

RESEARCH
TRANSFORMING
NIGHTLIFE IN
NORTHERN
IRELAND





FOREWORD

This research is the first in a series of work by Free The Night on late night culture and the night time economy in Northern Ireland, and we hope that it will be a catalyst for major change in the coming years.

Free The Night is a non-profit organisation committed to creating a safe, progressive and culturally rich environment for nightlife in Northern Ireland. We work collaboratively with individuals and organisations to help diversify the creative night time economy in Northern Ireland.

Since our inception in early 2021, we have been working tirelessly towards a vision of a more progressive and diverse nightlife environment for Northern Ireland. This research will allow us to advocate in the best way possible, as we progress in our work with government, council and key stakeholders across Northern Ireland. Most importantly, it allows us to continue to advocate for all who work in and use nightlife.

We want to extend our thanks to everyone who has supported this piece of work or volunteered their time in any way throughout the process; with special thanks to Resident Advisor for funding the project and to Sunil Sharpe (Give Us The Night), who's work in the Republic of Ireland has been pivotal in the development of this campaign.

A huge thanks also to our lead researcher Ciara Power, who is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast, and is currently undertaking a comparative study of the impact of people, policy and place on electronic music scenes and nightlife in Belfast and Dublin.

If you want to get involved with the organisation in any way or have any questions about our campaign or what is in this document, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

— Holly Lester & Boyd Sleator, Co-Founders | Free The Night



INTRODUCTION

This brief aims to give the licensing review panel, policymakers, local authorities, business owners and the public a clearer understanding of the cultural benefits and opportunities available in the night time economy in Northern Ireland. It acts as a guide to how licensing and other aspects of regulation impact nightlife culture, and includes good practice case studies from global night time communities, plus data from Free The Night's largest research study to date.

The findings show that public health, social infrastructure and policy interventions are needed to support the wellbeing of all aspects of the night time community in Northern Ireland. There are a wide-range of services needed to ensure safety for those who participate in nightlife activities, protect those who work during the evening and night, and accommodate residents who live in areas with a high number of nightlife activities.

The recent Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (2021) aimed to strike a balance between public health, order, individual freedom of choice and economic opportunity¹. A review of the amendments is due to be put in place in Autumn 2022, and will include areas such as:

- Economic impact
- Removal of the restrictions at Easter

- Impact of additional hours and drinking-up time
- Tourism
- Local councils
- Policing and wider justice system
- A&E and ambulance services
- Addiction and hospital admissions
- Workers' impact
- COVID-19 challenges on hospitality and tourism
- Communication between stakeholders

Free The Night believes the recent amendments to licensing do not strike the balance set out by policymakers. While the Department for Communities, responsible for licensing policy and legislation, say they recognise the wide range of impacts that licensing has on youth, public health, economy, tourism and wider society, there is no reference to the wider cultural, social or community impact of licensing regulation on nightlife.

We found that several areas of key evidence used by decision-makers to be anecdotal, not factual or statistical data. We also have concerns that public consultations did not include a sufficient range of voices from stakeholders who are pivotal in our nightlife scenes. There are also some aspects of the consultation



process(es) which are still unclear: Was public opinion within the consultation(s) considered properly? How did the consultation(s) meet the Bill's objectives? Was the evidence provided considered in detail? Has the entertainment aspect of licensing been wholly reviewed?

Free The Night circulated a nationwide survey in August 2022 which received 904 responses, with the aim of gaining a better insight into experiences and perceptions of nightlife in Northern Ireland. The majority of people (52%) lived in the Belfast Council Area. 46% of respondents were aged between 25 and 34; 20% were between 35 and 44, and those between 18 and 24 made up 19% of the total survey participants. 52% identified as men, 45% as women and 2% as non-binary.

Overall, the data serves as a useful tool in advocating for progressive policy on licensing safety, transport infrastructure, social mobility and night time culture. This brief is the start of our research into the latter and touches on many areas which should be explored in more depth in the future. In the following sections, we present thirteen evidence-based recommendations to be considered in the upcoming review of licensing.

**OUR
RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**#3 CREATE
INCLUSIVE, UP-TO-
DATE DEFINITIONS
IN NIGHTLIFE
LEGISLATION**

**#6 PRACTISE A
HOLISTIC APPROACH
TO NIGHTLIFE
REGULATION**

**#9 DEVOLVE
ALCOHOL AND
ENTERTAINMENT
LICENSING TO
COUNCILS**

**#12 COMMIT TO
IMPROVING AND
SUSTAINING
NIGHTLIFE IN ALL
SECTORS AND
INDUSTRIES**

**#1 RECOGNISE
NIGHTLIFE IS CULTURE
AND AN IMPORTANT
TOOL FOR BUILDING
COMMUNITIES**

**#4 IMPROVE
NIGHTLIFE
INFRASTRUCTURE**

**#7 REVIEW THE
SURRENDER
PRINCIPLE WITH
TRANSPARENCY**

**#10 CONSIDER THE
IMPORTANCE OF
COMMUNITY HEALTH**

**#13 SUPPORT AND
FUND PILOT SCHEMES
AND EVENTS TO
BETTER UNDERSTAND
NIGHTLIFE**

**#2 VALUE ALL NIGHT
TIME WORKERS**

**#5 DIVERSIFY
SOCIALISING
OPTIONS IN THE LATE
EVENING AND NIGHT**

**#8 INTRODUCE NEW
LICENCE CATEGORIES**

**#11 PROMOTE
EFFECTIVE SAFETY
AND MONITORING
INITIATIVES AT NIGHT**



#1 RECOGNISE THAT NIGHTLIFE IS CULTURE AND AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Nightlife activities are entertainment, social and leisure activities available to the public from the evening until the early hours of the morning, often described as being between the hours of 6pm and 6am². Nightlife is an important part of peoples' lives and an asset to communities in Northern Ireland, with almost everyone (98%) surveyed reporting that they engage in activities in the evening and night time. Most use nightlife regularly; at least once per week (44%) and at least once per month (41%). The most popular places for people to go out are in Belfast (87%), followed by Derry~Londonderry (6%). Most people primarily frequent pubs or bars (51%) and around 1 in 4 mostly go to nightclubs. Some people (16%) also stated that they usually go to a live music event, concert or gig while using nightlife in Northern Ireland.

Taking inspiration from community health experts³, our survey aimed to highlight the cultural and social role of nightlife. Our research and engagement with stakeholders consistently shows that nightlife is culture and provides an important space for building communities. This is clear from the views of our survey respondents, who believe that nightlife has the potential to rebuild and transform communities (51%) and bring people and communities together (53%).

One fundamental part of night time activity is the ability to build and practice emotional connections. Socialising with both friends and family is the primary reason people in Northern Ireland use nightlife (90%), showing that nightlife brings people together. People also

use it to meet new people (39%) and to feel part of a community (40%). Nightlife creates a space where people go to experience music, art and culture (75%) and watch sporting games or matches (17%). Some use it to escape day-to-day life (41%), and others rely on it to make a living (31%). The alcohol trade forms only part of the economic activity of the city in the evening and at night⁴, with less than a quarter of people reporting that they use nightlife to get drunk (22%).



EXPERIENCE
ART & CULTURE **75%**

TO FEEL PART OF
A COMMUNITY **40%**

TO GO TO WORK **31%**

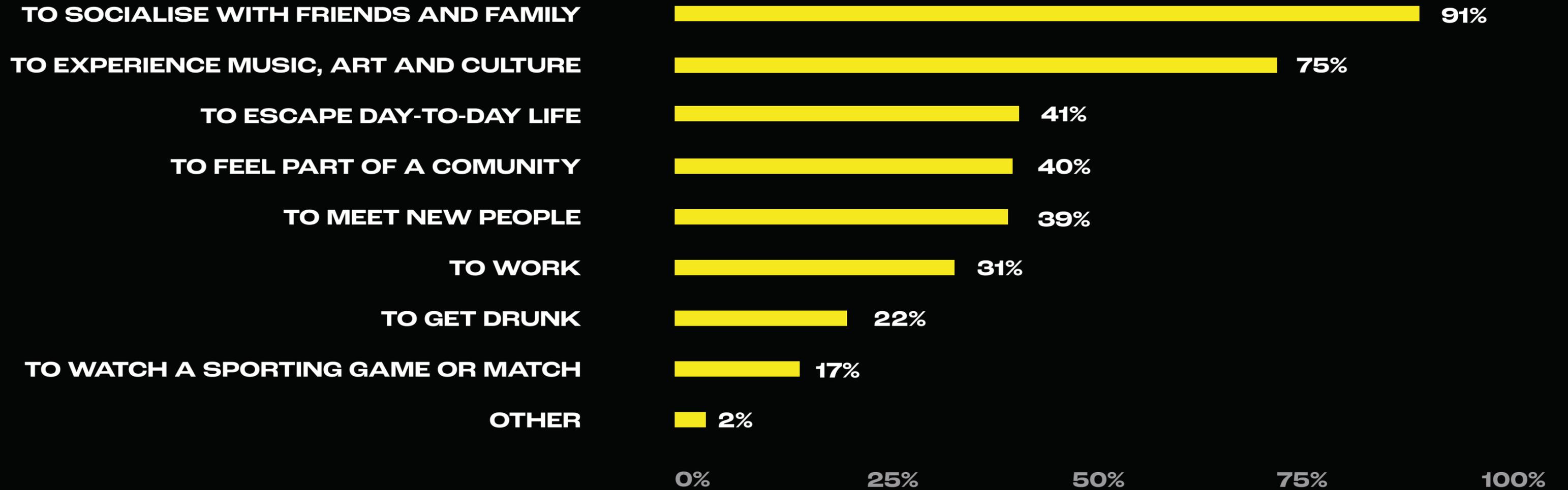
#SOCIALISING

90%

OF RESPONDANTS SAID SOCIALISING WITH BOTH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS THE PRIMARY REASON WHY THEY USE NIGHTLIFE



WHY PEOPLE USE NIGHTLIFE



#2 VALUE ALL NIGHT TIME WORKERS

Advancing our night time economy confers a huge range of economic benefits in revenues for both businesses and government, local and central. From taxation, jobs, transport and tourism, there are many economic incentives to diversify nightlife. However, the economic value of the entire night time economy in Northern Ireland has yet to be determined. What we do know is that, on a global scale, there have been continuous inequities between producers and consumers in cultural sectors, especially in night time economy and culture⁵. Rectifying this and assessing the impact of licensing laws can only be achieved if all sectors in the evening and night time economy are examined in the upcoming review.

It was argued that the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) 2021 Bill would primarily impact employment and the economy within the hospitality sector⁶; However, we must go further, and consider how all people who work between 6pm and 6am, are affected by licensing amendments and nightlife policy.

1 in 3 reported they currently worked during the evening and night. These workers span across many sectors. Evening and night time workers are mostly employed full-time (56%), followed by freelance (21%), and part-time (20%). Since the pandemic, the number of people working during the evening and night time have dropped by almost a fifth (19%). Most previously worked full-time (52%) and part-time (44%). People left evening and night time work mainly because they got a better job or needed a more stable income

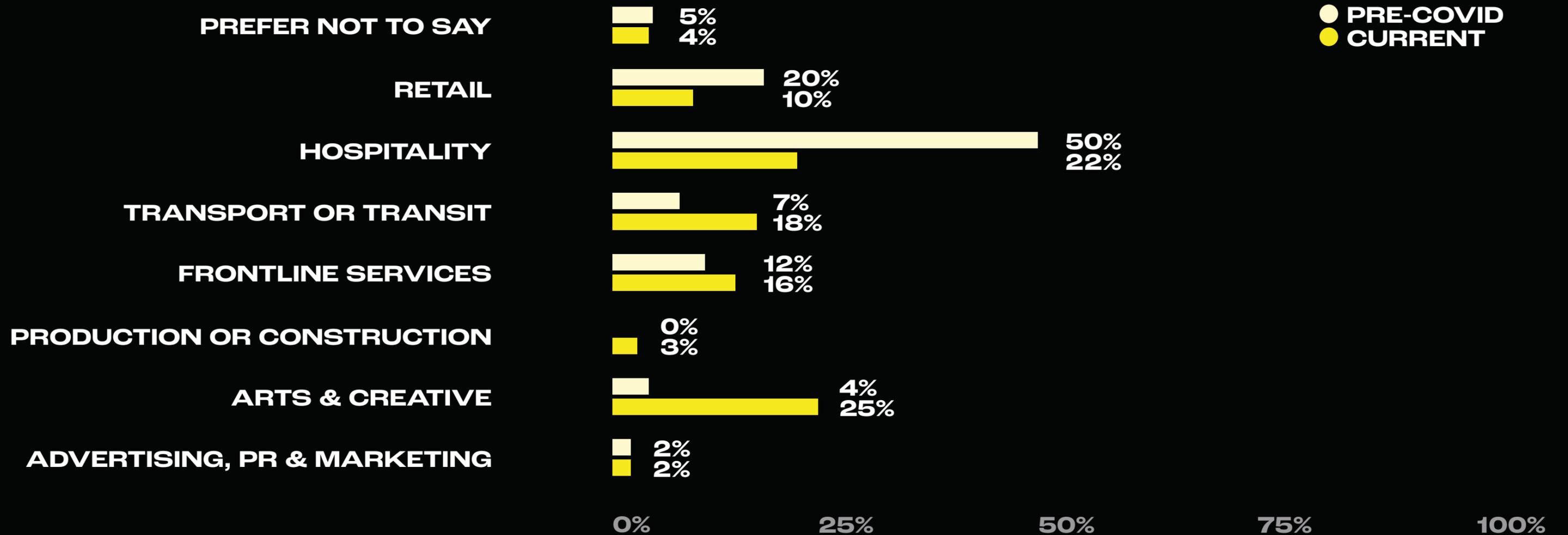
(51%). It was also reported people were fed up working during this time (32%), and workers did not earn enough money to remain in their job (16%).

In 2020, the median gross weekly earnings for all sectors in Northern Ireland's employment force was £529. The median gross weekly full-time earnings for the Accommodation and Food sector (Hospitality) here was £319.70 for the same year—around 40% below the median weekly pay. Similarly, it was reported the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors earn an average of £441.40 per week—around 17% below the median weekly pay. Both sectors are essential in the evening and night time economy, but wages do not accommodate unsociable hours and lack of cheaper public transport at night. The night time economy must improve for workers in terms of getting home, and keeping safe and healthy. A new evening and night time minimum wage would lessen the financial pressures for nightlife workers and encourage more people to pursue professions between 6pm and 6am.



PRE-COVID VS CURRENT INDUSTRIES AND SECTORS

● PRE-COVID
● CURRENT



CASE STUDY

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WORKERS IN THE EVENING AND NIGHT TIME

The lived experiences of those who work from 6pm to 6am provide important insights into the impact of nightlife policy and regulation on their lives. The current licensing operating hours cause difficulties for evening and night time workers to socialise outside of work, as night time venues are shut or close to shutting by the time many workers finish their shifts. By contrast, some workers feel that socialising is part of their jobs and have made long-lasting friendships, but for many, it is also impossible to socialise and can feel lonely outside of the workplace. The inflexibility of licensed operating hours makes workers in nightlife feel rushed and can lead to people ‘necking drinks to catch up with others who work earlier’... ‘This often leads to people getting into unfit states, which then makes them vulnerable’, as one respondent put it. However, extending operating hours could mean longer hours for staff, with some workers noting this must be considered too.

Many feel there are no places to relax or connect after their shift, other than at home. This excludes workers from nightlife communities, and society in general. Even on workers’ days off, it can be hard to socialise due to different sleeping patterns, meaning they miss out on seeing family and friends most weekends. For some, the only option is to drink at home or in another private dwelling if they want to socialise or ‘fancy a post work pint’. Some workers feel restricting hours does not reduce alcohol consumption, as ‘people will always find somewhere to party, so why not let them do it in a safe environment of a bar or club’.

Most who work in the evening and night note that they often need a second job to get by, and that socialising often means losing income, due to lack of opportunity in the current night time economy. Frontline service workers who work longer shift patterns also expressed similar concerns.



#3 CREATE INCLUSIVE, UP-TO-DATE DEFINITIONS IN NIGHTLIFE LEGISLATION

The term ‘nightclub’ is not defined in any legislation governing the night time economy, specifically in The Licensing Order 1996 and The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2021.

In legislation, the term “ballroom” is used to describe “any premises which are structurally adapted and used or intended to be used for the purpose of public dancing and the use of which for such dancing is licensed under Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985”.⁷ This term is outdated and does not reflect dancefloor and clubbing culture in Northern Ireland. There is little cultural consideration of nightlife, both in alcohol and entertainment licensing, with terms like ‘rave’ and ‘dancefloor’ omitted from legislation.

Furthermore, there is no mention of the terms ‘culture’ or ‘cultural’ in the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act 2021 or The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. In the Licensing Order 1996, the term ‘cultural’ is mentioned only once, in Article 30, around Occasional Licensing, provided only for “functions of an occasional nature which are organised by anybody established for social, charitable or benevolent purposes or for furthering the common interests of persons associated with any trade, profession, educational or cultural activity, game or sport”⁸.

Based on interpretation, the legislation could therefore imply that culture in the night time economy is only considered on an occasional basis rather than a continual one.

An understanding of how spaces are used at night and what they should be used for should be reflected in legislation. We need a fresh outlook on nightlife and its terminology—especially as raves and dance floors were instrumental in bringing young people from across the divide together in the later years of The Troubles.⁹



CASE STUDY

GERMAN DECLARATION OF NIGHTCLUBS AS CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

In May 2017, the German parliament decided that legislation which regulates planning and development of buildings and other structures (Building Use Ordinance), should define nightclubs and live music venues as cultural facilities, rather than solely entertainment venues. Before, clubs were categorised with brothels, sex cinemas, gambling halls and betting shops as 'entertainment spaces'. Now, clubs and live music venues are categorised with theatres, operas, museums and concert halls as cultural institutions, including for tax purposes.

This change aims to protect and develop club culture in Germany. In a place where culture can be divisive, nightlife culture can bring people together. However, policymakers, from government and councils, must lead this change from the front. ¹⁰



#4 IMPROVE NIGHTLIFE INFRASTRUCTURE

VENUES

Licensing determines a venues' viability. Prior to COVID-19, clubbing spaces globally were already in decline due to gentrification, financial pressure, stigma, competition, and lack of government and regulatory support.¹¹ Give Us The Night discovered there has been an 85% decrease in nightclubs operating in Ireland since 2000.¹²

There is still no statistical data on the opening and closing of nightclubs in Northern Ireland; however, the lived experiences of many respondents noted a serious lack of grassroots nightclubs and venues supporting music performance and providing a space for people to come together and dance. Many who work in the evening and night time recognise the venue 'crisis' that the cities of Belfast and Derry~Londonderry are facing. Some argued that there are many pubs and restaurants, but grassroots cultural venues are extremely limited;

"There are only three small nightclubs and one large scale venue [in Belfast] that cater to the type of music events that I attend and perform in, and none in Derry. Only two of these venues are accessible to external promoters to run events in at this time. Northern Ireland is facing a crisis in terms of small venues across the board, genre wise. This is severely impacting the creative scene that I and others exist in..."

Evidently, there are not enough culturally-driven grassroots 'nightclubs' and small venues, aiming to provide communities with a social space to connect through dance and live music. These spaces are not profit-driven or alcohol-centric, as events are centred around live acts and music. These spaces operate not purely for profit, but to serve communities.

CASE STUDY

RESCUE PLAN FOR LONDON'S GRASS- ROOTS MUSIC VENUES

In 2017, the Music Venue Trust released a rescue plan for London's grassroots music venues. From 2007 to 2016, grassroots music venues in London declined by a third, from 144 to 94. The plan presents six recommendations on planning, business rates, development, policing and health, music tourism, licensing and promoting venues. The Trust's definition of a grassroots music venue recognised the cultural and social importance of these spaces. This is a key measure to preserve cultural rights of small-time venue owners and promote diversity in music scenes.

Since the launch of the plan, six small grassroots music venues had been launched in two years. A similar approach should be considered in Northern Ireland. ^{13 14}

-35%

GRASSROOTS VENUES DECLINE 2007-2016

#4 IMPROVE NIGHTLIFE INFRASTRUCTURE

TRANSPORT

The uniformity of venue closing times means too many people try to access taxis at once. This exacerbates night time transport challenges, creating bottlenecks at 3am and leaving many with no way home. This creates other safety risks which police and community safety partnerships are all too familiar with.

The lack of transport infrastructure has become more apparent for users and workers in nightlife since the reopening of the evening and night time economy post-pandemic. Transport challenges were noted as a main reason why people left their jobs in the evening and night time (13%). COVID-19 has also put immense pressure on taxis. In August 2021, Northern Ireland's largest taxi service lost 30% of its drivers due to the pandemic, reportedly turning down 70% of customers one Saturday night due to a lack of drivers.¹⁵

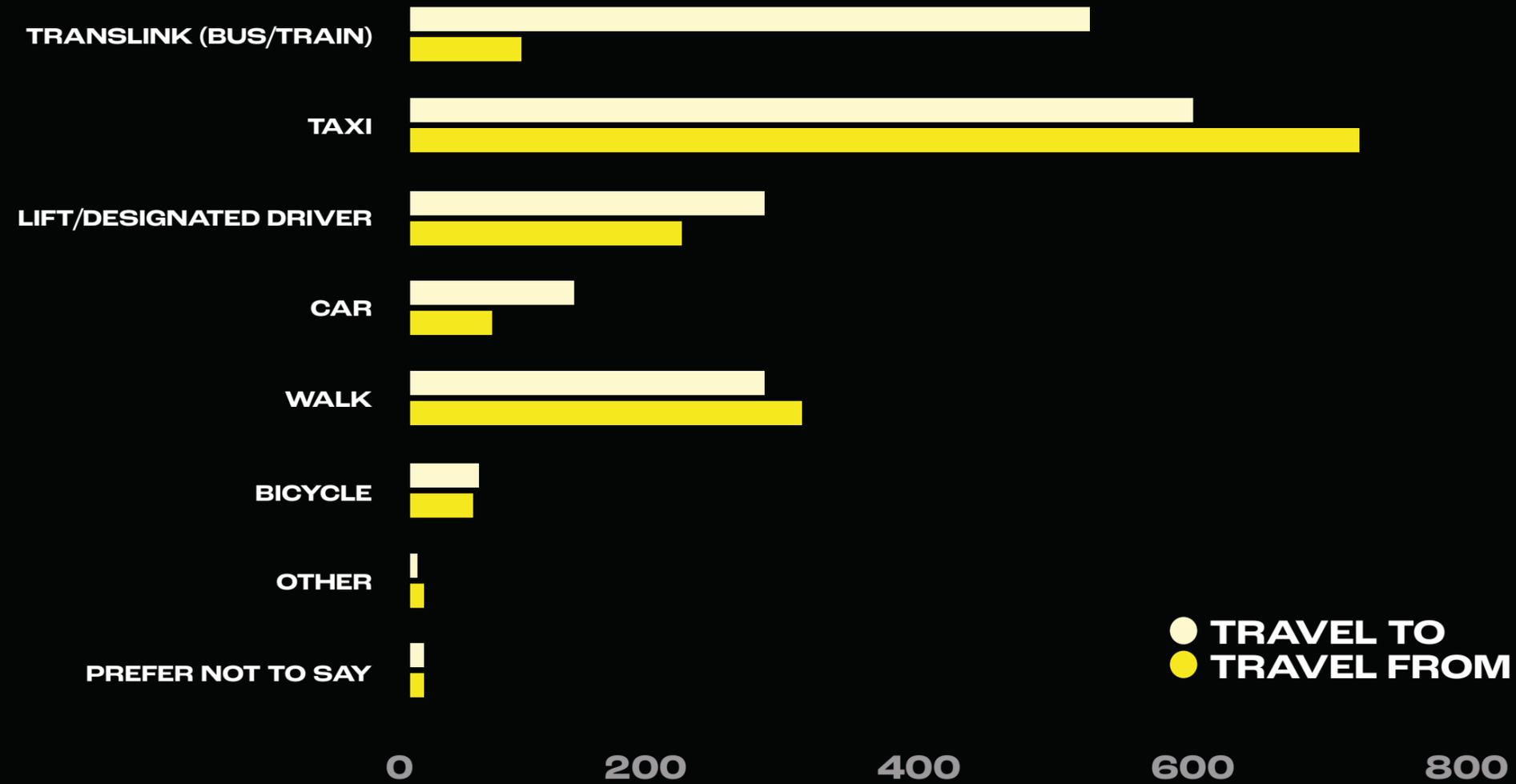
A collaborative research project by Grant Thornton and Translink¹⁶ found that public transport creates significant economic outputs and wages, enables active living, reduces isolation, supports local inclusion, provides access to employment, education and social opportunities, and supports the environment. The report noted that 53% of people considered public transport essential to access employment, and a further 63% identified it as important to socialise. While this research is valuable, there is little mention of public transport's role in the night time economy.

User experiences and needs must be heard in order to build better night time public transport. Our survey revealed a high majority of people (93%) are unsatisfied with the transport options available to them at night. Comparisons of how people travel to and from nightlife activities are shown overleaf, with respondents allowed to choose more than one answer.

Respondents believed a number of solutions would improve transport in nightlife, like more buses, trains or glider services at night (92%); more taxis at night (81%); cheaper public transport (55%) or cheaper taxi fares (57%); and more frequent public transport in the evening and night (74%). Public transport services should be extended in line with the current and amended licensing laws in Northern Ireland, not only improving public safety, but social inclusion and social connection too, especially in rural settings. More night time public transport also reduces pressures faced by taxis and cuts carbon emissions.



TRAVEL TO AND FROM NIGHTLIFE



CASE STUDY NEW YORK 24/7 TRANSPORT

New York’s 24/7 transport supports those who work in and use nightlife, with over 665 miles of subway, six ferry services, 3,500 taxis, 60,000 for-hire vehicles, and three major airports. Accessibility via public transport ranked highly in shaping consumers’ nightlife experiences. In 2020, over 2 million people travelled by subway on an average weekend, making it the most efficient way to travel around the city. There is a preference for public transport over taxis due to good infrastructure and availability. While Northern Ireland is reported to be one-tenth the size of New York state, the principle of accessible public transport for nightlife users and workers can be used as an example to policymakers. ^{17 18 19}



#5 DIVERSIFY SOCIALISING OPTIONS IN THE LATE EVENING AND NIGHT

Research shows that Northern Ireland has a concerning pattern of brain drain, losing thousands of young people each year.²⁰

Lived experiences of our creative workers shows regressive nightlife policies and infrastructure is also driving our homegrown talent away, with the intention of returning unlikely.²¹ Our survey findings suggest that diversity in nightlife offerings could make Northern Ireland a more attractive place to visit and live (79%) and help ease the migration of workers and creatives (45%).

Places that are not alcohol centric are very limited in the evening and night, and more consideration is needed on how to grow and diversify our options after dark. Around 85% of respondents reported they often or very often drink alcohol during nightlife activities. Arguably, the lack of late-night and 24-hour facilities like cinemas, sober spaces, restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, libraries, arcades, retail and shops contributes to this higher alcohol consumption rate.”

A limited number of permitted ‘late’ nights were introduced in the recent (Amendment) Act. Previously, late opening hours were up to 1am on weekdays and midnight on Sundays, with a 30-minute drinking-up time. New changes permit serving alcohol until 2am with a 1-hour drinking-up time. However, the new changes only permit this additional hour up to 104 nights per year. There have been no changes to the maximum operating hours for late-night venues, with the 3am curfew remaining the same. The changes highlight policymakers’ regressive attitude towards late-night

venues and dancing culture by restricting their operating hours further.

Expanding the night time economy to include a wider range of offerings will also greatly benefit evening and night workers who, as previously mentioned, find socialising after work difficult (62%), due to limited operating hours and lack of diversity in nightlife spaces. People who left their jobs before or during COVID-19 also felt there were not enough options to socialise in the evening or night (68%), which could be a contributing factor in why people leave evening and night time employment.



CASE STUDY

LONDON AS A 24-HOUR CITY

In 2017 the Greater London Authority launched a 24-hour vision for London, aiming to make it a world leader as a 24-hour city, with a primary focus of building and promoting nightlife culture. Some core aims of the brief include: increasing opening hours; improving safety for residents, tourists and workers in nightlife; increasing collaborative work between London's 32 boroughs, the police, and other stakeholders to establish a sustainable and balanced night time economy and culture; and promoting culture and leisure for all. A report followed in 2018, with some key findings stating that the demand for night time activities was set to increase in the next two decades, and that alcohol consumption was on a long term downward trend, from 67% in 1998 to 58% in 2016. Another important statistic revealed that nightlife workers accounted for a third of London's overall workforce. The commitment from London's councils demonstrates the potential of what nightlife can bring to a city. While we recognise that London is a lot larger, their evidence-based nightlife policy is a good starting point for policy intervention here in Northern Ireland. ^{22 23}



#6 PRACTISE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO NIGHTLIFE – REGULATION

In Northern Ireland, licensing focuses on the sale and supply of alcohol. However, licensing has a much broader role in urban vitality, and is intrinsic in enhancing and sustaining spaces which promote entertainment, music, arts and culture. Regulation can help or hinder the night time economy, and a holistic approach to licensing regulation could not only reduce alcohol-related harms, but enhance social sustainability and urban diversity.²⁴

We asked our respondents what they believed better licensing might improve, with the option to choose more than one answer. They said a holistic approach to licensing would stop closures of venues (69%) and improve the economy (74%), promoting new and upcoming business owners to position themselves in the market. Respondents agreed that staggered closing times for pubs, bars and nightclubs would cut bottlenecks at 3am (69%), stop crowds spilling out in the street at the same time (83%), and cut pressure on transport services, like taxis (81%).

84% wanted later operating hours in Northern Ireland, with a majority (38%) rejecting restrictions on closing hours. Having no restrictions is possible with dedicated nightlife districts, where premises can operate for 24 hours in locations less likely to be a nuisance to residents. Operators should have freedom to decide their own trading hours, with permission granted from councils or licensing committees (explored later in the document).

This would require negotiation and mediation between stakeholders, and pilot licensing schemes would determine if unrestricted licensing laws are feasible in Northern Ireland, and how to best manage and monitor the situation. In Amsterdam, 24-hour licences were piloted in 2013, and allowed the extension of opening times for venues on the outskirts of the city. The initiative successfully became permanent in 2017.²⁵

CASE STUDY

IRISH NIGHTLIFE

POLICY

– TRANSFORMATION

In October 2022, the Department of Justice in the Republic of Ireland reformed licensing regulation, by updating laws which dated back over 200 years. The General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill keeps restrictions on sale and supply of alcohol, while meeting the needs of modern Ireland, with more support for Ireland's night time culture and economy. It aims to include community voices and responsibility for licensing will be transferred from the Circuit Court to District Courts. Licences can be rejected if there are a number of similar premises locally, or a risk of nuisance. Operators may also lose their licence if they do not protect staff, performers and patrols from harassment. The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media also announced a €6 million support package for the night time economy, and in the initial stages of the new laws. The department also launched a Night Time Advisor Pilot scheme for 9 towns and cities, and funded sound-proofing grants to help venues prepare for late opening. Irish Policymakers adopted a holistic approach to nightlife working with many stakeholders to achieve this transformation in nightlife, setting a prime example for Northern Ireland. ^{26 27}



#7 REVIEW THE SURRENDER PRINCIPLE WITH TRANSPARENCY

Our survey revealed that few people understand the surrender principle (16%), and of those who did, most disagreed (82%) with the clause. The surrender principle requires an existing licence be 'handed in' to the court for a new licence to be granted, in order to open a new pub or off-licence. The court must be satisfied the existing number of pubs or off-licences locally is insufficient or there is need for another outlet. This licence can be used for music venues or nightclubs to sell alcohol. It can also be used as an occasional licence (briefly mentioned in #3), allowing the licence holder to transfer their licence temporarily to another venue up to 12 times per year. The surrender principle does not apply to other licensed premises like hotels or restaurants.²⁸

Over the past 16 years, the number of pubs in Northern Ireland has dropped by nearly a quarter. In December 2006, there were 1,549 pub licenses and 448 off-licences.²⁹ In December 2021, there were 1,193 pub licenses and 637 off-licences.³⁰ The number of pubs has fallen by 23% while off-licences have increased by 42%.

Key information is still unknown about who owns these licences, what premises they cover, and what licences are active.

The surrender principle is preventing the night time economy in Northern Ireland from reaching its full potential. While the market value is unclear, some licences were reported to be worth over £100,000.³¹ This high cost of entry to the night time economy requires high capital which is unattainable to most, entrenches

monopolies and limits social and cultural opportunities in the night time.

Grant Thornton's assessment³² on the economic impact of removing surrender found public financial accounts for licensees were scarce. Although the assessment was based on financial accounts in the public domain, there was not enough data to measure the economic impact of removing the surrender principle. There must be more dialogue about the clause and a more transparent way to assess its economic impact. If Grant Thornton's assessment was essentially a dead end, should we be asking why?

CASE STUDY

THE BEER ORDERS 1989

Since the 1980s, Britain's legislation on alcohol consumption has changed to suit new neoliberal policy. The changes got rid of price controls, scrapped trade barriers, cut privatization and austerity, and deregulated the alcohol market. Prior to the 1989 Beer Orders, most of the 60,000 public houses were owned by a select few. A government report found six breweries dominated the industry with landlords compelling tenants to buy beer from parent companies. New laws meant the big six lost control of thousands of pubs, and tenants could buy their produce more freely. It is symptomatic of Northern Ireland's current approach to nightlife, with a transparent review of pub and brewery ownership long overdue ^{33 34}

CASE STUDY

REMOVAL OF EXTINGUISHMENT LICENSING POLICY IN IRELAND

In October 2022, the General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill proposed an amendment to the extinguishment clause akin to the surrender principle, in that those who wish to open a new licensed premises, including off-licences, must purchase a licence from an existing licence holder. Licence costs also stop potential operators opening new pubs, especially in rural areas. The Bill includes a transition period, but ultimately it seeks to end extinguishment altogether. ³⁵



#8 INTRODUCE NEW LICENCE CATEGORIES

In the (Amendment) Act 2021, a new clause was made to allow local alcohol to sell their products for consumption off premises, bypassing the need to obtain a public house licence. To do so, an event promoting drink, food or craftwork must be happening at the premises they wish to sell their products at.³⁶

A new licence category is needed for culturally-driven venues, where alcohol is an addition rather than central to the experience. This licence should be open to operators wishing to specialise in music or arts based activities such as nightclubs, theatres and multidisciplinary arts spaces.

Our data shows a need for clear distinctions between standard pubs and culturally-driven spaces. Most people consume alcohol in alcohol-centric spaces, i.e a pub or bar (52%). Just 12% reported mostly drinking alcohol in a nightclub, showing nightclubs are mainly cultural spaces where alcohol consumption is secondary.

While nightclubs and performing arts venues are not all alcohol-centric, we do not disregard that some nightclubs do exist for alcohol-centric purposes. Free The Night advocates for grassroots nightclub and venue spaces with a strong cultural offerings of music performance and dancing. We recognise many nightclub owners are also pub owners, and may prefer to keep their public house licence. However, the introduction of a new licence category would allow more to enter the market and enhance the social and cultural value of our nightlife.

A new grassroots venue licence, combining alcohol and entertainment specifically for late-night activities beyond pubs should be an option, and would break down barriers to entry and the financial outlay required to comply with the surrender principle. The practicalities of proposed licence categories need to be negotiated, as venues would need to meet a certain criteria to be considered.

CASE STUDY

NEW LICENSING PERMITS IN IRELAND

In a consultation of licensing laws in the Republic of Ireland, Give Us The Night proposed new licence categories, enabling fair access to licensing, and enhancing nightlife activities. Similar licences could be introduced here.

A *cultural licence* for non-profit arts organisations could allow use of non-licensed venues like galleries. It could be used for projects, exhibitions or one-off events.

A *venue licence* could let culturally-driven venues open later at night. It is aimed at nightclubs, and removes these venues from the public house licensing system. This licence would be specific to venues with a stage or DJ booth, a dancefloor high quality ventilation professional sound and light set-ups, full-time sound and lighting engineers, accredited security staff, a cloakroom, and CCTV. Give Us The Night proposed venues should be graded on sound containment and nuisance levels for local residents. Venues could invest in soundproofing and noise cancellation in return for longer operating hours.

Finally, a *Late Bar Permit* could replace special exemption orders, used when a licensed venue wants to trade past normal operating hours. This permit would be available to any licensed premises.

These licence category proposals were integrated In the General Scheme of the Sale of Alcohol Bill (2022). In 2023, new licence permits will be introduced and allow for clear distinctions between public houses, late bars and nightclubs. New annual permits for late bars and nightclubs will replace Special Exemption Orders. Opening hours for late bars will stay at 2.30am and nightclubs can operate until 6am, with sale of alcohol stopping at 5am. Late bars and nightclubs must follow the permit rules and have CCTV and security on site. Nightclubs must have a live band or DJ, and 20 percent of their space dedicated to dancing.^{37 38}

#9 DEVOLVE ALCOHOL AND ENTERTAINMENT LICENSING TO COUNCILS

Alcohol and entertainment are separate in legislation. Entertainment licences are determined and granted by local councils, whereas alcohol licences are determined and granted by the courts. In 2009, the government planned to simplify the sale and supply of alcohol, including transferring responsibility of alcohol licensing to councils.³⁹ Over a decade later, this initiative has not happened.

Those who advocate for nightlife culture have been excluded in making decisions on licensing laws. A broader range of people must be involved in this. Enhancing the social and cultural value of nightlife is inseparable from alcohol and entertainment licensing laws.

It was argued that divergence of alcohol and entertainment licensing hours meant illegal sales and more policing difficulties.⁴⁰ In July 2022, the PSNI responded to our Freedom of Information request about the recommendation to align alcohol and entertainment licensing. They said “no factual data/statistics were submitted to the entertainment licensing review group” and the recommendation was based on anecdotes from an organisational lead in policing Belfast and the night time economy. This area needs further research.

CASE STUDY

LICENSING BOARDS AND FORUMS SCOTLAND

In Scotland, there are no nationally set hours for licensed premises. Licences are granted to premises by licensing boards, made up of councillors. Each council must have at least one licensing board. To get a licence, operators must provide boards with an operating plan including trading hours, activities in the premises, and their policy on child access to the premises. Licensing boards must follow a tailored Statement of Policy with licensing hours decided for that council. Unrestricted licensing is only given for festivals and one-off local events. As well as a licensing board, each council must have a licensing forum to advise on licensing in the area. Members include frontline workers, residents and business people. The Forum is strictly advisory and is independent from the board to maintain independence. The Forum and Board show what licensing governance could look like in Northern Ireland if power is delegated to councils.⁴¹

CASE STUDY

CUMULATIVE IMPACT ZONES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

The Licensing Act (2003) in England and Wales lets councils create Cumulative Impact Policies (CIPs) to limit the growth of alcohol outlets and strengthen licensing powers. Councils can create Cumulative Impact Zones (CIZs) if there are negative social effects on the density of alcohol premises in a particular area. These powers protect public health by restricting alcohol availability. CIP policies try to shift alcohol retail away from pubs and bars, and towards outlets that use alcohol as a subsidiary to other consumption like music, arts, coffee, meals and retail. A similar approach could be taken in Northern Ireland, with CIPs being used as an alternative to surrender to monitor alcohol outlet density. It enables fairer competition and more diverse nightlife options while monitoring public health.^{42 43}

#10 CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

Drinking too much alcohol in a short amount of time leads to more risk of harm, overdose, impaired coordination, poor decision-making and lack of impulse control.⁴⁵ We need a healthier drinking culture which avoids binge drinking before last orders. This was a factor in The Licensing Act (2003) in England and Wales, aiming to stop crime, disorder, public nuisance, and hazards to safety, including to children. The Act takes a flexible approach to operating hours for all licence holders and creates a more cosmopolitan drinking culture, with the expectation changes would cut alcohol-related harms.⁴⁵

Alcohol consumption in Britain has fallen from 64.1% in 2005 to 57% in 2017, especially amongst younger drinkers.⁴⁶ Alcohol offences also fell by 51% between 2010/11 and 2017/18, making up just 4.3% of all criminal activity at night.⁴⁷ Alcohol behaviours have changed over time with more deciding to buy alcohol from off-licensed premises and consuming more alcohol in private dwellings.

Public health experts say this is due to alcohol being cheaper outside of licensed premises.⁴⁸ 1 in 4 of our respondents say that they drink alcohol mostly at home or another private dwelling.

The research used by policymakers to justify curtailing hours is one-dimensional and insufficient.. According to Stormont's Health Minister, social costs for alcohol-related harm here cost up to £900 million per year, including £383 million to the Justice sector

and £250 million to Health.⁴⁹ A cost benefit analysis could be conducted to understand the broad financial impacts of Northern Ireland's night time economy. For example, the London Borough of Hackney's 2017 analysis shows the evening and night time economy can generate a return (in taxation and revenues) of four times the costs. For every £1 that the government has to spend on public services, for example, on front line services and street cleaning, it receives £3.97 in spending revenue,⁵⁰ accounting for health, crime and tallying against direct and indirect benefits including taxation, revenues and fees.

Alcohol-related harms do not stop when pubs, bars or nightclubs close. We need to understand the health implications of licensing from a whole perspective, and how progressive policy could cut alcohol consumption in unregulated spaces.

CASE STUDY

HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT APPROACH TO NIGHTLIFE IN WALES

In 2016, the Welsh government worked with the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) on a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of a night time economy framework. The HIA gives decision-makers comprehensive information on the health implications of a policy and works with many stakeholders to do this. Rather than concentrating on single risk factors, HIA methods study health determinants in an integrated way using an evidence-based approach. The HIA on the night time economy in Wales looked at lifestyle, social and community influences, mental wellbeing, living environment, economic conditions, access to services, macro-economic, environmental and sustainable factors. This is a useful type of assessment that should also be conducted on the impact of licensing policies in Northern Ireland.⁵¹



#11 PROMOTE EFFECTIVE SAFETY AND MONITORING INITIATIVES AT NIGHT

Licensing policies which promote safety, while diversifying nightlife culture for all, should be a key consideration in the upcoming licensing review. The good news is that, for the most part, people surveyed feel some degree of safety in nightlife [always safe (9%); generally safe (47%); and mainly safe (32%)]. Yet, most (81%) are either not satisfied or unsure of their satisfaction when it comes to policing and monitoring of the evening and night time in Northern Ireland. This signals a need to examine policies, resources and strategies that govern these areas.

Free The Night submitted Freedom of Information requests to the PSNI, A&E Department, and Ambulance Service, with the objective of gaining insights into call-outs and admissions for the first six months of reopening the night time economy after the pandemic, and for the 2022 Jubilee weekend, which saw many cultural and music events across the city. We wanted to understand how alcohol-related harms differed between licensed premises, non-licensed premises and domestic settings.

In the first six months of reopening the night time economy post-pandemic (from January 2022), 5,050 (94%) of PSNI call-outs were to unlicensed premises (including domestic settings), with just 344 (6%) to licensed premises. Over the course of the Jubilee Weekend, 173 (95%) call-outs were to unlicensed premises (including domestic settings) and 9 (5%) to licensed venues. Clearly, there are similarities between the ratio of PSNI call-outs between licensed and unlicensed premises/domestic settings within the time periods

studied. This reflects arguments from the Institute of Public Health Ireland, which suggests that alcohol related harms and incidents in the home such as domestic violence, child protection issues and house parties are increasing.⁵²

Neither the A&E department nor the Ambulance Service had complete information on where patients had been before going to A&E, as this type of information is not collected and stored. The Ambulance Service were only able to provide information on the number of call-outs to domestic settings over the six-month post-pandemic period, which were sourced from the Trust Command and Control system. Thus, comparative differences between licensed and unlicensed premises/domestic settings could not be determined.

Overall, this exercise highlighted discrepancies in data that is collected on drug and alcohol consumption and behaviours in nightlife settings. It is unknown how alcohol and drug-related health harms might be linked with licensed premises in Northern Ireland until data is collected on this, we cannot truly assess the impact of the (Amendment) Act on frontline services.



There are further interventions that can help promote safety in nightlife and reduce pressures on frontline services. Good street lighting (73%) is a top safety indicator for people in Northern Ireland, and other research has proven that outdoor lighting also limits the amount of people who avoid leaving home at night, reducing social isolation, improving wellbeing and boosting community pride.⁵³ It is true what they say about safety in numbers, as going out with trust-worthy people (73%) and being in a group (56%) help workers and night time users feel safe. Having a way to get home (72%) and enough money for a taxi home (57%) are also important safety determinants here, as well as having access to a phone in an emergency (67%). A nationwide safety advertising initiative, similar to the *Bristol Rules* campaign,⁵⁴ which educates people on how to have a good and safe night out would be effective.

Respondents voted on a series of proposed initiatives. Besides from more night time transport options (84%), night time crisis units and services (46%), CCTV in licensed venues and transport vehicles (45%), along with night time stewards (46%) and safety monitors in high-vis jackets (41%) could help to make people feel safer at night in Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

AMSTERDAM PILOT SAFETY PROJECT

In 2015, authorities in Amsterdam funded a pilot scheme to enhance the quality of nightlife and make visitors and residents feel safer by reducing violence and nuisance. It was negotiated with stakeholders such as night time business owners, councils and police. One of the key aspects of the pilot scheme was hiring twenty stewards in bright red jackets to patrol on Friday and Saturday nights. The findings indicated that the pilot scheme had been successful in that all of the measures that were agreed upon in the planning stage had been implemented, and all stakeholders involved supported the pilot, the collaborations, and the results. By the end, nuisance reports fell by 40% and violence fell by 20%.^{55 56}

#12 COMMIT TO IMPROVING AND SUSTAINING NIGHTLIFE IN ALL SECTORS AND INDUSTRIES

Nightlife needs to introduce regulation and management around culture rather than solely tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and health harms. We must measure the impact of the night time economy to improve nightlife for environmental, economic and social reasons. This is particularly important post-COVID-19, which has left evening and night time industries in a precarious position. There are four ways policymakers can create a healthy and sustainable night time economy and culture, with examples of good practice from other global nightlife hubs.



CREATE A CROSS-SECTOR, CROSS-INDUSTRY AND CROSS-DEPART- MENTAL NIGHT TIME ECONOMY TASKFORCE

CASE STUDY NIGHT TIME ECONOMY TASKFORCE IN IRELAND

In July 2020, the Night Time Economy Taskforce was established as one of the priority actions for the newly elected government and as a key intervention measure amid COVID-19 restrictions. Members span from a range of government departments and non-government stakeholders involved closely with Ireland's night time economy and culture, and who are recognised as valuable voices in policy and legislation. The taskforce published an important report on the obstacles preventing Ireland from developing vibrant local night time economies, covering planning regulations, licensing laws, transport and cultural diversity. The report presents 36 recommendations and action plans to combat key challenges, including a review of licensing laws and fees, and creating night

time advisors in major towns and cities in Ireland. A similar project is needed in Northern Ireland and we believe the taskforce should be set up in conjunction with the review of the (Amendment) Act.⁵⁷



ESTABLISH NIGHT TIME ADVISOR ROLES IN MAJOR TOWNS AND CITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

CASE STUDY THE NIGHT CZAR LONDON

includes the Mayor of London, the Night Czar, the London Night Time Commission and London's 33 local authorities.⁵⁸

In 2016, The Mayor of London appointed Amy Lamé as Night Czar, tasked to ensure London thrives as a 24-hour city. The Night Czar's role is important in bringing together and mediating between different stakeholders involved in nightlife. This position also involves championing London's nightlife in the UK and internationally, as well as safeguarding venues. Amy Lamé has helped to protect dozens of venues across the city, published an LGBTQ+ Venues charter and also a Women's Night Safety charter, which guides venues, operators, charities, councils and businesses on women's safety through better staff training, encouraging harassment reports and ensuring safety of public spaces. Amy chairs the Night-Time Borough Champions Network, which



WRITE A MANIFESTO FOR NIGHTLIFE SUSTAINABILITY

CASE STUDY VIBELAB GLOBAL MANIFESTO AND SUS- TAINABLE DEVELOP- MENT GOALS FOR NIGHTLIFE

With climate change becoming an ever more pressing issue, all night time sectors and industries must commit to enhancing sustainability in their practices. Nightlife consultancy agency Vibelab have opened the conversation about how to strengthen nightlife in cities, while also adhering to the agenda of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Future nightlife policies should be guided by the to allow for night time communities to grow sustainably, as well as culturally and economically. The

first SDG outlined by the UN is to end poverty. As previously mentioned, there are some sectors in nightlife that earn below the poverty line in Northern Ireland, and progressive policy is needed to tackle these issues.

In September 2022, Vibelab launched Rise Up for a Better Future, a global night time manifesto that explores the various aspects that drive nightlife communities and calls for improvements and wider acknowledgement of night time economy and culture, particularly from policymakers. Free The Night took part in the research for this manifesto, hosting an online session about the future of nightlife in Ireland and the UK. Key contributions of the manifesto include raising awareness for nightlife landscapes; enhancing collaboration between communities and stakeholders; promoting safety in nightlife; encouraging the next generation of night time advocates; and improving working conditions for workers of the evening and night. Policymakers should engage with this document to understand the importance of nightlife from a global perspective, and commit to creating a Northern Ireland-centric manifesto to mobilise and sustain nightlife.^{59 60}



INVEST PUBLIC MONEY INTO THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

CASE STUDY HELSINKI POLICY TRANSFORMATION AND INVESTMENT IN NIGHTLIFE

The Helsinki Strategy 2017-2021 guides planning regulations and aims to make it the most functioning city in the world in terms of mobility, sustainability, safety and services. The city has been described as a night centre because of gentrification of outer city centre areas. The City of Helsinki owns real estate firms which act as 'cultural incubators', and private investors have since followed suit and backed investment in nightlife. A shift in political powers influenced an increased interest in nightlife, arts, and cultural sectors, coupled with involvement of politicians from subcultural,

ecologist and DIY backgrounds. After increased willingness from the public and entrepreneurs to put Helsinki on the map like other European cities, licensing laws were reformed, and opening hours extended in clubs and bars until latest 5am. Similar policy intervention is needed in Northern Ireland which mirrors the approaches from Helsinki.⁶¹



#13 SUPPORT AND FUND PILOT SCHEMES AND EVENTS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND NIGHTLIFE

Pilot schemes are useful tools for policymakers to gather important data needed for nightlife legislative changes. These schemes are conducted temporarily without the need for any permanent changes to legislation. The review board should consider how pilot projects related to opening hours can help achieve a holistic development of nightlife in Northern Ireland. We recognise the need to further plan and negotiate such schemes, but have outlined two pilot projects which could be helpful for this process.



CASE STUDY

MONTREAL NON STOP 24/24

NON STOP 24/24 is an event co-produced by Montréal's nightlife advocacy organization MTL 24/24 and the SAT venue, with the financial assistance of the Government of Québec and the City of Montréal. From May 21 at 10 pm until May 23 at 3 am, the general public were invited to attend the SAT to see performances from over thirty local and international artists. The medical team reported two minor incidents throughout the course of the pilot event, and no police intervention was needed. The organisers and government of Montréal hailed it as a success and have funded further schemes to trial extended hours. A similar open approach is needed in Northern Ireland, considering the lack of data available to policymakers on the impact of operating hours.⁶²

CASE STUDY

GLASGOW LICENSING BOARD PILOT SCHEME

In 2018, the Glasgow Licensing Board published information on a 12-month pilot scheme which gave nightclubs in the city centre an extra licensed hour until 4am. The initiative was designed to reward good practice in nightclub trading where premises could demonstrate positive contributions to the late-night economy, as well as appropriate safety and security practices for customers and staff. The Board recognised that a pilot scheme of this nature was an effective way to properly measure the impact of late licensing on alcohol-related incidents, nuisance reports, and the volume of customers moving through the city centre at night. Alongside other stakeholders such as the police, the public health service and local authorities, the Licensing Board aimed to review the pilot scheme

to determine whether to maintain the usual licensing regulations or allow for an extension in licensing hours. The Licensing Board was particularly interested in gathering data on alcohol-related harms and hospital admissions figures.⁶³

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