Age Verification Testing of FOBTs in Coral Betting Shops, Reading & Slough

A report by MAKE Associates

for

Foskett Marr Gadsby & Head LLP

November 2014

Contents

1 Background

This report highlights the aims, approach and findings of a research (mystery shopping) exercise to check the age verification procedures in a sample of Coral betting shops. In particular, the research focused on the playing of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) by researchers who would reasonably appear to be around or under 18 years of age.

The study took place on Saturday November 8th 2014 and was undertaken by licensing research specialists MAKE.

MAKE are independent researchers. We report the findings of our research as they happened and do not make any recommendations about policy, legality or advise on the operation of the licensed premises being researched.

1.1 Aims

The aims of this study were:

1. To understand if Coral's age verification procedures (and its legal duty to prevent under 18s from entering licensed betting offices and gambling on FOBTs) are effective.
2. And, if Coral's procedures were either wholly or partly ineffective, to identify if there were any reasons why this may be the case.

The approach is set out in the following section. The findings are shown in section 4 and conclusions in section 5.

2 Approach

The approach to the study involved the following:

- An experienced research manager (and specialist in licensing research) briefing and leading a team of two mystery shoppers.
- The mystery shoppers were aged 18 and 19 respectively, but were specifically chosen for this research because they could reasonably appear to be under 18, with youthful looks, build and attire. These individuals are regularly asked for ID when seeking to enter pubs and buy alcohol in their everyday lives. Please see appendices for images and ID details of the researchers.

- By having two researchers who were different in appearance it was possible to ensure that there was nothing specific about their appearance that led to one being age verified more often than the other.

- From around eight Coral betting shops in the Reading area, four were chosen at random to test their age verification proecdures. The researchers moved onto neighbouring Slough and tested three further shops. This was performed as a control to understand if the results in Reading were particular to Coral premises in that town or if the results appeared to be a business-wide trend.

- The research process was as follows. A researcher entered each premises on the afternoon of Saturday 8th November 2014. They then approached a FOBT (sitting where a stool was provided) and placed at least one bet. Having placed the bet(s) but with some credit remaining, they terminated their session and requested a receipt. (These are shown in the Findings section of this report).

- Further information was gathered about each Coral shop:

  o Entry and exit time

  o Approximate number of customers in the venue

  o Number of staff visible

  o If the FOBT could be seen by staff from the counter.

- It is important to note that the researchers were told to walk in to each premise with their face clearly visible, not looking down, so that if staff were checking entrants to the premises it would be clear that a potentially underage individual had entered the premises.

- Observations were noted immediately on exit from the premises.

3 Findings

The following section highlights the findings of the research.

3.1 Reading

3.1.1 Premises 1: *3/5 Station Road, Reading, RG1 1LG*

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO

Entry time: 14:06

Exit time 14:09

Approximate number of customers: 6

Number of staff visible: 1

Line of sight: *"It is possible to see the terminal but hard for the staff member as the desk they were behind was high."*

3.1.2 Premises 2: *107 Friar Street, Reading, RG1 1EP*

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO

Entry time: 14:17

Exit time 14:21

Approximate number of customers: 14

Number of staff visible: 1

Line of sight: *"Yes I walked past the man at the counter to the machine. He could see it from where he was."*

3.1.3 Premises 3*: 310-312 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1AD*

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO*

Entry time: 14:46

Exit time: 14:54

Approximate number of customers: 25

Number of staff visible: 2

Line of sight: *"Yes, the one [FOBT] I was on [was visible], although I am not sure all of them are. It was busy though".*

*NB AT this shop the researcher was able to enter without age verification challenge and bet on one of the 'Bet in Play' terminals before realising this was not a FOBT. On approaching the desk to seek a refund to play on a FOBT, it was only then that he was challenged to produce his ID. However, his entry and an initial bet had already gone unchallenged. To this end, we would still consider this a failure from a test purchasing perspective.

3.1.4   Premises 4: *20 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7LA*

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO

Entry time: 15:15

Exit time: 15:18

Approximate number of customers: 10

Number of staff visible: 2

Line of sight: *"Yes, it was quite clear and the staff could easily see you walking in as it was pretty quiet, but they just weren't looking."*

3.2 Slough

3.2.1 Premises 5: 70a Stoke Road, Slough, SL2 5AP

Was the researcher asked for ID: YES

Entry time: 16:06

Exit time: 16:09

Approximate number of customers: 5

Number of staff visible: 2

Line of sight: *"Yes, the machine location was clear to them, as was their line of sight to the entrance. They clocked me straight away. They faced the door and it was the best lit of any of the ones [Coral shops] I went in. There were only 5 customers and two staff, so they could hardly miss me."*

3.2.2 Premises 6: 78 The High Street, Slough, SL1 1EL

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO

Entry time: 16:23

Exit time: 16:26

Approximate number of customers: 5

Number of staff visible: 1

Line of sight: *"Yes, I walked right past him, he wasn't looking – he was watching TV. I even looked at him in his cubicle."*

3.2.3 Premises 7: 26 Chalvey Road West, Slough, SL1 2PJ

Was the researcher asked for ID: NO

Entry time: 16:43

Exit time: 16:46

Approximate number of customers: 7

Number of staff visible: 2

Line of sight: *"Yes, it was easy to see me entering and the terminals from the counter as it really wasn't that busy."*

4   Conclusions

- Of the 7 Coral betting premises tested, 6 failed to check the ID of the young researchers. This is a failure rate of 86%.

- Only one betting shop was what might reasonably be considered busy (with 25 customers). This does not provide an excuse for the failure to check the ID at this premises (until the researcher had already bet and approached the counter), but it would have made it more difficult.

- While the design of the premises makes some difference to the ease of which it is to survey those entering and playing on the machines, the research shows that staff in most locations are not checking each entrants to the premises, which is the easiest way of ensuring potential underage individuals are prevented from gambling.

- The number of staff might have been expected to make a difference (i.e. more staff leads to better surveillance), yet this does not appear to be the case. Even if there were two staff visible, it did not appear to reduce the likelihood of failure.

- **Having checked 7 Coral betting establishments, (4 premises in Reading and 3 in Slough), it was clear that failure to check the IDs of potentially underage individuals entering their premises and placing bets on FOBTs was not a problem confined to Coral Reading, but appears to be a business-wide issue.**

5 About MAKE

MAKE are leaders in licensing research and town centre and night-time strategies. We provide research, insight and planning on the management of towns and cities 'after dark' to national and local governments, mayors and town centre partnerships and businesses including the likes of McDonald's, Ministry of Sound and Luminar Leisure.

MAKE Principal **Alistair Turnham** led this research into Coral's age verification in Reading and Slough.

Alistair's specialist subject is licensing field research, evening and late night city management. He was Special Adviser on this subject to the Department of Culture, Media & Sport from 2008 to 2010. He also completed a study for the Department of Communities & Local Government (CLG) on how the UK's cities might look at night in 2020 and helped develop CLG's How To… Manage Town Centres programme.

MAKE devised the world' first 'night-time observational studies' for councils looking to introduce cumulative impact policies. MAKE's work has helped the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and Liverpool City Council support the development of these policies and to rebut costly challenges to them.

MAKE has led numerous night-time economy projects for city centres across the UK from Liverpool to Preston, Oldham to London's West End. MAKE recently undertook a cost-benefit analysis of Sydney's night-time economy for the city's Mayor and has been advising Temple Bar in Dublin on possible future directions for this global destination.

MAKE's other recent projects include a masterplan for the London Borough of Lambeth's night time economy and the UK's first study into the impact of betting shops and crime for the London Borough of Ealing.

6 Contact details

Contact	Alistair Turnham
Address	Unit 9, Building 8, Blue Lion Place, 237 Long Lane, London SE1 4PU
Email	alistair@makeassociates.com

MAKE

# 7	Appendices

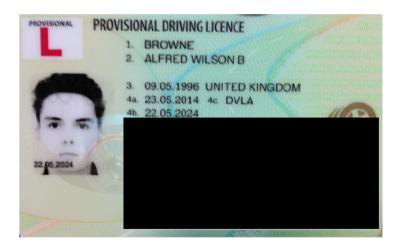## 7.1	Appendix 1: Researchers

### 7.1.1	Alfie Browne, 18

MAKE

7.1.2   Aleksi Leal-John 19