

# Cautious welcome for drug services funding commitment

**Cormac O'Keefe**  
Security Correspondent

Community drug organisations have given a guarded welcome to funding commitments under Budget 2023. However, they are still seeking confirmation from the Department of Health that a €3.5m provision in the National Drugs Strategy (NDS) budget will go to community drug projects.

Campaign, an umbrella group of community projects, has long lobbied for cuts made to funding over six years during the recession to be restored. Group co-ordinator Anna Quigley said it "appears on paper" that the budget was allocating €3.5m to maintain "existing" drug and alcohol services. However, it has asked the department to clarify if that fund is specifically for

community projects and that it will be funnelled through local drug taskforces, rather than through the HSE. The minister of state with responsibility for the NDS, Frank Feighan, said he was providing €3.5m for community and voluntary providers "to maintain the existing level" of drug and alcohol services. He said this was "the first allocation" to meet the cost of providing the existing

level of services of recent years. Mr Feighan said a total of €10.5m was secured for the NDS and inclusion health services and that €7m of this was for new developments, including €4m for the expansion of community and residential addiction services and €3m to improve access to healthcare services for socially-excluded groups. He said €850,000 was provided to expand integrated

care for high-risk users, with new residential addiction treatment services for women in Meath and Wicklow and a community alcohol service in Mayo. An additional €1m was earmarked for emerging drug trends and to expand community-based services, with €750,000 to mitigate the impact of drug and alcohol use on children and families. Ms Quigley said CityWide's "specific focus" for

years has been on restoring funding, which was slashed during 2009 and 2014. She said the destination of most of the funding now was decided centrally by the Department of Health and the HSE and no longer by local drug taskforces. She welcomed the €3.5m funding for existing services but said: "On paper, it looks like an allocation, but we have asked the department for clarification to see if it

specifically for community drug projects and will it be funnelled through local drug taskforces or will it remain with the HSE, in which case we won't be sure where it will go." Michael Guerin, senior addiction therapist with Cuan Mhuire addiction treatment centres, welcomed the additional funding. "Recently, we have been experiencing unprecedented demand, particularly in the

areas of cocaine dependence, problematic gambling, poly-substance misuse, and alcohol problems, some of which may have their origins in Covid times," he said. He said they were worried the current economic challenges "may exacerbate" levels of addiction. "Our organisation is under increasing pressure as the cost of inputs has grown exponentially throughout 2022," he said.

The HSE and addiction workers all say drinks industry funding has no place in schools. So how have 160 schools been educating children with a programme designed and paid for by the alcohol industry? **Jess Casey** reports



# Schools 'should be no-go area' for alcohol industry

IT WOULD be unimaginable for an organisation that receives even a euro in funding from the tobacco industry to run a school programme about smoking. So how is an organisation with close funding ties to the drinks industry allowed to train teachers about alcohol harm reduction against the advice of the HSE and the Department of Health? Working in addiction services for over 20 years, David Lane has seen the impact of alcohol misuse and the challenges it causes people across society, of all ages and backgrounds. "It's really pervasive in this country," Mr Lane told the *Irish Examiner*. "The impact of alcohol misuse on the health service and the impact, more importantly, on individuals and their own health and their families; we've been really trying to work on what we need to do to reduce the significant challenges it does cause."

As the HSE co-ordinator of drug and alcohol services in Cork and Kerry, one of the major pieces of work he has helped to get across the line in recent years is the enactment of the Public Health Alcohol Act 2018. "It was groundbreaking from our point of view," he said. "We started then for the first time as a country to deal with the things that will actually make a difference in terms of reducing people's consumption of alcohol." This week, Mr Lane will write to every secondary school in Cork and Kerry, urging them not to allow their teachers to take part in education programmes offered by Drinkaware. In line with Department of Education guidelines, the Drinkaware programme is intended to be delivered by teachers themselves to their students. The programme is not available to teachers who have not attended the training from Drinkaware. More than 310 teachers in over 160 schools have been trained on the programme to date. It was developed by the Drinkaware education programme manager, with the support of its education steering committee made up of six highly experienced educationalists, said a spokeswoman. "The programme involves 8 to 11 40-minute lesson plans delivered on a weekly/fortnightly basis as part of the SPHE curriculum." Drinkaware describes itself on its website as a charity that is primarily funded through donations from the private sector. According to the website, these include Alcosense, Aldi, Clonakilty Distillery, Dublin Beer Factory, Edward Dillon, Lidl, Marks and Spencer Ireland, Galway Craft Beers, Proximo Spirits, and William Grant. There is "no doubt" in terms of where Drinkaware's links are, said Mr Lane. "They are funded by the drinks industry, and the drinks industry should have no hand, act, or part in terms of developing educational materials for secondary school students," he said. "We need to be very clear. They should be nowhere near our schools is the bottom line, from my point of view. "It's not helpful, from my point of view, that there is that conflation of them trying to sell huge quantities of alcohol on the one hand in terms of making profits and all that, and on the other hand, they run these campaigns around reducing harm caused by alcohol. We need to break that cycle, we need to move away from it."



A Drinkaware.ie 'Alcohol & You' brochure cover, which is part of the programme being delivered in schools.

Delaying the age of a first drink is a key goal for Drinkaware, she added. "Our school alcohol education programmes are designed to prevent the start of underage drinking and reduce the number of young people who drink through effective alcohol education that challenges the normalised expectations and fact-based knowledge of young people. "A youth population that is uneducated on the facts regarding alcohol and its misuse, will mean the continuation and likely escalation of an unhealthy drinking culture, the perpetuation of negative social norms, and the increase of alcohol-related harm to self and others." **British study** In Britain, a recent major academic study of alcohol industry-backed education programmes found such programmes promoted children's familiarisation with drinking. "Distilling the Curriculum" scrutinised all classroom resources, worksheets, teachers' guidance notes, and PowerPoint presentations. Ms Leonard said: "Some of them include nudges towards drinking, and very glossy, positive images of alcohol were included in some of the materials." These resources are a concern to Mr Lane too. "All of them promote children's familiarisation with and the normalisation of alcohol as a 'normal' adult consumer product; this is what they say, which children must learn how to master and 'use responsibly'." "Those programmes also contain misinformation. They include things like selective presentation and the omission of risks. "People don't want to talk about them but these are the cancer risks associated with using a certain substance and we need to be very clear with people, like we are with cigarettes." The HSE, the Department of Health, and the Department of Education each said schools should not use any resources developed by alcohol industry-funded organisations. A spokesman for the Department of Health said the position of Health Minister Stephen Donnelly remains that "it is not appropriate that schools use any materials or resources developed by organisations funded by the alcohol industry".

# Almost 130,000 applied for school bus tickets

**Jess Casey**  
Education Correspondent

Almost 130,000 applications for bus tickets were made by the time the ticket registration for school transport closed at the end of July. That is according to an update on school transport from the Department of Education issued to TDs following the budget. This figure includes 44,299 new applications as well as roll-overs from the previous school year. More than 6,000 children who applied for school bus places did not get a space as demand soared after the fees were waived this year in response to the cost-of-living crisis. According to the department, over 125,000 bus tickets have been issued to students so far this year, compared to around 103,600 at the end of the last school year. This means over 21,400 additional places were needed, a 21% overall increase. "There has been an increase of 18% to date in the number of tickets issued to eligible pupils and an increase of 27% to date on the number of tickets issued to concessionary pupils, compared to the start of the 2021/2022 school year," said the department. Additional funding has been secured as part of the budget, the note added, which will "allow officials in consultation with Bus Éireann to consider and evaluate where temporary additional capacity may be available". "The initial focus will be where families applied on time and who previously held concessionary tickets, to alleviate the impact of the increased demands on the scheme for those families." However, this is subject to capacity considerations. "Constraints in sourcing vehicles and drivers in certain areas of the country may also mean that it may take a number of weeks to explore solutions for additional capacity." Labour TD said that parents will have looked at the budget expecting "definitive action" on school transport. "Instead, they got vagueness and confusion," said Mr Sherlock. "The minister still has not secured funds to address capacity. Fianna Fáil in Government had that chance this week to solve the school transport chaos once and for all."

Forum Ireland. "The concern that we would have is that there seems to be quite a low level of population awareness that Drinkaware is funded by the alcohol industry," said Ms Leonard. "Elected TDs have said to me, 'what do you mean Drinkaware is in our schools, what do you mean they are funded by the alcohol industry?'" The launch of the i-Mark initiative, which works to support independence from alcohol industry influences, has brought the work of many local drugs and alcohol task forces closer together, she believes. At a grassroots level, community workers are seriously concerned about Drinkaware working with schools. "The bottom line is that the alcohol industry exists to increase its profit margins for its shareholders," said Ms Leonard. "That is its job. They do that job really well; I don't have a problem with that." However, schools should

be a 'no-go' area, she says. "In common with public health advocates across the globe, we really feel that schools-based education with young people is not an appropriate area for drinks industry-funded initiatives to be involved in. "We feel those are best placed and best done and led by the Department of Education, the HSE, and the Department of Health. "If it was being delivered in my child's school I would like to know what is being delivered, I would like to be told in advance that the programme is funded by the alcohol industry, and I would certainly like to see what is included. "I think it's really important that parents, the public, and the communities really become aware of those issues. We have a right to know who is in our schools, what are they delivering to our children, and what are the risks that may be associated with that model of intervention. "When my daughter is

getting sex education, or anti-bullying education, we get a note home. Have any of these parents been asked for permission for an alcohol industry-funded programme to be delivered to their children?" The full classroom resources involved in the Drinkaware programme are not available online. It is understood to run to 300 pages. The stated aim of the programme is to delay the age of first drink in Ireland, which currently averages at just under 16 years, and to provide students with information on alcohol-related harms. From the excerpts provided to the *Irish Examiner*, lessons across the three years of the junior cycle are focused on themes such as the consequences of alcohol use, peer influences, building resilience, coping, and alternatives to alcohol. It includes using interactive learning methods as well as video clips and debates, challenging teachers' biases, and workshops with staff,

students, and parents. The programme has been evaluated by Maynooth University, with teachers describing the programme as "very comprehensive", "well-thought-out", and "expert and energetic". One student said: "If we didn't do this course, we would never know about the effects of alcohol. It is so important to know about peer pressure." The *Irish Examiner* asked Drinkaware why it is continuing to offer an education programme to schools when it contradicts HSE and Department of Health advice. The statement provided did not directly answer this question. However, Drinkaware did provide a statement from its chief executive, Sheena Horgan. "Through collaboration and the collective efforts of Irish society from educators and parents to charities and government, Drinkaware believes we can make a lasting difference to the next generation's relationship with alcohol," said Ms Horgan.

## Irish Examiner

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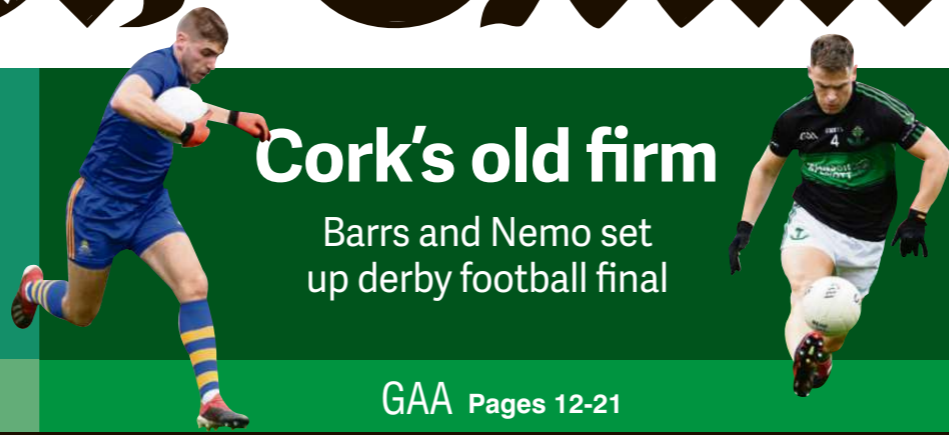
The Irish Examiner's team of leading health, nutrition and parenting experts are on hand to offer advice and answer your questions



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## Interest rate rise could mean delays to thousands of planned social homes

Paul Hosford and  
Cáit Caden

An interest increase by the State's social housing lender could delay thousands of homes being built.

The Housing Finance Agency on Friday informed approved housing bodies it would put its lending rate up 0.65% to 3.15% from November. It had previously raised rates 1% in May. It is thought that because of the move,

which comes as interest rates among European lenders increase, thousands of social housing projects may have to return to project assessment stage, even if builders are on site. While sources say those projects would continue on the assumption they will still be viable even with the higher rate, some projects will be delayed due to assessments being required.

Sinn Féin housing spokes-

man Eoin Ó Broin said he was concerned that any rise in the cost of finance could make cost rental schemes more expensive, leading to rents of €1,500 per month.

However, speaking to the *Irish Examiner* at this weekend's Fianna Fáil ard fheis, Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien said that "substantial changes" he has made to the schemes would "subsume" any rate rise.

"The Housing Finance

Agency operates independently of Government, so we can't instruct the agency on their rates, that wouldn't be appropriate, so we don't do that," he said.

"To answer the question specifically on viability post the rate increase, I've already made some significant changes on cost rental which the approved housing bodies' sector looked for in relation to their funding model. So I think the cost

rental piece is solid. We will work with the approved housing bodies sector to make sure that any projects coming forward aren't delayed," he said.

The news comes as a new report showed a slight dip in house prices during the third quarter of the year, but flagged a likely increase this year and in 2023. Asking prices for houses fell 1.3% in the last quarter, the Property Price Report

by MyHome.ie showed.

The median asking price for new constructions nationally is now €320,000, while the price in Dublin is €420,000 and elsewhere it is €275,000. Despite the recent dip, the report predicts that house prices will rise 6% in 2022 and 3% next year.

In addition to expected rising house price inflation, MyHome.ie is also expecting a drop in supply next year. Rising input costs and

ECB rate hikes are putting strain on development. It is now less likely that 30,000 units will be delivered by 2023, according to the report.

The report also showed that rent controls have been ineffective. A consumer price index of private rents during the third quarter suggested price pressures in the rental market intensified during the summer, the MyHome.ie report showed.

The index for August rose 1.4% on the previous month and was up 12.5% on last year. The report also showed rent controls contributed to the exit of small buy-to-let investors from the market.

This led to just 416 new buy-to-let mortgages in the first half of the year. As a result, fresh investment into the private rental sector is entirely dependent on large institutional investors, the report stated.

## Alcohol sector providing school training

Drinkaware move inappropriate, say HSE and Department of Health

Jess Casey  
Education Correspondent

Secondary school teachers are being offered training in how to lead classroom lessons about alcohol by Drinkaware, an organisation that is funded by the alcohol industry, distilleries, and breweries.

The warning from addiction experts and advocates say Drinkaware is working with schools against the advice of the HSE and the Department of Health.

Drinkaware, with funders including Diageo, Bulmers Ireland, and Heineken, confirmed that, to date, 15,000 first to third-year students have gone through its schools programme.

The HSE co-ordinator of drug and alcohol services in counties Cork and Kerry, David Lane, is to write to every secondary school in the region this week, urging them against sending teachers to take part in Drinkaware programmes.

"We don't support Drinkaware or anybody else from the drinks industry running training programmes for teachers, or in terms of running their kinds of programmes in our schools," said Mr Lane.

Schools should be a no-go area for the alcohol industry, according to Alcohol Forum Ireland national lead for community Paula Leonard.

"We wouldn't let the tobacco industry in the door of our schools to teach our children how to smoke sensibly," said Ms Leonard. "It would be socially unacceptable, it would be unacceptable to the minister for education, it would be unacceptable to the parents, because we now have a population awareness of the strategies of the tobacco industry."

The issue was recently raised with Education Minister Norma Foley by Social Democrat TD Róisín Shortall.

"When I asked the minister for education about this, she completely dodged the question and passed the buck to schools and teachers," said Ms Shortall. "She seems to have forgotten that she's in charge."

"After all, Ireland has one of the highest rates of binge

drinking in the world. We should not be outsourcing alcohol education to the very people profiting from this misuse. The conflict of interest is crystal clear. It's time for the minister to ban this inappropriate practise."

Drinkaware said its school programme for junior cycle students is based on evidence and best practice.

It "recognises that alcohol does not exist in isolation" and that it needs to be examined in relation to "our relationship, our coping skills, cultural and media influences, and our health and wellbeing".

The programme aims to highlight the risk of drinking alcohol, in particular drinking to excess with specific emphasis on alcohol's effects on the developing body and brain, and to support the development of skills that "promote independent decision-making about alcohol".

The programme also aims "to delay the age at which young people take their first drink". Both the HSE and the Department of Health confirmed to the *Irish Examiner* that it advises schools against getting involved with alcohol-funded initiatives.

A HSE spokesman said: "It is not appropriate that schools use any materials or resources developed by organisations funded by the alcohol industry."

Copies of the Drinkaware resource have not been provided to the HSE, he said.

"Drinkaware continues to make the resource available despite the HSE and the Department of Health stating that it is inappropriate."

The Department of Health spokesman said the Know the Score programme is the first national evidence-based resource on alcohol and drugs for senior cycle students.

"In addition, the Healthy Choices programme for junior cycle students is expected to be available to schools in 2023," it said.

A Department of Education spokesman said: "It is a matter for schools and teachers in the first instance to determine what resources and supports they will use to support their implementation of the curriculum."

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## Closed for business



Elsa Cabrini says goodbye to her staff, Pier Paolo Usi, Fabio Ghizzoni, Amelia Burke, and Jodie Healy, as she closes the doors of The Tasty Corner cafe and deli in Cobh, Co Cork, for the last time due to hikes in the cost of energy at the cafe, which opened in 2020 and has faced bill increases of up to 200%. SEE: News, Page 3

Picture: Dan Linehan

## Minister recovering after surgery for skin cancer

Ciará Phelan  
Political Correspondent

Minister of state for mental health and older people Mary Butler is recovering after having surgery for skin cancer, she has confirmed.

Speaking to the *Irish Examiner*, Ms Butler said she had a procedure in June under local anaesthetic to remove cancer from the bridge of her nose but it wasn't successful.

She is in recovery again at her Waterford home after a second surgery last Thursday.

Ms Butler was awaiting an appointment to see a dermatologist, having been referred by her GP in January.

However, while representing the Government in Brussels on St Patrick's Day, an Irish doctor was among a group she met and asked her if she realised she had a basal cell carcinoma on her nose.

She wanted to wait until the Government had announced the budget to have the second surgery.

She said: "I have a basal cell carcinoma on the nasal bridge, the diagnosis was



Mary Butler had a basal cell carcinoma on her nose.

confirmed in April. "It's the first time I had a full anaesthetic in my life, on my birthday too, last Thursday. I had a procedure under local anaesthetic in June but unfortunately it wasn't successful."

Ms Butler said the skin cancer appeared like a spot on her nose that wouldn't heal. She said it formed as a result of sun damage in earlier years.

She has a number of stitches on her nose following the invasive surgery and will be working from home for three weeks before returning to the Dáil. She said she was "floored" in the days following the procedure.

Ms Butler said her consultant has told her she does not

believe the cancer has spread elsewhere but she has to wait the results of biopsies.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland, with over 13,000 new cases diagnosed every year. The National Cancer Registry of Ireland expects this number to double by 2040.

"The importance of a good sun care regime has never been so important now with skin cancer the most common cancer in Ireland," she added.

Ms Butler was not present at the Fianna Fáil ard fheis on Saturday due to the procedure but said she was delighted to be re-elected as a vice president of the party.

Ms Butler is the second politician who has had treatment for cancer in recent days after it was reported the Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghail was recovering in a Dublin hospital after surgery for prostate cancer last Thursday.

He said he had discovered he had prostate cancer during the summer after a routine blood test which found he had a high prostate specific antigen level and would have to undergo surgery.

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### Analysis

According to the latest census results, identity and religion are separating in Northern Ireland, and it's happening faster than ever in the wake of Brexit. **Page 9**

### Life/Style

Whether it's the finest Moleskine or a tatty copybook, with a chewed-up Bic or collectable Montblanc, it matters not: Keeping a journal keeps me sane. **Page 10**

### Football tragedy

A minute's silence was observed before football matches around the world yesterday in memory of the victims of the disaster at a stadium in Indonesia that lasted at least 125 lives. Players, coaches, and leagues sent condolences and messages of support. **World: 16**

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# Irish Examiner

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Ensuring supply

## Power grid gets first winter test

There is an old, and distinctly off-colour joke about watching out for yellow snow but that does not distract from the importance of the colour coded warning system deployed by Met Éireann in spells of cold weather. With the alerts being forecast to alternate between yellow ('be aware') and orange ('be prepared') in the next few days, and the cancellation and delays of about 200 flights in and out of Dublin over the weekend, this 50th week of the year will also see the first major test of the reliability of our energy supplies as demand increases upon entering the peak midwinter months.

European countries have been practising contingency plans and bracing for blackouts (which could also bring down parts of the mobile phone network) since October. Tánaiste Leo Varadkar acknowledges the risk of electricity blackouts for households and businesses this winter cannot be ruled out due to "very tight" supplies. A *New York Times* headline proclaimed: 'Advice for Europeans: Bundle Up and Get Ready for Outages.' The French government, particularly anxious as half of its nuclear power plants have been offline for repair, has planned for rolling cuts, while Britain's national grid has warned of possible blackouts from 4pm to 7pm if gas used to generate electricity runs short.

To some extent the regular warnings, allied to unseasonably warm weather in October and last month, has helped persuade households and businesses to keep the thermostat turned down and allowed reserves to build up. However, with the arrival of the Arctic blasts from Greenland, those measures will now be put through their paces. Among the hungriest users in Ireland are the ever-increasing numbers of data centres which are viewed as fundamental to our economic future. Ireland has 70, with eight being built, and applications for another 30 in the planning framework.

It is suggested that they have been given one hour's notice to reduce their energy usage by up to 50% at times of high demand or risk having their power cut off under new 'load shedding' plans drawn together by EirGrid, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, the ESB, and Ireland's major tech companies such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Google. The centres will be expected to switch to supply from their own onsite diesel generators to prevent the system toppling over.

The worst case for Ireland in midwinter is high demand coupled with several low-wind days which will prevent renewable power topping up our supply. The growing contribution from wind turbines and solar power is seen as vital if Europe is to break its reliance on Russian president Vladimir Putin's fossil fuels though European electricity industry body Eurelectric has warned that investment in the grid needs to rise by 50% to 70% to reach €34bn to €39bn a year by 2030 to cope with the acceleration of new forms of capacity.

That is a problem for the future. For now, we must overcome the convictions of a previous tsar, Nicholas I, during an earlier conflict in Crimea: "Russia has two generals in whom she can confide — generals Janvier and Février." It is the job of all consumers, and the power supply companies, to ensure these months prove to be unreliable allies for the Kremlin.

Taoiseach transfer

## Micheál of the 900 days

There will be no shortage of reflection, and credit showered upon Cork's first Taoiseach since Jack Lynch when Micheál Martin concludes his stint as principal politician.

Mr Martin took over on June 27, 2020, and is due to hand over to Leo Varadkar this Saturday, a period in office of 903 days which has included a global pandemic, Brexit, with its implications for the North; the return of a major land war in Europe involving a continental superpower for the first time in 77 years; the worst cost of living crisis for decades and, of course, the inescapable reality of climate change.

His elevation to Taoiseach was born from coalition between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and the Greens. Such constructions are always a marriage of convenience, but the parties have made it last despite various contradictions and inconsistencies. Mr Martin entered office by affirming that politicians had to put the country first and despite early stumbles and gaffes involving Covid-19 measures he has come through with his reputation for integrity intact.

This is not the time for valedictions. They come at the end of political careers, and Mr Martin has a long road ahead of him yet, not least at the next election just over two years from now. But during challenging times he has been a safe pair of hands, a master of consensus, and a reassuring voice. His common decency has enhanced Ireland's reputation overseas. For all that he deserves the nation's thanks.

Twins' 100th birthday

## Remarkable duo

Centenarians aren't quite as uncommon as you might imagine in Ireland. Last year more than 500, the majority of them women, were honoured by President Michael D Higgins. But it is always a significant milestone when one person reaches the mighty age of 100, so the remarkable achievement of identical twins Joan Barrett and Kay Bogan, who celebrated their joint birthdays this weekend in Cork, is cause for great jubilation.

Joan and Kay toasted each other with champagne surrounded by generations of their family at the Darraglyn nursing home in Douglas. Those relatives who couldn't travel caught up by that relatively new-fangled thing, the video call. Local schoolchildren sent more than 150 birthday cards and others dropped in chocolates, flowers, and wine.

The siblings were born on December 10, 1922, at North Main St in Cork with Kay entering the world first and Joan following 40 minutes later. Their advice to people seeking a long life? "Enjoy yourself, but don't do anything out of the way." The wisdom of age is always worth hearing.

# Drinkaware may have had good intentions, but this was so wrong

Done but not dusted. That's how you might describe the Drinkaware situation. This paper led on Saturday with a warning letter going from the government to schools telling them that materials and courses sponsored by the alcohol industry should not be used in their classrooms.

According to Liz Dunphy and Jessica Casey, who wrote that lead, the letter that went from Department of Education and HSE bluntly stated "there is no place for the alcohol industry in schools". Meaning that the training courses for teachers and the materials supporting these courses, provided by the national charity Drinkaware, are severely non grata as of this weekend.

"It is not appropriate to use resources or materials produced or funded by the alcohol industry for education and awareness in schools, or for teachers to attend, in their professional capacity, associated training which may be offered by organisations funded by the alcohol industry."

The phrasing of the letter is significant. It is unusually comprehensive, hitting not only the issue of who pays but also who produces materials designed for use by/in school. In addition, as the quotation above makes clear, it's quite legalistic, defining as no longer appropriate that teachers in their professional capacity, would attend "training which may be offered by organisations funded by the alcohol industry."

If it ever was appropriate: The letter refers back to earlier official advice along the same lines. Message: "We told you this before. But in case you missed it..."

An organisation named the Alcohol Forum must take some of the credit for this firming up of previous disregarded policy. But so can this paper, whose Jess Casey has been to the fore in drawing attention to the intrinsic contradiction in an industry legitimately committed to selling more of its product sponsoring a charity committed to persuading teenagers to postpone consumption of that same product.

The *Irish Examiner* didn't quite run a campaign on this, but the paper, nonetheless, was key to moving Alcohol Forum's concerns onto — literally — the front pages. This led to an unusual encounter last week between Drinkaware CEO Sheena Horgan and Alcohol Forum spokeswoman Paula Leonard on *Morning Ireland* — unusual, because although the two women were to-the-death opposed to each other's stance, the level of courteous restraint evident in the item was spectacular, if courteous restraint can ever be so described.

They were like two surgeons operating at different ends of the same body while not letting on they were even in the same operating theatre. They never called each



## Terry Prone

other out for cynicism or self-righteousness. Neither negatively characterised the other. The Drinkaware speaker studiously avoided even acknowledging that the Alcohol Forum's objective was the amputation of the Drinkaware leg in schools. Indeed, she reiterated several times that Drinkaware was ready to "scale up" its offering. She kept stressing that the materials used were objective. And *Morning Ireland* presenter Gavin Jennings kept stressing — with dangerous quietude — that those materials were sponsored by the drinks industry.

A few days later, the powers-that-be came down heavily on the side of the Alcohol Forum, issuing a letter to schools that left no possibility of misinterpretation.

It would seem consequentially obvious that Drinkaware is unlikely to be able to fulfill its scaling-up ambitions. Any teacher who missed the story who tells their principal they'd like to attend a Drinkaware course is likely to find the room temperature dropping as precipitously as the national temperature fell before the weekend. If they persist, they're likely to be told that what they do in their own

### Have your say



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time is their business, but that the school will not be hosting any courses based on their teachers attending the Drinkaware course. In the unlikely event of a school deciding to a) send teachers to Drinkaware courses and b) offering classes as a result, that school and those teachers are going to find that the hydra of Greek mythology has nothing on a parental WhatsApp group when it comes to growing heads and biting you in bad places. Added together, all of these inevitabilities mean that Drinkaware is likely to go into operational decline as drink industry sponsors look at what may once have looked like a winning proposition and decide to put their corporate social responsibility funds somewhere else. Now, I have written pretty harshly about Drinkaware in this paper. Triumphalism over its

undoubtedly impending demise, however, would be inappropriate. It's doubtful that the industry ever saw the charity as a way of doing anything other than making some contribution to the public understanding of alcohol. It's certain that it was set up and run so that it met the requirements of the Charities Regulator. And it employed and continues to employ highly qualified professionals and has had Maynooth University cast an eye over what it does.

None of that is the issue. The issue is the link between the industry flogging different versions of the same product and sponsoring anything related to that product in schools. The association is unacceptable, no matter how many Chinese walls are constructed around it and no matter how valid the health education principles manifest in their programs.

Assuming the best of the alcohol industry, they will now re-group, decide that even if it seemed like a great idea at the point of inception, it no longer stands up, and wind it down in a generous and responsible way.

The people, many of them women, who have run it have done

“They were like two surgeons operating at different ends of the same body while not letting on they were even in the same operating theatre”

‘Giving teenagers information about the harm done by excessive drinking is, on the face of it, a good thing. The problem is the sponsorship.’

so in a pristine way and should be helped to emerge positively from this point in their careers.

Drinkaware's intention to postpone the moment when a kid starts drinking is, on the face of it, a good thing. Giving teenagers information about the harm done by excessive drinking is also, on the face of it, a good thing. The problem is the sponsorship. We are living way too sponsored a life, with big companies and their charitable off-spring effectively dictating the direction and standards of suppliers seeking money from them for good causes.

Precious few good causes get anywhere today without corporate sponsorship and corporate sponsors, while they may make a public virtue out of not interfering in the sponsored entity, know that — as American marketing journalist Leslie Savan says — "Over the long run, whether you buy a particular product is less important than that you buy the world that makes the product seem desirable."

Sponsorship of anything — it doesn't have to be alcohol — going into schools contributes to making the sponsor and what they offer seem more desirable. Back in antiquity, the school I attended had beautiful wall hangings about wild-life sponsored by an oil company. From today's point of view, that seems outrageous in its association of an environmentally challenging industry with pure, untouched nature.

The good intentions that created Drinkaware should now be channeled into a graceful leaving of our classrooms. And wider school-directed sponsorship subject to newly rigorous rules.

## Letters to the editor

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## We need a new Ireland defence forces

It is worth reflecting on past and present governments that have continually failed to organise and deliver a cohesive Irish defence strategy for all of its citizens.

One hundred years of neglect of our Defence Forces has finally delivered the fatal blow with every unit under strength, under-equipped, unable to attract sufficient recruits, and unable to stop the exodus from its dwindling military ranks to oblivion.

This government policy always appeared intended to give just enough limited resources to defend the state but never to defend the Irish nation. It is true when we are incapable of learning from historical mistakes we condemn ourselves to repeat them. A new Ireland Defence Force must be capable of utilising and harmonising the human resources (full, part and flexi time citizens) of the whole island and not just the 26 counties. I believe we need a radical change of government to truly transform the lives of all our citizens whether it be in defence, housing, health, and education.

Gretta Scully  
Clonakilty  
Co Cork

## Islands must get improvements

A number of islands off the south and west coasts need urgent improvements to protect the lives and livelihoods of people who need regular access to these islands. These islands include Dursley Island off West Cork and Turbot Island off Galway but these and other islands have been waiting several years for these life-saving improvements to take place.

If the local councils do not have enough funds to undertake these works, then funds should be provided by the government. Our government can afford so spend over €40m to provide prize money for the horse racing industry, and can afford to spend billions of euro on infrastructure projects in the east of the country but continues to treat the west of Ireland as the poor relation when it comes to funding vital life-saving projects.

Edward Horgan  
Castletroy  
Limerick

## Dismayed at resignations

As a member of the quality, safety, and risk committee of CoAction, it was with dismay and disappointment that I noted the resignations of all but two of the board of trustees of CoAction on December 8.

These board members voluntarily gave of their time, competencies, wisdom and professional expertise for the benefit of the organisation and those who avail of CoAction's services in a

terms, the protest of our international society against the plans of Marymount Assets Ltd, owners of the Cashel Palace Hotel, to build a 28-room, two-block luxury hotel on southern slopes of The Rock of Cashel.

This is no more than historic vandalism which will destroy the historic value of a world heritage site. The International Sister Fidelma Society, formed in 2001 to celebrate Peter Tremayne's international bestselling Sister Fidelma murder mysteries, set in 7th century Cashel, has brought Fidelma fans from many countries to the town over many years.

From 2006, the Féile Fidelma was established as a three-day gathering of fans in Cashel and was held until 2020 when Covid caused a break in organising the gathering. The last event brought Fidelma fans from 15 countries to Cashel, from Japan to Argentina, from the Czech Republic to the US, and Sweden to France.

The Féile brought to Cashel two Irish government ministers to officially open it at various times and attracted many speakers on academic and cultural affairs of Cashel, among them Patrick Gleeson, who conducted extensive research on The Rock and who is now leading academic protests against this piece of crass historic and literary vandalism.

We echo Dr Gleeson's statement that "The issue with this development would necessitate destroying a good deal of the archaeology that exists within the footprint of the development area."

David Robert Wooten  
The International Sister Fidelma Society  
Winston-Salem  
North Carolina

## A reflection on changing society

As we near the end of 2022, a century after the outbreak of the Irish Civil War, we can truly reflect on a changing Irish society in a very positive manner. Who could have considered twenty or even 10 years ago that a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach of this fair country of ours would or could be invited to address

the multitudes at Béal na Blath one hundred years after the death of Michael Collins? Well, it came to pass in a historic and healing manner. Hopefully, in a gesture of similar reconciliation Taoiseach Leo Varadkar will be requested to similarly attend and address the Liam Lynch Centenary Commemoration at Kilcrumper next year.

John Arnold  
Fermoy  
Co Cork

John Fitzgerald  
Callan  
Co Kilkenny

## In search of a dragon licence

With regard to the story 'California girl given licence to own a unicorn — if she finds one', Irish Examiner, Dec 9. At least it shows fantastic ambition on young Madeline's part and great foresight by the director of the LA department that issued one to her. Now, can I get one for a dragon?

Liam Power  
Dundalk  
Co Louth

## Fox takes special place in crib

The saga of Dublin's live animal crib, and the conflicting views about its aptness, remind me of my own favourite crib, the one unveiled each Yuletide in Limerick's Dominican church. It doesn't have any living, breathing animals like the controversial Dublin display, or the original crib back in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, but it does have an additional feature that endears it to animal lovers.

Along with the usual depictions of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and the time-honoured farm livestock, you'll find an effigy of a little fox among the animals encircling the Christ child. This celebrates a legend associated with the holy family. It states that one of the three wise men gave the baby Jesus the gift of a fox cub. Months later, when the cub had grown to maturity, Mary and Joseph had to grab the child and flee after hearing that the jealous and blood-thirsty King Herod

Desmond Murphy  
Douglas Rd  
Cork

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