in May 2018
- Review clause
 - Report to parliament reviewing the implementation and impact of MUP (Sept 2023)
- Sunset clause
 - Expires unless Parliament votes to renew beyond 30th April 2024



The aim of MUP



The policy aim of MUP is to reduce health harms caused by alcohol consumption...It aims to reduce both the consumption of alcohol at population level and, in particular, among those who drink at hazardous and harmful levels.

MUP Evaluation

- 5 year programme
 - 12 PHS-funded studies
 - 7 separately funded studies
 - 24 other publications
- Quality appraisal process = total of 40 papers in evidence synthesis

Outcome areas:



Evaluating the impact of
minimum unit pricing for alcohol
in Scotland: Final report

A synthesis of the evidence

27 June 2023

Deaths and hospital admissions

- Estimated 13.4% reduction in deaths only ever caused by alcohol (156 fewer per year) [*compared to no MUP*]
- Estimated 4.1% reduction in hospital admissions (411 fewer each year)
- Additional estimated 122 fewer deaths and 488 fewer hospital admissions due to alcohol from conditions where alcohol is not the sole cause
- Reductions largest among men and those living in the 40% most deprived areas



Consumption decreased

- Overall consumption reduced by 3%, driven by reduction in the off-trade
- Targeted consumption of those drinking at higher levels
 - Households that purchased the most, reduced the most (negligible impact on moderate drinkers)
 - 3.5% reduction in hazardous drinkers
 - Impact on harmful drinking more mixed, but some reported reduced consumption
 - Greatest reductions for products that had highest increases in price, especially strong cider.



Lack of widespread unintended consequences

- Overall, lack of evidence of impact on social outcomes at population level
 - ✓ No widespread increased use of drugs
 - ✓ Little indication of increased use of non-beverage or illicit alcohol
 - ✓ No impact on crime, spending on food or nutritional value of food
 - ✓ Impact on road traffic accidents was mixed
- Some drinkers - especially those with dependence - saw exacerbated existing social harms (such as financial pressures), but these were not prevalent or typical.
- Cross-border purchasing limited to those living near the border
- No evidence of impact on the industry



Changing Social & Political Context

2012

- Consensus on need to address the alcohol problem
- Strong government leadership
 - outright majority
 - personal commitment of Deputy First Minister
- Generally positive media coverage
- Reasonable understanding by politicians of whole population approach and purpose of MUP

2023

- Illegal drugs as dominant issue
- Weakened government under new leadership
 - 'New Deal' for business
- Many new Parliamentarians. More tribal (possible UK election in 2024)
- More active industry (incl through funded charities)
- Increased dominance of industry framing and narrative in media
- Cost of living crisis

Future price

- WHO state that pricing policies must be regularly reviewed and revised to maintain and maximise their effectiveness
- The effect of MUP has been eroded by inflation and by the pandemic
 - 50p in 2012 = 77p in July 2023.
 - Not adjusting MUP for inflation is estimated to lead to 1076 additional deaths over 20 years
- Increasing MUP would result in greater effects on health harm and reduced costs to the health service
- Need for a clear, long-term policy on MUP, with annual uprating of MUP with indexing to a measure of inflation or affordability

Next Steps

- Government consultation until 22 November:
 - Should MUP **continue**?
 - If MUP continues, do you agree with the Government's proposal to increase it to **65 pence**?
- Secondary legislation will be introduced in Jan 2024
- Vote in Scottish Parliament by end of April 2024 on whether to continue MUP and, if so, whether to increase it to 65p

Alcohol: Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP): Continuation and Future Pricing: Consultation

Conclusions

- MUP works! It achieves aim of reducing consumption → reducing harm
- Dependent drinkers were not target of the policy but need great support
- 50p per unit was probably too low to begin with; it definitely was too low (at least 65p per unit)
- Must establish a mechanism to automatically adjust the price to ensure policy is optimised
- Alcohol a big problem now; even bigger now – public health emergency
- MUP – already other preventative measures on marketing and availability – have never been more needed
- Government should be able to deliver a majority in support of renewing and increasing the MUP

BUT: will industry pursue a new legal challenge?

Thank you

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