

## **Calling Time on alcohol sponsorship of Scottish sport**

### **Scotland's alcohol problem**

Alcohol harm is one of Scotland's most pervasive public health issues, evidenced by the latest alcohol death figures from the National Records for Scotland (NRS). The figures show an increase from 1,245 alcohol-specific deaths in 2021 to 1,276 in 2022, with death rates 4.3 times higher among those living in the most deprived areas of Scotland, compared to the least.<sup>1</sup> In 2021/22, there were 35,187 alcohol-related hospital stays in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Alcohol consumption is a causal factor for more than 200 disease and injury conditions. Additionally, alcohol harm costs the Scottish Government an estimated £5-10 billion per every year.<sup>3</sup>

While figures convey the scale of harm caused by alcohol in Scotland, they mask the damage and pain caused in the lives of people who are living with an alcohol problem, as well as that in the lives of their loved ones and in wider communities. This harm is immeasurable.

### **Alcohol sponsorship and marketing in sport**

It is well established that exposure to alcohol marketing is causally associated with the initiation of drinking, an increase in alcohol consumption (including binge drinking), and also an increased risk of relapse (for those in recovery).<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9</sup> Alcohol companies invest billions of pounds every year in marketing, aiming to increase the consumption of their products, often through the targeting of heavy drinkers and recruitment of new drinkers.<sup>10</sup>

Sport sponsorship provides alcohol companies with a prominent and highly attractive method of reaching a large audience, influencing how much and how often they consume alcohol. Sponsorship is an especially influential communications tool - which allows brands to form attractive associations and capitalise on fans' emotional connections with sport and sports teams.

Alcohol sponsorship of sports can be presented in a variety of ways, including:<sup>11</sup>

- Alcohol brands and logos on match and training strips
- Advertising inside and outside of stadiums
- Exclusive 'pourage rights' inside and outside of stadiums
- Limited edition products featuring names of teams
- Social media activity
- Partnership activity promoting brands
- Competition tie-ins
- Players, managers, or coaches featuring in brand adverts and social media posts
- The naming of stadiums

Viewers are frequently exposed to alcohol marketing during televised broadcasts of both football and rugby (Scotland's most watched sports).<sup>11</sup>

### **Alcohol sponsorship of football**

In 2022, SHAAP commissioned research from the University of Stirling Institute for Social Marketing and Health which investigates the nature of sponsorship relations for professional football teams across countries with varied restrictions on alcohol marketing.

Main findings of [the report](#) included:

- In comparison to other European leagues with varying levels of restrictions, Scotland has a higher proportion of alcohol industry sponsors (6.4% compared to 2.6%).
- Of the 12 Scottish Premier Football League (SPFL) teams, 6 have at least one alcohol industry main sponsor or partner.
- Countries with statutory controls do appear to have comparatively less alcohol sponsorship. We believe this demonstrates efficacy of such measures.

We don't know exactly how much money SPFL teams make from their sponsorship deals with the alcohol industry, but given they make up only 6.4% of sponsors, banning alcohol sponsorship should not make a significant economic difference to Scottish football and removing it would allow for more appropriate sponsorship.

Scottish Women's Football have shown leadership in rejecting alcohol sponsorship, with SWF Chair, Vivienne MacLaren, stating that 'alcohol sponsorship has no place' there. [SHAAP are proud sponsors](#) of the Scottish Women's Football National Academy Programme.

### **Current legislation in the UK (and Scotland)**

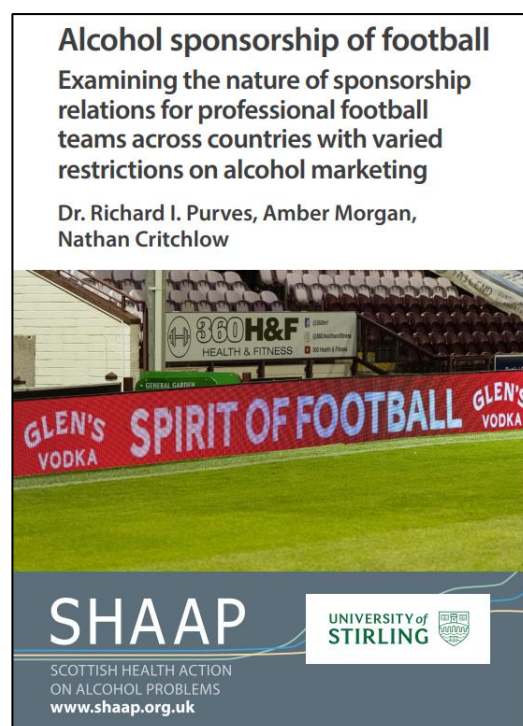
The UK currently adopts a permissive, industry-led, self-regulatory approach to the regulation of alcohol marketing and there are currently no legislative restrictions on alcohol sponsorship of sports in Scotland.

The UK alcohol industry self-regulatory code (the Portman Group's Code of Practice on Alcohol Sponsorship) indicates that all sport sponsorship relations must include a recognisable commitment to promoting responsible alcohol use (although our '[Alcohol marketing during the 2020 Six Nations Championship](#)' report found no references containing age restriction warnings and only a minority had clearly visible responsible drinking messages) and/or supporting diversionary community activities.

This current model of self-regulation is failing to protect the Scottish nation from harmful alcohol sponsorship in sports.

### **SHAAP recommendations**

Sport should be associated with (and inspire) good health and team spirit, and should not be used as a marketing tool for harmful products. The sophisticated, pervasive and widespread nature of alcohol sports sponsorship activity in Scotland exposes our nation to a high level of alcohol marketing which is a major public health concern.



**SHAAP are calling on the Scottish Government to implement a total ban on alcohol sponsorship of sport, in order to protect the health of the Scottish nation**

1. The Scottish Government should introduce legislation which prohibits alcohol sponsorship of professional sport

*Alcohol sponsorship of sport increases the consumption of alcohol across all ages, including youth. Evidence indicates self-regulation is not effective in reducing exposure to alcohol marketing and therefore a legislative ban is necessary to protect Scottish citizens.*

2. Restrictions must be broad and robust

*Alcohol sponsorship takes many forms, and legislation to prohibit this must cover the whole spectrum of marketing and sponsorship, including alibi marketing and brand extension via no and low alcohol products. Failure to cover all marketing activities associated with sponsorship may result in displacement of activities.*

3. An independent monitoring and enforcement programme should complement the introduction of restrictions

*Regulation requires enforcement, monitoring, and penalties independent from the biased alcohol industry in order to ensure compliance.*

4. The introduction of legislation to prohibit alcohol sport sponsorship should be part of a wider strategy to address alcohol marketing in Scotland

*Sport sponsorship is only one element of the wide spectrum of marketing activities employed by the alcohol industry. The Scottish Government should develop a comprehensive strategy to address alcohol marketing not just in sport, but across all sectors, as recommended by the Expert Network on Alcohol Marketing.<sup>12</sup>*

**About SHAAP**

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) is a partnership of the Medical Royal Colleges in Scotland and the Faculty of Public Health and is based at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE). SHAAP provides the authoritative medical and clinical voice on the need to reduce the impact of alcohol-related harm on the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland and the evidence-based approaches to achieve this.

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## References

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