



Gambling Related Harm APPG

Mr Nigel Huddleston MP
Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

3rd April 2020

Dear Minister,

Call for Tighter Restrictions on Online Gaming During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Today we have written to the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) and the five largest gambling companies to ask if they will put in place tighter restrictions on online gambling during the COVID -19 crisis.

The Gambling Related Harm All Party Parliamentary Group welcomed the announcement by the BGC this week that it is seeking to set the standards expected of members during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Their proposed measures, however, do not go far enough. As we set out below, most measures are loosely worded, do not make firm commitments or merely restate existing obligations. Instead, we would expect the industry to adopt standards that respond appropriately to the context we are in and which will help to protect gamblers at this critical time.

People are at home and are severely restricted with access to mini casinos on their laptops or mobile phones. As the Gambling Commission has identified, this period of isolation has real potential to encourage at risk and problematic gamblers and entice those who may be more vulnerable to gamble. As we have been saying for a number of weeks, it is urgent that stringent protective measures are put in place.

We therefore have deep concerns about the 'pledges' which have been proposed this week by the BGC; these fall well-short of what is required. All are very weak; a number need further explanation and others are obligations already set out within the Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice (LCCPs). We comment on each of the pledges in turn below:

1. Increase safer gambling messages across all sites and direct to all customers – **The BGC should explain how this will be measured, what the increase will be and what constitutes a safer gambling message?**
2. Step up interventions if customers increase time and spend beyond normal pre-crisis patterns – **It is essential to know what the threshold is for interventions, what is the % increase on normal time and spend that would lead to an intervention?**
3. Actively promote deposit limits – **As we set out last week, deposit limits should be made mandatory and immediately implemented.**



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4. Action to ensure appropriate and responsible advertising including monitoring volume – **It is our understanding that the first part of this, appropriate and responsible advertising, is in fact already the LCCPs. On the second part, will BGC members commit to reducing advertising during the Covid-19 pandemic?**
5. Report all illegal and rogue advertising from black market online operators – **It is our understanding that this is already under the remit of the Gambling Commission. This would also, of course, be in BGC members' interests.**
6. One strike and you're out policy where affiliates breach pledges – **Again operators would already be liable for affiliate marketing under the LCCP.**
7. Signpost help to GAMCARE and the National Gambling Helpline and Gam Stop for self-exclusion – **Again this is already contained within the LCCP.**
8. Commitment to ensuring funding for Research Education and Treatment - **Again this is already contained within the LCCP.**
9. Welfare checks and well-being help for staff – **We strongly support this but would ask what this pledge constitutes.**
10. Supporting the Government's 'National Effort' with volunteers and facilities – **We strongly support this but would ask what this pledge constitutes.**

Given that these pledges do not go anywhere near far enough, we are asking the BGC to review these proposals and include the following as a matter of urgency to protect gamblers and vulnerable people and their families at this time and that operators agree to also adopt these:

1. Commit to implement deposit limits for the duration of the crisis
2. Implement a £2 stake per spin limit on slot content online to reduce the harm that this highly dangerous content can have
3. End VIP accounts which encourage high levels of expenditure
4. End gambling advertising and sign up offers for bonuses
5. Companies should make their data available to ensure independent research can be undertaken to assess the scale of harm being caused by the industry at this time and the need for further harm prevention measures

We strongly recommend that the BGC members adopt these five measures as a matter of urgency. At this time, it is incumbent on us all to do everything we can to support people's safety and wellbeing, to support our society, protect the vulnerable and to put public interest ahead of gambling companies profit.

The Government should also be taking steps to urge the industry to protect vulnerable gamblers during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond it. We ask that you urge the online gambling companies to adopt these measures.



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Yours sincerely,

Carolyn Harris MP

Rt. Hon. Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP

Ronnie Cowan MP

Fiona Bruce MP

Tracey Crouch MP

Judith Cummins MP

Baroness Eaton

Lord Foster of Bath

Patricia Gibson MP

Peter Gibson MP

Richard Holden MP

David Linden MP

Tim Loughton MP

Stuart McDonald MP

Robin Millar MP

Jessica Morden MP

Gerald Jones MP,

Andrew Selous MP

Jim Shannon MP

Jo Stevens MP

Sir Desmond Swayne MP

Nick Thomas – Symonds MP

Sammy Wilson MP

Prof Henrietta Bowden-Jones OBE, Director of the National Problem Gambling Clinic