

England 'should look to the Scots' to solve alcohol problem, says Nottingham academic

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England should look to Scotland to solve its drinking culture, which has seen having a pint of lager become as cheap and freely accessible as downing a pint of milk, an expert at The University of Nottingham has said.

Dr Jane McGregor, a specialist in drug and [alcohol](#) addiction treatment in the University's School of Nursing, [Midwifery](#) and [Physiotherapy](#), said that with prices for a four-pack of lager as cheap as a pint of milk in some cases, people are drinking too freely and often way in excess of sensible limits.

And, she said that with initiatives such as minimum pricing, [Scotland](#) is leading the way in fighting back against its traditional hard-drinking image, placing it way ahead of its more liberal [neighbours](#).

Dr McGregor said: "It is treating alcohol as a health risk, rather than an issue of disorder — England is only now waking up to this.

"Because of the huge impacts of alcohol misuse on health, the Scottish Parliament has been quicker to act than the rest of the UK and now is way ahead of the curve in this area."

Dr McGregor made the comments as she launched a new book about alcohol problems in urban Britain, *Drink and the City*, which tracks drinking trends and the many factors which have led the UK to its current situation.

The publication of the book comes just weeks after the Prime Minister David Cameron called on the drinks industry to do more to tackle the 'scandal' of drunkenness and binge drinking and hinted that the Government's alcohol strategy due to be published later this year could contain proposals for minimum pricing for drink and the potential use of US-style 'drink tanks' to detain people while they sober up.

Dr McGregor said that Government liberalisation of alcohol laws had led to more deaths and an increase in health problems. She blamed a bid by politicians to create a 'café culture' and to rejuvenate city centres through the relaxation of licensing laws for actually fuelling binge drinking. Alcohol-related deaths are on the increase — the Office for National Statistics reported 8,790 fatalities in 2010, up 126 on the previous year.

At present the English Government favours 'nudging', a non-coercive approach to behaviour change. She added: "It expects people to follow the unit system of measure which was set in the 1980s. This sets sensible drinking limits of 21 units a week for men, and no more than 14 for women.

"While there is no evidence to raise the limits, there is evidence that this approach on its own is not enough. This is why the Government must look at other means — minimum pricing being just one of a number of levers — to encourage everyone to change their drink behaviour."

Dr McGregor said that Scottish policymakers had been quicker to emphasise public health concerns because the full impact of increasing levels of alcohol consumption has recently become all too apparent. Alcohol-related mortality in Scotland is twice that of the rest of the UK, with one Scot dying every six hours as a direct result of alcohol misuse, according to recent studies.

Scottish Parliament passed the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Act 2010, which came into force on October 1 2011 and introduced a ban on promotions that encourage [binge drinking](#), such as '3 for 2' and '3 bottles for £10'.

A recent report by Alcohol Focus Scotland calls for the Scottish Government to take further action to regulate off-sales and return licensing to its fundamental purpose of controlling the availability to prevent harm. This includes calls for separate alcohol checkouts and reduced trading hours.

Dr McGregor added: "Now the Scottish Parliament proposes to set minimum prices for alcohol, and is utilising the abundant evidence that the most effective way of reducing consumption and harm is increasing the price of alcohol relative to disposable income. Policymakers in [England](#) are looking to Scotland to lead the way.

"Altering the nation's drinking behaviour is becoming an increasingly pressing issue. MPs on the cross-party Science and Technology Committee recently raised concerns that the Government approach was not enough and that greater efforts should be focused on helping people understand the unit system and how to use it. They suggest that people also be advised to take at least two drink-free days a week."

Drink and the City — Alcohol and Alcohol Problems in Urban UK Since the 1950s is published by Nottingham University Press.

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