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## **BREAKTHROUGH BRITAIN: GAMBLING**

27 Policy Recommendations  
765 words

The age limit for gambling should be raised from 16 to 18 to combat the rise in problem gambling, according to a report from the Social Justice Policy Group.

It also calls upon the gaming industry to spend at least £10 million a year to pay for proper research into gambling addiction and programmes design to prevent and treat the problem.

The report, specially commissioned by Iain Duncan Smith, the chairman of the SJPG, warns that the recent Gambling Act will widen opportunities for gambling.

This, in turn, will lead to more problem gambling and a far greater need for services to prevent and treat addiction.

The report, by Dr Mark Griffiths, Professor of Gambling Studies at Nottingham Trent University, cites research suggesting that Britain already has roughly 300,000 problem gamblers – which is similar to the number of people addicted to hard drugs but fewer than the estimated 2 million with a serious drink problem.

It warns that problem gambling can damage many areas of an individual's life, such as physical and mental health, employment, finances and personal relationships. Depression, alcoholism and obsessive-compulsive behaviours are also linked with problem gambling.

The report the single most important step that could be taken to limit the damage done by gambling would be to raise the minimum age for all forms of gambling.

It also backs a cap on the number and size of casinos. At present, the UK has 140 casinos, but this number will grow by 17 as a result of the Gambling Act 2005.

The report says: "What has generally been demonstrated from research evidence in other countries is that where accessibility of gambling is increased, there is an increase not only in the number of regular gamblers but also an increase in the number of problem gamblers.

“The more gambling opportunities, the more problems. Therefore the number of outlets and opportunities could be capped (such as putting a cap on the size and number of casinos nationally).

“Particular psychological concern must be given to gambling in the new media, such as the internet, interactive television and mobile phone gambling, that may affect individuals in different ways.”

The report insists that steps must be taken to curb the involvement of young people in gambling.

“The single most important measure would be to raise the legal age of gambling. This would significantly reduce the age at which children start to gamble and would also help gaming operators and shopkeepers prevent underage gambling.

“Research by psychologists has consistently shown that the younger a person starts to gamble, the more likely they are to develop problems.

“Furthermore, gambling, like other addictions involving alcohol and illicit drug use, are ‘disorders of youthful onset’. At present, many young adolescents, as young as 11 and 12 years of age, can pass for 16. An age rise to 18 years would stop a lot of the very young adolescents gambling in the first place.

“At the very least, there should be a review of slot machine gambling to assess whether slot machine gambling should be restricted to those over 18 years of age.”

The report says that the Government should raise awareness of problem gambling among the general public and family doctors.

“Problem gambling is very much the ‘hidden addiction’. Unlike, say, alcoholism, there is no slurred speech and no stumbling into work. Furthermore, overt signs of problems often do not occur until late in the professional gambler’s career.

“When it is considered that problem gambling can be an addiction that can destroy families and have medical consequences, it becomes clear that health professionals and the public should be aware of the effects.

“GPs routinely ask patients about smoking and drinking, but gambling is something that is not generally discussed,” the report says.

The report backs gambling prevention initiatives. Their aim should be to head off gambling-related problems; promoted informed, balanced attitudes and choices; and protect vulnerable groups.

Gambling operators and service providers should provide information on gambling addiction, treatment and services to patrons.

They should also supply centralised training for gambling venue staff to ensure uniform standards and accreditation.

Finally, they should pay at least £10 million a year to fund research, prevention, intervention and treatment programmes. The Responsibility in Gambling Trust should administer this fund.

The report adds that treatment for problem gambling should be provided by the NHS and funded by the RIGT or other gambling-derived revenue.

Problem gambling treatment, advice and counselling services should be rolled out across the country, inside and outside the NHS.

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**Ten Key Policy Recommendations:**

1. Gambling operators and service providers should pay at least £10 million per annum to fund research, prevention, intervention, and treatment programmes. This fund is administered by the Responsibility in Gambling Trust.
2. Adoption of harm reduction strategies directed at minimizing the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of gambling behaviour for individuals, families, and communities.
3. Treatment for problem gambling should be provided under the NHS (either as standalone services or alongside drug and alcohol addiction services) and funded either by the RIGT or other gambling-derived revenue.
4. Information about gambling addiction services, in particular services in the local area, should be readily available to gamblers.
5. Gambling operators and service providers should supply information on gambling addiction, treatment and services to patrons.
6. Gambling operators and service providers should support development of centralised training for gambling venue staff to ensure uniform standards and accreditation.
7. Government should raise awareness about gambling among health practitioners and the general public
8. Adoption of strategic goals for gambling to provide a focus for public health action and accountability
9. Endorsement of public health principles consisting of three primary principles that can guide and inform decision-making to reduce gambling-related problems.
10. The number of outlets and opportunities could be capped (such as putting a cap on the size and number of casinos nationally)