

# APPENDIX 1: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE REPORT AUTHOR

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Dr. Mark Griffiths is a Chartered Psychologist and Professor of Gambling Studies at the Nottingham Trent University, and Director of the International Gaming Research Unit. He is internationally known for his work into gambling and gaming addictions and has won many awards including the American 1994 John Rosecrance Research Prize for “outstanding scholarly contributions to the field of gambling research”, the 1998 European CELEJ Prize for best paper on gambling, the 2003 Canadian International Excellence Award for “outstanding contributions to the prevention of problem gambling and the practice of responsible gambling” and a North American 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award For Contributions To The Field Of Youth Gambling “in recognition of his dedication, leadership, and pioneering contributions to the field of youth gambling”. In 2013, he received the Lifetime Research Award from the US National Council on Problem Gambling.

He has published over 450 refereed research papers, three books, over 120 book chapters, and over 1000 other articles. He has served on numerous national and international committees (e.g. BPS Council, BPS Social Psychology Section, Society for the Study of Gambling, Gamblers Anonymous General Services Board, National Council on Gambling etc.) and is a former National Chair of Gamcare. He also does a lot of freelance journalism and has appeared on over 2500 radio and television programmes since 1988.

He has been the keynote speaker at national gambling conferences in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Poland, Italy, Holland and Belgium. He has also given keynote addresses to the US National Academy of Sciences (Washington DC), and the US National Center for Addiction (New York). He has also acted as a consultant for many Government bodies including the Gambling Board for Great Britain, Gambling Commission, UK Home Office, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Department of Health, Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority (Australia) and various international Governments (including the US, Australia, Sweden, Norway and Finland). In 2004 he was awarded the Joseph Lister Prize for Social Sciences by the British Association for the Advancement of Science for being one of the UK’s “outstanding scientific communicators”. Other recent awards include the 2006 Excellence in the Teaching of Psychology Award by the British Psychological Society and the British Psychological Society Fellowship Award for “exceptional contributions to psychology”.

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## RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING INITIATIVES AND PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF THE ABB CODE OF CONDUCT

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## CONTENTS

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3	Executive summary
6	Background to the report
6	Responsible gambling and social responsibility
7	The Association of British Bookmakers' Code for Responsible Gambling
8	Pre-commitment and limit setting
13	Pop-up messaging
17	Voluntary self-exclusion
20	Customer interaction
20	Age verification
23	Commentary on betting shop FOBT data and other data on the ABB Code of Conduct
33	Conclusions
35	References and bibliography
43	Appendix 1: Brief author biography

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- The field of responsible gambling (RG) has developed from a basic interest in minimising gambling problems, to a fast-growing field of research, theory, and practice covering all aspects of the gambling experience.
- Previously, RG was largely influenced by a view of gambling problems that primarily adopted a medical and/or disease model, with little control or power attributed to those that were most negatively affected. However, increasing support for individual autonomy has become the important issue.
- The 'Reno Model' of RG argues that responsible gambling programs should be based upon two fundamental principles: (i) decisions to gamble reside with the individual and represent a choice, and (ii) in order to make good decisions, individuals need to be well informed.
- The number of research studies into RG has been steadily increasing. This has both helped to shape RG theory and improve upon the overall effectiveness of gaming company RG policies, procedures and protocols.
- Given the increasing importance attached to RG practices, the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) launched its Code for Responsible Gambling and Player Protection in October 2013. On March 1st (2014), the roll-out of the Code's new harm minimisation measures was completed in all of its betting shops.
- As part of the new Code, the ABB introduced new RG features for customers playing on electronic gaming machines, also known as Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs), in their shops. The new machines included (i) voluntary money limits, (ii) voluntary time limits, (iii) mandatory money-based pop-up reminders, and (iv) mandatory time-based reminders.
- The ABB are committed to auditing and evaluating the effect of the new measures, particularly in relation to whether the new measures are effective in promoting responsible gambling and minimizing gambling-related harm.

- This report is a preliminary evaluation based on industry data and attempts to provide insight as to how the new measures are working and how they relate to previous research in the responsible gambling field. It also briefly reviews previous empirical research that has been carried out on pre-commitment and limit setting, pop-up messaging, and voluntary self-exclusion.
- The report provides commentary on the data collected by the ABB since these new measures were introduced in March 2014, with specific reference to the time and money spending limits, mandatory time- and money-based pop-up reminders, consumer information, customer interactions, voluntary self-exclusions, and age verification compliance.
- The ABB data suggest that most FOBT play at a session level is a relatively short-lasting activity (less than ten minutes) and that session losses are relatively small (£7). The data appears to directly contradict the media perception that players typically lose hundreds of pounds every session and play for hours.
- The ABB data clearly shows that the publicity surrounding the introduction of limit-setting tools had some immediate effect with almost 11,000 instances of within-session limit setting nationally in the first week of operation.
- However, there was a dramatic drop in the number of sessions over the 15-week period where limit setting was utilized by players. The most likely explanation for this is that those using the limit setting facilities initially did not want to keep going through the process of setting limits every time they started a new playing session.
- The data show that approximately 95% of playing sessions are within mandatory spend limits, and that 90% of playing sessions are within mandatory time limits. This shows the vast majority of players appear to be playing responsibly and that the mandatory limits initially set by the ABB appear to be appropriate.
- The ABB data relating to what players do once they have reached the mandatory limits is encouraging. The data clearly shows that a significant minority of players either stop playing or do not put any more money into the machine once the mandatory time and/or monetary limits have been reached.

- The ABB data shows that among those that set voluntary limits, most players stop playing (with approximately 75% of those reaching their voluntary money spending limits stopping play or putting no more money in the machine, and approximately 85% of those reaching their time spending limits stopping play or putting no further money into the machine).
- The ABB data also indicate that a small proportion of the players benefit from the voluntary pop-up message as they either stopped playing immediately or carried on playing but did not put any further money in.
- The reaching of mandatory and voluntary limits appear to have impacted positively upon customer interactions between staff and clientele. This has seen a dramatic increase from October 2013 to June 2014 (an increase of 3,875% in a nine-month period). However, at a national level, different operators record customer interactions differently so it is not known for sure how much of the increase is solely due to players reaching mandatory or voluntary limits.
- The ABB data clearly shows that the number of players voluntarily self-excluding from betting shops nationally increased substantially from October 2013 to June 2014 (by 35%).
- These results taken as a whole indicate that the new ABB Code of Conduct is having an impact. Whether the impact is having a positive impact in terms of promoting responsible gambling and minimizing harm in a wider sense remains to be seen but the early indications outlined in this report are positive (although the sharp decline in the number of players that are voluntarily setting their own limits is an area that needs to be addressed).
- The data clearly shows that the number of players voluntarily self-excluding from betting shops has substantially increased, and that the number of customer interactions between staff members and clientele in betting shops nationally has dramatically increased.
- The data also appears to indicate that most FOBT players stay within their own time and money spending limits, and that the typical playing sessions are relatively low spending and short. The additional player protection measures such as pop-up messaging appear to be having a positive effect on many players and suggest that all of the measures introduced since should be retained.

# RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING INITIATIVES AND PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF THE ABB CODE OF CONDUCT

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## Background to the report

Over the last 15 years or so, the field of responsible gambling (RG) has developed from a basic interest in minimising gambling problems, to a fast-growing field of research, theory, and practice covering all aspects of the gambling experience. Even in the recent past, RG was typically the remit of perhaps one or two individuals in an organisation, maybe just a minor part of their primary role. However, over the last few years and in many gaming companies, RG has become a concept embraced at all levels from the CEO down to the point-of-sale retailer, and all those in between.

Whilst some of this focus has been driven through regulatory policy and an increased awareness of problem gambling across many jurisdictions, much of the interest stems from a realisation that problem-free players make for a better business, and that long-term customers are going to be those who continue to play, without problems, primarily for reasons of leisure. In short, proactive gaming companies have developed socially responsible business models, that are based on increasing the number of moderate-spending, long-term repeat customers and, that strive to avoid custom from players with gambling problems.

## Responsible gambling and social responsibility

Previously, RG was largely influenced by a view of gambling problems that primarily adopted a medical and/or disease model, with little control or power attributed to those that were most negatively affected. However, increasing support for individual autonomy has become the important issue (Bernhard, 2007; Reith, 2009). This position, was outlined in detail by the 'Reno Model' (Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, & Shaffer, 2004) which argues that responsible gambling programs should be based upon two fundamental principles: (1) decisions to gamble reside with the individual and represent a choice, and (2) in order to make good decisions, individuals need to be well informed.

This shift in perspective also reflects wider social and cultural changes that have seen more of an emphasis on the importance of consumers making informed purchase choices across a variety of products and services – whether reading nutritional labels for dietary purposes or clearly understanding the implications of signing credit agreements. As is the case in a number of commercial settings, facilitating RG through informed player choice has become a major priority in building RG policy and strategy – an approach that reflects the fact that millions of participants willingly gamble worldwide every day as a legitimate and problem-free leisure activity (Wood & Bernhard, 2010).

## The Association of British Bookmakers' Code for Responsible Gambling

Given the increasing importance attached to RG practices, the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) launched recently its Code for Responsible Gambling and Player Protection in October 2013. The new Code was developed in 2013. On March 1st (2014), the roll-out of the new Code's new harm minimisation measures was completed went live in all of its betting shops. The 'Harm Minimisation Strategy' focused on four levels:

- Issuing clearer and more accessible information on how to gamble responsibly and highlighting the sources of help available.
- Providing customers with new tools such as mandatory time and money based reminders, the ability to set spend and time limits on gaming machines and to request machine session data.
- Training staff to detect the signs of potential problem gambling more quickly and how to interact more effectively with those identified.
- Undertaking more consistent central analysis of data to identify abnormal activity both in specific shops and, where possible, that relating to individual customers.

Some of the specific new measures in the ABB code included:

- **Enhanced staff training:** All shop staff will be trained, in consultation with providers of responsible gambling expertise, to recognise a wider range of problem gambling indicators and will aim to identify those customers at risk of developing a gambling problem.
- **Enhanced customer engagement:** All shop staff will be actively encouraged to 'walk the shop floor' as part and parcel of an enhanced customer engagement role, including initiating customer interaction in response to specific customer behaviour which needs to be addressed.
- **Dedicated responsible gambling co-ordinator:** All ABB members will nominate a member of staff who will be responsible for responsible gambling on a local basis and will receive additional training to deal with more complex responsible gambling interactions.
- **Compliance objectives linked to managers' performance:** Compliance objectives will be added to the performance agreements of all relevant middle and senior managers working for ABB members and compliance will be a standing item agenda at Licensed Betting Office level performance reviews. The ABB will develop a minimum industry standard for staff training which is hoped will evolve into an accredited system.

The ABB also introduced new RG features for customers playing on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) in their shops. The new machines included (i) voluntary money limits, (ii) voluntary time limits, (iii) mandatory money-based pop-up reminders, and (iv) mandatory time-based reminders. The new code also banned the use of ATMs inside betting offices, and agreed to provide as much information as possible so that players can make an informed choice about gambling, along with help and guidance as to how to get help if a gambler thinks they are developing a problem. The new industry standard (to be reviewed annually) includes:

- Provision of appropriate information on the effects of problem gambling
- Recognition and identification of the indicators of problem gambling
- Conflict management
- Customer interaction in response to specific customer behaviour referral, and follow-up processes
- Effective self-exclusion processes at a local level
- The application of a Think 21 policy, especially with regard to machine players
- The identification of vulnerable groups
- Regular refresher training
- Auditing and testing of staff at least every two years

The ABB are committed to auditing and evaluating the effect of the new measures, particularly in relation to whether the new measures are effective in promoting responsible gambling and minimizing gambling-related harm. This report is a preliminary part of the evaluation process and attempts to provide some evaluative insight as to how the new measures are working and how they relate to previous research in the responsible gambling field. Before examining the preliminary data collected so far, this report briefly reviews previous research that has been carried out on pre-commitment and limit setting, pop-up messaging, and voluntary self-exclusion as these are the areas that most relate to the data being commented upon.

## Pre-commitment and limit setting

Pre-commitment has quickly become a major issue in the field of responsible gambling. According to Williams et al. (2014):

*“Pre-commitment” refers to a strategy whereby pre-set limits on time, frequency, or money spent gambling are registered prior to the start of play. Pre-commitment is believed to be a useful harm minimization strategy because it allows players to make rational decisions about gambling involvement prior to actually engaging in gambling and obliges them to retain these limits despite subsequent temptations that arise during play (Parke, Rigbye, & Parke, 2008). Research indicates it is fairly common for regular gamblers (including problem gamblers) to have budgetary limits in mind prior to gambling but to exceed these limits as play progresses (McDonnell-Phillips, 2006)” (p.61)*

Griffiths (2014) has also reported that there is much debate about whether (i) pre-commitment (in general) is effective, (ii) limit setting should be mandatory or voluntary, (iii) limits should be player-defined or operator-defined, (iv) limits are effective for particular groups (problem gamblers, at-risk gamblers), and (v) mandatory limit setting leads to unrealistic or unhelpful limit setting. Spend limits can also come in many forms. For example, Wood and Griffiths (2010) noted that player spending can be restricted in terms of the following:

- **Deposit limits** – This refers to the maximum amount of money that a player can deposit into their play account at any given time. Winnings can either be included or excluded from this figure.
- **Play limits** – This refers to the maximum amount of money that a player can actually play with at any given time. As with deposit limits, winnings can either be included or excluded from this figure.
- **Loss limits** – This refers to the maximum amount of money that a player is allowed to lose at any one session.
- **Bet limits** – This refers to the maximum amount of money that can be bet on a single game, or on concurrent games.

In addition to this, mandatory limits can either be fixed so that all games have the same limit, and/or all players have the same limit, or limits can be variable depending upon factors such as the type of game played, or the demonstrable wealth of the individual player.

Fixed limits have the advantage that they are initially easy to administer. However, this does not take into account that players vary in the amount of disposable income available to them. A low fixed limit may be frustrating for wealthier players but may not be low enough to avoid negatively impacting on poorer players. Furthermore, fixed limits may require regular monitoring and updating to examine their relevance to new games and to existing games over time. It could also be argued that fixed limits do not encourage and facilitate players to take individual responsibility for managing and monitoring their own gambling expenditure. Variable limits

Variable limits for specific games require that each new game be assessed independently. This may provide a more accurate assessment of the required limit. However, they need more consideration on initial set up. Furthermore, variable limits for individual players are difficult to assess and may require a more complex system of monitoring.

Broda, LaPlante, Nelson, LaBrie, Bosworth and Shaffer (2008) examined the effects of player deposit limits on internet sports betting by customers of bwin Interactive Entertainment. Their study examined 47,000 subscribers to bwin over a period of two years and compared the behaviour of players who tried to exceed their deposit limit with all other players. Deposit limit referred to the amount of money deposited into a player's spend account excluding any accumulated winnings. Bwin sets a mandatory deposit limit of no more than €1000 per day or €5000 per 30 days. Players can also set their own deposit limits (per 30 days) below the mandatory limits.

Overall, the study found that only 0.3% of players attempted to exceed their deposit limit. However, the large mandatory limit may be one reason for this finding as the authors noted that the vast majority of players never came close to reaching the maximum deposit limit. More specifically, the vast majority of the sample (95%) never deposited more than €1050 per 30 days, one-fifth of the maximum allowed €5000. However, it should be noted that the study did not distinguish between those who attempted to exceed either the mandatory limit or their own personally set deposit limits.

A study by Focal Research Consultants (2007) carried out in Nova Scotia found that the trial implementation of several responsible gaming features for Video Lottery Terminal (VLT) games (including player set spend limits) generally reduced the overall levels of expenditure by players. Use of these features was associated with longer play for the same or lower levels of expenditure. Whilst this research related to VLT games only, there is no reason to assume that there would be different findings for online games given the similarity of their basic structural characteristics. However, it must be noted that in this particular study, the specific impact of the player set spend limit could not be separated from the impact of the other responsible gaming features.

In Australia, McDonnell-Phillips Pty Ltd (2006) examined gambler pre-commitment behaviour by conducting a telephone survey of 482 regular gamblers who played electronic gaming machines (EGM's) and/or bet on horse racing. The key findings suggested that virtually all the players (including problem gamblers) reported that they tried to self-regulate by having some kind of spend limit in mind. They found that most regular gamblers expressed limits in terms of weekly spend rather than monthly or

annually, suggesting that budgets were not usually considered over the long term. Most players were in favour of both the option to set their own limits when gambling, and of receiving detailed statements about how much they had spent on gambling for a given day or month. Interestingly, players did not respond positively to the term 'limit' even when they acknowledged that they attempted to manage their own spending. Here, the term 'limit' may sound too restrictive and imposing for some players even when they have the option of setting it themselves.

The McDonnell-Phillips report also noted that problem gamblers only tended to consider their limits immediately before they gambled, whereas non-problematic players arrived at the venue with a spend limit already in mind. Consequently, education initiatives that emphasise consideration of gambling budgets well in advance of actual playing may have some merit. Such initiatives may be most effective for vulnerable players who have not yet developed a gambling problem. Research shows that people who already have gambling problems tend to gamble to avoid dealing with (and thinking about) their gambling problems, and as such would be resistant to thinking about how much they should spend prior to gambling (see for example Wood & Griffiths, 2007).

Another related factor that has been shown to impact upon the spending of both problematic and 'normal' social players is the size of the maximum bet that is allowed per game. Australian research by Blaszczynski, Sharpe, and Walker (2001) found that reducing the maximum bet size on slot machines reduced the overall amount of money that all players spent per gaming session. Furthermore, this was done without adversely affecting the gamblers' overall enjoyment of the game.

The Global Online Gambler Survey (International Gaming Research Unit, 2007) collected data from 10,865 participants, from 96 countries, who reported that they had gambled at Internet casino sites, Internet poker sites (or both) within the three months prior to the research. The survey covered many areas but one of the findings was that 70% of players thought that the option to set voluntary spend limits would be a useful feature. The same study also utilised a series of focus groups in five countries (Canada, USA, Sweden, UK, Germany). Overall, the attitudes among focus group participants were that the onus for playing responsibly should rest only with the player. Both survey and focus group data showed that players preferred informed choice options such as supplying regular financial statements to players. The majority of players were very much opposed to mandatory spend limits which they regarded as patronizing and overly restrictive. Very similar findings were observed in a series of focus groups conducted in Las Vegas, where participants were asked to consider a range of responsible

gaming measures including player set spend limits (Bernhard, Lucas & Jang, 2006). Mandatory spend limits were strongly opposed, whereas player-set limits were more widely regarded as useful, although not so much by players who already perceived that they had adequate control over their gambling behaviour.

Griffiths, Wood and Parke (2009) carried out a study among Svenska Spel clientele examining players' attitudes and behaviour towards using social responsibility tools among 2,348 online gamblers (all clientele of Svenska Spel) who completed an online survey. Approximately 25% of the sample (n=570) had signed up to use the RG tools (compared to around 10% of the total player base). The most useful feature reported by those that used the tools was the setting of spending limits with over two-thirds of respondents (70%) reporting the feature to be 'quite useful' or 'very useful'. The other 'quite/very useful' endorsement ratings were being able to view their gambling profile (49%), performing self-diagnostic tests of gambling behaviour (46%), being able to self-exclude for a certain period of time (42%), getting information about support for gambling issues (40%), and getting information about predicted gambling profile (36%). Respondents who had enrolled to use the tools were also asked which social responsibility features (if any) they had actually used. Over half (56%) had used spending limits, 40% had taken a self-diagnostic problem gambling test, 17% had used a self-exclusion feature, and 0.4% had contacted a gambling helpline.

It is also worth noting that there is some evidence to suggest that mandatory spend limits may (in some cases) facilitate players to gamble in other gaming venues with less restrictive practices. An example of this occurring in a more traditional gambling environment was the Iowa riverboat casinos that opened in 1991. These casinos had player loss limits of \$200 (US) per excursion and a \$5 (US) maximum bet limit. Two of the original five casino boats had closed within one year of opening and moved to Mississippi where less restrictive regulatory conditions prevailed (McMillen, 1996).

Most studies examining limit setting have concentrated on monetary limit setting. Very few studies have taken the time spent playing into account even though some (e.g. Braverman & Shaffer, 2012; Dragicevic et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2008) have shown that time spent gambling can be an important indicator of gambling involvement and problem gambling. However, using behavioural tracking data drawn from a sample of 100,000 online gamblers, Auer and Griffiths (2013) recently demonstrated players that set time and money limits gambled significantly less than prior to limit setting, although the effect depended upon the preferred type of games played. Time limits were found to be most effective influencing subsequent gambling among poker players and least effective among gamblers that

played casino and lottery games. Casino and lottery players got most benefit from the setting of monetary limits.

## Pop-up messaging

The increasingly advanced technological environments of gambling companies now allow for sophisticated ways of promoting responsible play among gamblers (Auer & Griffiths, 2013; Griffiths, Wood & Parke, 2009). The use of pop-up messages that appear while an individual is gambling is one way of informing players about how much time they have been playing and/or how much money they have spent. These pop-up messages appear to be becoming a common component of gambling companies' responsible gambling strategies and may be required as part of social responsibility accreditation schemes (Griffiths, 2012). However, it remains to be determined whether these pop-up interventions deliver the desired effects among the players that receive such messaging.

The use of pop-ups can be purely informative (e.g. to let players know how much time and money they have spent gambling) but another potential use for pop-ups is to provide an enforced break to gamblers that may be in dissociative states. Among slot machine players, dissociation has been reported (Griffiths, Wood, Parke & Parke, 2006; Jacobs, 1988). Due to their high event frequency, slot machines have been associated with problem gambling (Parke & Griffiths, 2007), and are also considered potentially harmful for susceptible and vulnerable players (such as minors, problem gamblers, the intoxicated, etc.). Becoming dissociated coupled with the lack of self-control can lead to excessive playing that has been observed in both real life environments (e.g. Griffiths, 1991) and experimental settings (e.g. Griffiths, 1994).

Several studies using slot machine players in laboratory settings have reported that static informative messages were no more effective in influencing player cognitions than static warning signs without further informative content (i.e., Monaghan, Blaszczyński & Nower, 2009; Monaghan & Blaszczyński, 2010). Unsurprisingly, it was also reported that dynamic messages were recalled more often than static messages and that messages encouraging self-appraisal resulted in significantly greater effect on self-reported thoughts and behaviours during gambling. This leads to the conclusion that the content of messages as well as the way of presentation determines – at least in part – the resulting effect on gambling behaviour.

Wohl, Gainsbury, Stewart and Sztainert (2013) investigated the effect of two responsible gambling tools that targeted adherence to monetary limits among 72 electronic gaming machine (EGM) gamblers. These tools

comprised an animation-based educational video (used previously by Wohl et al., 2010) and a pop-up message. In this experiment, EGM gamblers were required to set a monetary limit before commencing play and half the participants were informed when they had reached their money limit via a pop-up message. Both single and additive effects in addition to possible linear or non-linear interactions were subject to analysis. Confirming previous findings, both responsible gaming tools showed the anticipated single effects. A monetary pop-up reminder helped gamblers to stay within the pre-set limits. However, no synergy between the monetary pop-up reminder and the animation-based educational information was found. EGM gamblers that received animation-based information in addition to a monetary pop-up reminder did not adhere to the pre-set limit more often compared to EGM gamblers that only received a monetary pop-up reminder.

Another study reported that exposure to a warning banner informing players of the randomness of outcomes of VLT games decreased faulty gambling beliefs in both problem and non-problem video lottery terminal (VLT) gamblers (Gallagher, Nicki, Otteson & Elliot, 2011). It has also been demonstrated that the presentation of animated educational information about slot machines appears to be an effective way to increase user adherence to pre-set limits (Wohl, Christie, Matheson & Anisman, 2010). Stewart and Wohl (2013) also showed that adherence to monetary limits was significantly more likely among participants that received a monetary limit pop-up reminder compared to participants who did not.

Studies have also investigated the optimum time at which pop-up messaging should occur within a gambling session. Ladouceur and Sevigny (2009) reported the most effective social responsibility feature was a pop-up reminder after 60 minutes of gambling (compared to 15, 30, and 45 minutes) and resulted in a decrease in the length of time spent gambling among players. Schrans, Grace and Schellink (2004) investigated the benefits of a 30-minute pop up compared to a 60-minute pop up on VLTs. They found that earlier exposure to pop-up messages during gambling did not influence either the likelihood of reading the message or choosing to stop play instead of selecting 'yes' to continue. A study by Schellink and Schrans (2002; cited in Monaghan, 2008) carried out for the in Canada found out that the 60-minute pop-up message was associated with a small reduction in session length and a decrease in expenditure among high risk players.

Hyoun et al. (2014) investigated the effect of time limits in a virtual reality casino environment among 43 participants and reported that setting time limits influenced time spent gambling. More specifically, they examined the

effects of setting time limits on slot machine gamblers and found that if the gambler was prompted by a pop-up message, they were more likely to choose a time limit and they also spent less time gambling (compared to those that were not prompted by a pop-up message).

A study by Auer, Malischnig and Griffiths (2014a) investigated the effects of a slot machine pop-up message in a real gambling environment by comparing the behavioural tracking data of two representative random samples of 400,000 gambling sessions before and after the pop-up message was introduced. The study comprised approximately 200,000 gamblers. The results indicated that, following the viewing of a pop-up message after 1,000 consecutive gambles on an online slot machine game (i.e., *"You have now played 1,000 slot games. Do you want to continue? [YES/NO]"*), nine times more gamblers ceased their gambling session than did those gamblers who had not viewed the message. The authors suggested that pop-up messages can influence a small number of gamblers to cease their playing session, and that pop-ups appear to be another potentially helpful social responsibility tool in reducing excessive play within session. Previous studies (i.e., Monaghan, Blaszczynski & Nower, 2009; Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2010) had reported that messages encouraging self-appraisal resulted in a significantly greater effect on self-reported thoughts during experimental sessions and subsequent EGM playing behaviour compared to pure informative messages. For example, a message that encouraged self-appraisal in the study by Monaghan and Blaszczynski (2010) was *"Do you know how long you have been playing? Do you need to think about a break?"*

Additionally, normative feedback has been emphasized as an important aspect in facilitating behavioural change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Xu and Harvey (2014) investigated the hot-hand fallacy and the gambler's fallacy, two well-known cognitive beliefs among gamblers, in a real world online gambling setting. They found that people who won were more likely to win again (apparently because they chose safer odds than before) whereas those who lost were more likely to lose again (apparently because they chose riskier odds than before). They concluded that the gamblers' own behaviour created the hot-hand and gamblers' fallacy effects. Addressing cognitive beliefs such as the gamblers' fallacy or the hot-hand fallacy have been reported to change gamblers' subsequent beliefs (Gallagher, Nicki, Otteson & Elliot, 2011).

Using the same methodology as that of Auer et al. (2014a), the same research team (Auer, et al., 2014b) investigated whether enhanced content on a pop-up message had any additional effect on player behaviour (i.e., can a pop-up message stop players gambling after a long gambling session).

Their study was again conducted in a real-world environment by comparing the behavioural tracking data of two representative random samples of 800,000 gambling sessions in two conditions (i.e., simple pop-up message versus an enhanced pop-up message).

In September 2013, the content of the pop-up message was changed and further enhanced addressing self-appraisal, providing normative feedback, and addressing cognitive beliefs commonly found among gamblers. Whereas the previous pop-up message simply notified gamblers that they had played 1,000 consecutive slot games and asked whether they wanted to continue or not, the new pop-up message delivered more content. The new pop-up message (translated from German, the native language used on the Austrian site) read: “We would like to inform you, that you have just played 1,000 slot games. Only a few people play more than 1,000 slot games. The chance of winning does not increase with the duration of the session. Taking a break often helps, and you can choose the duration of the break”. The reasoning behind the messaging is as follows:

- “*We would like to inform you, that you have just played 1,000 slot games*”: This part of the message objectively informs players about the behaviour they engaged in.
- “*Only a few people play more than 1,000 slot games*”: This part of the message provides normative feedback. Only 1.5% of playing sessions exceeds 1,000 consecutive slot games.
- “*The chance of winning does not increase with the duration of the session*”: This part of the message addresses a common misbelief among gamblers (i.e., the gamblers’ fallacy).
- “*Taking a break often helps, and you can choose the duration of the break*”: This part of the message provides advice and leaves the decision up to the player and is in line with the techniques of motivational interviewing (Millner & Rollnick, 1991).

Apart from the content of the message, nothing else in the pop-up was changed (e.g. size, location on the screen, etc.). The player had to press the less visible “*Spiel beenden*” (“*Close game*”) button to exit the playing session. If the player presses the more dominant “OK” button, the pop-up disappears and the playing session continues. This is important with respect to the interpretation of the results. All changes in effectiveness can solely be traced back to changes in message content as all other confounding variables were identical to the previously published study by Auer et al (2014).

The effectiveness of the pop-up message was determined by the number of sessions that terminated after playing 1,000 consecutive slot games. Of the 11,232 sessions that lasted at least 1,000 consecutive slot games prior to the pop-up message change, 75 sessions immediately terminated after the simple pop-up message was shown (0.67%). This behaviour was almost certainly due to the appearance of the pop-up message. After the new pop-up was introduced,

169 sessions immediately terminated when the pop-up message was shown at 1,000 consecutive slot games (1.39%). The results indicated that the additional normative and motivational content doubled the number of gamblers who stopped playing after they receive the enhanced pop-up message compared to the simple pop-up message. More specifically, twice as many gamblers ceased to gamble when presented with an enhanced pop-up message compared to a simple pop-up message. This enhanced pop-up contained normative, self-appraisal, and cognitive-belief content as well as behavioural advice. The data again suggested that pop-up messages can influence a small number of gamblers to cease their playing session and that the delivered message content is an important part of this intervention strategy.

## Voluntary self-exclusion

Voluntary self-exclusion (VSE) initiatives are now very common and although these contracts have some value in containing the harms to established problem gamblers, they could certainly be a lot more effective. The first formal VSE program is thought to be Manitoba (Canada) in 1989, quickly followed by Holland Casino (The Netherlands) in 1990. Since then, many gaming operators around the world have adopted VSE programs (casinos, betting shops, online gambling sites in many countries e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Holland, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, UK, US).

According to a review by Gainsbury (2010), the assessments of VSE programs internationally generally find that the majority of participants benefit from such schemes. These benefits include (i) decreases in gambling expenditure and improved financial circumstances, (ii) decreases in gambling frequency and time spent gambling, (iii) reduction in problem gambling severity and negative consequences of gambling, (iv) reduction in related psychological difficulties including depression and anxiety, and (v) feeling of having more control over their circumstances.

There is little research demonstrating whether they stop gambling in either the short-term or long-term as exclusion from one or more venues still leaves opportunities to gamble elsewhere (Williams, Simpson & West, 2007). However, a small proportion of problem gamblers appreciate the opportunity to self-exclude and this is clearly a valuable service for them.

Williams et al (2007; 2012) report that the effectiveness of offline self-exclusion programs can be measured in three ways. These are the: (i) utilization rate, (ii) percentage of self-excluders who successfully refrain from entering the gaming venue during the self-exclusion period, and (iii) impact self-exclusion has on overall gambling behaviour. Findings suggest 0.6%-7% of problem gamblers use VSE programs in Canada, US and Australia (Williams et al., 2012). Higher rate found in Holland due to proactive approaching of regular players (Bes, 2002; Goudriaan et al, 2009).

There has been only a limited amount of research examining how many self-excluders refrain from gambling at a venue where they have excluded themselves. Typical rates suggest around 20-25% of self-excluders attempt to re-gain access to the gambling venue they excluded themselves from (e.g. Ladouceur et al, 2000; 2007; Steinberg & Velardo, 2002; O'Neil et al, 2003) although higher compliance rates have been reported in Holland (Williams et al, 2007; 2012). There have been very few empirical reports of whether self-excluders curtail their gambling behaviour. Some studies report that when gamblers have self-excluded from one venue, they simply go and gamble elsewhere (De Bruin et al, 2001; Ladouceur et al, 2000). Studies have found gaming staff unable to detect breaches of self-exclusion (Schrans, Schellinck & Grace 2004).

The most positive evaluation was a Canadian study carried out by Ladouceur, Sylvain, and Gosselin (2007) who examined 161 self-excluders. Researchers from the same university also reported some success with an 'improved' self-exclusion program but the number of self-excluders in the data set (n=39) was very small (Trembley et al, 2008). After a two-year follow-up, most had significant reductions in the urge to gamble, the intensity of negative consequences, and pathological gambling scores using DSM criteria.

Some studies report that the majority of problem gamblers are detected if they attempt re-entry (e.g. Croucher et al, 2006). Studies have also reported self-excluders are generally satisfied with the program and feel it is effective (Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, 2007). Other studies have shown that the majority of self-excluders simply gamble at other venues where they are not excluded (Goudriaan et al, 2009; Responsible Gambling Council, 2008; BC Center For Social Responsibility, 2011), although some studies have found self-excluders significantly reduce their gambling during the VSE period (e.g. Hayer & Meyer, 2011a; 2011b; Nelson et al, 2010; Responsible Gambling Council, 2008; Tremblay et al, 2008). In relation to offline VSE, Williams et al., 2012) concluded that:

*"The most unambiguous impact is that most people who enter into these programs have a significant reduction in their gambling and problem gambling symptomatology. Undoubtedly, a good portion of this effect is due to the fact that some people taking this step have a recognized they have a problem, are highly motivated to do something about it, and have made a public proclamation that they do not intend to re-enter casinos. The subsequent behavioural changes observed in self-excluders are not fundamentally different that what is observed in people presenting themselves to any form of gambling treatment. The additional utility of self-exclusion lies in its potential to provide additional external constraints on the person's gambling when his/her motivation falters" (p.49).*

However, Griffiths (2014) noted that the studies evaluating the effects of VSE have (i) typically had very small sample sizes, (ii) typically used self-report methods, (iii) only been carried out in a few countries or jurisdictions (Australia, New Zealand Canada, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, a few US states), (iv) only been carried out on casino gamblers and only assess the effect on their casino gambling, and (v) typically do not assess other important factors (e.g. whether the self-excluders are enrolled in a treatment program, the amount of social support they receive, etc.).

Furthermore, Williams et al (2012) also note there are other factors that need to be taken into account when assessing the effectiveness of VSE programs. These include (i) whether the bans are irrevocable, (ii) whether longer bans are available, (iii) how widely applicable the ban is, (iv) the perceived and actual chances of re-entry being detected, (v) the consequences for the gambler of detection (e.g. forfeiture of any winnings), (vi) the consequences for the gaming operator in failing to detect, and (vii) the availability of complimentary treatment.

Research examining offline self-exclusion has almost exclusively viewed self-exclusion schemes as being about protecting problem gamblers. However, this is not necessarily the case with online gambling. Compared to offline self-exclusion, there has been even less research on online self-exclusion schemes. Here, most of the research has examined what online gamblers actually think about self-exclusion schemes and/or their use of them. The *Global Online Gambler Survey* (International Gaming Research Unit, 2007) collected data from 10,865 online gamblers. The survey specifically asked about the use of online social responsibility tools. Although no single feature stood out as critically important, 58% stated that they considered self-exclusion as 'quite useful' (with 23% saying it was 'very' or 'extremely' useful).

In another survey of 2,348 online gamblers (all clientele of Svenska Spel) examining online social responsibility tools via the PlayScan behavioural tracking system, Griffiths et al (2009) reported that a quarter of their sample used PlayScan. Over one-third of respondents (42%) reported the self-exclusion features to be 'quite useful' or 'very useful'. Just under one in five PlayScan users (17%) had actually used one of the self-exclusion features. In another study of online gamblers, Hayer and Meyer (2010) carried out a follow-up survey one year after the initiation of self-exclusion with a small sub-sample (n=20). They reported that the restriction of access to a single online gambling site had favourable psychosocial effects.

Despite the limited empirical evidence showing whether self-exclusion schemes are effective, gamblers (particularly those online) appear to appreciate short-term self-exclusion facilities even if they do not have a problem with gambling. For instance, in the study by Griffiths, Wood and Parke (2009), online gamblers reported that the most useful self-exclusion feature was the 7-day self-exclusion rated as 'quite/very useful' by just under half of respondents (46%). This was followed by 1-month self-exclusion (24%), 24-hour self-exclusion (24%), and permanent self-exclusion (16%). These types of self-exclusion are likely to be associated with non-problem gamblers who may want to restrict their gambling behaviour to a very specific instance. Given the (presumed) unproblematic nature of internet gambling among respondents, it was unsurprising that only 16% thought permanent self-exclusion would be useful to them personally. If anything, this might appear to be a slightly higher figure than might have been predicted as it could be argued that non-problem gamblers would be unlikely to make use of a permanent self-exclusion.

As noted above, the seven-day exclusion period was the most useful with almost a half of participants endorsing this as their most favoured. This may have been especially useful for those who do not want to gamble for a particular period such as the week before a monthly 'pay day'. One-month and one-day self-exclusion periods were most popular for around half the participants (approximately 25% each). These types of self-exclusion are more likely to be associated with non-problem gamblers who may want to restrict their gambling behaviour to a very specific instance such as preceding a night of heavy drinking (e.g. 24-hour self-exclusion) or a particular time of the year like the run up to Christmas (e.g. one-month self-exclusion). Overall, these results suggest that self-exclusion is not a tool for problem gamblers but more generally a tool for responsible gambling.

## Customer interaction

A number of authors (e.g. Delfabbro, King & Griffiths, 2012) have raised the issue about the extent to which the gaming industry should take a proactive role in identifying and assisting people that appear to have gambling problems. Existing staff training provisions in land-based gambling typically encourage staff to assist people who show obvious signs of distress, who confess to having difficulties, or who are acting in a disruptive, abusive or violent manner. Unless required by legislation, most training provisions do not require staff or venues in general to play any active role in trying to look for indicators or patterns of behaviour that might indicate that a particular person should be assisted (Delfabbro Osborn, McMillen, et al., 2007).

Several reasons have often been advanced to explain why this might be the case. First, industry staff members are typically not trained to diagnose problem gambling in situ. Industry respondents will often argue that it is inappropriate for non-clinically or psychologically trained people to make a judgment about the status of gamblers (Allcock, 2002). A second problem is the threat of resentment and customer privacy. Unsolicited scrutiny of customer behaviour could be considered a violation of trust by some patrons and evoke an angry response (Delfabbro et al, 2012), although there are international examples which suggest that this process can be facilitated by appropriate staff training. Finally, it has been

argued that venue staff may not have sufficient time to observe particular patrons in enough detail to make any sort of judgment about their disposition (Allcock, 2002).

Despite these practical impediments, there are still likely to be contexts in which the process of behavioural profiling may be of value. In some venues (e.g. European casinos), where identification is checked before entry and there is some consistent organizational structure across multiple venues, it may be possible for the behaviour of individual players to be tracked over a longer period. For instance, Hafeli and Schneider (2006) have reported that in Swiss casinos files are opened for particular players of interest and potential indicators of gambling-related problems are systematically recorded. Opportunities may also arise in situations where there is greater capacity for staff to obtain a closer working knowledge of certain individual players. For example, in smaller venues, in membership only clubs, or specific tables or rooms at casinos, staff may have the capacity to interact with the same players on repeated occasions and therefore obtain greater information about the nature of the players' behaviour and status.

Such action is common in Holland and is part of Holland Casino social responsibility protocol (Griffiths, 2010) where incident registration can be undertaken based on a range of 28 indicators classified into five categories (Verbal; Behavioural; Demeanour; Other; Visit frequency) (Hancock, 2011). Other similar policies and indicator checklists (of varying length and rigour) have reported been used at Crown Casino in Melbourne (Australia), SkyCity Casino in Auckland (New Zealand) and Christchurch Casino (New Zealand) where gaming legislation requires that a policy for identifying possible gambling-related harm be put in place. Many gambling venues (including betting shops) believe that customer interaction is important in both facilitating repeat business and harm minimisation. A recent review of empirical studies by Delfabbro et al (2012) indicates that there do appear to be some valid and reliable indicators or behavioural profiles that might be used to potentially identify problem gamblers in offline gambling venues and that these could be disseminated in gaming industry staff training.

A study by Hing, Nisbet and Nuske (2010) interviewed gaming venue staff. Most felt reasonably confident in being able to assist people who self-reported as having difficulties with gambling, but few felt confident about proactively approaching patrons. It was generally considered easier to assist people if they were regular patrons and where there had been some opportunity to build some personal rapport, but it was also acknowledged that many problem gamblers are also secretive and made active attempts to conceal their difficulties and avoid contact with staff.

Another potential challenge in gaming staff identifying problem gamblers is that the data in empirical studies uses aggregated results. Although problem gamblers are likely to share many similarities, it is also known that different subgroups of gamblers very likely exist. These views suggest that the significance of particular indicators may, therefore, differ depending upon the type of gambler. For example, in a number of these models or typologies, a distinction is often drawn between gamblers who are emotionally vulnerable and gamble to escape from feelings of anxiety or depression, and those who gamble because of the excitement or 'action'. Those gamblers who are more emotionally vulnerable may be more likely to display emotion when they gamble and be detectable because of these characteristics, whereas there may be others whose behaviour is distinctive because of stronger externalised behaviours (e.g. displays of anger, large bet sizes, histrionics, etc.). At present, based on existing research evidence, it is difficult to determine whether visible indicators cluster according to these subtype models, but it will be important for this possibility to be considered in future research.

## Age verification

Age verification is another social responsibility practice that is now common across many gaming operators. Many companies now require any customer wishing to register to gamble (online or offline) to have their age verified before their application is accepted. This ensures that no-one under age is able to access the gambling area. It has been suggested that the facility should be permanent as children and adolescents need to be protected. Given that research worldwide demonstrates that children and adolescents are one of the most high-risk vulnerable groups (e.g. Griffiths, 1995; 2002; 2011; Derevensky, et al 2004; Wood et al 2004), Griffiths and Wood (2008a) recommend that operators or their agents should prominently display the minimum age of entry and not make external premises attractive to youth.

Griffiths (2012) has noted there should be a sufficiently controlled and supervised point of entry to make underage gambling difficult. This means that gaming terminals should be prohibited unless they are supervised and/or in an area that no minor has access to. Although 18 (to 21) years-of-age is the legal age limit to gamble in many countries, it is recommended that anyone who appears to be under the age of 21 years should be challenged by staff to show ID. All betting shops operate a 'Think 21' policy in which anyone thought to be under 21 years of age is challenged to show they are over the legal age of gambling in betting shops (i.e. 18 years of age). Mandatory use of player cards would help to enforce this policy, although it is possible that an under-aged person could borrow a card from an older person in order to play.

Identity verification is carried out in a number of distinct ways. Offline it typically involves the gambler presenting two pieces of photographic ID (e.g. driving license, passport). Online, gaming companies may use credit card and/or social security number checks. Some online gaming operators only allow residents of their own country to gamble on their products (e.g. Svenska Spel in Sweden), and do this by using social security number checks (Griffiths, 2012).

## Commentary on betting shop FOBT data and other data on the ABB Code of for Responsible Gambling

The remainder of this report provides commentary on the data collected by the ABB since the new measures in the Code were introduced, with specific reference to the time and money spending limits, mandatory time- and money-based pop-up reminders, consumer information, customer interactions, voluntary self-exclusions, and age verification compliance. The machines data covered a 15-week period commencing March 1st, 2014 (when the new ABB Code of Conduct completed its roll-out nationally across all betting shops). Most of the data concerned gambling behaviour on fixed odds betting terminals and related to time and money spent and responsible gambling initiatives (e.g. limit setting features and pop-up messages).

FOBT session gambling behaviour: At a national level, the data showed that the typical session length on a FOBT was approximately nine minutes resulting in 33-39 consecutive plays. The amount of money typically put into the machine during the session was approximately £45 of which around £7 was lost. These data were very consistent across the 15-week period with little fluctuation on any of the spending parameters (for both time and money).

**Commentary:** These data suggest that most FOBT play at a session level is a relatively short-lasting activity (nine minutes) and that within-session losses are relatively small (£7). These data appear to directly contradict the media perception that players typically lose hundreds of pounds every session and play for hours at a time.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the ABB continue to collect and periodically review the time and spend data on FOBTs. It is also recommended that the ABB continue to let concerned stakeholders (e.g. the media, anti-gambling (or anti-FOBT lobby) groups have information concerning typical playing patterns to both correct and counterbalance the incorrect perceptions about FOBT play. While FOBTs may cause problematic behaviour in a small minority of players, the data appear to show that the vast majority of FOBT players gamble responsibly.

**Average voluntary time and money limits set by FOBT players:** At a national level among players that set time limits, the voluntary time limits set were approximately three-quarters of an hour (38-48 minutes). Among those players that set spending limits, the voluntary typical money limits were set at around £350-£450.

**Commentary:** These data suggest that the limits set are modest although there no comparative studies to evaluate whether these limit setting practices lie outside the norm. The average limits reported in the other few published studies earlier in the report relate to online gambling games and are not directly comparable with FOBTs.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended the ABB continue to offer limit setting tools for players and that the limits set by players remain voluntary as they know best as to what they can spend in terms of both time and money. It is also recommended that the ABB continues to monitor the limits set by players and follows players' spend levels over time (i.e. whether time and money spending limits remain stable, increase or decrease).

**Number of voluntary limit setting sessions across all FOBT players:** At a national level, the number of voluntary money limits set peaked in the first week that the ABB Code came into force (n=10,721) and declined every week with the lowest number in Week 15 (n=1,557). The same pattern was also observed for those that set voluntary time limits with the peak being the first week (n=5,652) and declining to the lowest number in Week 15 (n=832). At a national level, the percentage of sessions in which players set a voluntary spend limit was 0.27% in the first week and then declined every week to 0.04% in Week 15. At an individual betting shop level, the average number of voluntary money limits set peaked in the first week that the ABB Code came into force (n=1.3) and declined every week with the lowest number in Week 15 (n=0.19). The average number of voluntary time limits set peaked in the first week that the ABB Code came into force (n=0.68) and declined every week with the lowest number in Week 15 (n=0.10).

**Commentary:** These data clearly show that the publicity surrounding the introduction of limit-setting tools had some immediate effect with almost 11,000 instances of within-session limit setting in the first week. Studies elsewhere suggest that less than 10% of gamblers voluntarily utilize responsible gambling tools (Griffiths, Wood & Parke, 2009) and in this context there is perhaps little surprise. Here the take-up of voluntary responsible tools was extremely low and suggests that the ABB needs to think about strategies that would increase adoption of such tools. Arguably the statistic of most concern is the dramatic drop in the number of sessions over the 15-week period where limit setting was utilized by players. The most likely explanations for this is that players (i) using the limit setting facilities initially did not want to keep going through the process of setting limits every time they started a new playing session and/or (ii) feel they have self-control and do not need to use the RG tools in the first place. If the ABB wants to encourage uptake of responsible gambling tools it needs to have a process whereby players only have to determine time and money limits once rather than on every single session (and which is used by online gambling companies that have limit setting measure options upon customer registration). The easiest way to do this would be via a player card (as used in countries such as Norway and Sweden). The data also show that the number of limit setting sessions at an individual betting shop level were extremely low (but this is necessarily the case given the low national take-up at Week 15). It may be worth seeing if there were any individual betting shops where take-up rates were higher as this might suggest that those shops are doing something to internally promote the tools in a way that other betting shops were not.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the ABB continue to develop strategies that increase adoption of such tools. For example, allow customers to only have to determine time and money limits once (rather than every time) via player accounts. It is also recommended that ABB members continue to improve consumer information to ensure players know the benefits of using such tools and do this in the most automated way possible.

**Player behaviour on reaching voluntary time and money spend limits:** In relation to those players that voluntarily set their own time and/or money spend limits, approximately 20-25% of players reached their pre-set money limits, and approximately 12-15% of players reached their pre-set time limits. Once the voluntary money spending limits had been reached, approximately 43-50% stopped playing immediately, 23-27% collected their money excess, carried on playing, but put no further money into the machine, 15-21% collected their money excess, carried on playing and put more money into the machine, 3-5% viewed the 30-second pop-up message, carried on playing but put no further money into the machine, and 6-9% viewed the 30-second pop-up message, carried on playing, and put further money into the machine. Once the voluntary time spending limits had been reached, approximately 71-80% stopped playing immediately, 10-15% viewed the 30-second pop-up message, carried on playing but put no further money into the machine, and 10-18% viewed the 30-second pop-up message, carried on playing, and put further money into the machine.

**Commentary:** The data relating to what players do once they have reached the voluntary limits is also encouraging. The vast majority of players that set their time and/or money limits did not reach them (with approximately 75% of players keeping within their voluntary money limits and approximately 85% keeping within their voluntary time limits). These data are not comparable with other studies mentioned earlier as those games related to online gambling. Of those that do reach the limits they set, many stop playing (with approximately 75% of those reaching their voluntary money spending limits stopping play or putting no more money in the machine, and approximately 85% of those reaching their time spending limits stopping play or putting no further money into the machine). The data also indicate that a small proportion of the players benefit from that pop-up message (“do you want to stop?”) as they either stopped playing immediately or carried on playing but did not put any further money in.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the use of pop-up messaging informing players of when they have reached mandatory time and money spending limits is continued as the messaging appears to be having the desired effect among some players. In-shop customer interactions could perhaps be used to further increase the percentage of players ceasing their play after reaching mandatory limits (if that was what the player desired as some people can afford to spend more money and/or time).

**Mandatory limit setting information across all FOBT players:** At a national level, the number of mandatory spend limit warnings each week was typically between 185,000 and 200,000. The number of mandatory time limit warnings nationally each week was typically between 333,000 and 369,000. At a national level, the percentage of sessions in which players received a mandatory spend limit warning each week was typically between 4.4% and 5.1%. The percentage of sessions in which players received a mandatory time limit warning each week was typically between 8.3% and 9.3%. At an individual betting shop level, the average number of mandatory spend limit warnings ranged between 22.2 and 24.4. The average number of mandatory time limit warnings ranged between 40.2 and 44.9.

**Commentary:** The number of mandatory warnings for the reaching of both time and money limits suggests that the significant minority of players that play above the norm are being systematically reminded of how much time and money they are spending. This can only be a positive thing. The data also show that approximately 95% of playing sessions are within mandatory spend limits, and that 90% of playing sessions are within mandatory time limits. This again appears to be a positive finding as it shows the vast majority of players appear to be playing responsibly and that the mandatory limits initially set by the ABB therefore appear to be appropriate.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that mandatory warnings are continued (as the small numbers of players that receive them are forced to think about how much time and/or money they have spent gambling) and that such data are periodically reviewed. Should the data show increased numbers of players exceeding mandatory limits over time, the ABB would need to take proactive action to inform and help players gamble more responsibly.

**Player behaviour after reaching mandatory time and money spend limits:**

At a national level, once the mandatory money spending limits had been reached, 4% stopped playing immediately, 21% carried on playing but put no further money into the machine, and the remaining 75% carried on playing and put more money into the machine. Once the mandatory time spending limits had been reached, 6% stopped playing immediately, 50% carried on playing but put no further money into the machine, and the remaining 44% carried on playing and put more money into the machine.

**Commentary:** The data relating to what players do after they have reached the mandatory limits is encouraging. The data clearly show that a significant minority of players either stop playing or do not put any more money into the machine once the mandatory time and/or monetary limits have been reached. Once mandatory limits have been reached, there is no evidence to suggest that those that carry on playing do not have the time and money resources to carry on playing. Should in-shop interactions and observation by staff members suggest that those carrying on are gambling beyond their means, players should perhaps be given comparable customer information that they are gambling more heavily than the typical shop player. Comparative and normative data given in a non-judgemental and non-confrontational manner help enable behavioural change. Another area that the mandatory limits appear to have impacted positively upon is in the area of customer interactions between staff and clientele. This has seen a sharp increase from October 2013 to December 2013 (12,439 interactions), January 2014 to March 2014 (271,154 interactions), and April 2014 to June 2014 (482,078 interactions). This is primarily driven by alerts going off behind the counter and staff responding to this.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that national mandatory limits are continued as these appear to be facilitating customer interaction. It is also recommended that the ABB consider ways in which to provide players with comparable customer information as this may lead to behavioural change with positive outcomes in terms of safer and more responsible gambling.

**Customer interactions:** The data clearly show that the number of customer interactions has risen substantially over a 9-month period. Between October and December 2013 there were 12,349 customer interactions reported. Between January and March 2014, this rose to 271,154 customer interactions. In the final three-month period (April to June 2014), the number of customer interactions rose to a total of 482,078.

**Commentary:** Customer interaction is arguably at the heart of the new Code and of all the data collected since the Code's introduction, it is customer interactions that have most significantly increased. Between December 2013 and June 2014, there has been an increase in customer interaction of over 3800%. Much of this may be due to the fact that a customer interaction now often takes place when mandatory limits have been reached by customers playing on FOBTs. However, another factor may be that in the new Code, betting shop staff have been encouraged to spend more time on the shop floor. At present, operators nationally provide different guidelines to staff as to whether such interactions should be mandatory or taken based on assessment of that particular customer. For example, some operators require staff to automatically interact with a customer on receiving a behind the counter notification that they player has exceeded a voluntary limit, but others do not. Furthermore, operators differ in which interactions are logged and which not. Some log every instance of asking a customer "if they are OK" whilst others would not qualify this as warranting recording in their numbers. This has an impact on the reading of the figures.

**Recommendations:** The policy of staff members being recommended to speak with players once they have reached a mandatory limit or reached their voluntary limit should be encouraged across all operators nationally. As noted earlier in the report, developing a rapport with players is important for the development of staff-player relations and is likely to be of great benefit should players find that they are developing a problem. An enforced customer interaction following a voluntary or mandatory limit being reached will almost certainly make players think about how much time and/or money they are spending and any mechanism that gets players to address how much time and/or money they have spent is to be commended. The increase of over 3800% in customer interactions – while arguably pleasing – does not provide any indication about the quality and content of the interactions, although any such interaction with players should have at the very least communicated to the player that they had reached a limit deemed by the ABB as one that is among the bigger spending sessions (whether related to time or money spent). In a review of empirical studies examining whether problem gambling and/or risky behaviour can be identified by staff within gambling venues before

gamblers formally seek help, Delfabbro, King and Griffiths (2012) noted that smaller gambling venues provide greater capacity for staff to obtain a closer working knowledge of certain individual players. For example, in smaller venues staff members may have the capacity to interact with the same players on repeated occasions and therefore obtain greater information about the nature of the players' behaviour and status. This observation suggests that staff betting offices (which tend to be much smaller than other gambling venues such as casinos, arcades and bingo halls) might have greater chance of interacting with customers compared to other types of gambling venue.

**Voluntary self-exclusion by players:** In relation to the numbers of players opting for voluntary self-exclusion, the data provided shows that there has seen a steady increase from October 2013 to December 2013 (4,700 voluntary self-exclusions), January 2014 to March 2014 (5,398 voluntary self-exclusions), and April 2014 to June 2014 (6,328 voluntary self-exclusions).

**Commentary:** The data provide good evidence that the new Code is making more players think about whether they should be playing FOBTs in the first place. Although players can self-exclude for a variety of reasons, one of the main reasons is because they feel they are not in control of their gambling (and may be a problem gambler). The data shows that voluntary self-exclusions increased by 35% over the data collection period.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that ABB members continue to offer voluntary self-exclusion as this is a responsible gambling initiative that clearly helps a small but significant minority deal with their gambling. The significant increase on voluntary self-exclusions is almost certainly due to the visibility of the new Code to players at a local level.

**Age verification compliance:** The data show that the total number of age verification tests carried out by an independent company between October 2013 and June 2014 (using a 'mystery shopping' methodology using young people aged 18 to 20 years) was 9,446 (3,421 between October and December 2013; 3,264 between January and March 2014; 2,761 between April and June 2014). Results showed that compliance rates were 79.2%, 85.3%, and 79.9% respectively (i.e. the percentage of young people challenged either on entry to the betting shop, at the betting shop counter, at the FOBT, or during FOBT play). The compliance rates for challenge on entry were 59.1%, 65.9%, and 64.1% (i.e. the percentage of young people challenged when they first entered the betting shop premises). The overall number of challenges made by betting shop staff over the whole period (April 2014 to June 2014) was 443,170.

**Commentary:** The data provide good evidence that a high percentage of betting shop staff enforce the ‘Think 21’ policy as at least four out of five young people across all three test periods were asked for proof of their age. This is pleasing to see and is to be commended. Obviously, there is room for improvement as approximately one in five young people were not challenged about their age at any point during their presence within the betting shop environment. It was also pleasing to note that if some young people weren’t asked for proof of age on first entering the shop, they were asked at the counter or when on the FOBTs. It is not known why one in five young people were not approached by betting shop staff but it may be the case that (a) staff members genuinely thought the young people in the independent tests carried out looked over 21 years, and (b) some staff members may not have approached such people for specific personal reasons (e.g. female staff may not have approached young men because they did not want to have to deal with the consequences if the person refused to leave if they did not have proof of age).

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that all staff members in all betting shops are reminded by their local shop managers to be vigilant in enforcing the ‘Think 21’ policy. The policy (as outlined earlier in this report) is there for a good reason – young people are more susceptible to problem gambling. If there are other reasons such as only female staff being present in a predominantly all-male environment, local managers may need to think about staffing rotas that maximise experienced staff being on shift.

**Responsible gambling information awareness:** Research was carried out on adults aged over 18 years by Kantar Media who examined responsible gambling awareness across two waves in the week prior to the launch of the new Code (21-23 February, 2014; n=2,052) and the week after the launch of the Code (7-9 March; n=2,058). The results showed that awareness of betting shops encouraging responsible gambling rose from 27% (Wave 1) to 40% (Wave 2). The rise in awareness was mainly attributable to press coverage surrounding the Code launch but approximately 10% of respondents also noted they had seen the poster campaigns adorning betting shop windows (a figure that doubled to approximately 20% among those identifying themselves as betting shop customers [BSCs; n=398]). Other sources of awareness about the new Code came from other people talking about it (5%), posters inside betting shops (4%; BSCs 21%), comments on social media (3%), leaflets inside betting shops (3%; BSCs 13%), messages on the machines (2%; BSCs 12%), announcements inside the betting shop on television, radio and/or tannoy (1%; BSCs 6%), and being told by the betting shop staff (1%; BSCs 5%).

All people surveyed were asked to agree or disagree with five statements concerning responsible gambling on a scale of 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree). The five statements were:

- Bookmakers are actively promoting a message of responsible gambling to their customers.
- Bookmakers encourage their customers to set limits on how much they gamble.
- Bookmakers make gambling support groups and helpline numbers visible.
- Bookmakers don’t take problem gambling seriously enough.
- Betting shops will never be able to protect vulnerable people adequately over how much they gamble.

Results showed that across the total populations before and after the Code launch there were few significant differences in attitude. However, results also showed those who were aware of the new Code were significantly more positive on all statements (as were those who identified themselves as betting shop customers).

Another survey was carried in April 2014 out by RSVP Research (Emadi, 2014) on Bonus Club members of *William Hill*. The research aimed to (i) measure the awareness of the *William Hill*’s ‘responsible gaming’ message, (ii) assess the attitude of gaming machine customers towards responsible gambling, and (iii) gauge the likely take up of new game machine limit-setting technology. A total of 2,540 members were contacted but only 179 participated (7.3% response rate). The results showed that 99% of the participants were aware of responsible gambling policies and initiatives. Following the introduction of the new Code, the majority of *William Hill* customers were aware of machines that allowed players to set limits (89%), posters about limit setting (78%), messages on machines about limit setting (74%), posters that included a national helpline gambling number (56%), posters that explained what *GamCare* is (56%), and *GamCare* leaflets (55%). However, it should also be noted that when shown the leaflets or posters, 96% then said they recalled them. Only 2% of respondents claimed they had no awareness of any of these responsible gambling initiatives.

The survey also showed that there was widespread agreement on the availability of responsible gambling information. For instance, there was high agreement on the statements “The betting shop(s) I use have clear information and notices about responsible gambling” (92%), “Information on responsible gambling is easy to find and clearly explained on betting websites” (76%). However, 73% believed that betting shops would never be able to protect vulnerable groups adequately over how much they gamble. In relation to their own experiences, the research showed that:

- 51% agreed that bookmakers provide help and encouragement to their customers to gamble responsibly.
- 34% agreed that a shop team member had clearly explained responsible gambling measures to them.
- 32% agreed that a shop team member had showed them how to set voluntary limits on a machine.
- 32% agreed that bookmakers don't take the issue of responsible gambling seriously.
- 27% agreed that the bookmakers' approach to responsible gambling had helped them to make better decisions about how much money and how often they bet.

The research also reported that three-quarters had never set limits themselves and provided a number of reasons as to why not including: it wasn't something they felt they had a need for (54%), they weren't interested in setting limits (38%), it sounded too technical (4%), they weren't aware of limit setting (3%), or other reasons (10%).

**Commentary:** The research by *Kantar Media* showed that awareness of responsible gambling initiatives significantly increased after the Code was launched in March both among those that frequented betting shops and those that did not. The research also shows that the majority believe the bookmaking industry is taking the issue of problem gambling seriously (as highlighted that 68% in the *RSVP* study think betting shops take problem gambling seriously). The research by *RSVP* among *William Hill's* customers clearly shows that responsible gambling initiatives are well known but that most players do not feel they are relevant to them. There was little evidence that the new Code changed attitudes about responsible gambling and the data from these two studies suggest that most people view responsible gambling as something that applies to problem gamblers rather than all gamblers. Results of these research studies also show that those that frequent betting shops generally think the bookmakers are doing a good job in helping the clientele more responsibly but that betting shops cannot stop those that are vulnerable from gambling and/or developing gambling problems. The research also shows that a significant minority of betting shop customers are aware of RG messaging on machines and that there is high awareness of limit setting facilities on FOBTs. Given that many betting shop customers do not play FOBTs, it is highly likely that such customers would be aware of machine features designed to facilitate responsible play. The results of the two research studies clearly show that the new Code is being taken on board by individual betting shops nationally as there was high awareness of responsible gambling and measures to help facilitate responsible gambling (even if those asked did not use these features themselves).

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that the ABB retain all of the information dissemination initiatives surrounding responsible gambling as there is little evidence of a negative effect. However, more needs to be done to highlight the message that responsible gambling is not just about problem gambling but about anyone that gambles. Gamblers need convincing that responsible gambling tools are for anyone that gambles and are akin to seat belts and air bags in cars. These are safety features that rarely come to be used but can be lifesaving in extreme circumstances. Given that the research data collected appears to show that the majority of betting shop customers do not feel that the responsible gambling measures in place will not prevent vulnerable individuals that have a gambling problem, it is recommended that more is done via information dissemination to highlight what vulnerabilities the Code is trying to minimise. It is highly probable that when answering questions relating to 'vulnerable people' that those questioned were only thinking about problem gamblers or gambling addicts. Vulnerable people include minors, the intoxicated, the learning disabled, and problem gamblers. It is clear that the responsible gambling initiatives and policies in place clearly prevent some of these vulnerable groups from gambling in the first place and that there is good evidence that such initiatives are effective. It is also recommended that the Code is not designed to stop those people that are already problem gamblers. All the betting industry can do in these cases is to refer such people on to service providers. The Code is likely to be of more use to those that are developing a problem and providing mechanisms that can help such people to minimise harm. Again, the message that responsible gambling is for all gamblers and not just problem gamblers is key here. The results from the *RSVP* research study appears to indicate that 'saturation point' has already been reached about responsible gambling (at least among customers of *William Hill*). Therefore, it is recommended that such players need 're-educating' about who such measures are aimed at (i.e. all gamblers not just problem gamblers). It is also recommended that FOBT players are given reasons as to why it is in their best interests to use limit setting features of the machines (particularly as the research by *RSVP* suggests very few (15%) of *William Hill's* customers say they are likely to use such features in the future).

## Conclusions

These results taken as a whole indicate that the new ABB Code of Conduct is having an impact. Whether the impact is having a positive impact in terms of promoting responsible gambling and minimizing harm in a wider sense remains to be seen but the early indications outlined in this report are positive (although the sharp decline in the number of players that are voluntarily setting their own limits is an area that needs to be addressed).

The data clearly shows that the number of players voluntarily self-excluding from betting shops nationally over a nine-month period has substantially increased by 35%, and that the number of customer interactions between staff members and clientele in betting shops nationally has dramatically increased by 3,875%. The data also appear to indicate that most FOBT players stay within their own time and money spending limits, and that the typical playing sessions are relatively low spending and short. The additional player protection measures such as pop-up messaging appear to be having a positive effect on many players and suggest that all of the measures introduced since March 1st (2014) should be retained.

Overall, the data collected since the Code was introduced appears to indicate that responsible gambling initiatives are perceived as being for problem gamblers. This perception is not only shared by gamblers but can also be found among other stakeholders in the gambling studies field (e.g. treatment providers, academic researchers, policymakers, regulators, etc.). This perception has to change for responsible gambling initiatives, measures and policies to succeed.

Thankfully, the number of research studies in responsible gambling has been steadily increasing. This has both helped to shape RG theory and improve upon the overall effectiveness of gaming company RG policies, procedures and protocols. Consequently, the range of responsible gambling tools and features has expanded considerably, to include a diverse range of initiatives such as: enhanced player information and support services, self-diagnostic tests, behavioural tracking and feedback, pre-commitment and limit-setting (for both time and money), dynamic warning messages, educational videos, and game risk analysis (see for example: Auer & Griffiths, 2013; Auer, Malischnig & Griffiths, 2014; Bernhard, Lucas, & Jang, 2006; Griffiths, Wood & Parke, 2009; Monaghan, 2008; 2009; Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2007; 2010a; 2010b; Nisbet, 2005; Sharpe et al, 2005; Williams, West & Simpson, 2007; Wohl et al, 2010; 2011; Wood & Bernhard, 2010; Wood & Griffiths, 2008; Wood, Shorter & Griffiths, 2014a; 2014b). As noted at the start of this report, there is now a realisation that problem-free players make for a better business, and that long-term customers are going to be those who continue to play, without problems, primarily for reasons of leisure.

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