

# Study reveals alcohol industry tactics to influence alcohol policy reform in Scotland

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including supermarkets, drinks companies, and trade associations – distorted international evidence on effective alcohol control measures in an attempt to influence the Scottish Government's public health policy to its advantage, according to a study published today in *PLOS Medicine*.

Researchers, led by Dr Jim McCambridge at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, found that the alcohol industry had ignored, misrepresented and undermined scientific evidence in submissions made to the Scottish Government's 2008 consultation, "Changing Scotland's relationship with alcohol." The consultation looked at policy proposals to introduce minimum unit pricing and end irresponsible promotions including below-cost selling of alcoholic drinks.

Dr McCambridge said: "There is a broad consensus internationally among researchers that the most effective measures to control problems caused by alcohol are to raise the price, control availability and restrict marketing activities. However, our study shows that key players in the alcohol industry constructed doubt about this wealth of scientific evidence and instead chose to promote weak survey-based evidence as well as making unsubstantiated claims to their advantage.

"These tactics mean it is harder for governments to make evidence-based policy where industry is involved. The public interest is not served by the alcohol industry's misinterpretation of research evidence and we must consider to what extent we should allow the health of the population to be compromised by these commercial interests."

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical [Medicine](#) and the University of York looked at 27 submissions made to the Scottish consultation by the alcohol industry.

Tesco criticised the data supporting the Scottish

Government's proposals, claiming there was "little in the way of evidence" to support the impact of price on consumption. The Wine and Spirit Trade Association heavily promoted weak evidence in their submission, citing a small community trial which lacks thorough data.

The Portman Group made unsubstantiated claims that the proposals could "increase the appeal of alcohol to young people by creating a 'mystique' and thereby "turning alcohol into a 'forbidden fruit'". They also claimed that the approach taken by the Scottish Government had been "widely discredited in research studies" when in fact there is broad consensus among researchers, who strongly support the approach as the correct one.

ASDA also made unsubstantiated claims about the adverse effects of policy proposals, saying they believed "minimum pricing and a promotions ban will create incentives for the black market and criminals and illegal door to door sales."

The findings raise concerns over the [alcohol industry's](#) ongoing involvement in alcohol policy-making for England and Wales. Unlike in Scotland, where submissions were available for all to see, not all submissions to the Home Office consultation on the implementation of the Government's [Alcohol Strategy](#) will be accessible in the public domain. It is unclear whether minimum unit pricing will be introduced.

**More information:** J. McCambridge, B. Hawkins, C. Holden. Industry Use of Evidence to Influence Alcohol Policy: A Case Study of Submissions to the 2008 Scottish Government Consultation. *PLOS Medicine*. [DOI:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001431](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001431)

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