

PER CAPITA ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE UK

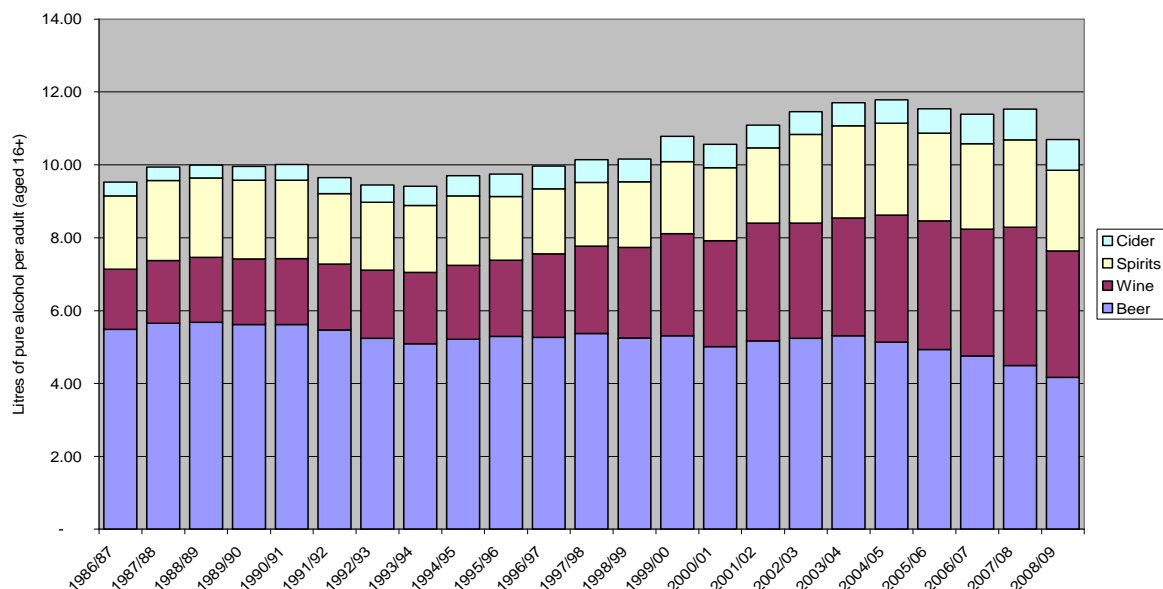
Measuring per capital alcohol consumption

- Alcohol consumption can be estimated either by consumer survey or taxation data.
- A survey has the advantage that it seeks to measure what the consumer actually drinks and it therefore takes account of alcohol purchased overseas, etc. Taxation data has the advantage that it is not subject to bias such as under-reporting by the consumer; it is therefore generally regarded as the more reliable statistic.

Trends in per capita consumption¹²

- The UK's alcohol consumption has fluctuated considerably over the past 100 years or so. In 1900 it stood at approximately 11 litres of pure alcohol annually per head of population. By 1950 it had dropped to below 4 litres. By 2000 it had risen again to over 8 litres and it currently stands at 8.9 litres.
- Changes in the proportion of children in the population may affect the per capita consumption figure; it is therefore useful to measure consumption per adult head of population. This currently stands at 10.7 litres.

Fig 1 - Alcohol clearances per adult (aged 16+)



- The long-term rise in consumption since the 1950s seems to have peaked in 2004/5 and consumption has since fallen back by 9%.

¹ First report from the Health Committee: Alcohol; Session 2009-10: HC 151-1

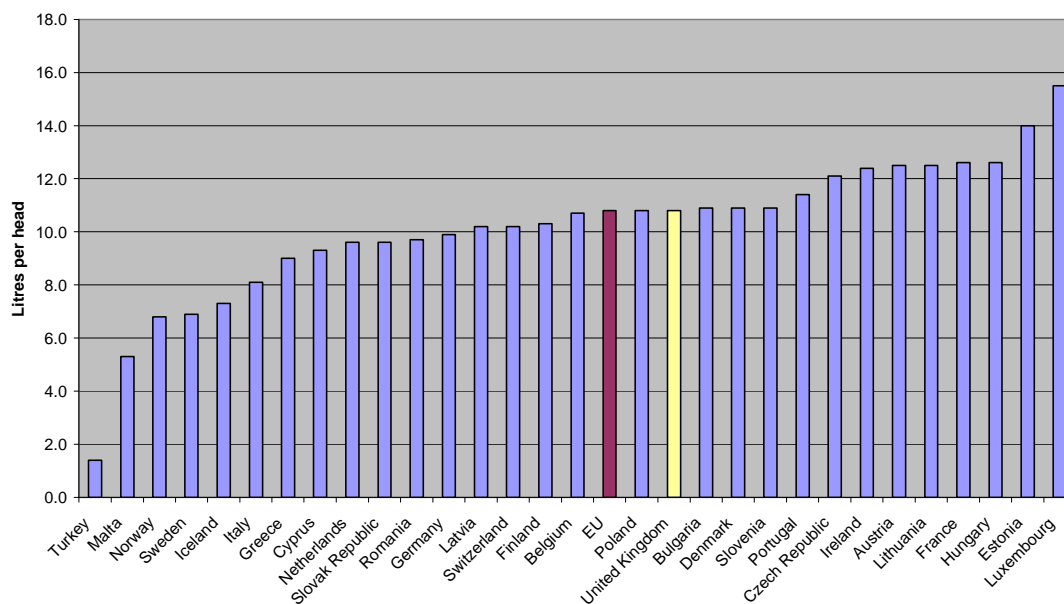
² HM Customs and Excise

- Beer is the most popular drink, followed by wine and then spirits.

International comparisons³

- In comparison with per capita consumption in other leading countries, the UK is mid-table. The heaviest drinking country in Europe apparently is Luxembourg with per capita consumption of 15.5 litres, though this figure is likely to be significantly inflated by cross-border trading.

Per capita consumption in EU countries among population aged 15 years and older



Usefulness of per capita consumption measure

- Per capita consumption data is interesting in that it provides top-level information on the nation’s overall alcohol consumption. It, however, can hide information on drinking patterns and trends among population sub-groups (e.g. what proportion of the population is drinking excessively? Is women’s drinking going up or down?). Such information relies on survey data and is explored in other Fact Sheets (see, for example, Fact Sheets on “Excessive and Binge Drinking”, “Drinking among Under-18s” and “Women’s Drinking”).

³ OECD Health Data ,2010; WHO, 2010