

Collecting adult gambling prevalence data

Overview of consultation responses and next steps, January 2011

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to:

- explain the Gambling Commission's (the Commission's) position following the recent consultation on collecting adult gambling prevalence data
- provide a brief overview of the consultation responses received (a full responses document will be available in the Spring)
- set out the emerging issues which require further exploration and discussion with stakeholders. These discussions will take place once the British Gambling Prevalence Survey (BGPS) 2010 has been published.

1.2 This paper is structured as follows:

- Background
- Overview of consultation responses
- Emerging issues
- Next steps.

2 Background

2.1 The Gambling Commission (the Commission) is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the way in which we gather adult gambling prevalence data. In a consultation paper published on 9 September 2010, we put forward a limited (but not exhaustive) set of options which would allow future collection of adult gambling prevalence data to be undertaken on a more flexible and frequent basis. The consultation document also assessed the methodological implications and consequences of these approaches to examine the impact that cheaper and quicker data collection approaches would have on the reliability, consistency and comparability of the data produced.

2.2 The consultation period ran from 9 September 2010 to 2 December 2010. A stakeholder workshop was held on 4 October 2010 in which we encouraged wider thinking and the submission of responses which went beyond the three options the Commission put forward in the consultation document. At the end of October the government announced its decision to withdraw its grant-in-aid funding allocation to the Commission. This funding has been used to fund the collection of adult gambling prevalence data. Potential respondents were notified of this development on 28 October 2010 and were asked to give it consideration in their responses.

2.3 We received twenty three consultation responses which have been analysed. Respondents provided some useful ideas on potential future funding arrangements. Likewise, a number of respondents sought to address the inherent difficulty presented by a large-scale prevalence survey (i.e. the sample size is too small to adequately look at the correlates of problem gambling, given that BGPS 2007 only identified approximately fifty problem gamblers, yet the sample size is larger than the minimum needed to measure participation in gambling).

Gambling Commission – collecting adult gambling prevalence data

- 2.4** In addition, given its cross-sectional nature, a large-scale prevalence survey has severe limitations in providing an explanation of underlying causes of problem gambling which is important to drive effective regulation, and to inform prevention and treatment programmes. Given these limitations there is a growing argument for focusing any available funds on research into causation.

3 Overview of consultation responses

Responsibility for data collection

- 3.1** Respondents overwhelmingly supported the Commission retaining responsibility for the collection and publication of adult gambling prevalence data. The Commission shares the view that this information is essential to fulfil our statutory advice function. However, the removal of funding presents challenges about whether the funding and management responsibilities could be successfully split/divided between two bodies. For example, one potential model could involve the Responsible Gambling Fund (RGF) providing funding and the Commission managing the survey. There is experience on which to draw here as previously the Commission has worked with DCMS as the providers of the funding to provide reassurances of how the funding was being spent. Respondents noted the importance of ensuring that the current knowledge and expertise built up in the management of the survey is either transferred or retained by ensuring some continuity in the management of the survey.

Uses and importance of the existing data

- 3.2** The consultation document explained that, in addition to the role it plays in assisting the Commission in providing advice, prevalence data is also useful for resource planning, informing the Commission's risk-based research, and providing a statistical backdrop for other research. Respondents broadly agreed with this assessment of the uses of the data. However, respondents also added that the current prevalence survey has a range of academic uses including secondary analysis, and for shaping future research priorities. Respondents also suggested that the prevalence survey informs the industry's approach to social responsibility and is used within the policy making landscape.
- 3.3** There was overwhelming consensus on the importance of adult gambling prevalence data, with respondents stressing that:
- the data is used for the planning and scoping of prevention and education initiatives
 - the dataset becomes more important with each survey wave
 - government decisions often hinge on the outcome of the survey.

Methodological considerations

- 3.4** Against this question a number of respondents took the opportunity to suggest that the Commission should consider using different survey approaches to collect different aspects of the current survey. In essence, this would mean splitting up the data collected on participation and problem gambling prevalence rates.
- 3.5** Respondents broadly agreed with our assessment of the methodological considerations outlined in the consultation document. However, it was pointed out that response rates and strategies to overcome non-response biases should also be given consideration when evaluating future approaches.

What data is important?

- 3.6** There was a general consensus that headline data (i.e. descriptive data that shows who gambles, and on what, and estimates of the overall rate of problem gambling within the general population) is essential. Most respondents claimed it was difficult to take a view on the newer areas of the BGPS 2010 until they had seen the results of the survey.

Advantages and disadvantages of current approach

- 3.7** Respondents clearly saw the advantages that retention of the current approach would offer in terms of comparability and continuity. They also supported the high quality of the current approach and the credibility and recognition this gives the survey amongst a wide range of stakeholders, both in Britain and internationally. They did however, emphasise the Commission's observations that the length of time between survey waves prevented short-term trends from being monitored. In spite of this, there was a fair degree of scepticism about the alternative approaches, with suggestions that a closer look at trends could lead to regular 'knee-jerk' responses to fluctuations in the data. Others did stress that the current approach is resource intensive, that the data could be available from other sources, and that the current approach is not the best mechanism for obtaining an in-depth understanding of problem gambling.
- 3.8** Most respondents thought that if the Commission retained a large BGPS-type survey then it should continue to be supplemented by the collection of omnibus survey data. The majority of respondents believed that the omnibus survey offered value in providing regular gambling participation data. However, there was a view that it was not of critical importance and only a third of respondents indicated that they currently use the omnibus data which the Commission publishes. These respondents comprised two treatment/charity/faith groups, two trade associations and one operator.

Views on a continuous prevalence survey approach

- 3.9** There were mixed views about the value of this approach and general doubts about whether it would offer comparable results or any cost savings. The concern that more frequent reporting would indeed lead to regular knee-jerk decisions was reiterated in response to this question.
- 3.10** There were also mixed views about what impact there would be if the next set of results were delayed until 2014. There were some concerns about a resultant delay in decision making. There were mixed views as to whether the advantages of more frequent reporting outweighed the drawback of no overall cost saving.

Moving to a telephone survey approach

- 3.11** Respondents were fairly clear that while this approach is cheaper and potentially more flexible there were reservations about the use of quota sampling, the exclusion of 'mobile-only' households, low response rates, and the lack of comparability with previous British Gambling Prevalence Surveys. Respondents did not feel that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Many respondents made the point that a cheaper approach does not equate to better value for money if the outputs are of a lower quality.

Overall preferences

- 3.12** Of the three options put forward in the consultation document, Option A – maintain the status quo - was the preferred option, closely followed by a continuous survey approach (Option B). While academics and trade bodies preferences were equally split between options A and B respondents in both the operator (n=3) and treatment/charity/faith groups (n=3) preferred Option A over Option B by 2 to 1.

4 Emerging issues

- 4.1** In the light of the withdrawal of funding and the various ideas put forward by respondents for collecting adult prevalence data through different routes, there are a number of outstanding issues which we would like to discuss further with our stakeholders. These discussions will take place once the BGPS 2010 has been published. This will allow stakeholders to consider these outstanding issues in light of the survey findings.

4.2 The issues can be summarised as follows:

Management and funding

- If the current approach to the collection of prevalence data is retained, careful consideration would need to be given to the issue of who should have responsibility for the funding and management of the data collection. The Commission considers that in resolving this issue it is critical to maintain the independence of any survey.
- Given the government's withdrawal of the Commission's grant in aid funding, the Commission sees it as essential to achieving its advice function to collect regular participation data. For the purposes of the forthcoming fees consultation it has been assumed that the Commission will continue to fund the quarterly participation surveys at least while decisions are taken about whether, and how, to fund anything else.
- Given the current knowledge gaps, the issue remains about who would fund the collection of problem gambling prevalence data and research into causation. Should Research Education and Treatment (RET) funds be used for these purposes?
- How can the current knowledge base and expertise in delivering the BGPS be retained in any future survey arrangements?

Decoupling data collection

- It would also need to be established whether a 'split' approach (i.e. the separate collection of participation data and problem gambling data) to data collection would free up valuable research funds to undertake more in-depth research into the causation of problem gambling.
- Further exploration is needed of the advantages and disadvantages of decoupling this data collection including the implications of using a telephone based approach to collecting participation data.
- If a decoupled approach was taken there would be a clear advantage to some level of combined reporting in which the Commission pulled together the component sets of findings and presented the results in a coherent way and aimed to demonstrate trends over time.
- Some respondents suggested that it may be possible for the Commission to measure problem gambling via the inclusion of a problem gambling screen in a wider social/health survey being conducted by another body. Should such an approach be feasible, it is likely that the space available in any third party survey would be fairly limited. Given this potential space restriction, the development of an effective and robust mini-screen (i.e. a shortened version of a full problem gambling screening instrument) would clearly be advantageous, or perhaps even a necessity.

5 Next steps

5.1 Following the publication of this paper we:

- invite readers to start giving consideration to the outstanding issues set out above
- will engage in discussions with stakeholders (including academics) on these issues once the British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010 has been published. The forthcoming Prevalence Survey Advisory Group will provide a forum in which to start these conversations, but the Commission welcomes comments and feedback on an ongoing basis outside of this group.

Keeping gambling fair and safe for all

Gambling Commission
Victoria Square House
Victoria Square
Birmingham B2 4BP