



16 November 2007

## More research on drinking norms needed

Cross-party MSP calls for further research into how to change social attitudes to alcohol misuse have been supported by The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) following this week's debate in the Scottish Parliament.

Research in Scotland and the USA has shown that what is perceived as 'normal' drinking behaviour has a strong influence on how individuals drink. University students, for example, tend to overestimate alcohol consumption amongst their peers - e.g. 'everyone is getting drunk in the union on Friday night' - and the greater the over-estimation of what is 'normal' to drink, the more an individual feels justified in his/her own consumption.

Researchers concluded raising awareness of the fact that the norm is most people drink responsibly is a powerful tool to reduce alcohol misuse. It opens up a possible alternative approach to public health messaging that appears to offer positive outcomes.

Douglas Meikle, the SWA's Alcohol Policy Manager, said:

"Changing misperceptions about the incidence of excessive drinking can play an important role in tackling alcohol misuse. The Scottish norm is to drink responsibly as part of a healthy lifestyle. Academic research in Scotland and the USA shows that by consistently highlighting that fact, rather than focusing solely on excessive behaviour, individuals can be persuaded to question and change their own drinking patterns. The industry welcomes this timely Parliamentary debate and both Ministerial and cross-party MSP support for further research into how social norm interventions can change attitudes to alcohol consumption."

- ENDS -

### Note to Editors:

1. On 15 November, MSPs debated Motion S3M-668 on 'Perceived Norms of Alcohol and Tobacco Consumption - Pilot Studies in Scottish Educational Institutions' lodged by Dr Bill Wilson MSP.
2. For further information, please contact David Williamson at the SWA on 0131 222 9230 or 07730 496 151.