

# The Royal College of Psychiatrists

## Gambling Bill : Briefing for the House of Lords

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the statutory body responsible for providing guidelines and advice regarding the treatment, care and prevention of mental and behavioural disorders.

In the course of their work, psychiatrists deal with people who are in difficulty as a result of excessive gambling. Therefore, the Royal College of Psychiatrists is concerned about aspects of the Gambling Bill that will have an impact on excessive gambling.

- **ABANDON DEREGULATION OF CASINO GAMING**

In spite of the reduction in the number of regional, large and small casinos, the increased promotion of gaming and a sizable expansion in gaming machines, many with unlimited jackpots, are retained in the Bill. These latter aspects will inevitably lead to a marked increase in individual and social disorder as a result of excessive gambling, whatever other preventative measures are set up.

**The Royal College of Psychiatrists therefore advises that the drafting of the deregulation aspects in the Gambling Bill requires more careful and detailed consideration, especially where it involves the most addictive forms of gambling. The deregulation of casino gaming should therefore be abandoned in order to enable urgently required regulatory aspects of the Bill to be enacted. In particular, the setting up of a Gambling Commission, which should regulate all gambling *including* the National Lottery and spread betting, is vital.**

In addition, The Royal College of Psychiatrists advises that there are two particular issues, which need to be dealt with immediately by appropriate amendments of the Gambling Bill.

- **PREVENT ACCESS TO ANY CATEGORY D JACKPOT GAMING MACHINES BY CHILDREN**

At the present time, Category D machines are anomalously classified as amusements with prizes. While some of them offer toys and other non-monetary prizes, the majority are jackpot gaming machines, which are identical to those found in casinos apart from a smaller stake and jackpot.

There is substantial research evidence that the jackpot gaming machine, regardless of stake and monetary prize, utilises well-recognised processes of conditioning. It is inherently very addictive and this is especially so in the case of children.

**The Royal College of Psychiatrists advises that the Gambling Bill should explicitly ban children from access to all Category D machines offering monetary prizes with jackpots, wherever they are located, including seaside arcades.**

- **RATIONALISE THE AVAILABILITY OF FIXED ODDS BETTING TERMINALS (FOBTs)**

The most common form of FOBTs is based on roulette played on video gaming machines. When they first appeared in betting shops, the Gaming Board intended to prosecute, because they are a form of gaming, which would not even be allowed in casinos at the present time. However, eventually, in 2003, it was decided not to pursue this. Instead, a code of conduct to protect punters was agreed with the industry. In view of the increasing number of people that are now presenting with addiction to FOBTs, this has clearly not been effective.

**The Royal College of Psychiatrists advises that, since FOBTs are not a form of betting but one of hard gaming, the Gambling Bill should explicitly state that FOBTs should be confined to casinos and the stakes and prizes should be drastically reduced.**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**  
**ABOUT EXCESSIVE GAMBLING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC POLICY**

- Gambling is a form of entertainment that is inherently addictive. As a result, **everyone** is vulnerable to take gambling to excess with the resulting damaging individual and social effects. Therefore, public policy should encourage moderation.
- The most important factors determining the incidence of excessive gambling leading to disorder are the availability of gambling facilities and the social pressures encouraging participation. The relatively low number in the UK of those who are at present in difficulties as a result of excessive gambling is due to the longstanding, unstimulated demand policy, which is being abandoned in the Bill. Experience in other countries indicates that deregulation leads to an increase in excessive gambling.
- Treatment of excessive gambling and educational programmes to prevent it, while desirable, are of limited value, especially if public policy allows the demand for gambling to be stimulated. A policy of “socially responsible gambling” in such a setting is a contradiction in terms.

**Further information about any of the issues that have been raised can be obtained from:**

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