

# Self-regulation—Voluntary industry initiative to combat alcohol misuse

## Quick Summary

To tackle rising harms from alcohol misuse, the Public Health team in the Department of Health worked with the industry to fund and deliver a social marketing campaign. Industry agreed to contribute voluntarily £25m per annum (with at

least £5m of that in cash) over 5 years to encourage more responsible drinking and shift public attitudes to drunkenness. This was delivered through the charity Drinkaware.

## What was the context?

### The Policy Challenge

*Macro context:* While the vast majority of people who drink enjoy alcohol in moderation, there is a growing public health problem with many regularly drinking too much or dependent on alcohol. Alcohol-related crime and disorder by binge drinking young adults is also problematic. Both of these issues cost taxpayers billions of pounds every year in police and hospital resources.

*The challenge:* Launch an industry-funded social marketing campaign aimed at reducing public acceptance of drunkenness and to shift public attitudes in order to reduce excessive consumption. It aimed to encourage people to take responsibility for their own behaviours and to pose questions that encouraged them to think about their drinking habits.

This was to counter-balance the day-to-day marketing activities of alcohol manufacturers and retailers promoting their brands and products.

### Why was taking no action not an option?

Alcohol misuse amongst young adults was harming individuals, communities and society with financial, social and health impacts, some of which are rising dramatically.

Consumption of alcohol per capita has doubled over the last 50 years, and nearly 10m people drink above the NHS recommended limits. This results in nearly 1m alcohol-related hospital admissions each year from liver disease, cancer, stroke and heart disease, accidents and toxic poisoning amongst others. This costs the NHS £2.7bn, and the number of admissions are rising at 11% per annum. Alcohol is also a major contributor to crime, and is estimated

to cost society £8-13bn to address.

Government committed to 'seek a financial contribution from the industry towards the harms caused by excessive drinking' in the 2004 Alcohol Strategy.

### Why was a regulation not chosen as an option?

Prescribing Government approved campaign material in retail outlets through regulation may not have been effective and would have been both difficult and costly to enforce.

### Why was the voluntary option preferred as an alternative?

Working with businesses can achieve more contributions and better targeting (e.g. using company / in-store magazines).

There were also suitable vehicles available:

The Portman Group, supported by the UK's leading drinks producers, promote sensible drinking to help. However, membership did not include retailers (key players for the campaign) and was not independent.

The Drinkaware Trust ([www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)), was established as an independent charity in 2007 to address the independence issue. The trust provides consumers with information to make informed decisions about the effects of alcohol on their lives and lifestyles. Its target issues include irresponsible drinking by young adults, addressing health harms in the 25-44 year olds, and those drinking underage.

Whilst there were existing contributions from industry, these were not evenly spread or sufficient to make the required impact.

## What was delivered (mechanism)?

### Campaign for Smarter Drinking - July 2009

The industry secured financial and 'in kind' pledges from over 45 businesses to fund £100million social marketing campaign over 5 years aimed at encouraging more responsible drinking among young adults and shifting attitudes towards drunkenness. It represents the largest ever media spend on responsible drinking messages.

### Future Funding for Drinkaware

The success of the Campaign was used as a catalyst for the negotiations on future funding of the Drinkaware Trust, an industry funded charity, with a balance of industry and non-industry board members, which commissions responsible drinking campaigns across the UK. The negotiations secured over £5m cash per annum over the next three years from major retailers and producers.

This fulfilled the Government's commitment in the 2004 Alcohol Strategy to 'seek a financial contribution from the industry towards the harms caused by excessive drinking'.

### Terms

Industry devised and agreed a funding formula dependent on alcohol turnover and sector, and public pledges were made by firms to contribute.

### Administration / Enforcement

Payment was made directly to the Drinkaware trust by individual firms. No enforcement mechanism was put in place - the system is based on reputation and peer pressure.

## How did we make this happen?

### The Development Process

#### (1) The General Process

This was a long-term development covering two different alcohol strategies over six years (Alcohol Strategy 2004, and Safe. Sensible. Social. strategy 2007). During this time, various options were considered and feasibility varied, depending on success of marketing and other initiatives .

#### (2) How Industry and Other Stakeholders Were Engaged

The Department of Health chaired fortnightly meetings over six months with key stakeholders (e.g. the Portman Group, Wine and Spirits Trade Association, Diageo) who in turn engaged with the rest of the sector.

#### (3) Role of the Government

- No. 10 Summit in 2007 hosted by the Prime Minister challenged the industry to deliver.
- The summit provided a springboard for the Department of Health chaired process in 2009 to secure future funding at a higher level from across the entire manufacturing and retailing industry.

- The Ministerial summit with the industry chaired by the Secretary of State for Health in 2009 added further impetus.



## Lessons learnt

#### • Work with the industry champions

Getting some big companies on side early is essential

#### • Have a clear goal – but be flexible in how it is arrived at.

Being flexible in one area can produce benefits elsewhere (e.g. a 1 year only 2% early payment discount was agreed which enabled around half the companies to sign up early)

#### • Make it the right thing and the smart thing for businesses to do. (moral-suasion)

Explain how adopting a socially responsibly attitude is in a businesses long-term interests, and it should not require government threats to elicit such action.

#### • Speak with one voice across government

Both HO and BIS attended various of the DH-chaired events. This was essential to ensure industry did not receive mixed messages, and any rumours of such could be quashed.

#### • Keep all on board

There were times when some companies were keen to do their own thing, however, the success of this initiative depended on harnessing collective will. In this respect peer pressure within the industry can be highly effective.

The success of Drinkaware is still to be evaluated, and a strategic review is planned in 2012. However, the process has provided an effective template for future engagement with industry on similar initiatives.



## The Team / Further information

#### The Team—Public Health, Department of Health

- Jean Nicol

#### Want to know more about alternatives?

- Contact the BRE: [alternatives@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alternatives@bis.gsi.gov.uk)

