

## **World Gaming Executive Summit 2018 Barcelona**

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The question of how many people are negatively impacted by gambling is a complex one. In Britain, work is underway by Dr Heather Wardle and others to significantly improve our understanding and measurement of gambling-related harms. In the meantime we continue to rely on surveys which count the number of problem gamblers in the population.

Now, it is never right to reduce such a complex issue to a single number or metric, but for now it is perhaps the best measure we have. Our research suggests that in Britain there are approximately 430,000 people who experience problem gambling- plus around a further 2 million people at risk.

However, it does seem that different people have drawn totally different conclusions on the direction that the rate of problem gambling is moving in. Depending on how you use the data you might claim that the rate has increased by a third; or that it has crept up a little over time; or you might claim that it has remained relatively stable.

But whatever your chosen interpretation there is one clear message in the data- we have not seen a real and sustained decline in the rate of problem gambling.

Now I accept that whilst we have experienced significant growth in parts of the British gambling industry over the last few years, this has not necessarily coincided with an explosion in the percentage of people experiencing problem gambling. However, a number of voices have used this to suggest that a statistically stable rate of problem gambling is a sign of success.

The Gambling Commission does not share that view.

There is also a view out there that we have actually reached a floor in the number of problem gamblers and, whatever you do, you will not be able to reduce the numbers below their current level or further reduce harm. In effect, a suggestion that there is a level of problem gambling and harm that we should find acceptable and that we should be willing to tolerate.

The Gambling Commission does not share that view.

We are not willing to limit our ambitions to simply maintaining the current rates of problem gambling. We are not going to ignore the wider harms that people can experience from the gambling of others. We do not accept that all of the opportunities to reduce gambling related harm have been grasped and acted upon.

If problem gambling numbers have reached a floor then it is surely no more than a glass floor. A glass floor that, if we put enough cracks into it, can be smashed through. Today I want us to make a start on that task by focussing on three areas that will be key to making progress on that front: prevention, collaboration and evaluation.

Proper treatment provision for problem gambling is essential but is underfunded and often inaccessible to the people that need it. That has to change. However, relying solely on

treatment will not bring about a long term decline in problem gambling or harm and will serve simply to sacrifice one generation after another.

The same can be said of self-exclusion. Again, helpful and important when seen alongside other gambling management tools but one with limited scope to prevent harm from happening in the first place.

So, in addition to accessible and properly funded treatment services- in addition to effective and comprehensive gambling management tools we now need a sharper focus on how we prevent gambling from becoming a problem in the first place. This is a key theme of the Gambling Commission's three-year strategy.

Designing safer, socially responsible products that don't encourage dangerous behaviours is, over the longer term, going to have a much greater impact than mitigating harms after they have occurred.

We all rightly focus on the business to consumer relationship and its role in safer gambling. But placing greater attention on a preventative approach also means considering the business to business relationship.

- Are you fully exploiting the creativity of game developers to find engaging ways of encouraging safer forms of gambling?
- Are you making full use of your relationships with data analysts to not just identify your VIPs but to also identify people who are on the path to riskier gambling- incidentally the same people may often appear in both those groups.
- Are you working with your marketing providers to ensure that your advertising doesn't target vulnerable people and promotes safer forms of play?

A preventative approach to safer gambling requires every person in your company, every part of your supply chain, to work together to build in appropriate protections. Which takes us to collaboration.

We have recently spoken a lot about the need for greater collaboration between operators and across sectors. I hope that, now the gambling review has concluded, we will see a cessation to the factional hostilities that have plagued the British gambling industry for so long. Because it is only by setting aside commercial differences, sharing your experiences and working together that you will have a real and lasting impact on gambling related harms.

The Commission will continue to both challenge and support industry to work with each other for this greater good and will be starting a series of co-creation workshops later this year where consumers, operators, and the regulator can come together to build solutions in partnership. But for now I want to highlight further forms of collaboration that could be used to deliver safer gambling.

*We want to see greater collaboration with public services.*

There is woefully little information gathered about how gambling is, or is not, linked to other issues that place pressures on public finances and impact our communities.

Take the criminal justice system- Data is easily available for levels of alcohol related crime; police are trained on how to respond to people showing signs of alcohol addictions. The same cannot be said for gambling.

And the healthcare system has similar knowledge gaps. Department of Health guidelines encourage the screening of patients for signs of alcohol misuse; primary care providers such as GPs are trained on spotting alcohol dependency and have established referral pathways for treatment; the National Health Service routinely collects and publishes data on alcohol related admissions.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the almost total invisibility of gambling addiction in our health services and maybe explains the experience of one person with a gambling addiction that I recently met who asked his doctor for support with his addiction and simply received the response “Well, just stop gambling”.

This all makes our job and your responsibility for protecting people from harm significantly more difficult. If there is a lack of data on the impact your businesses are having in a community how can you take effective action to address those impacts? If health services that are there to support people with addictions do not recognise or understand problem gambling then how can people be guided to the right support as soon as the early signs of addiction or harm appear?

And so our message to policy makers is clear- regulation can and will make gambling safer. But it will not, by itself, lead to a sustained reduction in the number of problem gamblers or gambling-related harms. Only collaboration with and across public services will achieve that.

Our work in seeking to have problem gambling recognised as a public health concern is one example of how we are looking to drive a more joined-up approach. A much overlooked development in the Government’s response to the gambling review were the announcements that Public Health England would be commissioned to carry out an evidence review of the public health impacts of gambling; that there will be public health research in this field; and that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will draw up treatment guidelines.

These are really significant steps forward in creating the same joined up and collaborative approach that is seen in addressing other public health concerns. We will be making our expertise and data available to this and any other work by public bodies that seeks to address the harms from gambling.

I would encourage you to do the same- don’t see gambling’s greater prominence in the public policy debate as a threat to your companies or your reputations; see it as a golden opportunity to collaborate with people inside and outside the industry to make your products, your services, and your businesses safer and more sustainable.

*We want to see better collaboration internationally*

Across the world every jurisdiction that has legalised gambling, and indeed those that haven’t, has to grapple with the harms that some experience as a result of that gambling. Each market may operate slightly differently but the harms can be the same. So if a challenge transcends national borders- shouldn’t the solutions do that as well? Shouldn’t we look for greater international collaboration to make gambling safer?

And the range of nations here today just shows that there are some big potential opportunities to do this. The recent decision by the Supreme Court of the United States appears to have opened the door for States to legalise sports betting. In turn, there are companies around the globe, maybe some in the room today, who are already eyeing up the possibilities that this provides for them.

But where many may see the commercial opportunities from liberalisation in the global market, we see opportunities to encourage an internationalist approach to promoting safer forms of gambling. Opportunities for longer established regulatory regimes to share their experiences of what works. Opportunities for newly emerging markets to share the innovative approaches and fresh thinking that inevitably come from a recently liberalised landscape.

At the Gambling Commission we have set out a desire for Britain to become a world leader in safer gambling approaches. And to do that both we and the operators we regulate must draw upon practice across the globe.

So our call, amongst all of the excitement that SCOTUS has caused, is to make use of the opportunities that international markets bring for collaboration with partners around the world to make gambling safer.

And, as a slight aside to British operators, our increasingly close relationship with our regulatory cousins in the States should act as a reminder not to let the excitement of a lucrative new market distract you from your continuing responsibilities to your British consumers.

A sharper focus on prevention and collaboration should lead to greater action around safer gambling. But it is essential that the actions we all take are effective and actually deliver results. As I have said before “Don’t just do more things...do things that work”.

In my comments today I was asked to provide some positive examples of actions that had made gambling safer. I’m afraid I’ve failed. I can give you an almost exhaustive list of actions that operators are taking, some of which may look quite promising. But what I haven’t easily found is evidence of actions that have been robustly evaluated to measure their impact on the safety of gambling.

For those of you who are frustrated that the Commission so often talks about what has gone wrong but so rarely highlights the successes- I share that frustration. So give us the evidence of success.

In developing your safer gambling programmes, don’t forget to build in time and resource to carry out proper evaluations of your initiatives. Evaluations that are robust and credible- where people feel confident in their outcomes; and that are open- where both what works and what does not is shared freely across the industry. Importantly, don’t see an initiative that hasn’t had the desired impact as a failure- see it as another step towards finding what works.

And where you do have a breakthrough, where you find something that will help to add a crack to the glass floor of problem gambling, share the evaluation with us. Because if it works we will want others to adopt it. When appropriate we can use the power of our rules to spread your successes across industry and ensure that even the most intransigent company is forced to keep pace with you.

This year our focus will be on shaping the next iteration of a national strategy for safer gambling and as the regulator we will take much greater ownership of it by ensuring that the ambitions and priorities in the National Strategy are supported in the way we regulate.

We want to turn a national strategy for safer gambling in to a weapon. A weapon that will attack the cause of gambling related harms; that will reduce the level of problem gambling; that will smash that glass floor.

And we will do that by seeking to recruit as many as possible to join that fight. By encouraging a wider range of bodies to work with industry to make gambling safer- charities, academics, public bodies. By giving greater recognition to the contributions being made by and to the range of bodies whose work could further the delivery of the National Strategy. By moving away from the somewhat monopolistic position that GambleAware has been placed in and seeing involvement in Research, Education and Treatment as a more open invitation...not a closed shop.

We need to create the environment where all those with a part to play can play it fully. Where a broad coalition can work together to prevent gambling related harms and can more effectively measure the success they are having, unconstrained by false perceptions that we have reached a floor in problem gambling numbers.

We will reduce problem gambling...

We will address gambling- related harms...

We will smash that glass floor...

So grab your sledgehammers and join us in taking aim. Because the alternative is that you could be left standing in the middle of that very same floor as it shatters beneath your feet...and believe me, it's a very, very long way down!