

Scottish Youth Parliament

October 2023

Introduction:

Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) response to the minimum unit pricing consultation is based on a focus group with Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) in the Health and Wellbeing Committee. It was held during SYP80, SYP's Autumn sitting in Aberdeen on 7th October 2023, and gave MSYPs the opportunity to share their views on minimum unit pricing in Scotland, and on increasing it to 65p.

Summary of our key recommendations:

1. For the Scottish Government to continue and renew the minimum pricing unit of 50p.
2. To not increase the minimum unit pricing to 65p when renewing

Who We Are

The Scottish Youth Parliament - www.syp.org.uk

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis for the Scottish Youth Parliament's (SYP's) vision, mission and values. In particular, SYP embodies Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that young people have the right to express their views freely and have their opinions listened to in all matters affecting them. As a completely youth-led charity, the words and sentiment of Article 12 have profound importance for our work.

Our Vision

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

Our Mission

SYP is a rights-based charity, with members supported by all of Scotland's 32 local authorities and 11 National Voluntary Organisations. SYP's mission is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development, and empowering them, using a youth work ethos. Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

Our Values

Democracy - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14 to 25. Our democratic structure and the scale of our engagement across Scotland gives us a mandate that sets us apart from other organisations.

Rights - We are a rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights and ensuring that local and national governments uphold their rights.

Inclusion and Diversity - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure policymakers and politicians hear the voices of young people from every community and background in Scotland.

Political Impartiality - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we deliver the policies that are most important to young people.

Our Approach

As a youth-led organisation, we are constantly seeking the views of our MSYPs and other young people to ensure our policy positions represent their views as clearly as possible. This means that we have numerous opportunities to collect qualitative and quantitative data on a variety of issues underneath the umbrella of health. To ensure our response can accurately reflect the views of our members and the young people they represent, we pulled our information from various sources. These included:

Focus Groups

To help respond to the consultation SYP held a focus group with members from across the health and wellbeing. The focus group took place in person at our autumn sitting in early October.

The group focused on two questions, whether minimum unit pricing should be continued by the Scottish government, and secondly, whether this should be raised from 50p to 64p.

SYP Campaign Priorities

In March 2022 MSYPs consulted their constituents before voting for four National Campaign Priorities for the rest of their term (until November 2023). For each priority, MSYPs have worked with SYP staff to deliver a number of campaign activities which have included consultation with young people and awareness raising of the issues relating to our work.

Questions:

1. Do you think Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) should continue?
Yes
2. If MUP continues, do you agree with the proposed Minimum Unit Price of 65 pence?
No
3. We invite comments on the Scottish Ministers' proposal to continue MUP, and the proposed Minimum Unit Price of 65 pence.
Comments Below:

To help respond to specific questions in this consultation we held a focus group with members of our Health and Wellbeing Subject committee. The focus group took place during our Autumn sitting in October 2023.

SYP believes that dignity is a foundation of human rights, and as a right-based organisation, we advocate for decision-makers to embed these into the responses to tackle health issues. This concept is central to our approach.

The focus group was in agreement on maintaining the Minimum Unit Pricing for alcohol. MSYPs saw minimum unit pricing as a deterrent for binge drinking and potentially reduces binge drinking in young people as the high price point for drinks with a high alcohol percentage can be prohibitive.

They also argued that anything that was already in place that was sufficiently bringing down alcohol-specific deaths was worth continuing by the Scottish Government. The importance of reducing alcohol deaths was the first thing brought up by the group and a priority that was raised throughout the discussion. Having a minimum unit price could also help people be more aware of their drinking habits. If each drink is going to cost a certain amount it can subconsciously make people think about their intake. One MSYP compared this to the sugar tax, and how that can help people choose healthier options. The same way minimum unit pricing could help people actively or subconsciously choose lower percentage alcohol.

However, whilst there was overarching agreement to renew the Minimum Unit Pricing, to reduce alcohol-specific deaths the group did not fully agree with increasing the Minimum Unit Pricing to 65p.

A concern MSYPs in the focus group had of the increase to 65p was due to the cost-of-living crisis. There already has been an increase in the cost of alcoholic drinks, and this would further inflate those prices. This means that it can create more financial hardships for those on lower incomes.

A specific concern was raised for students who are already having to rely on SASS funding and other financial aid would suffer with this increase in unit pricing. MSYPs felt this could affect the social element of their university experience. One young person pointed out that the increase in a bottle of wine would significantly impact their budgeting for the week. Another young person also shared their personal experience of missing out on social events at university because they already cannot afford alcohol, and increasing this further would mean that they would move only further away from their peers.

The MSYPs in the focus group believed that the jump from 50p to 65p was too great. They felt that if an increase was going to be put forward by the government then gradual increases would help with financial hardship.

A further concern of members of the focus group was the fact that those who are struggling with alcohol addiction would continue to buy alcohol to the detriment of other necessities. Simply putting up the minimum unit pricing creates a short-term fix, rather than addressing other social factors.

MSYPs also stressed the need for other approaches, one group suggested the need for preventative measures such as youth work groups to try and help prevent young people from turning to alcohol, and also support systems being put in place for if they do. The group all argued that there was a need for more support for those struggling and that this one approach (minimum unit pricing) would not fix the alcohol-specific deaths on its own.