

Control bingeing with chip 'n' pin

Young people should get an alcohol CREDIT CARD in a bid to cut binge drinking, it was claimed yesterday.

Convenience stores believe that putting a cap on the amount of booze 18 to 25-year-olds can buy will reduce drunken anti-social behaviour.

The plans of the Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) are submitted in a proposal to the Government's Alcohol Advisory Group.

They want people to produce their card whenever they buy drink and if they have gone over a certain number of credits they are to be refused service. The number of credits would depend on the person's age, the time since the last booze purchase, behaviour and other criteria to be decided by a co-ordinating body, the CSNA suggests.

CSNA boss Vincent Jennings said the scheme "would prevent over-purchasing, or over-indulging within a time-frame."

"A bank debit card prevents withdrawal if funds are not present - perhaps the group should consider investigating a parallel system." The CSNA want the Garda age card to become mandatory for anyone aged under 25.

If it is introduced they also hope it could be withdrawn or suspended if it is misused.

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 that binge drinking by large numbers of people is causing huge social and personal difficulties.

However, they reject claims that the increase in binge drinking and alcohol-related anti-social behaviour can be linked to the spread of off-licences throughout the State. Mr Jennings also rejected calls for a ban on petrol station shops selling alcohol.

He said: "Many service stations have developed from being the local filling station to being the local neighbourhood store.

Meanwhile the head of the Government's Alcohol Advisory Group has said teenagers under the legal drinking age should be sent into pubs and off-licences to catch owners who sell booze to kids.

Dr. Gordon Holmes said it was "not very desirable, but we were left with no alternative".