Reviewer's report

Title: Cleavages and co-operation in the UK alcohol industry: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 17 February 2012

Reviewer: Betsy Thom

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1. Discretionary: There is already some work on the alcohol industry (as the authors acknowledge). I was surprised that they did not include some reference to the report by Baggott R (2006) Alcohol strategy and the drinks industry: A partnership for prevention York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation (available on line). Although that research has a different focus, there are relevant themes. However, I agree that the particular focus of the submitted paper – an examination of the dynamics between the industry/trade players, and especially the examination of the trade associations – has not received detailed consideration elsewhere. Although the findings from the research are not surprising, the research helps to put some meat on the bones of debates and commentaries which have been prominent in the literature.

2. Minor: Is the interpretation (discussion and conclusion) well balanced and supported by the data? The discussion is incorporated into the findings sections and this could be appropriate for a qualitative study of this type. However, down to p25, the section comprises findings; it then begins ‘discussion’. The discussion does not refer to any other work in the field or place the findings of this study in relation to other research. While I think the interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn are appropriate, the discussion element is rather weak. I would suggest that the authors have a section which is ‘findings’ only and then a final section which is ‘discussion and conclusions’. This would help to bring the paper together and make it easier to refer back to other studies.

3. Minor: Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to allow others to evaluate and/or replicate the work? The methods are sufficiently described but would benefit from a bit more detail. I would have liked a breakdown of the 35 interviews to know e.g. how many were with industry, trade; how many with policy makers/politicians; and how many with professionals. Despite triangulation (which seems to work well and is reassuring), it is important to get some idea of the extent to which the findings appropriately reflect the views of those involved in the industry/trade (the main focus of the paper on inter/intra- industry dynamics). The authors acknowledge that access to industry/trade informants is difficult. Clearly, issues of confidentiality limit the type of detail which can be provided about respondents but it would be helpful to know who was lost – what types of ‘voices’ may not be reflected and how that may affect the findings. This could, perhaps, be in the later part of the paper where limitations are briefly mentioned.
4. Discretionary: Can the writing, organization, tables and figures be improved?
The paper is well and clearly written. I felt that the section on p25, last paragraph
‘This article…’ might have been better integrated into the conclusion. It is
basically a summary of the findings – it comes across as a little repetitious where
it is. (see also my suggestion above).

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

No interests to declare