

The Scottish Grand National Festival
Report by Licensing Standards Officer

Following a request made by the previous Licensing Board, I would like to bring to your attention my experience of the Scottish Grand National Festival held on Saturday 2nd April at Ayr Racecourse.

As members may be aware the Scottish National was held earlier than usual this year, which was dictated by the racing calendar and it was also one of the first large scale events to be held in South Ayrshire post-lockdown with approximately 13,500 in attendance on the Saturday. The event was also televised as usual and benefitted from the bars in the permanently licensed Princess Royal stand at Ayr Racecourse and a number of other permanent and temporary bar structures which were permitted due to an Occasional Licence, as is usual practice on larger race days.

Prior to the event I had discussions with Ross Donald the Premises Manager (and holder of the Occasional Licence) in particular regarding staff training and the management of the large number of temporary (agency) bar staff that are employed for the event. Further to this I also attended (accompanied by officers from Licensing at Police Scotland) a meeting with the agencies providing the staff for the race meeting and made it very clear what was required.

On the day of the Scottish Grand National (2nd April 2022) I attended the Racecourse for a number of hours and carried out checks at the bar areas, noting staff names and numbers (so that records could be checked) and observing if/when ID was being requested and how the queues were being managed and customers served.

Besides colleagues from Police Scotland and the majority of licensed stewards, I was one of the few other people wearing a mask, despite the requirement for face coverings still being in place. I did not notice any signage at bars, entrances or toilets to encourage face coverings and I am not aware of any announcements or messages to that effect.

Checks carried out by myself at the various temporary and permanent bar areas on the day quickly demonstrated that the 'Challenge 25' message was being ignored by staff and I witnessed NO examples of ID checks (other than one I instigated following discussion with a staff member). In addition to this I witnessed many examples of staff paying little or no attention to who they were serving, indeed I also observed drinks being handed to people who had not ordered them. In one particular case a female who had been standing next to me happily commented on having received 'free drinks' when she was handed two glasses (as she had not yet ordered) and she walked away. These examples in my opinion demonstrated that if staff were paying little or no attention to the person they were serving alcohol to then they would not be able to make an appropriate judgement on whether that person had already consumed too much alcohol and therefore should not be served.

There was however an obvious difference between the 'permanent' Racecourse Staff and those who had been brought in to work for the race meeting only. Some staff who were familiar to me were attempting to take on supervisory roles in a number of bar areas and were aware of where the refusals records were stored, however this was of limited use when the serving staff were not making use of these records or practices. Having spoken to one staff member who was working in a temporary hut in the champagne lawns about the need to request proof of age, he indicated he was aware of the requirement but was 'too busy' to do so and would adopt this practice when the bar 'got quieter'. At my request he then requested ID from the next customer but then failed to notice the year of birth when I questioned him as to the age of the customer.

Following my disappointing experiences at the various bars, I met with Ross Donald prior to the Scottish Grand National race and agreed that it was obvious that the staff training was not adequate and/or that staff were not carrying out checks and procedures as they had presumably been instructed to do so. For this reason I decided not to check the training records that had been provided by the agencies on this occasion. Mr Donald advised that he was also not happy with the service provided by all agency staff and that changes would be required in advance of the next large meeting.

On the day of the races I also became aware of a bar area that was not shown on the plan and which I later discovered was being run by an 'external company'. For this reason the bar supervisor did not understand my role or indeed the importance of complying with the requirements. Having requested to see the refusals record I was advised by them it was not necessary as due to the cost of a ticket to be within the champagne area there would be no under age drinkers. I attempted to explain the need for refusal of service to someone who had already had too much to drink and I was given a similar dismissive response. During my discussion with Ross Donald later in the day regarding this it was explained to me that the bar had been agreed with the management of the Racecourse and the staff were not organised by him but from an external company and he had little notice of this. I reminded Mr Donald that the licence is issued to him and the running of all bars and the conduct of all staff is his responsibility.

It is usual practice for a plan and list of bars and staffing to be provided to me in advance of the larger capacity race meetings. Due to a change in staffing structure and responsibilities at the Racecourse this information was not provided/available until the last minute this year and therefore the Occasional Licence was not able to be granted until the week of the race meeting. This practice of late provision of information is not one which should be repeated in future as there is no guarantee that the licensing service can accommodate the last minute grant of a licence due to staffing and availability and it is the applicants responsibility to make sure all information is available in advance.

Additionally following discussion at that time both Mr Donald and I agreed that the Scottish National meeting and Ayr Gold Cup meeting were not 'family friendly environments' and therefore the Children and Young Persons access on the day of these two meetings should be reviewed so that only patrons of 18 years and over are permitted access.

At the race meeting there were obvious signs of drunkenness and unacceptable behaviour and I am of the opinion that the failures I witnessed at the bars will have contributed considerably to this. On exiting the premises many patrons continued with unacceptable behaviour including causing damage to fences and walls in the neighbouring streets and urinating in private gardens and roads. Whilst I am aware that this behaviour mainly happened out with the grounds of the Racecourse, I am of the opinion that the alcohol consumed at the Racecourse was the main contributing factor to this behaviour and the complaints received from residents and the public on the day.

A debrief meeting took place on 28th April at Ayr Racecourse to discuss the Scottish Grand National and was attended by various Council departments to discuss the event itself and Police Scotland who were in attendance on the day in various roles. The meeting was not focused on licensing but intended to address a number of subjects and as a result there has been a request for various strategies and plans to be put in place prior to the Ayr Gold Cup meeting in September 2022.

In relation to licensing it was suggested at the meeting that an Alcohol Management Plan should be provided by the Racecourse and I would request that this Board endorsed this request and I would be happy to provide an update on this at the licensing Board meeting in August 2022. The Board may also request that the Occasional Licence for the Ayr Gold Cup in September is considered at a Board meeting rather than being granted under delegated powers and I would be keen to work with Mr Donald in advance of that Board meeting to ensure the application can be heard in time.

Catrina Andrew

Licensing Standards Officer

21st May 2022