

Official Response

Subject: Alcohol: Review of the minimum unit pricing and continuation consultation
Requested by: The Scottish Government
Date: 21 November 2023
Prepared on behalf of: The Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group

Question 1

Do you think Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) should continue?

Yes

No

Please give reasons for your answer.

It is clear that the misuse and excessive consumption of alcohol has an adverse effect on many aspects of life in Scotland, not least our health.

The Minimum Unit Price (MUP) is a strategically targeted attempt to help address some of these issues- particularly in relation to those who drink to excess. However, it must be remembered that the vast majority of alcohol-attributable deaths are due to common causes, such as cardiovascular and digestive diseases, cancers and injuries, due to violence or falls. In addition, it is clear that alcohol use, while having a direct effect on the health of the consumer, is also an aggravating factor in a substantial proportion of crimes and thus imprisonment. All of these issues are interlinked, and should be regarded as such.

We must not lose sight of the fact that MUP, while helpful, can only ever be one weapon in the armoury of seeking to tackle the public health problem that is alcohol consumption in Scotland. We would urge the Scottish Government to continue to escalate work in areas in this space in relation to education and rehabilitation, as well as wider work to tackle poverty and to better understand trauma. Comprehensive analyses of the effects of MUP have helpfully been presented by Public Health Scotland ([Evaluating the impact of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Scotland: Final report \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](https://publichealthscotland.scot)) and others such as the Sheffield Alcohol Research Group ([New modelling of alcohol harms in Scotland - SARG \(sarg-sheffield.ac.uk\)](https://sarg-sheffield.ac.uk)). These indicate, for example, that approximately 150 lives per year have been saved as a result, and that both hospital admissions related to alcohol consumption, and the sales of alcohol from shops and supermarkets, have been reduced.

Figures such as these are sufficient to convince us that MUP is a policy which should be retained. We fear that to fail to do so would risk losing benefits already gained- which, given the wider context, Scotland can ill- afford to do.

Question 2

If MUP continues, do you agree with the proposed Minimum Unit Price of 65 pence?

Yes

No

Please give reasons for your answer.

Having agreed that MUP should continue, the question then becomes in what form, and at what level? One of the aims of MUP is to use price increases as a disincentive to alcohol purchase (and therefore its consumption). Even with MUP, analysis indicates that, compared with average household income, alcohol remains significantly cheaper than it has been in the past (74% more affordable now than it was in 1987; just in the decade between 2008 and 2019, alcohol became 13% more affordable. ([Alcohol price and duty | Alcohol Change UK](#))).

However, there is evidence that there remains some public resentment as regards MUP- especially among men and those from more disadvantaged communities (groups which are most likely to experience the health benefits of the effects of MUP)

Since MUP was introduced in 2016, the increase in the rate of inflation has meant that some of the gains made have been blunted. As a result, a significant increase in MUP is, in our view, essential. The analysis presented in the documents accompanying this consultation ([Alcohol: Minimum Unit Pricing \(MUP\): Continuation and Future Pricing: Consultation - Scottish Government consultations - Citizen Space](#)) comes to the conclusion that the correct level at which to set the new rate of MUP would be 65p per unit (ppu) alcohol. A major factor in reaching this conclusion is the inflation rate. However, the report acknowledges that to set the rate at 65ppu will have “increased impact on (*the alcohol*) industry”.

However, given the volatility of the inflation rate in recent years, we would suggest that future increases should be made on a more regular basis, and should be explicitly linked to, but slightly above, the rate of inflation. There is a need for boldness in setting this element of health policy, in order to bring the relative price of alcohol closer to being a realistic reflection of household income. We would suggest that the MUP level should be reviewed on a 2-yearly basis, and should incorporate a form of “price escalation”, perhaps 1.5% above the average monthly inflation rate for that period. The consultation report cites increased alcohol deaths for 2022 as an additional factor in recommending setting the level at 65ppu. However, this rise in alcohol deaths may need to be considered in the context of the increased alcohol consumption levels associated the Covid-19 pandemic- a factor which is unlikely to be germane in years to come

In conclusion, we would be in favour of 60ppu, a slightly lower rate than that advocated in the consultation document, as long as it is in association with a form of regular rate escalation, perhaps similar to that we recommend above.

Question 3

We invite comments on:

- the Scottish Ministers’ proposal to continue MUP, and
- the proposed MUP of 65 pence

Please comment below

The Scottish Government is to be congratulated on having been in the vanguard of nations seeking to use MUP as a means to tackle alcohol misuse. However, we must not take our eye off the ball, nor should we think that increases in MUP, however steep they may appear, will solve all of the issues relating to alcohol and the health and wellbeing of our nation

In addition, as the effectiveness and practicality of the MUP has now been established, we would recommend the removal of the sunset clause