The Joint Committee met at 11.05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Michael Colreavy,  Senator Paschal Mooney.
Deputy Timmy Dooley,
Deputy Dessie Ellis,
Deputy Terence Flanagan,
Deputy Tom Fleming,
Deputy Noel Harrington,
Deputy Seán Kenny,
Deputy Mattie McGrath,
Deputy Eamonn Maloney,
Deputy Patrick O’Donovan,
Deputy John O’Mahony,
Deputy Ann Phelan,

In attendance: Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan and Senator Cáit Keane.

DEPUTY TOM HAYES IN THE CHAIR.
**BUSINESS OF JOINT COMMITTEE**

**Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** We have a quorum. As there is a vote in the Dáil, we will suspend the meeting.

*Sitting suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.*

**Sponsorship of Major Sporting Events by Drinks Industry: Discussion with Alcohol Action Ireland and College of Psychiatrists of Ireland**

**Chairman:** The purpose of this morning’s engagement is to hear the views of two bodies, Alcohol Action Ireland and the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, on the sponsorship of sports and cultural events by the drinks industry. The joint committee will hold a further meeting on the issue with other interest groups, probably next week. On its behalf, I welcome Dr. Bobby Smyth and Professor Joe Barry of Alcohol Action Ireland and Dr. William Flannery and Dr. Eamon Keenan of the Faculty of Addiction Psychiatry, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they give to the committee. If they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against a person or persons or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The submissions made to the committee and opening statements will be published on its website after the meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I invite Dr. Smyth and Professor Barry of Alcohol Action Ireland to make the first presentation. They will be followed by the representatives of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland.

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** I thank the joint committee for giving us the opportunity to meet it. We have a major problem with the consumption of alcohol which kills 1,200 people per year in Ireland. Some 2,000 Irish people are in hospital beds today owing to alcohol use. The harm generated by alcohol is felt not just by drinkers but also by those around them. Some 10% of Irish children say their lives have been adversely affected by their parents’ drinking. More starkly, it is estimated that parental drinking accounts for one sixth of all cases of child abuse and neglect. How strange these innocent victims of our drinking culture must find it looking into an Ireland that chooses to bombard them with positive images of alcohol, linking it with fun, social success and sporting prowess. Alcohol Action Ireland was one of a vast number of stakeholders represented on the national substance misuse strategy steering group. Like committee members, that group recognised that this was a complex health and social problem, with many factors influencing consumption and, therefore, requiring a multi-pronged approach. Today we are discussing in isolation just one of the dozens of recommendations made in that report. There is a danger that we will fail to see the big picture.

In addition to making changes to pricing and availability to apply a brake on Ireland’s runaway drinking culture, we must also take our foot off the accelerator. Alcohol promotion via
advertising and sponsorship acts as that accelerator. While common sense tells us that sponsorship promotes consumption, with typical arrogance, the alcohol industry and those in receipt of its money demand that we provide them with evidence that it does. It is this multi-billion euro industry that should be required to provide proof. If they have proof that alcohol sponsorship does nothing to increase alcohol-related harm or drinking by adolescents, Alcohol Action Ireland would have no issue with this activity.

Although the recession has caused per capita consumption to fall slightly, Irish adult drinkers still consume, on average, the equivalent of one bottle of whiskey per man and woman per week. This average consumption is well into the range of hazardous drinking, using WHO definitions. The My World survey in 2012 demonstrated that the majority of young Irish men grew up to use alcohol in a manner that was harmful to their health. Again, this information is based on on the World Health Organization’s AUDIT screening instrument. With 72,000 babies born each year, it is our view that this country now functions as a conveyor belt, producing very heavy drinkers, each of whom generates great profits for the alcohol industry.

The sports in receipt of the bulk of drink industry money are rugby, soccer and Gaelic games. These sports are typically played by young men aged 15 to 29 years. Young men tend to be healthy. The two biggest causes of death among young men are suicide and accidents. We all know that alcohol commonly has a role in accidents. We also know from Irish research that it is a contributory factor in half of all suicides and that the majority of young men who kill themselves are drunk at the time. Overall, it is estimated that alcohol is responsible for one in every four deaths among young males aged 15 to 29 years. There is no product on the planet that causes more deaths and social problems in young men. We believe, therefore, that there is no product on the planet that could more inappropriately be promoted by sports organisations. In terms of the harm experienced by the demographic who play these sports, it would make more sense to allow them to be sponsored by tobacco companies, as cigarettes tend to kill old people.

The age of onset of drinking is typically around 15 years. During the next 12 months 60,000 children will start drinking. Therefore, during the next five years 300,000 Irish children will commence their drinking careers. Because they are going to grow up to be among the heaviest drinkers on earth by the time they are 20 years old, it is they who are the real targets of alcohol advertising and sponsorship. From a business perspective, it is vital to establish brand awareness and, ideally, brand loyalty prior to children commencing drinking. As was pointed out last weekend by a former president of the GAA, through our ridiculously lax advertising and sponsorship guidelines, we facilitate the drinks industry to groom children in the interests of profit to become the next generation of hard and heavy Irish drinkers.

Chairman: I thank Dr. Smyth for his presentation and now invite Professor Barry to make his.

Professor Joe Barry: I thank the Chairman and joint committee for affording us this opportunity. We read with interest the transcript of the committee’s interaction on 27 March with the three main sports bodies. I have been playing sport since my early teens and only gave up contact sports after five years of playing over-35s soccer. Like the majority of Irish adults, I, too, drink alcohol. I continue to enjoy watching and attending all sports codes and agree that sports organisations have a very important part to play in the social life of the country. I was, therefore, saddened by what the heads of the IRFU, the FAI and the GAA had to say to the committee on 27 March.
I would like to concentrate in my presentation on the influence of alcohol marketing. Alcohol marketing and advertising does work. It influences young people’s alcohol beliefs and behaviour. The alcohol companies would not spend so much on marketing and advertising if it did not work. That is obvious. We have much evidence that young people exposed to alcohol branding begin drinking at an earlier age and that this can lead to dependence in adulthood. The younger a person is when he or she commences drinking alcohol the greater the chance he or she will have a dependency problem from his or her 30s onwards.

A study commissioned by the Department of Health in 2001 showed that alcohol advertisements were the favourite among children. They are expensive to produce, but obviously they are the best advertisements. A study in the United States in 2006 showed that young people who watched more alcohol advertisements on television were more likely to have drunk beer. It also showed that for each dollar spent on alcohol advertisements alcohol consumption increased and that drinking by people brought up in more advertising rich environments plateaued in their late 20s, while drinking by people exposed to alcohol marketing plateaued in their early 20s. As such, what one is exposed to as a teenager has long-term effects. Another study in Australia and New Zealand showed that sports people exposed to alcohol sports sponsorship had higher drinking scores. In this study approximately 600 people in New South Wales were asked about their exposure to sports sponsorship in their sports organisations. There was a link between sports sponsorship and their drinking behaviour.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I apologise for interrupting, but a vote has been called in the Dáil.

Chairman: As we have eight minutes before we need to leave for the vote, Professor Barry can continue his presentation.

Professor Joe Barry: The third study was an across-Europe study and involved 13 longitudinal studies which tracked people over four time periods. It showed that young people who were exposed early to alcohol marketing were more likely to commence drinking earlier or, if already drinking, were more likely to drink more. There was what was termed a “dose response”, namely, the more one was exposed the more one drank. The statement that alcohol advertising does not influence behaviour is not true. There is a great deal evidence to the contrary.

The sports bodies and the alcohol industry are incorrect when they state there is no evidence that sports sponsorship by drinks companies influences children to drink. The measures we are hoping will be introduced to break the link between sports bodies and alcohol marketing are a crucial part of our response as a country. We have a big drinking problem and many young people are storing up trouble for themselves and their families in the future. Sport is a very important part of our culture and long may it remain so, but let it not be dependent on alcohol money as seems to be the case. The alcohol industry is making money from sports sponsorship. Those involved on the health side believe there should be reduced alcohol sponsorship of sports. Unfortunately, the sports bodies are very much in the pocket of the alcohol industry, which is a shame. We would like them to take our point of view on board. I appeal to members of the committee, as legislators, to implement some of the recommendations made. Self-regulation does not work, as we have seen to our cost in other areas of public life.

I will be happy to elaborate on any of these points or answer questions.

Chairman: I thank Professor Barry for his presentation.

Sitting suspended at 12.10 p.m. and resumed at 12.25 p.m.
Chairman: Will Dr. William Flannery of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland make his opening statement?

Dr. William Flannery: I am the chair of the faculty of addiction psychiatry of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland.

The college has repeatedly called for the implementation of evidence-based measures to reduce alcohol-related harm. Such measures include pricing, reducing availability and banning the promotion of alcohol. In 2008, the college issued a policy paper calling for a ban on all alcohol advertising and sponsorship in Ireland, particularly given the evidence of adolescent alcohol-related harm. Since then, additional national and international research has outlined the extent of alcohol advertising targeted at adolescents.

Internationally, the British Medical Association, BMA, which advocates for the health of the public, has examined the damaging effect of alcohol marketing on young people. It concluded alcohol marketing communications have a powerful effect on young people and are independently linked with the onset, amount and continuation of their drinking. Through the use of TV, social networking, sponsorship of music and sporting events, they reinforce and exaggerate strong pro-alcohol social norms. Its first recommendation was to ban all alcohol marketing communications.

The scientific opinion of the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum found consistent evidence to demonstrate an impact of alcohol advertising on the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people and increased consumption among existing drinkers. A survey in New Zealand found that sports people receiving direct alcohol industry sponsorship reported more hazardous drinking than those not receiving sponsorship. Finally, the World Health Organization has stressed the critical importance of delaying the onset of drinking in young people.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds in Ireland. We have the fourth highest rate of youth suicide in the EU. Research from the National Suicide Research Foundation in 2010 found that alcohol was involved in 24% of all cases of deliberate self-harm, that is attempted suicide, which rose to 44% for male cases. The association between alcohol and attempted suicide appears self-evident given the timing of peak presentation to accident and emergency departments around midnight on Sundays, Mondays and increasingly on or after public holidays. More research from the National Suicide Research Foundation shows suicides among men rose sharply as the economy went into recession with higher rates for those in the construction industry and having a harmful drinking pattern.

Given these facts, I am disappointed at the drinks industry behaviour towards the national substance misuse steering group. The aim of the group was to develop an alcohol strategy to run alongside the national drug strategy. The college, the drinks industry and representatives from other areas of health, community and government were there. The college believed all present were acting in good faith and over two and a half years worked to reach a consensus. The group issued its report just over a year ago. Despite being in the group, the drinks industry chose to stand aside and issue a minority report.

At a personal level, I have been working in psychiatry now for 15 years. One of my first training positions was in child psychiatry where every morning the patients greeted me with “Whassup”. This was a slogan for Budweiser at the time. These patients were children, the majority under the age of 12. It is these children who picked up on this advert who are now
adults and making headlines about being drunk in Australia.

I now run an addiction service in the midlands and most of the patients are dependent on alcohol - that is, alcoholics. As anyone who knows an alcoholic is aware, denial is a strong feature of the illness. They are convinced they need alcohol to be normal, to be happy and to function. I hear the same language from those who have alcohol sponsors with statements such as “Without alcohol our sports, music or culture events will not happen” or “We need alcohol sponsorship to have major tournaments or to run our organisation”, or “Alcohol is our culture”. Denial is very powerful.

Sadly with some of my patients, my advice and that of their family, friends and work colleagues is ignored and they continue drinking to their death. Since 1990 there have been 11 committees and 15 reports giving advice on how to tackle alcohol-related harm. Just as the call to drink responsibly for an alcoholic does not work, I ask this committee to call a stop to the promotion of the drinks industry and call for a ban on all alcohol advertising and sponsorship.

**Chairman:** I thank Professor Barry, Dr. Smyth and Dr. Flannery for their strong views and presentation and thank them for coming before the committee. Last week we had delegations from the GAA, rugby and soccer organisations and they suggested that a ban would lead to a reduction in their ability to fund participation programmes for children in many communities throughout the country. As the witnesses are aware, all three organisations are embedded in communities where they do substantial work. They have made a strong statement that a ban would inhibit the activities for young people in our communities. Would any of the witnesses like to comment on that?

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** I have a six year old son and an eight year old son and between them they play gaelic, soccer and rugby. I understand from the clubs with which they are involved that mini-rugby and under-age gaelic are a major source of income for the clubs. Armies of little lads are training away, generally trained by their dads, at minimal or no cost to the clubs, but the parents pay €100 or €200 a head per child per sport. I refute the suggestion that a ban on the advertising of alcohol would inhibit those programmes and would ask the associations to give the committee the hard figures on that. I agree the organisations will take a hit as a result of a ban, but that hit will be felt at the upper and elite levels as it will be the elite sports people and the coaches who will get less cash. It will not have an impact on children.

**Professor Joe Barry:** What we have been looking for over the past four years is a phased reduction with the ultimate elimination of sports sponsorship. The task force began in 2009 and we suggested a phased reduction in about four years from then, but now we are talking about 2016. What the sporting bodies said was that in an ideal world, they would rather not have alcohol sponsorship and that they had never seen any evidence that it works. However, it does work. Therefore, if they say they will continue as they are doing because they do not believe it causes any harm, they are-----

**Chairman:** They made a very strong point that the low-cost selling of drink in supermarkets was a bigger problem. They also specifically stated that they could not survive without the moneys they receive in sponsorship from the alcohol industry.

**Professor Joe Barry:** I was on the task force, as were Dr. Flannery and the others, and it recommended a phased reduction. The same issue arose in the context of tobacco sponsorship approximately ten or 15 years ago. Some non-alcohol companies will sponsor sports. We all want sporting organisations to flourish, but we believe they have been completely influenced
by the alcohol industry. If I was working for the alcohol industry, I would be doing what it is doing and trying to minimise the harm my product causes and trying to associate it with positive health. This issue first arose about 2002 and the industry was concerned then that a ban would be introduced before the 2002 soccer world cup. A generation of youngsters has been exposed to alcohol advertising since then and we have a very young age for the onset of drinking. Other sponsors could be found for sporting organisations, such as sponsors from the mobile technology area.

Reading between the lines of what the GAA, the FAI and the IRFU have said, there are probably differences in the degree of dependence on alcohol sponsorship. However, it is unacceptable that our major sporting bodies are dismissing the evidence and saying they must continue to get funding through alcohol sponsorship. We have a duty of care to our children. Clubs must not be under any illusion that if they accept alcohol sponsorship, this will not increase drinking among young people. They cannot pretend this is not a problem. That is the reason I am saddened by the fact the sporting bodies have completely accepted the words of the drinks industry.

**Chairman:** We need to move on and allow members contribute.

**Dr. Eamon Keenan:** I have a brief comment to make. The call for the ban on alcohol industry sponsorship is only part of the recommendations from the national substance misuse strategy. The other recommendations we made include a social responsibility levy on the drinks industry. If this was implemented, it would be up to the Government how to spend that money.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** I thank the witnesses for their presentation. They are right in saying that we are legislators and have a job to do in terms of bringing forward proposals. This is never easy. We have been presented with facts from Alcohol Action Ireland, but I am not overly taken by what has been presented. Perhaps the group can give us more backup data. We have also had presentations from the sporting organisations, but two of them made a lazy sort of assertion that life will not go on if they do not continue to receive this sponsorship. The GAA pretty much said that a ban on this sponsorship is not a deal breaker and it can survive.

The way I look at this is that we have a dreadful culture of abuse of alcohol. This is a cultural issue that existed before modern sport emerged in a televisual way and had more to do with an ancestral culture passed down from generation to generation. Perhaps we need to consider this. The sporting organisations made the point here when questioned on whether alcohol advertising had the potential to encourage the misuse of alcohol that it did not. They also felt that it did not encourage the increased consumption of alcohol. They made the point that the pie was so big and there were so many competitors for a slice of it, making sponsorship more about brand awareness and developing brand loyalty than about targeting or increasing the sale or consumption of alcohol. What is the group’s view on that? Some people take a bland approach and see sponsorship and brand development as part of advertising.

If we are to proceed as Alcohol Action Ireland recommends, there is an issue with regard to the practical implications. One would have to consider how we could block content from other jurisdictions. We live in a very open world where the flow of content is televisual, on the Internet, on the phone and on the iPad etc. How can we prevent information presenting alcohol in a good light getting to young people? It is all very well that the alcohol companies will no longer sponsor the local soccer club, but young people already access content in a mobile way over which we do not have any control because it is sourced from jurisdictions outside of ours. Is Alcohol Action Ireland asking for something impossible in this regard? Will the group also comment on the situation in France where a ban was introduced and the consumption of alcohol
Chairman: We are under pressure for time so we will take the questions of two members at a time.

Deputy John O’Mahony: I welcome the presentations and the group’s visit here this morning. However, I am pretty shocked by some of the assertions made and would like clarification on some issues. The bigger picture was mentioned and it was suggested there is an issue with pricing and availability as well as with sports sponsorship. Where does sports sponsorship rate as a priority in that regard?

Is Alcohol Action Ireland seeking that sponsorship and funding by alcohol companies of sports be banned in isolation, thereby allowing for the money spent on that to go into radio, television and print advertising of alcohol? How would the group deal with the situation where if Ireland passed legislation on this, we would still have multimedia and digital media putting advertising through to youngsters anyway? How would the witnesses deal with that? How would they deal with the issue that was mentioned by Deputy Dooley? My experience relates primarily to a single sporting organisation - the GAA. The GAA might decide it could do without this form of sponsorship at the top level, but how would that be dealt with at local level? If a pub and restaurant that provides support to the local GAA club in a town sponsors it in the name of the restaurant, everyone will know the sponsorship relates to the pub as well. Are we talking about something that will not be possible to implement?

When Dr. Smyth mentioned the costs in this regard, he suggested that sporting organisations could do without the money. While I am not here to speak on behalf of the sporting organisations, I would like to pick up on Dr. Smyth’s remark that most of the coaching is done by parents rather than highly paid coaches. As someone who has been coaching for many years, I am aware of the difficulties that can arise when parents coach their own children. There needs to be a distinction between parents who help out and those who provide coaching. I have often attended under-12 games where one would worry about the parents rather than the children. Dangers exist in that respect as well.

I would like to mention something else I have noticed during my involvement in coaching over the years. Four or five years ago, when I was helping to train a local club team, I looked out the window to see two or three of the guys who were supposed to be training that day walking by with 24-can slabs of €1 beer on their shoulders. It was clear what they were planning to do instead of attending training. I know from my experience of coaching that sport helps to encourage people to be disciplined. I would love if they had gone training instead of going home with slabs of beer on their shoulders. Will this country’s issues with drink be solved if we ban alcohol sponsorship, advertisement and promotion of sporting teams and events? That is the key to this.

Having listened to the three presentations, it seems to me that the witnesses are saying this entire problem would be solved if we could prohibit alcohol altogether. Are we heading into a prohibition situation? Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan, who is in attendance, has suggested at other forums that cannabis should be legalised and that such a move would bring a great deal of funding to Governments. Is it possible that alcohol will be driven underground in the future but drugs will be okay?

Deputy Eamonn Maloney: Alcohol is a drug.
**Professor Joe Barry:** Nobody is talking about prohibition. The Deputy asked about the bigger picture. There are approximately 40 recommendations, across many domains, in the substance misuse strategy. Some of the recommendations relate to the availability of cheap drink. It has been recommended that corner shops should not be able to sell drink as they can at present. The approach that has been taken with regard to drink-driving has been very successful. There has been a big improvement on the roads as a result of the legislation that was needed in that case. Some of the recommendations relate to marketing, promotions and culture. Sport and music are the two biggest forms of culture that grab the hearts and minds of Irish people of all ages. There is strong evidence that the potential and the reality of people drinking more - particularly younger people - increases when the alcohol industry gets itself gripped onto sports. We are all pro-sport. Our problem relates to the sporting bodies. I think the GAA is different because it has alternative strategies. It has taken a very public position on drink for quite a while.

**Deputy John O’Mahony:** I am addressing some of my questions in that context.

**Professor Joe Barry:** As Dr. Keenan said, the strategy is multifaceted. We have been asked to talk about this aspect of the issue today. We know what the alcohol industry’s position will be. We are making our position known, just as the Department of Health has done. As the committee knows, all of this is being discussed in the hope that some sort of political position will be reached soon. Our position is that the process of phasing out the alcohol sponsorship of sports should be commenced. It is doable. Of course it will not sort out everything. The overall aim is to reduce consumption of and harm caused by alcohol by approximately 15%. If there are fewer people in trouble, there will be less pressure on the health service. We are not here because this is a trivial issue. It is a very serious issue. It is important to address marketing by encouraging the sporting bodies to seek funding from other avenues. I would like to refer to a suggestion that was made in one of the newspapers I mentioned. In Australia, it has been proposed that the taxes collected through excise duty on alcohol should be used to fill the gap. Of course we do not want the sporting bodies to struggle. Nobody is saying they should. We are saying we need to exert some pressure. Alcohol is causing harm. We have big problems. I remind Deputy Dooley that all the evidence is available on our website. It will help the members of the committee to make their decision on the basis of our material as well as what they have been told by the sporting bodies.

**Deputy John O’Mahony:** It is important to strike that balance.

**Professor Joe Barry:** We would prefer them to be pro-health. At the moment, their relationship with these drinks companies is causing a great deal of harm to our young people. As health professionals, we are concerned about that. We believe that legislators are concerned about it as well. Legislation is sometimes needed in order to change behaviour. Voluntary codes can be tried in any field, but legislation is ultimately needed.

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** Deputy Dooley asked about the position in France, which tends to work its way into this discussion fairly regularly. The French people and the French Government became very concerned about alcohol consumption levels in the 1980s. A complex multi-pronged strategy was introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This included a ban on sponsorship and severe restrictions on advertising. Over the following four or five years, *per capita* consumption decreased by approximately 50%. The point made by the sporting organisations is that youth drinking, specifically, has increased slightly in France in recent years. If that is an indication of the inability of sponsorship curtailment to solve the drink problem, that should not come as news to anyone. It is a multifaceted problem. The escalation in drinking among young
people in France is reflected across the Mediterranean. Perhaps youth culture is becoming more homogenised as a result of the influence of MTV, etc. It has been suggested that drunkenness among people in this age range has become more acceptable in Mediterranean countries than it used to be. That has nothing to do with sports sponsorship. The short-term impact of the French prohibition on sports sponsorship, as part of a broader suite of measures like those recommended in our substance misuse strategy, was to reduce consumption and, importantly, to reduce harm. We do not want people to drink less for the sake of it - we want to see fewer body bags, fewer suicides and fewer people in our emergency departments, psychiatric hospitals and prison cells.

Both Deputies asked how we propose to deal with the challenge of alcohol-related content. The French have laudably stood alone in Europe by insisting on restrictions, at significant costs to local organisations. When we watch Champions League matches from France, we do not see the Heineken logo. Similarly, the Heineken Cup is known as the H Cup in France. Ireland needs to decide whether it will wait for everyone else, or whether the problem is currently bad enough to justify showing some leadership on this issue as we did in the case of the smoking ban, when the world followed. We need to put these actions in place while advocating loudly and consistently at European level to get our colleagues in Europe to follow what we do. I understand that Norway is putting restrictions in place as we speak.

Dr. Eamon Keenan: We keep hearing that there is a lack of scientific evidence. It is a sort of mantra on the part of the drinks industry. Certain people seem to believe that the more something is repeated, the more true it becomes. The reality is that there is clear scientific evidence to link alcohol sponsorship of sports with alcohol use and misuse among young people. The science group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum examined many longitudinal studies. It looked at patterns of behaviour over periods of time, which is the most effective way of measuring change. They looked at 13 studies which involved 38,000 young people between the ages of ten and 21. Of those 13 studies nine were from America, one from New Zealand, one from Belgium and one from Germany. Seven of the studies showed that there was clear evidence that the data related to initiation of alcohol use among non-drinkers. Three of the studies indicated that the maintenance and frequency of alcohol use among people who were drinking increased and seven of the studies showed that on the overall pattern of people who are not drinking, alcohol sponsorship has an effect on their alcohol use. Only one of the studies would have indicated that there was no impact; that study was in relation to outdoor advertising near schools. All of the other studies, which included 38,000 people, indicated a clear link between sponsorship, marketing, advertising and the initiation and use of alcohol by young people. It is young people we are concerned about. The Deputy asked about all the other social media issues that are thrown at young people. Sport is supposed to be a healthy option for a young person. If one is linking sport with alcohol, which has clear detrimental health effects for young people, it is incongruous, it does not work.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: I thank the delegation for its presentations. Legislation and regulation are about making it easy for people to do the right thing and making it difficult for people to do the wrong thing, as expressed by society, through legislators and based on available evidence. If any of us were to go to any of the sporting organisations and say they could replace what they are currently getting from the alcohol companies with A, B, C plus what they are getting we would not have this debate and the sporting organisations accept that. We talked about the sporting bodies at national level. At local level clubs would have difficulty in paying for insurance, transport and a kit unless the local pub sponsored them. It may not be a large amount of money but the sponsorship is crucial to the running of the under-eights, under 12s
and under 16s teams. What are the alternatives? If they go to the banks, they will take the shirts off their back and will certainly not sponsor their kit. They do not have that many options. That is my first concern. To some extent that issue might be addressed through phasing in but we or somebody needs to identify alternative sources of financial support if the sports companies are to deliver the benefits that I see in my local community, particularly at under age level and in teenage teams.

Is there any research or data that identifies the level of alcohol abuse, the level of suicide or self harm attempts among young people who commenced drinking before the legal minimum age? In other words, are we failing to enforce existing legislation in this area? It is a frightening statistic that Irish adult drinkers still consume the equivalent of one bottle of whisky on average for every man and woman per week. I think it was Dr. Bobby Smith who gave that statistic. Is that a percentage of alcohol consumers or a percentage of adults over the age of 18 years?

Deputy Eamonn Maloney: I thank the delegation for its concise contributions which were interesting. I am in favour of a total ban on sponsorship of any of the national sports by alcohol companies. Just as some people become dependent on alcohol, cocaine, hash, and so on, the drinks companies, very cleverly, have manoeuvred in the past 20 or 30 years into a situation where the major sporting bodies depend on them. I cited an example when the sporting bodies appeared before the committee. People ask where the sporting bodies will get their money from as if the only commercial operations in the country were alcohol companies. We all know they are not. We also know, or at least we should face up to the fact, that none of the other commercial operators can compete with the alcohol industry because they have more money. That is the reality.

The French Government was quite right to phase alcohol sponsorship out in 1991. It did so very cleverly. I heard some rubbish coming from the alcohol industry in relation to the French experience. These people should take a look at the report prepared two years after the ban, after the phasing out of sponsorship of the sports bodies by alcohol companies in France. I will give one example. There was a decline in domestic violence. These people never mention that. I represent a constituency which is almost exclusively working class. People stand up and say that the alcohol thing in Ireland is a cross-community issue. It affects all the community but it affects working class people much more. One has only to ask a primary school teacher in a working class community and he or she will tell one all about it.

The phrase “being in denial” was used. That alcoholics are in denial is true. There are more people than alcoholics in denial. Irish society is in denial. On the basis of the number of reports that came out of this House, most politicians are in denial. There are so many reports that one could actually build a barricade on Kildare Street, but none is ever acted upon. One of the glaring examples of the lack of courage among politicians to deal with the national drug - it is a gateway drug and not a soft drink - was when the controversy arose about head shops. I know nothing about head shops except what I read. I was not a member of this esteemed body when the head shops became an issue. There was such a flurry around here that within a matter of weeks the head shops were banned. I do not know how one can calculate the damage caused by head shops compared to what the national drug has cost over the years. It costs €3.4 billion every year in domestic violence, courts services, etc. There is an issue here that needs to be addressed.

Professor Joe Barry: To respond to Deputy Colreavy, one of the strategies is community mobilisation. There has to be an element of people working through within themselves what
are the potential unintended consequences of all this. What we are talking about here is sponsorship and high profile bombardment by the large alcohol companies of the major sporting bodies. There are different issues when it comes to local clubs. People suffer hugely because of alcohol-related problems. For some it is a matter of shame. Nobody will go public on this issue. I am not exaggerating but the problem is huge within the health service. There are also social impacts. There are evidence-based strategies that work. This country needs them more than most because of our drinking patterns. I will not say further negative things about the industry, but the committee must hear about the impact there has been. Members will be aware of it from their own work.

**Dr. Eamon Flannery:** It is very real problem. I mentioned the substance abuse strategy group before. I thought we were there to address real issues and the practical implementation of the 40 recommendations made, some of which were not in accordance with my position, but there was consensus on them within the group. I was disappointed that the drinks industry had chosen to stand aside, which raised the question of what exactly we had achieved after two and a half years. Some of the solutions to the issues raised are within the recommendations of the strategy group.

As a psychiatrist, my job is to prevent suicide, which, unfortunately, has become more and more widespread. Once again, we win when it comes to the European Union in having one of the highest rates of youth suicide, which is matched by one of the highest rates of binge drinking. These two issues are certainly related.

**Deputy Noel Harrington:** Much of the very valuable testimony we have heard would be very relevant to the health committee. The joint committee has a sports remit. In that regard, I want to touch on a question posed by Deputy O’Mahony. In the suite of recommendations what is the priority or urgency of the proposed phased ban on sponsorship? I have a concern. If sponsorship was to be phased out, the national sports bodies could easily fill the gap. Information and communications technology accounts for some €60 billion, or 35%, of total exports, but I rarely see the brands of companies in that sector in sports organisations. They are missing. The drinks industry has a very active advertising budget and uses its initiative on how it is spent. If a ban is phased in or imposed, the industry will not invest 40% of its advertising budget somewhere else. Drinks companies will advertise where young people are. One might see them advertising on games consoles. While advertising money may not come to sports organisations, it may go to sports personalities, subliminally.

Deputy O’Mahony touched on the club issue. I have not reached the lofty heights reached by the Deputy in the GAA, but I was an active club footballer and coach. When I started, it was tolerated to have a drink a few days before a championship match. Now, it would not be unusual for a club player to avoid alcohol and bars for three or four weeks before a game. In the national arena, however, one reads in the gossip columns about sports personalities who have been out for the night after a Premiership or FA Cup game, even though there is another game a week later. It becomes acceptable again. This is where we have a problem when it comes to sport. The national side will look after itself and the GAA seems to have a strong, different opinion. I have seen in the case of one club in County Kerry that it cost €30,000 to get to an all-Ireland final - to put jerseys on 30 guys to get them to the end of a championship campaign. Alcohol would not have been a feature of the lives of these 30 guys for eight months of that year.

The problem for the committee is how to make one policy fit all. I am concerned that the effort would slip sideways and that the advertising budgets of drinks companies would be spent in areas which were not as public or as well supervised and which might be even more threaten-
ing to the well-being of younger people. If the delegates have a view on this, I would be very interested to hear it.

**Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan:** I had worries about alcohol advertising in sport and elsewhere before I attended the committee, having read quite a bit about the subject. Some of the things the heads of the main sports organisations said to the committee on the last occasion were astounding. They did not fit with what I had read about the damage sponsorship by drinks companies of sports events and in general caused. Having listened to the delegates, I would like to have a look at some of the studies to which they have referred. I believe what they are saying, which is that it is not good and is, in fact, very bad.

The suggestion that the main sports organisations are dependent on sponsorship is true, which they showed by saying at our meeting that sponsorship was not the problem but the selling of alcohol in supermarkets at low prices. That argument is not good enough. It is the sort of argument I have with my daughters when one of them does something wrong and tries to get off by suggesting her sister has done something even more wrong. That does not actually let the first child off. They have still done something wrong and it needs to be changed. In fairness to the sports organisations, they told us that if they could get the money somewhere else, they would not go near sponsorship by drinks companies. We must listen to this. They need the money and will not have it if we ban such sponsorship. We must find another way to get the money.

There was a suggestion about using the money generated through excise duties for sport. The committee has been told that alcohol abuse costs the country €3.4 billion every year. If we could reduce the figure by 1%, it would save the State €34 million. We did not get a figure from the three main sports organisations the last day, but from what they told us, I get the impression that the money they receive through sponsorship does not amount to much more than €34 million. The delegates have made it quite clear that it is not good to have a connection between sport and the alcohol industry and I cannot see how anyone could argue with them. If we ban alcohol advertising within sport, we must start to explore alternative revenue streams. If it means putting an extra penny on a pint or a short and investing the revenue generated in sport, it must be done.

Alcohol advertising should not only be banned in sport, it should be banned full stop. The idea that one would promote - another word for which is “push” - a drug to young people cannot be accepted. In reality, people will drink in any event. I drink and like to do so. Every now and then I like to get drunk, which is perhaps not the politically correct thing to say, but I recognise the damage alcohol causes. Deputy O’Mahony wondered would we end up banning alcohol. That would be ridiculous. They tried that in the early part of the last century in the United States and to this day there is a Mafia as a result. That would not be a good way to go. Deputé O’Mahony’s point that somehow alcohol is not really a drug is very important. It is a drug and until we face that fact we will never really solve the problem because a drug is not defined by its legality or otherwise. It is a pharmacological question. It has nothing to do with legality. Alcohol is a drug. It is a mind-altering substance. I know. I have tried it. To keep half-denying that means that we will never deal with the problem. There is an idea that if alcohol were banned, which it would not be, other drugs might be legalised. Maybe we can learn something from places which have gone down the road of partial legality, or tolerance as they call it in Holland. Marijuana cannot be advertised there. The places where one purchases the drug cannot be called marijuana shops or anything like that. They are called ‘coffee shops’. This is done so that young people will not walk by them and say “Oh look, this is where a cer-
tain substance is sold.” It is just another coffee shop. They are shielded from that.

What the witnesses have told us today is very important. I look forward to reading more about it but they have further convinced me that alcohol sponsorship must be taken out of sport. The sporting organisations will survive. I want to make one final point.

Chairman: The Deputy should put a question. He has exceeded his time.

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: What is the witnesses’ opinion of what I am about to say? There is a question. Local clubs can survive without alcohol sponsorship. In my first few years as a county councillor I set up a soccer league with 16 teams, in order to give people of all ages something to do. Every week I received a phone call from a pub asking me would I bring them in there afterwards for a few sandwiches. My response was to put the tournament on later to make sure they would not be able to get to the pub but this went on for two years. We resisted it. Our league was successful and we were not dependent on the alcohol industry. There is another way. There has to be another way because it is not acceptable for young people to go around with jerseys with advertisements for alcohol printed on them. It is sick.

Chairman: Do the witnesses have any response to that? There were a lot of statements.

Professor Joe Barry: Deputy Harrington said that this is a matter for the Committee on Health and Children rather than this committee, which deals with sport. That is not so. When the Taoiseach launched a Healthy Ireland document two weeks ago he said health is everybody’s business. It is not just a matter for the Department of Health.

Deputy Noel Harrington: I was making the point that sport is part of the remit of this committee, no more, no less.

Professor Joe Barry: I am appealing to the members of this committee. There are only 200 people in this country who can legislate. They are the Members of these Houses and sometimes legislation is required to change behaviour and culture. We are well past the time to do this. I was on the task force in 2002 and at that time Diageo was very worried about a ban on sports sponsorship and that there would be no soccer sponsorship for the 2002 World Cup. A decade has passed and there is an industry trying to do one thing and a public health group trying to do something else. Unfortunately at the moment the sporting bodies are completely tied in with the industry. I appeal to the members of this committee to come down on the side of health. They can do it. We cannot. We can advocate what should be done.

Deputy John O’Mahony: I would like the witnesses to focus on the issue of sponsorship in isolation. Can this be implemented, in view of the fact that sponsorship comes from other countries too?

Dr. Bobby Smyth: Deputy O’Mahony asked where this lies in the ranking order. In other words, if we could implement only two of the measures recommended in the substance misuse strategy, where would sponsorship lie? It is not at the top of the list. Curtailing availability, increasing cost and reducing affordability would be the bigger impact features. We also believe that Deputy Flanagan is absolutely correct. Even if sponsorship influences only 2% or 3% of those it reaches, 2% of 2,000 dead people could reduce the death toll by 60 per annum.

Deputy John O’Mahony: Perhaps it needs to be banned altogether because the millions of euro that go into sport could be put into advertising on radio, TV and in print or some other form of advertising. This cannot be treated in isolation. I am anti-drink but I am trying to tease out
how this can be done by isolating a particular group rather than attacking the whole problem.

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** There are recommendations about reducing advertising as well but unfortunately the committee with responsibility for communications will be lobbied by RTE which will worry about the financial impact on it. The committee responsible for finance will worry about the impact an increase in excise duty will have on inflation. Any committee which looks narrowly at the stakeholders for which it has primary responsibility has nothing to gain from this. Unfortunately the problem is global. It impinges on every aspect of society. Each sector of society is probably going to have to take a bit of pain to get the broader benefit.

Deputy Harrington asked where the money will go. The tobacco industry spends as much on the marketing and promotion of its products now as it ever did. It just does it in a different way. Marketing will not go away but marketers will not be given direct access to our homes via sports sponsorship. It will become less convenient, more expensive and less efficient for the companies to market alcohol. I will use a brief anecdote to illustrate this. I asked my eight year old son to name a cigarette brand, and I encourage the committee members to do likewise if they want evidence that bans do work. He could not name any and suggested we Google it, despite the fact that his mother smokes cigarettes. I asked him to name any brands of alcohol. The first two to trip off his little lips were Guinness and Heineken. He struggled beyond that.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** If he was a Liverpool fan he would have said Carlsberg.

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** Possibly.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** That is a fact. My nephew drinks it because he has followed Liverpool from the age of eight.

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** My son is eight years old and is already brand aware. That is the whole point of advertising and sponsorship and we should not be facilitating that, given the reality it entails and the extent of the harm it causes.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** I asked one question to which I did not get an answer. Perhaps it is an unfair question. I asked whether there is any research or data which would help us to understand to what extent our failure to enforce existing legislation feeds into alcohol abuse and the rate of suicide among young people. How many of those young people started drinking earlier than the minimum legal age?

**Dr. Bobby Smyth:** The international research is emphatic that the earlier someone starts drinking the more likely they are to develop alcohol dependence and to experience harm. The short answer to the question is yes, the earlier someone starts drinking the more likely they are to end up as a casualty of the alcohol culture.

**Deputy Michael Colreavy:** Does Dr. Smyth have evidence------

**Dr. Eamon Keenan:** We are talking here about sports sponsorship but I urge the committee to see the strategy as a whole. We have spoken about the need to introduce a social responsibility levy on the drinks industry which could go some way towards funding sporting organisations. There are alternative forms of sponsorship. The drinks industry aggressively aims at sporting organisations to provide sponsorship for them. If they were not there other areas of society would want to advertise through sport because it is seen as a healthy alternative for young people as they grow up. RaboDirect has replaced Magners. Reference was made to Liverpool and Carlsberg. When Liverpool played in France and Carlsberg did not appear on their jerseys,
my son asked me what was going on. It was the first time he mentioned alcohol advertising and the ban in France had any impact in Ireland.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** Can any of the studies mentioned be referenced?

**Professor Joe Barry:** Mr. Conor Cullen, our communications officer, has put them on the website.

**Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan:** I will access them on the website.

**Chairman:** I thank the three witnesses. They gave us food for thought and have offered a strong counter-argument to what we heard last week. We will take on board the views of the witnesses and forward them to the relevant committee. I also thank the members and those who attended who are not members of the committee. We will need the attention of the members tomorrow for a short technical meeting with the Minister of State, Deputy Alan Kelly.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.20 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Thursday, 18 April 2013.