HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry

Corrected oral evidence: The Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry

Tuesday 23 July 2019

4.35 pm

Watch the meeting

Members Present: Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Chair); Lord Butler of Brockwell; Lord Foster of Bath; Lord Layard; The Lord Bishop of St Albans; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Baroness Thornhill; Lord Trevethin and Oaksey; Lord Watts.

Evidence Session No. 3 Heard in Public Questions 29 - 35

Witnesses

Dr Anna van der Gaag, Chair, Advisory Board for Safer Gambling; Tim Miller, Executive Director, Gambling Commission.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Anna van der Gaag and Tim Miller.

Q29 **The Chairman:** Thank you and welcome. May I ask you to introduce yourselves for the record?

Tim Miller: I am an executive director at the Gambling Commission.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: I am the Chair of the Advisory Board for Safer Gambling.

The Chairman: The acoustics in this room are notoriously bad—worse than the Albert Hall—so if you could project to the back of the stalls it would be most helpful. Feel free to cox and box and join in whichever questions that you have a contribution to make. I will kick off and we will go around the table and people will come in with supplementaries.

My first question is about the extent to which gambling policy is evidence-based and whether the policymakers have the evidence that they need to make these policy decisions. Where are the pressing issues and gaps in the evidence about gambling in the UK and how should those gaps be filled? There is a lot there to unpack.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: Much has been achieved in this field. I am relatively new. I took up my position as chair of this advisory board in April. I joined the board last November. By comparison to other fields, gambling research is smaller, closer and arguably more conflicted than comparative evidence bases. Policymakers have some of the evidence that they need but I sense that there has been some reluctance to gather evidence and there has been a sense in which there is evidence available that has not necessarily been acknowledged or brought into the centre.

The Chairman: Acknowledged by whom?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: Within this field. Within this community.

The Chairman: Within Government? Within the commercial sector? Within the regulatory framework?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: Within the policy space, which involves a number of players. If you look at a major review from Canada, for example, that looked at 492 studies related to gambling, it found that 59% of those studies were consultancy reports rather than academic peer-reviewed journals.[1] That is an important illustration of some of the frustrations and the difficulties with gathering and assessing evidence and understanding how that evidence relates to practice.

With regard to practice, there are two key issues. One is that there has been a tendency for gambling research to operate in silos—within disciplines—and the other is that the pace of change that has already

[1] The review concluded that many of these consultancy reports were conflicted as a result of their industry and other funding sources.

been referred to, in, for example, gambling product design or online marketing strategies, has been incredibly rapid and research struggles to keep pace with identifying what is safe and what is not.

With regard to the gaps, it seems that the gaps in evidence are around understanding the structural characteristics of gambling products and understanding the social and financial costs. I would add the perspectives of those with lived experience. There has not been very much focus on that. Finally, as others have said, there is certainly a need for longitudinal research to understand some of the big questions around trends and behaviours and how things evolve over time.

Tim Miller: The debate around gambling policy has a slightly weird relationship with evidence from time to time. At one end of the spectrum there are often proposals thrown out that seem like magic bullets that we grasp at to solve often complex problems and it does not always have a lot of evidence behind it. At the other extreme, I sense sometimes that you cannot take any action until the evidence base is 100% conclusive. Both of those positions are equally damaging if you are going to take action that makes a difference.

As a regulator, we always seek to be evidence based—we carry out a lot of research ourselves—but that is not at the expense of having to wait for the evidence to be 100% conclusive. We make suitable use of the precautionary principle where the lack of evidence might be a reason why you need to take some action, particularly where it relates to young people.

One of the biggest barriers to evidence-led decision-making is the data that is available to you to do the research to make those decisions. While we know quite a lot about gambling and its impact, and a lot of that comes from the research that we do ourselves, there is also a lot that we do not know and when you compare it to other public health issues, such as alcohol and drugs, those same datasets that researchers in those areas might rely on simply do not exist. If you take the criminal justice system or the health system, for example, I can easily access data which shows the relationship between alcohol and criminality or alcohol and various health conditions. Those same datasets do not exist for gambling and that is a gap that impacts on the ability to take evidence-based decisions.

The Chairman: Do you agree with the priorities that Dr van der Gaag has outlined?

Tim Miller: Absolutely.

The Chairman: Are there any that you would like to add?

Tim Miller: The key thing is making sure that we have the strongest possible data in the first place and data that is accessible and is clearly seen to be independent. I suspect later we will have a discussion in relation to the independence of money and how that is spent. One of the

key things that I have heard from researchers about independence is having free and easy access to the data whereas negotiating with gambling companies for access to the data, if it does not impinge on their independence in reality, there is certainly a perception that it does. This is one of the reasons why in the national strategy that we published a couple of months ago we have thrown our weight behind the idea of having a central data repository, most likely underpinned by regulation, so that researchers and others can have the right to roam and to ask the questions that we may not think of asking until we look at the data.

The Chairman: Are there data protection issues in achieving that?

Tim Miller: There would be, particularly regarding data about individual consumers. We still have to scope this project out. I am not sure that we are necessarily looking at data that can identify a named individual. We do work very closely with the ICO as one of our regulatory partners, so we would look heavily for their advice and support as we develop that piece of work.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Could I ask a simple question of Dr van der Gaag? Who set up the advisory board and who does it advise?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: The Advisory Board for Safer Gambling, which until April was called the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board, was set up by the Gambling Commission and its role is to advise the commission on all things to do with safer gambling. It covers a huge range of subjects. In its original constitution it was the body that designed the strategy on responsible gambling. From April this year, the national strategy became owned by the Commission, and the Advisory Board for Safer Gambling is there to monitor and oversee the progress of the strategy and to continue to provide independent advice. It is, however, no longer the owner of the strategy. That is the critical difference, in a short history.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Could you explain why that change was made?

Tim Miller: Shall I explain that, as one of the people who drove that change? There are several reasons. One is that we did not feel that the concept of responsible gambling was the right concept to have at the heart of the strategy. Too often, the idea of responsible gambling is used as shorthand for the gambler being responsible. Yes, there will be elements of individual responsibility but addressing gambling harms takes a concerted effort by everybody involved, including the industry, the regulator, Government and the individuals themselves. That is one of the reasons for dropping the "responsible" part.

The other reason for the change was that we had a series of responsible gambling strategies where all of us were disappointed with the lack of progress. When you look at it, is it any surprise that that was the case? The ownership of that strategy was given to a body that did not have any statutory authority or weight or levers itself. We took the view, therefore,

that if we are going to make real progress in addressing gambling harms, as the regulator we need to step up and show leadership and take ownership of that strategy because we do have those regulatory levers.

Q30 **Lord Foster of Bath:** On data and the reluctance of the industry to help in data gathering, is it possible or already the case that in the licence agreement with a company, subject to the usual caveats and use of commercial and confidential data, you can require a gambling company to provide data to any legitimised research organisation?

Tim Miller: Yes. First, we have seen positive change in the industry around the accessibility of data. There is growing openness with that data and a greater willingness to share it as well, but that does not get away from the independence point. Under our rules, we would have powers to make it a requirement of the licence conditions that operators share data that we determine needs to be shared, and that is certainly one of the approaches that we are considering as we scope a data centre to give it that regulatory underpinning.

Lord Foster of Bath: Why might you not do that?

Tim Miller: I am not sure that there are very strong arguments not to do it, but as we have only just started this work I do not want to jump straight ahead to a solution. My view, however, is that in order to give people reassurance that it is properly independent and ensure that there is a level playing field and that everybody co-operates, changing our rules would probably be the most effective way of doing that.

The Chairman: Is there anything in the statutory remit that limits your remit and stops you doing things that you think would be useful?

Tim Miller: I do not think so. Having worked in a range of different public bodies with a range of different legislative remits, we have an advantage that the legislative framework leaves a reasonable amount of discretion to us to set the rules throughout our licensing codes and conditions of practice. That is positive. We have the ability to flex as our circumstances change. As we see a greater move to online, for example, we have had that ability to flex our rules. We always need to be mindful as to whether the pace of change is something that things such as the fees structure that we operate within will allow us to keep pace with. As the Government's adviser, we will continue to give them advice on that and we will not be complacent. I do, however, think that we are in an advantageous position that we do not always have to wait for Parliament or Government to act, which can be a lengthy process.

The Chairman: For the record, how are you paid for?

Tim Miller: We are paid for primarily through licence fees. Individual operators have to be licensed and pay a fee to that. In relation to our role as the regulator of the National Lottery, we also receive grant in aid funding.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: Sadly, Lord Foster in his supplementary

question has asked you exactly the same question that I was supposed to ask you in question 2, which is whether researchers should be given access to things that you can do with your licence. Although I do not have a question for you, I am sure you are pleased that you have been spared my cross-examination.

Tim Miller: I am sure you will think of something for me later.

Q31 **The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** One of the things that has been raised around the room is inconsistency of research gaps. I have often been in an organisation or a senior management team where, when we are discussing something different, someone says, "We need more research". That is the constant plea. That is what Government Ministers say when we ask them questions on the Floor of the House—that the evidence is weak or whatever. Can you help us a bit? We are trying to drive down to some simple recommendations which may protect people who have suffered hugely through this. I have been with families and I guess you also know families where there have been suicides, people have lost homes, they have lost everything. Do you feel we have enough solid core evidence already in existence to base some good recommendations on? I want to clarify that because we are getting various questions coming in saying, "Oh dear, what about the evidence base?" Your people are immersed in this. Can you help us a little, please?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: I have spent the last few months listening to people with lived experience primarily, but also to treatment providers and others, and I have also been looking at the literature. It strikes me that, as I alluded to earlier, we know an awful lot, but we do not necessarily gather that and galvanise ourselves around the evidence that we have. For example, on the costs, that is an interesting area where there is a tendency to say we do not know what treatment costs are or we do not know what the social cost of harm is.

A recent piece of work by the London School of Economics has looked at the social costs in some detail. They have gone outside the UK and have come up with clear costings on the social and economic costs of gambling-related harms. In Australia, for example, the Productivity Commission, which has done a huge amount of work across a whole range of provisions, looked at this in 2009 for the first time and estimated that the social costs of gambling-related harm were between 4.7 and 8.4 billion Australian dollars. To come closer, in a study at the University of Hamburg in Germany, where they looked at the additional healthcare costs for problem gamblers, their estimate was around €218 million per year. There is evidence out there that may not be generated from the UK that is not necessarily being brought into decision-making in the way that it could be.

Looking at data from the UK, a recent piece of work comparing expenditure on treatment for people with gambling addictions was estimated at around £591 per person per year. If you were to take the population that we know about from research have a problem with gambling in this country—that is 340,000—you would arrive at a figure of

just over £200 million per year needed for that population. Compare that to Public Health England's data on expenditure for treatments for drug-related addictions, which is around £2,800 per person per year, or alcohol-related addictions, which is around £2,700 per person per year, you begin to be able to get some comparable costings which could potentially allow decisions to be made about what treatment would cost and what the potential social costs in this country might be.

My sense is that there is a tendency to say we have not got the evidence. To quote a great statistician of our time, Doug Altman: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence". My sense is that there is more but there is a reluctance to make decisions and to move forward despite the urgency that we all feel about this issue because of the suffering that we are aware of.

Tim Miller: If the only recommendation of this Committee is more research that would be disappointing and a missed opportunity. There is absolutely a need for more research but not at the expense of action as well.

One of the key things around research is ensuring that we get the maximum value for money from what is being done. So much money has been wasted on some research because of the lack of independence or perceived independence around it. I say that in its broadest sense. I do not simply mean that research may be tainted because of its relationship with the industry, although there will be examples of that. My view on independence is that the independence of research can equally be challenged when you have researchers who are starting to get into that kind of campaigning space. We want proper independent research and there is a space around gambling and a need for researchers, campaigners and policymakers. We have had too many examples of them wearing interchangeable hats. That has made it too easy for people to challenge the validity of what has been some good research. We saw that in the gambling review on FOBTs. There is an unedifying spectacle around duelling pieces of research from time to time which does not end up making a single person safer and we have to move away from that.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: Should that research also include looking at the benefits of the gambling industry: the benefits of social cohesion for the people who like to gamble but who do not have a gambling addiction; the amount of revenue that the gambling industry brings in—about £3 billion a year—that pays for essential public services; or the number of people who are employed within the gambling industry? Should it not also look at the benefits as well as the burden?

Tim Miller: One of my responsibilities at the Gambling Commission is for the safer gambling function. In that space there is value in research to better understand the behaviours and activities of gambling consumers who have not yet experienced harm. In order to address harms and reduce harms and keep people safe, we need to understand the experiences of people who have experienced harm but also understand why some people have gambled and not experienced harm. With that

safer gambling hat on, I certainly think that there is a space. In wider government policymaking and using the broadest evidence base, there is space for understanding the amount of tax revenue and other things that come into society from gambling. From the regulator's perspective, when pursuing the licensing objectives, we are rightly and understandably more focused on understanding where the harm is coming from because the harm is the challenge to the licence objectives.

The Chairman: Could you expand a little on understanding where the harm comes from? What does that entail?

Tim Miller: Heather Wardle touched on some of this earlier. For a long time, we have been focused on trying to count the number of problem gamblers or people at risk. There is some value in doing that but that does not give you a sense of the full scale and, indeed, the full challenge that you are facing. Heather highlighted the concept of looking at the harms more broadly and it is why we have a National Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms. It is quite deliberately that broad.

One of the other hats that I have worn in the past is as chair of a large citizens advice bureau. In that role, I saw day after day examples of people who had never gambled in their lives but were experiencing harms from gambling—for example, the child who had a disrupted home life because of their parents' gambling and the wife who was struggling to feed her children because of her husband's gambling. If we ignore those people who have never gambled and only count the people that are problem gamblers, we miss a whole area of risk that is coming from gambling. As a gambling regulator with a duty to keep gambling fair, safe and crime-free, we need to understand the totality of those impacts.

Q32 **Lord Trevethin and Oaksey:** We have already had quite a bit of evidence about the voluntary levy and the possibility of a mandatory levy. We know, as you will, about the recent announcement about the increased contribution from five of the biggest bookmakers. Taking that recent development into account, do you think that the voluntary levy is providing satisfactorily for funding, research, prevention and treatment? I am not leading you, but possible deficiencies that have been mentioned by other witnesses include, first, that it is not enough; secondly, it is providing funding that is tainted because if used for research the research will be regarded as insufficiently independent; and, thirdly, it does not guarantee the receipt of a certain amount of money, mentioned by another witness, which makes it difficult to make long-term plans for the development for the future of proper research centres, et cetera. Those are three possible deficiencies in the voluntary levy. I would like you to comment on those and if there are others that we do not yet know about, I would like to know about those, too.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: We should recognise that much has been achieved through voluntary contributions, but my sense is that the landscape has changed, and the current level of expenditure is insufficient and the mechanisms for delivery are no longer fit for purpose. Coming from outside, if you look, for example, at the evidence from

tobacco or from the drugs industry where there is substantially more research to call on, what you see is consistent evidence that industry sponsorship diverts money away from public health towards a focus on commercial benefits.

There was the Cochrane review in 2017 which looked at this in relation to drug research and found a marked difference between research funded by drug companies and that not funded by industry, with regard to the outcome. There is a large body of evidence outside this sector which would support the move towards a more independent method of funding.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: By a more independent method of funding, do you mean a mandatory levy of some sort?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: Yes, I cannot see any other way of achieving that independence.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: Funding that is effectively compelled or payments that are compelled.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: It creates a level playing field, addresses the issue around conflicts, which we have heard, and we see every day in terms of researchers not wanting to engage in this field. What I observe is a lack of trust and credibility in the quality of research. We have a research community at the moment that is very divided. The issue is over funding and where that funding comes from. All these things point towards the imperative for something which creates that level playing field. It is critical to take all research out of that current voluntary system.

The Chairman: To press you on that, are you saying that funding should not come from the industry but should be from central government funds or some other source, or are you talking about the governance of those funds?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: I am talking about the governance of those funds.

Tim Miller: To quote my chairman earlier when we launched the strategy supporting the principle of a statutory levy, in that speech he called, notwithstanding any changes of the statutory levy, for a significant increase in funding from the industry. It would be churlish if we did not acknowledge that the big five have stepped up very quickly in responding to that call from the Gambling Commission and increased their funding. Speaking to them, I feel that there is a genuine commitment to try to make a difference and we should welcome that.

However, since that announcement was made, we have not seen the extra money coming into the system and we have not yet evaluated the impact of that. As of today, I see no reason for the Gambling Commission to change the view that they offered when we launched the strategy. We will always keep our eyes on that. In his statement to the House, the Secretary of State has set out that the Gambling Commission will have a

role providing a certain amount of oversight for the increases to the voluntary system.

What is important, particularly if we are going to provide that kind of assurance and oversight, is that extra money coming into the system cannot be used as a reason to create a parallel system alongside what is already set out in the national strategy. It needs to be used to accelerate the progress of what is in the strategy, and we need to ensure that it is distributed and spent in a way that is clearly and demonstrably independent from the industry. The Commission will be working on this over the coming weeks to ensure that people have trust and confidence in how the money is being used.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: In one of the documents produced by the commission, it says that some of the major operators in the gambling industry support the mandatory levy. Is that right?

Tim Miller: Yes. You would have to ask them whether their views have changed, but certainly most, if not all, of the industry trade bodies have supported a statutory levy. There is certainly industry support for that. For some of the reasons that you have set out, it creates a level playing field and gives certainty of funding. As someone who used to chair a charity, certainty of funding is almost more important than the amount of funding itself.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: Can you shed any light on the mystery that has already been mentioned in the course of evidence, namely why have the Government not used the power that they have had since 2005 or, strictly speaking, since 2007 to make regulations, which they could do more or less overnight, to provide for a mandatory levy?

Tim Miller: I do not speak on behalf of the Government. I would not want to, and I suspect they would not want me to either.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: No, but you will have interacted with them or the commission will have done.

Tim Miller: I do not have an answer to that. You are best asking them to give you an answer.

Lord Trevethin and Oaksey: I am sure we will, but is the commission interacting with the Government in relation to that possibility?

Tim Miller: We are constantly working with Government, not just DCMS but with the department of health and other public bodies as well, to ensure that the system in the future is as effective as it possibly can be. As I say, our chairman and the Gambling Commission have supported a statutory levy but that does not mean that we are going to sit on our hands and allow the current system to fail. If we can make things work better, we will, and we have a firm commitment to doing that but that does not diminish what our chairman said at the launch of the strategy.

The Chairman: Would it be a fair statement—as an ex-journalist I will

put words in your mouth here—to say that if you had a blank sheet of paper, leaving aside the quantum of money available, you would not structure it the way it is currently structured?

Tim Miller: I am happy for you to put those words in my mouth. That is right. It is a system that, notwithstanding more money coming in, does need further reform. Our chairman made that same point that the amount of funding is not the biggest hurdle that we face but ensuring that it is used effectively, that there is public trust and confidence in the independence of that system and that we have treatment services that give people the support that they need where they need it, when they need it. They are all different factors.

The Chairman: If there was a magic wand to wave, are you statutorily in a position to take over all those responsibilities and administer and govern and manage?

Tim Miller: As of today, we are not.

The Chairman: Would you want to?

Tim Miller: There are two different points. The way the legislation is framed, if the levy was brought in the Commission would have a key role in administering that. There is, therefore, a role written into legislation for us already. Under the current system, the fact that we took leadership on the strategy shows that we want to take clear leadership in this space. We have received the challenge that maybe we are operating outside the strict parameters of our statutory remit. I do not think that is correct, but we are, as Heather Wardle said earlier, possibly doing things that we are not the most effective people to take on. We do not have expertise in the commissioning of detailed research. We are certainly not experts in treatment. However, as an experienced gambling regulator and as a knowledgeable and authoritative one, we have to step into that space to share that knowledge and experience.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: The issue for me is that in an ideal world we would have sufficient funds for research, prevention work and treatment coming from central government. We are in a situation where we have a long history of levies and what we are trying to do in the short term is to try to find a way of creating much more clarity and transparency around how that money is given, to ensure that people receive the treatment that they need and deserve and that the system is working in partnership towards prevention that is underpinned by research.

The Chairman: You would prefer to be swept up in the spending review than be in the hands of the sector?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: In an ideal world, absolutely, but we are where we are.

The Chairman: It is hardly secure funding, is it?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: I agree, but if you look at the model in New Zealand where since 2004 they have had a commitment to public health spending which today is around 6% of their overall health expenditure, they have an integrated provision in terms of prevention and treatment along with their mental health and addiction services and have made a commitment as a Government to providing that funding and delivering since 2004. As a result, they have had significant impact on the harms from gambling. There is a model there which is driven by central government, but we are where we are in this country.

The Chairman: We are indeed. Thank you.

Q33 **The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** We have ranged widely and some of the things that I was going to ask have probably already been touched on. Could you say a little more about the fact that we are probably not going to get it through straight taxation and it is probably going to be either a voluntary or mandatory levy? What models are there internationally to make a real separation so that researchers would be happy to accept them? How do we do that? A question we also asked of the previous witnesses was: "Are you aware of any researchers leaving the UK or this field of gambling research due to lack of funding or the nature of the funding arrangements?"

Dr Anna van der Gaag: In answer to the second one, I am aware of researchers who have left the UK and I am aware of concerns among researchers who are outside this field who are reluctant to engage because of the issues around funding. That is a clear message. Particularly when we think about the wider research community that we would want to attract, including people from artificial intelligence, from big data, from health economics as well as from public health, those people who have not up to now engaged in research in this area also have misgivings about the current funding model. We have a challenge around moving new people into this area and creating truly interdisciplinary research which is free of conflict.

Are there models elsewhere? I think that there are. My sense is that New Zealand is a strong model. Victoria in Australia is another place I would signpost. They have the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation which is responsible for co-ordinating the research and the delivery along with partners from the departments and from the third sector and, crucially, involving experts by experience. People with lived experience are very much part of the New Zealand model and the Australian model.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: Would that satisfy the WHO?

Dr Anna van der Gaag: I believe it would. We are where we are in this country. For me, the critical thing is to separate research from voluntary contributions and to do it quickly.

Q34 **Lord Layard:** Why has the National Institute for Health Research not taken a lead in this? They have a massive budget. Have they been asked by people like yourselves to initiate some sort of research programme in

this area?

Tim Miller: We have had conversations with them and with other research councils as well. The independence of funding sources is a significant hurdle for many of them and that is understandable. That will probably lessen over time. Particularly if we can put in place the right governance arrangements around these increased voluntary contributions I think that might help and there is a range of different models that can be explored around that. I do not want to be totally doom and gloom around this because independence is one reason why some researchers and academics have been unwilling to work in Britain.

To sound rather un-regulatory, bringing some real passion and energy to this is one way we can attract people to come and work here. When we launched the strategy we deliberately did so with a real fanfare because we wanted to create that energy around it. We wanted to remove the stigma that working in gambling research in Britain is not what you want to do. In a couple of short months since we have launched that, we have been contacted by people in Australia, Canada and the United States who want to work with us. We have entered into a partnership recently with the Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, a world leader in the dissemination of gambling research. People are starting to want to come and work with us because they see a regulator, a range of public bodies and a Parliament and media engaged with this topic. We need to grasp that and look at the opportunities that brings.

Q35 **Lord Watts:** A couple of us were surprised that the Government do not have their own strategy for preventing harm from gambling. First, do you think that they should? Secondly, should they have a public health approach to gambling as they do in New Zealand? Is the DCMS the right department to be in the lead on this?

Tim Miller: On a national strategy for reducing harms, in case anyone has missed it in this session, we have one and we should not lose sight of that. It has been very well received and we do need to get behind it to drive that delivery. Whether it should be owned by Government or not, our position would be we are not remotely territorial or precious about it and if Government or someone who felt that they were better placed than us to own it wanted to take on ownership, we would happily hand it over to them.

On public health and the approach in New Zealand, we set out in the strategy that we want to be a world leader and to do that we are looking at what else is going on around the world. I have, for example, met with the Interior Minister of New Zealand to understand the way that they are approaching things and to share our approach to things. We have taken an unashamedly public health approach in the strategy and that is one of the reasons why people in other Commonwealth jurisdictions are looking to work with us because that is the sort of approach they are much more used to.

On which part of government, I am loth to comment on government issues when it will have been shifting outside this room as we speak. It is almost a secondary question in some respects as to which department. For me the primary question should be: is this joined-up across government and indeed in and out of government? We have seen some positive changes in that respect over the last year or so, both within government and within Parliament. In a world where we are told that politics is increasingly divided, gambling has been an issue that has managed to unite all sides of the House and lots of different people. A body like the cross-government working group on research, education and treatment has been great because it has brought together different public bodies and different parts of government. The department of health has been much more engaged. It has probably helped having a Secretary of State who previously held the gambling brief as well. They are all positive things and I would say whichever department it sits within, that cannot be at the expense of cross-government collaboration and working.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: Expert opinion from other jurisdictions would say that a public health approach is absolutely essential. While we have a huge amount on the economic benefits of gambling, the revenues, employment and services, we increasingly have a focus on the risks and the harms, whether you are talking about suicide, mental health impairment, impaired relationships, or financial loss, loss of employment and so on. A public health approach, therefore, is critical to this and it seems that, if you look at successful models elsewhere, having the Ministry of Health in New Zealand playing a central role in driving that strategy forward has been one of the reasons for its success. I would say, therefore, that while I appreciate the need for a cross-government approach, the shift, if we are really going to address the risks and harms, has got to be towards healthcare and public health.

Lord Watts: Can I play devil's advocate for one second? There is a problem with looking at New Zealand. It is a small country and has not got the same level of problems that we have in our health service. Is there a danger that if you give that to the department of health, along with its other priorities it will be lost in the sense that every day there is a new target to be set? Obesity is a big issue for them and alcoholism. It could be just another problem that in public health terms it would have to address, and it may be better if it were in a different department.

Dr Anna van der Gaag: If you look at the recent activity in New Zealand, such as the mental health review led by Ron Paterson, there is extensive involvement of people with lived experience and 40 recommendations of which 38 have been accepted by government. There is a huge injection of new cash into mental health services. Because of the infrastructure, services to address gambling-related harms are part of that new initiative. They are recognised as part of the addictions team in mental health services and the suicide prevention work. That would be my observation in relation to the New Zealand model.

Closer to home, if you look at the 54 mental health trusts in England, for example, which have what are called Recovery Colleges, which are small, low-cost, co-peer-led centres in localities that offer services to a wide range of people with mental health challenges, bringing support and treatment for people with gambling addictions into that infrastructure would seem eminently sensible. At the moment we are outside and there is an infrastructure within mental health trusts that could be utilised, but it is not because services for gambling and gambling-related harms are separate from services for other mental health challenges and addictions.

The Chairman: I have one last question for you, Mr Miller. It is a bit left field. It relates to the design of products from the industry. Are you confident that, given the array of planet-sized brains that are creating these products with algorithms and who knows what else in order to part a punter from his or her money, you can give us confidence that you have access to equal brains in order to understand exactly what is going on in the products that you are licensing? It is rocket science and nuclear science and nuclear physics.

Tim Miller: It is a big challenge and we increasingly see ourselves as not just a gambling regulator but as a tech regulator as well. Our board has recognised that we did not necessarily have all that experience within a gambling regulator. What we have done is establish a digital advisory panel made up of people who have got those big brains that you have talked about. The managing director of Twitter is an example, and people like that who can give us that expertise that we do not have ourselves.

The Chairman: Do you have any gamblers on that panel? What I would call a professional gambler.

Tim Miller: No, their expertise comes from the technology space. There will be people on there who have experience of gambling, but we draw our expertise from a range of places. That is specifically on digital. We have our Advisory Board for Safer Gambling. We have a consumer panel and we have a range of different ways of bringing that expertise into our organisation.

The Chairman: Okay, we may come back to that subject. May I on behalf of the Committee thank you both very much indeed for giving us your insights and answering the questions so well? I declare the public meeting completed. Thank you.