SHAAP
Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems
11 Queen Street
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Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Scotland
House of Commons
London
SW1A OAA

16 September 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Welcome to your new ministerial post. Although many areas of policy which affect Scotland's alcohol problem are devolved to Holyrood, there are of course many which are reserved to Westminster. One such is alcohol duty, and I am writing to you specifically to put the case to re-introduce a duty escalator.

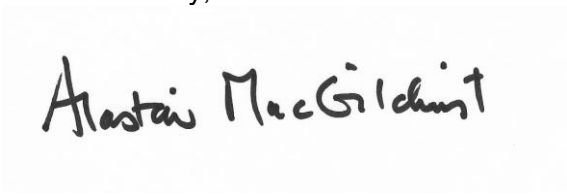
We were delighted to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer increase duty at the last Autumn budget. Increasing duty makes good public health and economic sense. Currently, the overall UK revenue from alcohol duty (£12.7 billion in 2023-24) is less than half of the costs of alcohol to society (roughly £27 billion). An increase to duty would help to reduce the burden on our over-stretched health services and contribute vital funds to the public purse.

Former Labour Chancellor Alistair Darling introduced a duty escalator in 2008 which saw duty automatically uprated by 2% above inflation each year. While this was in operation, the death toll from alcohol fell, but sadly, and predictably, they rose again when the escalator was removed by the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government . The Labour government should reintroduce this policy if it is serious about tackling alcohol-related harm.

We are aware that you will have received representations from the industry regarding the impact of a rise in duty, particularly on Scottish whisky. I have attached a briefing which addresses some of the arguments frequently made by the industry, which I hope you will find helpful.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this and any other issues relating to Scotland's alcohol problem.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Alastair MacGilchrist OBE
SHAAP Chair