

Health and Community Care

Review of the Alcohol Sponsorship Guidelines for Scotland

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In August 2011, Ipsos MORI was commissioned to conduct an independent review of the Alcohol Sponsorship Guidelines for Scotland. The overarching aim of the review was to evaluate knowledge of, and compliance with, the Guidelines by the alcohol industry, with a focus on identifying best practice and examining whether there is a need to enhance and improve the Guidelines to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Main Findings

- Overall, the *Alcohol Sponsorship Guidelines for Scotland* were viewed very positively by research participants. The Guidelines, in their current form, were viewed as necessary, worthwhile and effective, as well as clear, concise and easy to comply with.
- Self-reported knowledge of the Guidelines was generally high among industry representatives, particularly Scottish Government Alcohol Industry Partnership (SGAIP) members. Knowledge was lower among rights-holders (that is, those who own the rights to a sponsored activity/event, e.g. a football club or festival organiser), who tended to be unaware of the detail within the Guidelines.
- The review uncovered no major issues with regard to the interpretation of, or compliance with, the Guidelines. However, industry representatives felt that compliance might be an issue among some smaller alcohol companies and that rights-holders could take on more responsibility for implementation.
- A number of recommendations for enhancing the Guidelines flow from the research. These include: adding some case studies to the Guidelines to illustrate what is meant by a 'recognisable commitment' to 'diversionary and community activities'; providing more of a steer on what constitutes good practice in respect of the collection of demographic data for sponsored events or activities; addressing the question of whether or not it is appropriate for children's replica clothing to be branded with non-alcoholic versions of sponsors' products; giving consideration to adapting the wording of the principle relating to replica shirts to address this issue; addressing in the Guidelines the growth of online and digital communications relating to responsible drinking messages; and updating the principles relating to sampling to reflect the move to Challenge 25.
- The findings of the review also point towards actions that might help ensure compliance with the Guidelines in the future. These include: raising awareness of the Guidelines among all those to whom they apply (particularly smaller alcohol companies that are not part of the SGAIP and rights-holders); developing a mechanism for identifying and addressing non-compliance; developing an online portal to provide easy access to the Guidelines and related documentation; and bringing greater consistency in sponsorship guidelines across the UK and between the UK and Europe.

Introduction

The overarching aim of the review of the Alcohol Sponsorship Guidelines for Scotland was to evaluate knowledge of, and compliance with, the Guidelines by the alcohol industry, with a focus on identifying best practice and examining whether there is a need to enhance and improve the Guidelines to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

The specific objectives of the research were to:

- map the landscape of sponsorship activity across Scotland
- identify the level of knowledge of the Guidelines
- review current practice in implementation and interpretation of the Guidelines
- identify good practice of application of the Guidelines
- identify areas of, and reasons for, non-compliance with the Guidelines
- make recommendations for enhancing and improving the Guidelines, to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Methods

The research comprised three phases. Phase one involved a desk-based mapping exercise to establish knowledge of the Guidelines and the range of sponsorship activity undertaken by the alcohol industry in Scotland since the Guidelines came into effect.

Twenty-four companies were sent a pro-forma in which they were invited to record details of all commercial sponsorships with a value of £5,000 or more and signed in Scotland after 1 February 2009 (and/or activities that were signed before 1 February 2009 but are still active/ongoing). The pro-forma also included questions on awareness and perceptions of the Guidelines.

The sample for the mapping exercise was provided by the SGAIP. To provide reassurance that no companies had been missed, Ipsos MORI searched the internet for other companies that might be undertaking sponsorship activity in Scotland within the set criteria, and for events in Scotland which may be sponsored by alcohol companies. However, no companies were added into the sample following these searches.

This meant that the sample comprised primarily SGAIP member organisations and that local alcohol

companies were largely excluded from the research. These companies are potentially less likely to be aware of the Guidelines, and therefore perhaps less likely to be complying with them. Although the research was unable to confirm whether or not this is the case, interviewees suggested that low awareness among smaller companies is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Phase two comprised a series of in-depth interviews to explore awareness and perceptions of the Guidelines in more detail, and assess current practice in respect of implementation. Interviews were undertaken with industry representatives (7 interviews), independent stakeholders (3) and rights-holders (5).

Industry participants were chosen from among those who completed pro-formas and selected to be broadly representative of pro-forma returns in terms of their sector, sponsorship activity and knowledge of the Guidelines.

The stakeholders and rights-holders were chosen in consultation with the Project Advisory Group. The stakeholders represented organisations which campaign on alcohol issues and/or aim to promote good practice in alcohol policy and/or sponsorship. The rights-holders came from the sport and entertainment sectors.

Phases one and two culminated in the production of draft recommendations for enhancing the Guidelines. The final phase involved discussing the recommendations with the alcohol industry, to ensure that these were deliverable and in the spirit of the Guidelines.

Two focus groups with industry representatives were held. All those who were sent a pro-forma were invited to take part. Roughly half (13 of 33 invited) attended.

Findings

Sponsorship activity in Scotland

Twenty-one completed pro-formas were returned from alcohol companies, 18 of which reported undertaking sponsorship activity. A total of 43 sponsored activities reported.

Almost half of the reported activities related to sports events, clubs, or teams, while a third related to music events or other cultural activities, including book, comedy and film festivals. Half of all the sponsorship activity was undertaken by the whisky sector and around a third accounted for by the beer and cider sector. In keeping with the principles of the Guidelines, all sponsored activities and events were targeted at audiences aged 18 and over. One third

were targeted at audiences aged 25 and over and one third were not targeted at any specific age group in particular. None of the sponsored activities were aimed specifically at females, with around a third targeted at males and the remainder at both males and females.

Awareness and perceptions of the Guidelines

Self-reported knowledge of the Guidelines was generally high among industry representatives, particularly SGAIP members. Knowledge was lower among the three rights-holders interviewed, who tended to say that they could not actually remember seeing the Guidelines document, and were generally unaware of the detail contained within it. However, there was a sense in which rights-holders felt they did not require an in-depth knowledge of the document as their industry partners should, and do, inform them of their obligations in this regard.

While the research was focused primarily on SGAIP member organisations, which tend to be larger national alcohol companies, there was a perception that smaller alcohol companies will have a lower than average awareness of the Guidelines, and thus, may be less likely to comply with them.

Interpretation and implementation of the Guidelines

The review uncovered no major issues with regard to the interpretation of the Guidelines, and identified very few barriers to compliance. However, in addition to industry representatives feeling that compliance might be an issue among some smaller alcohol companies, there was a view that rights-holders could take on more responsibility for implementation.

Additionally, there were a number of suggestions for enhancing specific principles covered in the Guidelines, the most common of which were:

- clarifying what is meant by a ‘recognisable commitment’ to ‘community or diversionary activities’
- providing more of a steer on what constitutes good practice in respect of the collection of demographic data for sponsored events or activities
- addressing the question of whether or not it is appropriate for children’s replica clothing to feature branding for non-alcoholic versions of sponsors’ products
- addressing the growth of online and digital communications in principles relating to the promotion of responsible drinking messages

- updating the guidelines on sampling to reflect the move to Challenge 25.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations flow from the research regarding the content of the Guidelines. Specifically:

- the SGAIP should consider adding to the Guidelines some case studies to illustrate what is meant by a ‘recognisable commitment’ to ‘diversionary and community activities’
- it would be prudent to recommend that companies avoid sponsoring teams that could potentially comprise a majority of under 18s. In respect of the sponsorship of individuals, the SGAIP should be mindful of the view that an under 25 threshold should apply as per the Portman Group and Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) guidelines, and consider whether this is an area it might review in the future
- the SGAIP should undertake a detailed review of the approaches alcohol companies take to collecting demographic data, with a view to identifying good practice to include in the Guidelines
- the wording of the principle relating to shirt sponsorship should be adapted, to address the issue of branding for non-alcoholic versions of sponsors’ products appearing on replica shirts
- the principles relating to sampling should be updated to reflect the move to Challenge 25
- the SGAIP should consider addressing in the Guidelines the growth of online and digital communications – at a minimum, it would be helpful to include a reference to the Portman Group’s digital marketing code and recommend that companies follow this.

In addition to these recommendations relating specifically to the Guidelines document, the findings of the review point towards actions that might be taken to help ensure compliance with the Guidelines in the future:

- raising awareness of the Guidelines among all those to whom they are applicable, particularly smaller companies that are not part of the SGAIP and rights-holders. Suggestions for raising awareness included using relevant existing events, forums or networks as “conduits for getting the information out there”

- developing a mechanism for identifying and addressing non-compliance – while some participants favoured the continuation of a self-regulatory approach, others felt that any monitoring should be conducted by an independent body, suggesting that this would be more credible than self-regulation and consequently may “pre-empt” any potential tightening of the Guidelines
- developing an online portal where the Guidelines and related documentation can be easily accessed – participants felt that an online portal would facilitate cross-referencing of the relevant legislation and codes, and serve as a vehicle for the sharing of ideas, experiences and best practice
- bringing greater consistency in sponsorship Guidelines across the UK and, indeed, between the UK and Europe – while it was recognised that consistency is complicated by the fact that legislation and policy priorities in respect of alcohol differ in Scotland and the rest of the UK, there was a view, and indeed an aspiration, that the Portman code will be loosely based around the Scottish Guidelines but include “caveats” referencing relevant variation in legislation and practice across the UK.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131-244 7560.

ISBN: 978-1-78045-693-5

APS Group Scotland
DPPAS12678 (06/11)



Social Science in Government