



Dame Caroline Dinenage MP
Chair, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

6th February 2024

Dear Dame Caroline,

Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on Gambling Regulation

I write as the Chair of Peers for Gambling Reform (PGR) to welcome the recent report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee on the issue of Gambling Regulation. We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful response to the issue and thank them for their work on this important area. We were pleased to see the Committee echo many of the points raised by the Peer for Gambling Reform in areas such as improved protection for children, stake limits, and the need for a timely delivery of the White Paper's proposals.

Since the White Paper's publication, PGR has undertaken extensive work to inform the ongoing consultation processes, and we have continued our work to highlight the need for further attention to be paid to neglected policy areas - including the issues of loot boxes and advertising, which are of particular concern to our Group.

With regards to the implementation of the proposals outlined in the White Paper, PGR is in agreement that a detailed timetable of delivery for the White Paper's proposals is essential. Whilst we note that the Government and Gambling Commission have continued to proceed with the planned consultations of the White Paper, we note that there is little certainty regarding timescale of delivery. With a General Election looming, detailed clarification around when we can expect the proposals to be delivered is of the essence. The wait for much-needed regulatory change has gone on for too long, and we can seldom afford for these changes to be delayed further.

Another welcomed area of the report was the Committee's recommendations on gambling advertising, which is of particular interest to PGR, and a policy area in which the White Paper fell short in delivering any meaningful proposed change.

PGR has long challenged the Government's continued reliance on a causal, or 'causative', link between advertising and harm. As the Committee has noted, despite the purported absence of a causal link, ample evidence exists to support the case for gambling advertisement regulation. Like the Committee, PGR shares the view that the Government should have undertaken a 'precautionary approach to gambling advertising in general'. The Government themselves has acknowledged that 'drawing a causal link between the level of advertising and problem gambling is exceptionally difficult to do'.¹ It is therefore illogical for them to continue to pursue an evidence base that relies solely on proving a causal link. It is

¹ S. Andrew., Culture, Media and Sport Committee Oral Evidence Session, 5th September 2023, [internet], committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13584/pdf/ (accessed 29th January 2024)



critical therefore that the Government takes the long overdue steps to adopt a precautionary approach to gambling advertisement regulation.

As observed by the Committee in recommendation 16, PGR have also noted the regrettable insufficiencies of current self-regulatory efforts with regard to gambling advertisement, sponsorship and marketing. The continued reliance on self-regulation and voluntary measures to reduce harms is inadequate.

As noted by the Committee, these self-regulatory measures, such as the front-of-shirt ban in the English Premier League, simply do not serve to significantly reduce the volume of gambling messages visible to viewers of top-flight matches. Research produced by the University of Bristol in 2023 which assessed the frequency of in-game gambling and gambling-like logos in the EPL for the 2022-23 season, showed that front-of-shirt gambling logos accounted for only 6.9% of all gambling-associated logos seen in broadcast.²

Equally, current self-regulatory measures do not sufficiently address the wider gambling advertisement eco-system. Further research from the University of Bristol, produced in 2023, has shown that nearly 11,000 gambling messages were identified during the opening weekend of the EPL across various media channels.³

PGR also welcome the Committee's recommendation for the imminent publication of a gambling sponsorship code of conduct. However, we would stress that recent evidence testifies to the growing inability of codes to maintain the needed pace of change to appropriately regulate the advertising, sponsorship and marketing landscapes. A recent assessment of gambling messages in the opening weekend of the EPL, for example, found that 92% of content marketing ads issued by major gambling operators could not be clearly identified as advertising, leaving them in breach of codes established by the ASA. They were still however, present in the public domain.⁴

Current codes therefore are failing to effectively regulate current challenges. If we cannot be assured in the ability of these codes to appropriately regulate the current landscape, we have little faith in the ability of self regulatory measures and codes to do so, let alone keep pace with the ever changing, and ever more sophisticated ways in which operators proliferate advertisements.

² J. Torrance, et al., Gambling, Cryptocurrency, and Financial Trading App Marketing in English Premier League Football: A Frequency Analysis of In-Game Logos, OSF (2023)

³ . Rossi, J. Wheaton, M.Moxey, E. Tozzi., New Season, More Self Regulation, More Marketing, [internet], <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/business-school/documents/BRISTOL-UNI-GAMBLING-Report2023-2.pdf> (accessed 29th January 2024), p.5

⁴ R. Rossi, J. Wheaton, M.Moxey, E. Tozzi., New Season, More Self Regulation, More Marketing, [internet], <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/business-school/documents/BRISTOL-UNI-GAMBLING-Report2023-2.pdf> (accessed 29th January 2024), p.5



On the need for further research, PGR agrees with the Committee's recommendation to the Government to commission independent longitudinal research to explore the link between gambling advertising and the risk of gambling harms. PGR would emphasise, however, that this longitudinal research should not be privileged above the significant pre-existing evidence base which demonstrates the need for prompt action.

It is well-known that there is a clear link between gambling advertising exposure and increased risk of gambling harms. Research produced by the Gambling Commission has shown that 34% of British bettors admitted to being influenced by advertising, and that an additional 16.3% of those indicated that gambling advertisement had caused them to increase their gambling activity.⁵ Indeed, research produced by the University of Stirling found that 96% of people aged 11-24 who had seen gambling marketing messages in the last month and were more likely to bet as a result.⁶

Given that clear evidence exists of the relationship between gambling harm and advertising, we would encourage to Government to act appropriately, undertaking a public health approach, and not rely on the production of further research before deciding to act.

PGR would strongly urge the Committee to continue to hold the Government to account, particularly in areas such as advertising, sponsorship and marketing, which were glaring lacunae of the White Paper. Given the clear impact that advertising, sponsorship and marketing has, and the vast amounts of money and energy invested in proliferating these mediums, we feel it would be of great importance for your Committee to push the Government further on this particular issue.

PGR would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to help implement effective recommendations and ensure the swift delivery of the proposals outlined in the White Paper.

Rt Hon Lord Foster of Bath
Chair, Peers for Gambling Reform

⁵ <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/understanding-how-consumers-engaged-with-gambling-advertising-in-2020>

⁶ <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/understanding-how-consumers-engaged-with-gambling-advertising-in-2020>