

Response to the findings of the 2011 Ipsos MORI Young People Omnibus

Introduction

The National Lottery Commission takes our legal duty to prevent under 16s from playing the National Lottery very seriously. While the National Lottery is safe and fun to play for the vast majority of players, we work hard to make sure that vulnerable groups such as children are protected.

We have worked closely with Camelot to put in place a number of measures to ensure that National Lottery games do not attract underage players, and to prevent any who do try to play.

To help us do this we need a firm evidence base from which to make our decisions. We commissioned research from Ipsos MORI which surveyed nearly 3,000 children aged between 11 and 16 in England and Wales to find out their behaviour in relation to the National Lottery and gambling more widely. We worked with the Gambling Commission to make sure that this study will complement their research relating to the prevalence of UK adult gambling.

The headline finding from this report is that 10% of children under 16 (11-15 year olds) claim that they have played the National Lottery in the last week. This is consistent with the levels of underage play over the past five years. Strict measures to discourage retailers from selling tickets to children were introduced in 1999 and have been effective in reducing levels of underage play, which have since stabilised at around 9-10%. However the Commission cannot be complacent and is constantly looking at ways to reduce the number of underage players even further.

Along with the headline figures there are a number of other interesting findings which we will need to examine in more depth to help us shape our regulation. For example the research found that most (73%) of children who say that they have played the National Lottery in the past week, did so while accompanied by their parent or guardian. We are interested to see how the National Lottery fits in with family life to see where we can best focus our efforts to reduce underage play. To help us understand and address this we are planning to carry out further research including talking to experts in family issues, doing qualitative research with players and consulting parents through parenting forums, such as Mumsnet.

Research method

The survey of nearly 3,000 children aged between 11 and 16 in England and Wales was conducted independently by Ipsos MORI. The fieldwork for the survey was conducted between 23 January and 15 April 2011.

Previously we have carried out larger surveys of up to 9000 children every three years. We have decided that it would be more useful and efficient to carry out smaller surveys but on a more frequent basis. This approach provides more current information, allowing us to act promptly where required, as well as costing less. We are currently in discussions with the Gambling Commission to make sure that this important work continues when the two bodies merge.

Main findings

- The number of under 16s who report playing the National Lottery in the last week is 10%.

This compares with 9% in 2008 and 2007, showing that the levels of underage play have been unchanged for the past five years.

Camelot have a mystery shopping programme in place called Operation Child which tests National Lottery retailers to make sure they do not sell tickets to children who appear to be under 16. This has been a licence requirement since 2001. While these questions are not directly comparable with previous surveys we are pleased that significantly fewer young people continue to report that they have played the National Lottery now than before the introduction of Operation Child.

- The number of under 16s who report taking part in any type of gambling in the past seven days is 23%.

This is in line with what we have seen previously as it compares with 19% 2008 and 22% in 2007.

- 7% of under 16s said they have played a scratchcard in the past seven days.

This question did not specifically ask about play on National Lottery scratchcards so respondents are likely to have included in their responses playing non National Lottery scratchcards, which could include promotional scratchcards that can come free with products such as fast food or other purchases.

Ipsos MORI believes that this may explain why there are more under 16s reporting to have played scratchcards (7%) this year than reported playing National Lottery scratchcards in previous surveys (4%), when the question specifically asked about National Lottery scratchcards.

- Of those who have played the National Lottery in the past week, 73% did so while with a parent or guardian. Four in five (79%) tickets purchased were bought accompanied by someone aged 16 or over.

The majority of young people who said that they have played the National Lottery in the past week claim they did so while they were accompanied by their parent or other adult. The Commission is very interested to explore this statistic further. It could be that under 16s are not actually buying National Lottery tickets themselves but they are being bought them by their parents as gifts or even that the children are simply helping their parents pick the numbers.

- Only 6% of under 16s think that it is legal for them to play the National Lottery

On average children tend to think that legal age limits are higher than they are in reality

Next steps

The purpose of this research is to help us improve the way we regulate the National Lottery by getting a better understanding of how under 16s interact with it.

The research has shown that the steps we have taken previously continue to make a difference but that the number of underage players has not continued to fall. We will assess what appropriate action we should take to reduce the number further.

There are a number of issues raised in the findings that we will explore. For example we are very interested in how the National Lottery fits into family life, looking at the nature of children's involvement in participating overall and purchasing products.

Operationally we remain in dialogue with Camelot about what steps we can take to further tackle underage play - our ongoing research ensures we have a firm evidence base for these discussions.