

# chapter fourteen

## Attitudes To Gambling

### Historical perspective

- 14.1 Much of the existing legislation in the UK reflects an attitude that gambling is, at best, something to be grudgingly tolerated and contained, rather than allowed to be encouraged. This attitude is based either on the belief that gambling is bad in itself (the moral argument) or that it can lead to serious harm (the danger argument). It is for this reason that the concept of “unstimulated demand” (enshrined in the 1968 Betting and Gaming Act) has such a central role.
- 14.2 In considering the historical background, it is worth noting that when, prior to the 1960s, many forms of gambling were illegal in the UK, a great deal of illegal gambling took place. The legislation of the 1960s was introduced at least in part to regulate a form of activity that the law was unable effectively to suppress. Consequently, the UK is unusual in that the primary purpose of its existing gambling legislation is social control. In other jurisdictions, such as the US and Australia, gambling has been used as a tool for economic regeneration. But in the UK, at least until the advent of the National Lottery in 1994, commercial and economic interests took a secondary place in determining the nature of legislation.

### Have attitudes to gambling changed?

- 14.3 The argument that attitudes towards gambling have changed, and that it is no longer generally the subject of disapproval, is an argument widely used in written submissions to us. It is based on the fact that so many people in the UK now gamble by means of the National Lottery. Yet the effect of the National Lottery on social attitudes to gambling is hard to determine, and may be readily exaggerated. So while it is often repeated that social attitudes to gambling have changed in the UK, we have not been presented with any firm evidence to this effect. Whilst most of those making submissions shared the view that attitudes had changed, there were dissenters. One submission claimed that suggestions that attitudes have changed were based on self-serving industry wishful thinking<sup>1</sup> and another that gambling should not be thought of as part of a wider leisure industry.<sup>2</sup> We decided to test the assertion that attitudes have changed by commissioning a survey by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the results of which are discussed below. We also wanted to test the general assumption that the

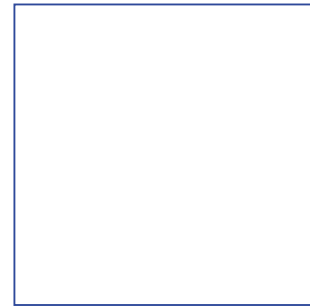
advent of the National Lottery had revolutionised attitudes towards gambling, and to test whether our emerging views were in tune with those of the general public.

### Sources of information

- 14.4 We have used a number of other sources to complement the data about attitudes in the ONS survey. We derived information from the Prevalence Survey,<sup>3</sup> the MORI survey in the BISL report “The Economic Value and Public Perceptions of Gambling in the UK”<sup>4</sup>, a survey conducted for the Home Office on attitudes to the controls on gambling and drinking<sup>5</sup>, and several surveys conducted for contributors to the review about their areas of activity. We also looked at surveys conducted abroad.

### Survey on Attitudes to Gambling commissioned by the Gambling Review Body

- 14.5 The survey was conducted by the ONS over two weeks in January and one week in February 2001 as part of their January omnibus survey. A random sample of 3,000 private households in the Great Britain was selected and stratified by region, by the proportion of households renting from local authorities, and by the proportion in which the head of the household is in Socio-Economic Groups 1-5 or 13 (that is a professional, employer or manager). 1,678 face to face interviews were conducted with people aged 16 or over. Details of the methodology of the survey and tables of the data collected are annexed to this report.
- 14.6 The survey aimed to measure public attitudes in four areas:
- changes in attitudes towards gambling
  - attitudes towards the availability of fruit machines in places not usually associated with gambling
  - attitudes towards allowing children to play on the type of fruit machine commonly found in seaside arcades
  - whether people considered the National Lottery to be a form of gambling.



## Do people think the National Lottery is gambling?

- 14.7** So that they were not prompted into considering the National Lottery as a form of gambling, respondents were asked by the ONS whether they had played the National Lottery before they were asked about their views on gambling. People were asked if their attitudes had changed over the past 10 years, because we wanted to use a period which would include the introduction of the National Lottery without making it obvious that this was one of the aims of the question. 80% of people surveyed thought that doing the National Lottery was gambling. 73% had bought a lottery ticket or scratch card in the last year.

## Have attitudes to gambling changed in the last 10 years?

- 14.8** The results of the ONS Survey seem to indicate that the National Lottery has not changed attitudes to gambling. The vast majority (80%) said that their attitude was unchanged over the last 10 years. The percentage of people who said their attitude had become more negative towards gambling over the last 10 years (15%), was higher than the percentage who said their attitude had become more positive (6%). The percentage of those who said their attitude had become more negative towards gambling over the last 10 years (21%) was higher in London than anywhere else in Great Britain. The percentage of those who said their attitude had become more positive (11%) was higher in Scotland than anywhere else in Great Britain.
- 14.9** Early in 2000, the Home Office commissioned an ONS omnibus survey to look at attitudes to the regulation of gambling and drinking – both areas in which the legislation was under review.<sup>6</sup> That survey involved 1,753 interviews. Respondents were asked if they thought they knew what the controls on gambling were, and if they replied that they did, they were asked whether they thought the controls should be relaxed. 27% of those questioned thought that they knew what the controls were. Of that 27%, 96% did not want the controls relaxed. In the light of this result, it is interesting to note Dr Rachel Volberg told us that surveys in the U.S. show that although gambling participation has increased, attitudes have not changed very much. She referred to a 1999 Gallup survey which revealed that 47% favoured the status quo on regulation, 29% a reduction or ban on gambling, and 22% expansion.<sup>7</sup>
- 14.10** We asked those making written submissions to us to comment on whether attitudes to gambling had changed since the 1960s. The views of those who answered this question differed from the results of the

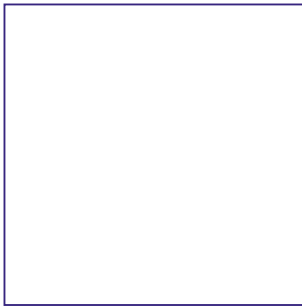
ONS Survey. 38% of those who made written submissions responded to this question. Of those, 98% thought that attitudes had changed. Their comments suggested that they thought gambling had become more acceptable. This difference could be accounted for by one or more of the following factors:

- the periods of time covered by the questions are different
- people may have answered the question on the basis of their impression of attitudes in general rather than their personal attitudes
- the sample was smaller and self-selecting, and the majority of those contributing to the review who answered the question on attitudes were from the gambling industry.

- 14.11** If gambling participation rates are any indicator of attitudes towards gambling, a comparison of the results of the survey conducted for the Rothschild Commission in 1978<sup>8</sup> with the ONS Survey in 2001 would indicate there has been very little change. The 1978 survey reported that over 94% of adults (some 39 million people) had engaged in some form of gambling. The ONS Survey reported that 90% (some 41 million people) had participated in an activity which they regarded as gambling over the past 12 months. (The Prevalence Survey<sup>9</sup> in 2000 reported a lower participation rate of 72%, but it did not include categories such as premium bonds which were included in the surveys of 1978 and 2001.)

## Attitudes to gaming machines

- 14.12** The ONS Survey found a high level of disapproval for fruit machines in places like cafés and taxi cab offices. 66% would like to see either none or fewer in such places. 33% would like to see the same number, and only 1% would like to see more. This finding illustrated an interesting correlation with the results of the MORI survey for BISL<sup>10</sup>. MORI asked people about their perceptions of the social acceptability and seriousness of gambling activities. The least acceptable activities were fruit machines in cafés and takeaways.<sup>11</sup> Local authorities have the power under the 1968 Gaming Act<sup>12</sup> to impose blanket bans on machines on unlicensed premises. A report in 1993 (the most recent information available) indicated that over 100 local authorities had chosen to impose blanket bans, in premises including fish and chip shops, taxi cab offices and launderettes.<sup>13</sup>
- 14.13** The ONS Survey sought views on children playing on fruit machines with a prize limit of £5, which are most commonly found at the seaside. 42% of respondents disapproved of children playing on these machines.



41% approved so long as an adult accompanied the child. 13% neither approved nor disapproved and only 4% approved of children playing on these machines. There was a higher level of disapproval in Wales (54%) and Scotland (56%) than in England (40%). The percentage of the youngest respondents (16-20 year olds) who approved so long as the child was accompanied by an adult was 49% – a higher percentage than the average, and the highest of all the age groups. The percentage of the youngest respondents who disapproved of children playing on these machines was commensurately lower – at 24%, the lowest of all the age groups.

**14.14** In assessing how these perceptions should affect our recommendations, we have considered how changes in the law could affect seaside towns where family amusement centres with these machines are located. We therefore also took into account a survey of visitors to seaside towns and amusement arcades commissioned by BACTA and BALPPA.<sup>14</sup> In a survey of 1,000 visitors to seaside resorts and 1,000 people who had visited seaside amusement arcades, just under 62% of the visitors considered amusement arcades to be either quite important or very important to seaside towns.

**14.15** The MORI survey revealed that if machines in cafés and takeaways were the least socially acceptable form of gambling, the next least acceptable form of gambling was fruit machines in inland arcades. This lack of public enthusiasm is similar to the results of a national survey commissioned by the Australian Productivity Commission.<sup>15</sup> In response to the question “should numbers of gaming machines be increased, decreased or stay the same?”, 51% thought they should be decreased, 41% thought they should stay the same and 1.7% thought they should be increased.

### Social aspects of gambling

**14.16** There seemed to be some conflict in the evidence about the extent to which sociability is an important feature of gambling. MORI<sup>16</sup> found that one of the key benefits felt by gambling participants was the sociability associated with gambling. The Bingo Association commissioned a survey of the views of the public and of bingo players.<sup>17</sup> 69% of the public and 83% of bingo players agreed with the statement that “playing bingo in a bingo club was more of a social activity than gambling”. However, according to the Prevalence Survey,<sup>18</sup> the reply to the statement, “I have made good friends through gambling” was:

- 63% never
- 5% rarely and
- 5% sometimes.

It is of course possible that the respondents to the Prevalence Survey did not have bingo in mind when they answered the question. Moreover, for 35% of respondents in the Prevalence Survey, their only gambling activity was the National Lottery, and buying a National Lottery ticket is not an activity which we would expect to be conducive to making good friends.

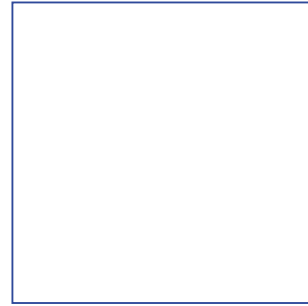
### Gambling to benefit charity

**14.17** The ONS survey revealed that the vast majority of the 90% of people who gambled in the past 12 months had participated in the National Lottery and bought raffle tickets. 73% of people played the National Lottery, and 58% bought raffle tickets. The next highest level of participation in a gambling activity (buying scratch cards) was much lower at 20%. Gambling which mixes public benefit with potential private gain is clearly the most prevalent form of gambling. By comparison, a far smaller proportion of people bet on horses and greyhounds (15%) play bingo (14%) and play on fruit machines (13%). MORI reported that small lotteries were perceived as the most acceptable and least serious form of gambling, closely followed by buying premium bonds and doing the National Lottery. The fact that so many people do the National Lottery<sup>19</sup> does not lead us to conclude (as some have argued) that people would welcome exposure to other forms of gambling in all places where the National Lottery is available.

### Range of attitudes in submissions to the Review Body

**14.18** We received over 200 written submissions covering a broad range of views from individuals, representative organisations and the industry. Most thought the time had come for change, but there were considerable differences in the degree of change advocated. Only one submission proposed that legislation should be introduced to prohibit all forms of gambling.<sup>20</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, one submission put the case for radical change in forthright terms, “current anachronistic restrictions should be lifted to enable the industry to access untapped markets of potential gamblers”.<sup>21</sup> 20% of those who made submissions answered the question “what influence should a change in attitudes towards gambling have on the regulatory structure?” Just over half thought that regulation should reflect current attitudes and just under half thought caution should be exercised in regulation.

**14.19** We do not believe that there is any indication in any of the surveys we have seen that the attitude of the public to gambling has undergone radical change since the introduction of the National Lottery. Attitudes about the acceptability and seriousness of the various forms of gambling do not lead us to believe that there is a



public desire for unrestricted access to gambling. The survey which the ONS conducted for us indicates that most people would prefer less accessibility to fruit machines in non-gambling locations. We think that public attitudes should play a part in our recommendations, and we interpret the survey data as encouragement for our view that there should be a cautious approach to relaxing the controls on gambling.

**14.20** We have noted that in Australia radical change to gambling legislation resulted in a rapid proliferation of gambling opportunities. The Australian Productivity

Commission reviewed the effects. Among the surveys it commissioned was a national survey on community attitudes to gambling, which found widespread concern about the expansion of gambling. Around 70% of respondents (including a majority of regular gamblers) considered that gambling does more harm than good.<sup>22</sup> At 2.3%, the rate of problem gambling in Australia is the highest noted in the international comparisons given in the British Gambling Prevalence Survey. We think that the Australian experience offers reinforcement for a cautious approach.