

Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse briefing Scotland



Updated March 2021
by David Bradwell

Drugs deaths

Scotland has the worst drugs death rate in Europe, and in 2020 records showed 1,264 people died, a record number for the sixth year in a row. It is about three and a half times the rate for England and Wales.

Drugs regulation is a matter for the UK parliament, and there has been some debate about whether relevant powers should be devolved to Holyrood.

One key argument is to change the focus of drug misuse policy away from criminal justice and towards protecting public health. One practical change of this might be to allow safe consumption rooms. There is evidence to suggest that where they are used in other countries, this makes a difference to prevent overdoses. Drug users may also be able to be in contact with support agencies which could also be beneficial.

Policy change or devolving this responsibility to Holyrood would need the agreement of the UK Parliament – something which the UK Government has ruled out.

These debates may continue for many months or years, but there are increasing calls for urgent action to happen now to tackle a crisis within Scotland using the methods that are currently available.

Alcohol

In May 2018, a Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol was introduced. It targeted low-cost, high-strength products by setting a minimum price of 50p per unit of alcohol. Since then, there have been two full years' worth of data which have shown that alcohol consumption in Scotland is at its

lowest level in 25 years¹. The legislation which introduced the Minimum Unit Price included a ‘sunset clause’ meaning it will expire on 30 April 2024 unless the Scottish Parliament votes for it to continue.

Questions for candidates

1. What is your party’s position on tackling Scotland’s drugs deaths crisis? Is it about more money for rehab and addiction services, or about moving away from criminalisation and towards a public health approach?
2. What do you think about the impact of the Minimum Unit Price on alcohol consumption, and if elected how will you vote on the sunset clause resolution of whether to keep it or not?

Contact

We would like to know how this guidance was useful and what should be added or changed for future publications.

If you have questions, suggestions or comments please write to:

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¹ <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/media/440014/mup-two-years-on-briefing-may-2020.pdf>