

ALCOHOL 'CREDITS' CARD FOR YOUNG PEOPLE PROPOSED

Young people aged 18 to 25 should be issued with alcohol "credits" on an electronic card as a way of controlling binge and anti-social drinking, according to the group representing convenience stores.

The card would have to be produced every time a young person purchased alcohol in a shop or pub, the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) says in a submission to the Government's advisory group on alcohol.

The number of credits allocated to a young person would depend on age, time elapsed since a previous purchase, behaviour and other criteria to be determined by a co-ordinating body, the association suggests.

"This would prevent over purchasing, or overindulging within a timeframe.

"The bank debit card prevents withdrawal if funds are not present – perhaps the group should consider investigating a parallel system," executive Vincent Jennings said.

The association says the Garda Age Card should become mandatory for under-25s, and it could be withdrawn or suspended for defined periods where misuse occurs. Gardai would be able to view card data to trace drinking behaviour, although this information would not be accessible for marketing purposes.

The group says it accepts the misuse of alcohol by large numbers of people is leading to significant societal and personal difficulties, but it rejects claims that the increase in alcohol-related antisocial behaviour can be linked to the spread of off-licences throughout the stat.

"We are fearful that the advisory group or the Minister for Justice might initiate controls upon our sector that are not replicated elsewhere, without any statistical evidence to back up such constraints," Mr Jennings said.

Whatever measures are implemented should apply equally to pubs and off-licences, he added.

"There has not been any noticeable increase in offences prosecuted through the courts that could reasonable be laid at our doors. That does not mean there is not a social or public order problem."

Mr Jennings rejected calls for a ban on petrol station shops selling alcohol.

"Many service stations have developed from being the local filling station to being the local neighbourhood store. To suggest that they are different because they also retail fuel is a misunderstanding of the fundamental and radical changes that have occurred over the past number of years by these vital components to local convenience."

In its submission, the Beverage Council of Ireland calls for a ban on the advertising of price promotions for alcohol products, saying they contribute to anti-social activity.

It also recommends the segregation of alcoholic drinks in shops and the immediate introduction of a mandatory national ID card for over-18s.