

These notes refer to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (c.7) which received Royal Assent on 26 August 2021

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

3. The legislation regulating the sale of intoxicating liquor in Northern Ireland dates back to 1996. In broad terms, the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (the Licensing Order) sets out the general licensing systems, including procedures governing the granting or renewal of licences by county/magistrates' courts, permitted hours for the sale of intoxicating liquor, conduct of premises, conditions pertaining to the presence of children in licensed premises, and enforcement. The Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (the Clubs Order) does the same for the supply of intoxicating liquor in private members' clubs.
4. The legislation was amended by the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which included measures such as closure powers for police, penalty points, proof of age requirements and the prohibition of irresponsible drinks promotions. These measures were aimed at striking a balance between facilitating the sale of intoxicating liquor, public safety and the public interest. The Licensing of Pavement Cafés Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 inserted Part 5A in the Licensing Order, effectively extending the licensed area of certain premises to a specified public area.
5. A further review of the legislation, which had begun in 2012, resulted in the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, which was introduced in the Assembly in September 2016 but subsequently fell with the dissolution of the Assembly in January 2017. Earlier in 2016, the Licensing Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (which resulted from a private member's Bill) successfully completed its legislative passage in the Assembly, and added outdoor stadia as a category of premises which may be granted a liquor licence.
6. The aim of the Act is to address concerns surrounding the level of alcohol misuse in Northern Ireland and to respond to calls from the licensed trade for changes to support the hospitality sector. Its objective is to introduce a balanced package of measures to update the law in respect of the retail sale of intoxicating liquor and to make it more responsive to the social and economic environment.