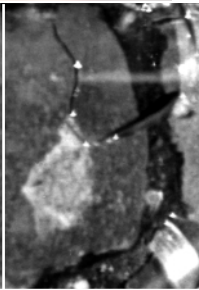


A close-up photograph of a man, a woman, and a young child smiling together. The man is on the left, the woman is in the center wearing glasses, and the child is on the right. They are all looking towards the camera with joyful expressions.

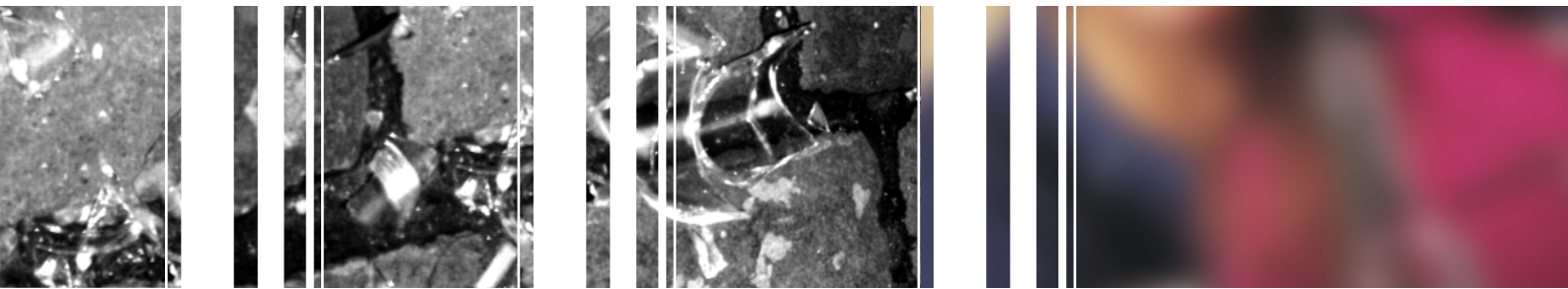
chapter three

culture change





|| ■ ■ ■ | Plan for Action on alcohol problems



introduction

3.1 This chapter:

- describes what we mean by the social context or cultural aspects of the use of alcohol in Scotland;
- says where we want to make a difference to these cultural aspects;
- sets out the action to bring about change.

What are “cultural aspects of the use of alcohol”?

3.2 One way to define culture is:

- The way we view things and do things around here.

3.3 The Executive acknowledges that there is not a single culture surrounding drinking in Scotland, but several. There are differences between age groups, genders, ethnic and religious groups, urban and rural areas. In the past, many cultural aspects of drinking were associated with male behaviour. This is less the case now, however.

3.4 These are some aspects of the cultures surrounding drinking in Scotland today:

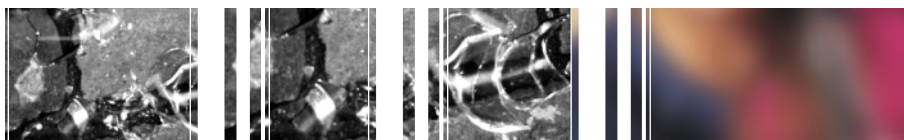
- Drinking as a social act: who we drink with and on what occasions.
- Where people drink: e.g. in pubs and bars, at home, over a meal.
- What people drink and their images of specific types of drink.
- How much people drink at a time.
- What behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable, when someone has been drinking.
- Gender and age aspects: what drinking patterns and subsequent behaviour are acceptable.
- Alcohol as part of individual, group or national identity.
- When we think that someone has a problem with alcohol.
- Whether and when people with a problem get help.
- Links between use of alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco.

3.5 Some of the positive points about our use of alcohol are:

- Drinking is part of many social occasions.
- Offering alcohol can be a gesture of hospitality.
- It is a way of celebrating important events in people's lives.
- Drinks produced here are a positive aspect of Scottish national identity.

3.6 Evidence for the Plan has, however, identified a number of worrying aspects of the social context of drinking in Scotland today. Not everyone shares the following perspectives, but many do:

- Binge drinking is accepted as the norm for some groups of people.
- Lack of knowledge of risks from alcohol and of how to drink safely.
- Needing alcohol to relax, get a buzz, socialise, be accepted by a peer group. One of the young people in the Save the Children consultation said: "If you don't drink, you won't have friends".
- A view that drunken behaviour is acceptable and fun for some people.



- Drinking as the only or cheapest form of entertainment available.
- Lack of personal responsibility: blaming alcohol itself for people's behaviour.
- Excusing the negative consequences of drinking such as hangovers or argumentative behaviour.
- Perception that there is only one kind of alcohol problem: alcoholism or serious dependence, rather than a range of problems.
- Stigma attached to seeking help for alcohol problems at an early stage.
- Lack of awareness of what types of help are available.

Is Scotland different?

3.7 We had some hard-hitting comments in our consultation exercises that there is:

“A cultural focus on intoxication”,

and that:

“The Scots have a world-wide reputation for hitting the bottle and [celebrating] a hard drinking reputation”.

3.8 In practice, Scottish drinking patterns are not very different to those in other Northern European countries. Worrying features include young people's increasingly heavy drinking. Some of our perceptions and attitudes need to change so that we can move on to shift the harmful drinking behaviours we wish to target.

Why is change needed?

3.9 Shifting the harmful attitudes and behaviour surrounding alcohol that are listed above and promoting better alternatives are fundamental to other action in the Plan. Changing cultures surrounding drinking involves and affects everyone: individuals, families, and communities of all kinds. Culture change will help to promote attitude and behaviour change where these are needed. It will build essential support for more specific action, and give other measures a realistic chance of succeeding.

3.10 Underlying each of the three other broad areas for action in the Plan (prevention, provision, protection) is a balance between **rights** and **responsibilities**. We have rights to choose our lifestyle, but we are also responsible for our personal behaviours and choices. We share responsibilities for the behaviours and choices of our family, our neighbourhood, our colleagues at work and the wider society that we live in. Organisations of all kinds have rights and responsibilities too.

3.11 The balance between acceptable and unacceptable cultures was summed up by one of the people who spoke to System Three:

“The whole attitude towards drinking has to change, [to one] which sees excessive drinking as bad, [but where] using alcohol as part of daily life is normal”.
(Previous service user, Borders.)

3.12 Objectives that make a difference to the cultures surrounding drinking in Scotland are among the most important in this Plan. They are ambitious and change will take time.

3.13 Changing drinking cultures involves:

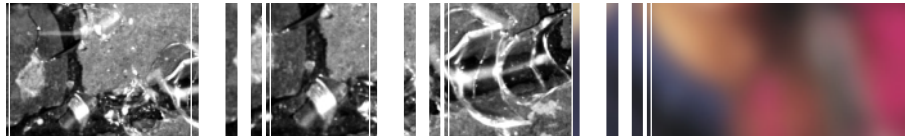
- Addressing some underlying broad issues such as poverty, that may foster harmful drinking cultures and prevent health improvement.
- Prompting thought and debate among the general public and opinion-formers about the issues involved.
- Giving people the information that they need.
- Influencing attitudes of individuals and organisations.
- Giving people access to help when they want to change their behaviour.
- Ultimately, changing behaviour.

3.14 The Executive’s strategies mentioned at the end of chapter 1 will help with some of the broad issues about health improvement and social justice. This chapter and those that follow address culture change and other action targeted more specifically at alcohol problems.

Communications strategy

3.15 The Executive believes that a national communications strategy is needed. Using mass media is one way of influencing both the general public and specific target groups. There was support in the public consultation exercise for such a strategy.

3.16 It’s happening already: the Executive produced a TV advertisement at Christmas and New Year 2000/2001 to raise awareness of the links between excessive drinking, particularly binge drinking, and violent crime. The advertisement was based in a hospital A&E department. It was part of the Scottish police *Safer Scotland Campaign* against violent crime generally. When the impact of the TV advertisement was researched, it was found that:



- **Over 80% of people remembered spontaneously that they had seen the advertisement.**
- **The message was clear that violent consequences of binge drinking were socially unacceptable.**
- **The advertisement affected attitudes through making it less acceptable for individuals to drink excessively.**

3.17 > The Executive will put in place by Easter 2002 a national, long-term “responsible drinking” communications strategy.

3.18 The national communications strategy will aim to influence cultures through its impact on people’s attitudes to:


- Their own drinking, if they have, or might develop, problems with alcohol.
- Alcohol problems of family, friends and other people.

3.19 Communications will include a sustained mix of national and local activities spread over a period of years. At a national level, the strategy will portray the costs of alcohol problems to health, personal safety, public order, effectiveness at work and family and other relationships. The strategy will aim to shift attitudes and subsequently behaviour of the heaviest binge drinkers. It will also support the proposition that binge drinking is unacceptable to the population as a whole. As one of those consulted by System Three told us:

“Drink is fair enough in its own place but I can’t understand why they have to take so much that they don’t know what they are doing.” (Wife of drinker, Edinburgh.)

3.20 The communications strategy is being developed with the support of a sub-committee of SACAM. This includes national agencies such as HEBS and Alcohol Focus Scotland and the alcohol industry, through The Portman Group. Future national communications activities by these organisations will support and complement the Executive’s approach. The current Drinkwise campaign, funded by the Executive and HEBS, will be brought within the strategy and the current efforts of local Drinkwise committees will be incorporated within local strategies. We say more about local co-ordination in chapter 4 of this Plan.

> The communications sub-committee of SACAM will continue to advise at a national level on key messages about alcohol problems, target groups and appropriate channels of communication.

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- 3.21** The HERU study of effectiveness and the review of international experience concluded that media campaigns may affect knowledge and attitudes, but on their own, they generate little effect on behaviour. Mass media needs to be used in conjunction with other prevention activities. Local activities are likely to be more effective than national approaches in targeting specific groups, including equality groups. The communications strategy will therefore need to incorporate a whole range of national and local activities.
- 3.22** The mass media elements of the national communications strategy will not target children directly, although they will undoubtedly reach children and have some general effects on them. The following chapter of this Plan includes some more specific action to address alcohol problems among children and young people.

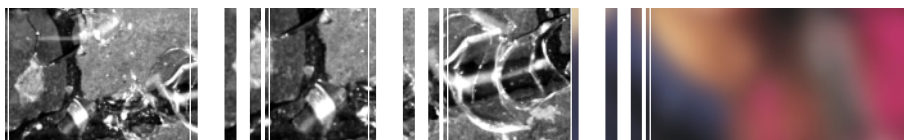
The Words We Use

- 3.23** Many people, including professionals in the alcohol field, said in the consultation exercises that the terms currently used to describe the problems individuals have with alcohol are confusing. They include:

- Alcohol problems, misuse or abuse.
- Drunkenness or intoxication.
- Binge drinking.
- Harmful, hazardous or at-risk drinking.
- Alcohol dependence.
- Alcoholism, addiction and disease.

Descriptions and definitions of what these terms commonly mean are included in the glossary at the start of the Plan.

- 3.24** Some of the reasons for changing the ways alcohol problems are commonly described are:
- It is confusing to all concerned when people use the same words to mean different things.
 - The words used can get in the way of informing people about the whole range of actual and potential problems with alcohol.
 - Descriptions, especially those that imply value judgements, can deter people from seeking help for alcohol problems at whatever stage.



- 3.25** The telling point was made in the public consultation exercise that this Plan should focus not on “people with alcohol problems” but rather on “the problems that some people have with alcohol”. The Executive thinks this will contribute to the changes in culture that are needed and make it easier, for people who need to do so, to say: “I have a problem with alcohol”. One of those consulted by System Three highlighted the issue:

“It doesn’t matter if the person needs help, what matters is if the person knows they need help”. (Family member of drinker, Edinburgh.)

- 3.26** The action that is required to start shifting the terms used in everyday speech:

- > **“Alcohol problems” should be used generally to describe a range of harmful patterns and levels of drinking and their consequences.**

Alcohol problems here refer to a whole spectrum of harm (actual or potential), to the individual or to others. They may result from consistently exceeding sensible drinking levels through to more serious dependence on alcohol. The amounts of alcohol involved will vary from individual to individual and over time.

- 3.27** The term alcohol problems is preferable to “misuse”, or “abuse” which are interpreted in many different ways. As the figures in chapter 1 illustrate, alcohol problems cause harm, to both individuals and to others. We heard from the System Three study that alcohol becomes a problem:

“when it sets a whole train of events in motion – it affects your work, relationships, family life, children, finances”. (Service user, Borders.)

- > **Communications by the Executive and statutory agencies, with both the general public and specific target groups, should reinforce the terminology of “alcohol problems”.**
- > **References to the more technical terms for types of alcohol problems should be reserved for specific settings and purposes, for example discussions between doctors and patients.**

We discuss in chapter 7 improvements to information and definitions used by those who plan and provide services.

- 3.28** We shall need to change the names of some current bodies such as the Scottish Advisory Committee on Alcohol Misuse (SACAM) and Alcohol Misuse Co-ordinating Committees (AMCCs) to reflect the shift from “misuse” to “problems”. It is more convenient to call them by their current titles in this Plan, however.

Culture within organisations and professions

3.29 Organisations and professional bodies can influence cultures surrounding the use of alcohol, through the practices that leaders and managers adopt. This applies to both work and social or leisure-based organisations. All should define when alcohol is, and is not, an appropriate part of the normal working day, or the organisation's other pursuits.

- > **More organisations and professional bodies should adopt alcohol policies that define sensible and appropriate use of alcohol by their members, relevant to their work or other pursuits.**

3.30 It's happening already: the Executive's own alcohol policy is to make sure that people who drink do so sensibly and preferably not during the working day. As a rule, alcohol is not provided during working hours on official premises as part of official hospitality. The Scottish Parliament has a similar workplace policy on alcohol for Parliamentary staff. MSPs operate to a code of conduct which states:

In relation to consumption of alcohol, members are reminded of the requirement in Standing Orders to conduct their Parliamentary duties in an orderly manner; they should not engage in any activity as a member that would bring the Parliament into disrepute. Members are required to ensure that they, and guests to whom they provide hospitality in the course of their Parliamentary duties, so conduct themselves.

Other action

3.31 Some of the action in later chapters of the Plan is also relevant to changing cultures. For example:

- Providing low-cost or free activities that do not involve drinking: for the population as a whole, and particularly for young people (chapter 4).
- Support to parents in discussing alcohol with their children (chapter 4).
- Preventing underage sales of alcohol and inappropriate purchases of alcohol for children (chapter 6).
- Promoting environments that encourage responsible drinking. For example, family settings (which are smoke-free), providing food, relative pricing of soft drinks (chapter 6).
- Improving training for staff in relevant services (chapter 7).

3.32 In addition, the licensing review may be able to recommend changes that influence drinking cultures and, more specifically, the key priorities in the Plan to reduce binge drinking and harmful drinking by children and young people.

