

Government launches review to ensure gambling laws are fit for digital age

- National Lottery minimum age raised to 18 to protect young people
- Online stake limits, gambling advertising and age limits to be considered
- Gambling Commission's role and powers will also be looked at

Online restrictions, marketing and the powers of the Gambling Commission will be looked at as part of a call for evidence, to examine in detail how gambling has changed over the past 15 years.

Protections for online gamblers like stake and spend limits, advertising and promotional offers and whether extra protections for young adults are needed will all be explored.

The findings will be used to inform any changes to the Gambling Act 2005 to ensure customer protection is at the heart of the regulations, while giving those that gamble safely the freedom to do so.

The review will also look at evidence on the action customers can take where they feel operators have breached social responsibility requirements, such as intervening to protect customers showing clear signs of problematic play, and how to ensure children and young people are kept safe from gambling-related harm.

The Government recognises the need to balance the enjoyment people get from gambling with the right regulatory framework and protections.

It has also been announced today that the minimum age for playing the National Lottery will be raised from 16 to 18 from October 2021.

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden, said:

“Whilst millions gamble responsibly, the Gambling Act is an analogue law in a digital age. From an era of having a flutter in a high street bookmaker, casino, racecourse or seaside pier, the industry has evolved at breakneck speed.

“This comprehensive review will ensure we are tackling problem gambling in all its forms to protect children and vulnerable people. It will also help those who enjoy placing a bet to do so safely.

“This builds upon our clear track record of introducing tough measures to protect people from the risk of gambling harm – banning the use of credit cards, launching tighter age verification checks and cutting the maximum stake on fixed odds betting terminals.”

Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage Nigel Huddleston said:

“We’re committed to protecting young people from gambling related harm which is why we are raising the minimum age for the National Lottery. Patterns of play have changed since its inception, with a shift towards online games, and this change will help make sure the National Lottery, although already low-risk, is not a gateway to problem gambling.”

It follows a range of measures recently introduced by the Government to protect consumers from the risk of gambling-related harm. These include cutting the maximum stake on fixed odds betting terminals, bringing in tighter age and identity checks for online gambling, banning gambling using credit cards and expanding national specialist support through the NHS Long Term Plan.

In September the Government launched a call for evidence to explore young people’s experiences of loot boxes in video games. This will provide a clearer picture of the size of the loot box market in the UK and fully examine any evidence of harms or links to problem gambling.

The review of the Gambling Act 2005 will also consider the Gambling Commission’s powers and resources to ensure it can keep pace with the licensed sector and tackle the black market.

In October the Gambling Commission introduced new rules on VIP schemes, and has called for evidence around how to ensure operators identify and intervene where people are at risk of harm, including through carrying out affordability checks. The Commission will also soon set out new rules on safer game design for online slots and withdrawing winnings.

Alongside the launch of the review, the Government is announcing its decision to raise the minimum age to play the National Lottery from 16 to 18, to protect young people from gambling related harm.

Since it began in 1994 the National Lottery’s games portfolio has changed significantly and there has been a growing trend towards online play and instant win games like scratchcards. Following a consultation, from October 2021 it will be illegal to sell all National Lottery products to under 18s.

The Government is working with the Gambling Commission and Camelot to roll out the new age limit across the National Lottery products as quickly as possible and to ensure that it is in place by October. Under current plans, online sales to 16 and 17 year olds will stop in April 2021.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The call for evidence will run for 16 weeks and will close on 31 March 2021.

Changes around the National Lottery minimum age will be brought into effect by October 2021 at the latest.

The Government has also published its response to the House of Lords Select Committee report on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry.

The first three of up to 14 new specialist clinics are open as part of the NHS Long-Term Plan to expand the geographical coverage of NHS services for people who experience serious gambling problems. A dedicated children and young person's service operates out of the National Problem Gambling Clinic in London.

The Department for Health and Social Care is working with the NHS and GambleAware to ensure best use of all available funding, and to align and integrate the expansion of treatment services across the system so patients get the right treatment at the right time.