

UK wine educators asked to get a licence

4 Jul 2006 by JR

More nonsense from the British government. After much reading of the fine print of their recent Licensing Act, it has been decided that wine classes cannot be given on premises that don't have a licence to sell alcohol. This would mean that every little classroom and church hall at which evening tasting classes for instance are given would have to painstakingly apply for a licence (expensive in both time and money), as well of course as every one of the premises used by such bodies as the Wine & Spirit Education Trust. The trade association is currently doing its best to fight back.

The Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) today calls on the Government to exempt trade education courses from the Licensing Act 2003. In a letter to Shaun Woodward MP [the one married to a Sainsbury who was a Tory until going over to the other side], the Minister responsible for Licensing, the WSTA argues that wine and spirit education courses should be given an exemption as they pose no risk to the four licensing objectives (see below). The WSTA further argue that learning to assess wines and spirits systematically and objectively with tasting samples should be viewed differently to everyday retail sales of alcohol.

The WSTA are currently in discussion with officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport after recently obtaining legal advice from Government lawyers stating that such education courses are considered a licensable activity under the Licensing Act 2003. Under the previous licensing regime providers of educational courses had not been required to obtain a licence. However, the new Act has brought about different interpretations of the Act by licensing authorities which has brought this issue to a head.

Jeremy Beadles, WSTA Chief Executive, says, "We do not see the need for licensing authorities to compel educational bodies to obtain licences for providing courses that do not pose any risk to crime and disorder or any of the other licensing objectives whatsoever. These courses are used by members of the trade, as well as the public, to learn more about the product in an educational environment. By requiring these courses to be licensed, the Government has created a barrier to education and career development – as well as placing unnecessary additional costs and bureaucracy on the trade. The Government has interpreted the Act in a way which helps no-one and which, ultimately, is in danger of creating a barrier to education. We are asking the Government to provide clarity and to apply some common sense on this specific issue by explicitly exempting educational courses from the Licensing Act."

The four licensing objectives are the prevention of crime and disorder; public safety; the prevention of public nuisance; and the protection of children from harm. The government is clearly worried that wine students are likely to fight and cheat each other; leave their classes intent on rape, pillage and unspeakable acts in public; and likely to corrupt their children by forcing their leftover samples on them.