

Safer Gambling – putting our customers first

Conor Grant, CEO of Flutter UK & Ireland

As we approach the festive period, with reports of a new Covid strain threatening to disrupt Christmas celebrations it's inevitable that we feel a sense of déjà vu. I don't think any of us could have anticipated that we would be in this position another year on. And as I reflect on the changes we have seen in the gambling industry over the past twelve months, there is also a sense of continued uncertainty around how the impending Government white paper will impact the sector.

At Flutter, we welcomed the launch of the Gambling Act Review last December and have consistently championed a regulatory framework that raises the responsibility threshold for all operators and creates a level playing field. Importantly, though, we have not been idly tinkering round the edges in the hope that the status quo can be maintained. We have been looking at meaningful ways we can enhance customer protections – not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is vital for the sustainability of our industry. The initiatives we have pioneered during the past twelve months aren't cosmetic gestures; they are meaningful changes which we believe will move the dial for customers.

Take our approach to affordability, for example. We know that blanket measures are blunt instruments that will fail to tackle the issue. Each customer's circumstances are different, which is why we need to take a risk-based approach to safer gambling and affordability. Our Affordability Triple Step does just this, using cutting-edge technology and algorithms to stay close to our customers, monitor their behaviours and assess their circumstances. The first step, which takes place early in the customer journey, involves financial vulnerability checks which identify red flags at a relatively low level of spend. This allows us to step in and take action where it is appropriate to do so, minimising unnecessary friction for the majority of our customers who enjoy a flutter safely.

And we have also challenged ourselves to go further on protecting younger customers and encourage sensible spending habits. Our own research, and that from other industries, suggests that younger customers overall have a higher risk profile, which is why we needed to look at measures that would cut right to the heart of their potential vulnerability. Our new policy, which will be implemented early next year, will introduce net deposit limits of £500 per month for customers under the age of 25. Whilst the vast majority of our customer base spend nowhere near that limit, it provides a helpful safety net for those that need it.

These changes have also been introduced in Ireland, where we have been long-time advocates of a fully regulated market and recently welcomed the publication of the General Scheme of the Gambling Regulation Bill. Again, we have been clear that we will not wait for regulation where there is clear evidence to act, which is why we introduced a number of progressive initiatives earlier this year, including a ban on the use of credit cards in retail and online, a 'whistle-to-whistle' advertising ban on televised sport pre-watershed, and a commitment to donate 1% of Net Gaming Revenue (NGR) by 2023 to support the research, education and treatment of problem gambling in Ireland. Based on reported NGR in 2020, this will amount to a contribution of c. €1.25m this year, rising to approximately €3m in 2023.

None of this would have been possible without the commitment and hard work of my talented colleagues. It is our shared mission to provide the best experience for customers in a safe and sustainable way that has led us to where we are today. As we all look ahead to 2022, with many of us still working from home and Christmas still unclear, I am comforted by the real changes we have made as a business over the last twelve months and look forward to the new year with optimism.

And as we continue to evolve for the benefit of our millions of customers, we remain committed to driving meaningful change across the industry.