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Responsible Promotion

In May more than 32,000 on trade outlets, representing over half of Britain's pubs and clubs, agreed to a strict policy of regulating promotions and 'Happy Hours'. All are members of the Beer and Pub Association who have published a ten page guide on 'Standards for the management of responsible drinks promotions and Happy Hours'. Promotions such as drink as much as you like for a fixed sum, drinking games, and 'women drink free' are banned.

It is hoped that the measures, which aim to improve the drinking environment, will help reduce alcohol related disorder but still allow pubs to be competitive. The original reason for the introduction of happy hours (a US invention) was to attract customers into premises during quiet times – such as early evening or mid week. The BBPA guide advocates good promotions as necessary to show-case new products, to reward customer loyalty and to boost trade during quiet periods. It suggests extending special offers to non-alcoholic drinks and using food as a promotional tool.

Longer term offers are advocated by the Portman Group code, such as collecting coupons to receive a free jacket over a month period for example. Some club groups have not signed up to the code - the club group Luminar for example is keener on a minimum price policy.

John Denahm M.P Chair of the Home Affairs select committee believes part of the problem behind existing irresponsible promoting is the competition between premises in some city centres with drinking zones of similar outlets desperate for trade. He is calling for better city planning **'with diverse activities supported by adequate transport and other facilities'**.

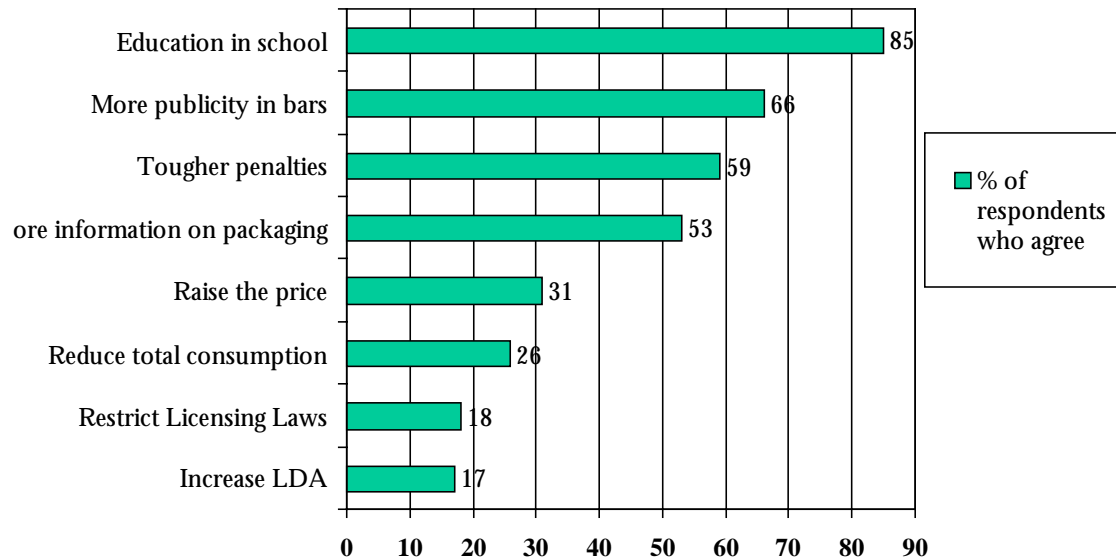
The guide gives a useful framework for local authorities to work from when creating licensing policy or when assessing renewal of licenses or considering suspending the license of an outlet acting in a way to promote disruptive or antisocial behaviour. Mark Hastings, Director of Communications of BBPA comments that **"the local authorities and the police will be using the standards as a benchmark throughout the sector, and clearly will be considering action against those that fall short"**.

Few countries in Europe would need such a guide as their youth do not display the 'mob' tendency which has become so synonymous with the sizeable minority of 'antisocial drinkers' who dominate the media and public perception of Britain's youth culture both at home and abroad. The British Medical Association in its recent findings on binge drinking sums up the UK position well: **'Several cultural factors conducive to binge drinking have been identified in the UK and other parts of Northern Europe. In Northern Europe, for example, drinking tends to occur away from the family and apart from meals. In addition in the UK, the practice of buying rounds is widely observed. This encourages everyone to drink at the speed of the fastest'**.

A study by Generation Europe into the drinking habits of young Europeans (566 participants aged 19-29 from 33 countries) found that peers and friends are deemed the most influential in shaping patterns of drinking (84%) a result echoed by many studies (see AIM forum report issue via http://www.aim-digest.com/gateway/pages/binge/articles/HC_Speech.htm), followed by family, society and 'mass media'.

Only 26% received alcohol education at school, and of that 26% only 12% of those who received information found it effective. Yet the survey reveals that young people believe the most effective way to promote more responsible consumption (85%) is via more education in schools. The second most important influence (66%) was 'more publicity in bars'. Young people clearly recognise the importance of the drinking environment and if the 'temptation' to drink up to the limit or to drink more alcohol can be managed better with more imaginative promotions that avoid promoting excess then the adherence by a sizeable proportion of Britain's pubs and clubs to a responsible promotions policy is an excellent step indeed.

The BBPA guidelines have been well received. Mark Hastings commented “we are delighted with the widespread and warm welcome these standards have received from government, police, licensing authorities, media and the trade”.



Irresponsible promotions damage the reputation of the sector and jeopardise the prospects for individual businesses
Irresponsible promotions can also expose a business to action by the police and licensing authorities through the nuisance and disturbance they can cause
Irresponsible promotions drive down quality and standards and have no place in a well- managed licensed business
In simple terms, an irresponsible promotion is one that encourages or entices individuals to drink to excess, behave in an anti-social manner, or fuels drunkenness