



SUNDAY SHOPPING

Summary of responses to
informal consultation on
Sunday Shopping hours

January to April 2006

JULY 2006

URN 06/1383

Introduction

1. Over 12 weeks (13 January to 14 April) we asked for views on the pros and cons of relaxing the restrictions on Sunday shop opening hours. We received 963 responses: 872 of these responses were from private individuals while 91 were from organisations. An additional 1,034 individuals either signed campaign letters or petitions campaigning against a further extension of Sunday shopping hours.
2. The majority of organisations fall into the following groups: large retailers & their trade associations (33); small retailers (21); faith groups (21, of which 17 are Christian); employee representation groups (4). Many individuals were inspired by Keep Sunday Special or various church groups to provide their views.

Arguments in favour of liberalisation

3. 26 organisations and 68 individuals or roughly 10% of those who responded supported an extension of Sunday shopping hours for large shops.
4. The reasons stated by **organisations** for supporting partial/full deregulation were (in order of the greatest number of responses which referred to the reason):
 - would like to align their opening hours according to consumer demand and/or to improve customers' shopping experience.

For example, some retailers spoke of the frustration felt by customers at the end of the Sunday trading period as they had to be rushed and faced long queues at the tills and in the car park. In addition, because shops can open within a window rather than for specified hours, consumers were sometimes confused about store opening hours.

IKEA said that its Bristol store had to use security guards to manage access to the store for the first 30 minutes of shopping on Sundays. They also noted that Sunday is the only day of the week when IKEA stores in England and Wales were required to respond to safety / capacity problems by closing the entrance doors to their stores during peak hours to ensure the safety of the many visitors already in the store and that this was not the case in Scotland.

- believe that the current restrictions are an unnecessary regulation. Large retailers would like a level playing field, particularly so they can compete with internet sellers

For example, the National Consumer Council have said that the 1994 Act unnecessarily restricts the ability of consumers in England and Wales to decide for themselves when and where they can shop.

- believe there would be additional employment opportunities.

For example, Asda said that full liberalisation would create an extra 7,500 jobs. Other large retailers also believe they would be able to offer additional jobs. In addition, Working Families have noted that working parents can benefit from Sunday shopping both as consumers and employees – indeed some parents may choose to work at weekends as childcare can be covered by other family members, although Working Families said that the issue was not clear-cut.

- would like to see/have consistent opening hours across the UK, possibly the same as their stores in Scotland.

For example, shopping centres have said that there is often confusion caused by different opening hours across the UK and consumers often don't know when a shop will open. This can cause great congestion between 12-4pm as consumers know that the store will definitely be open during this core period.

- will enable large stores to meet tourist demand for shopping

For example, the British Council of Shopping Centres said that liberalisation would benefit the tourist industry and support regeneration of town / city centres (particularly since the relaxation of licensing laws). Selfridges also said that extending shopping hours would benefit tourists, particularly those visiting for short stays, and that it would make the UK a more attractive destination.

- weekend shopping is often a family leisure activity,

For example, shopping centres and some large retailers have noticed that larger party sizes visit stores at the weekends, showing that this is when many families can shop together, retaining the tradition of Sunday as a family day.

- would like to be able to meet greater consumer demand for shopping hours in the run-up to Christmas.

For example, clothing retailers such as Arcadia felt that this was the period when there was most demand for increased Sunday shopping.

- the small/large shop definition caused confusion, as it did not align with SME definitions¹ and also large stores are subject to different treatment by the various local authorities.

For example, the Trafford Centre said that the current restriction on trading hours could lead to confusion and irritation for consumers. This was because their small shops open from 10am, whilst those over 280 sq metres could not open until 12 noon. Customers found this confusing, irritating, and illogical, especially when they saw that, for example: Next Childrenswear store could open, whilst Next Ladies and Menswear could not; The Body Shop could open, whilst Boots could not; Birthday's could open, whilst Clinton Cards could not.

¹ SME definitions look at employment/turnover, rather than the size of a premises' sales area

In addition, the Horticultural Trades Association said that whether a garden centre was subject to Sunday shopping restrictions depended on whether their local authority decided to include outside retail areas – possibly those covered by canopies or covered walkways - in their measurement of the centre’s size. They said that the public had little understanding of the law and no way of knowing whether or not a garden centre had a retail area of over 280 square metres – and the fact that garden centre coffee shops could open for as long as they wished (but not the retail area) led to further confusion.

5. The reasons stated by **individuals** for supporting partial/full deregulation are (in order of the greatest number of responses which referred to the reason):

- would like to be able to shop for longer on a Sunday

Which? noted that the prevalent lifestyle is for both partners in a household to work from Monday to Friday, meaning that many consumers generally complete almost all their shopping during the weekend.

- believe it is outdated or unnecessary for government to restrict shops from opening at certain time
- do not want to be prevented from shopping because of the views of others
- believe there will be additional work opportunities for them or others
- believe it will dissipate traffic congestion around major stores or shopping centres

For example, IKEA said that peak volumes of visitors on Sundays had an impact on the local road infrastructures around IKEA stores resulting in delays and frustration for both customers and local residents who found themselves “trapped” by IKEA traffic.

- would like a similar picture to Scotland which has no restrictions in place
- would like to see unified opening hours (and no ‘browsing’)
- large stores should not be prevented from opening when people can shop online, outside the restrictions
- believe it may lead to improvement in other services, such as transport
- believe it will increase revenue from tourists

Arguments against further liberalisation

6. 54 organisations (out of 91) and 803 (out of 872) private individuals supported the current restrictions (some even wanted the restrictions to be tightened). Also, 1,034 individuals supported campaigns or have signed petitions arguing for the current restrictions to be kept unchanged.
7. A large number of the responses from **individuals** referred to the Keep Sunday Special (KSS) and USDAW's 'Save our Sundays' campaigns and there were also a number of smaller campaigns run by church groups.
8. The reasons stated by **organisations** supporting the status quo are (in order of the greatest number of responses which referred to the reason):

- want Sunday to be different to other days of the week

For example, Keep Sunday Special argued that it was good for everyone to have a shared day off, whatever their religious beliefs.

- concerns about potential loss of sales for small retailers

Evidence from the Association of Convenience Stores, the Rural Shops Alliance and small shops represented at the small shops focus group held at DTI indicated that Sunday was a very significant trading day for small retailers (representing about 17-20% of the weeks turnover on average) and that the most important hours of the day were after the large stores closed in the afternoon.

- concerns about the impact on employees – they family life, work-life balance and their health

For example, in their 'Whose Convenience?' report, Lord Anderson's panel of parliamentarians, argue that there could be an increase in work-related stress due to longer working hours, leading to ill-health and lower productivity.

- believe there is a lack of consumer demand for more shopping hours, or that the current regime provides enough hours
- oppose any easing of restrictions for religious reasons (and in fact some would like greater restrictions, allowing no Sunday shopping)

For example, the Church of England wanted to emphasise the significance of a day when people can attend to their spiritual life and Sunday was important to allow time for people to attend Christian worship. They noted that the 2001 Census found that over 70% of the population identified themselves as Christians.

- concerns about the impact on issues, such as traffic, the environment and crime

- concerns that the loss of small shops will lead to adverse impact on communities and/or vulnerable groups (elderly, disabled and poor)

For example, the Association of Convenience Stores said that communities would suffer from local shop closures, causing particular problems for the elderly, infirm and those without transport who relied on the services they provided. They also said that local convenience stores were a focal point of a neighbourhood and integral to sustainable communities agenda, serving their community, providing key services, and offering flexible employment to local people.

- believe it will increase operating costs for large shops

For example, the Dixons Group said that operating on Sundays is usually more costly to a business due to higher staff and other costs.

- concerned about the impact on ancillary staff that will need to work longer on Sundays
- do not believe opening longer will increase sales in large shops
- feel there may be difficulty finding staff to work the extra Sunday hours

For example, Keep Sunday Special said that large retailers in Scotland were having some difficulty recruiting staff to work unpopular hours on Sundays. Some large retailers have asked their employees whether they would want to work more hours and found that on balance they didn't. Morrisons said that their people don't want longer hours. USDAW have carried out a survey of 4,000 retail staff, which found that only 3% of employees wanted to work more hours and 35% wanted to work less hours on Sunday. The GMB and TUC are also against, believing it will impact negatively on employees, particularly their ability to have a work-life balance, that their family life will suffer. GMB surveyed their members and found that 92% rejected any extension to Sunday shopping hours.

- loss of small retailers may lead to reduced consumer choice in the long run

The Association of Convenience Stores have said that the loss of convenience stores will ultimately mean consumers lose out as they will suffer from lack of real choice, diversity and competition in a balanced grocery market.

- concern about a consumerism society
9. The reasons stated by **individuals** supporting the status quo are (in order of the greatest number of responses which referred to the reason):
- want Sunday to remain 'special' or for it to be a shared day or rest

- concerns about the impact on employees – their family life, work-life balance and health. (However, only 2% of individuals stated that any change in policy would directly impact on them.)
- oppose for religious reasons
- believe there is a lack of consumer demand, or that there are already enough shopping hours and people should be able to organise themselves so that they can meet their shopping needs within the current regime
- concerns about wider issues, such as greater traffic, environmental impact (including a specific comment about potential rise in energy use) and greater crime
- believe it will negatively impact on small retailers
- want England & Wales to follow the rest of Europe’s example where most countries have no Sunday shopping
- believe there may be an adverse impact on society

The “Whose Convenience?” report by Lord Anderson and colleagues stated that weekend working arrangements for parents need to consider the quality of family time, especially where there were school-age children. The report also said that couples need to invest in their relationships and extending Sunday shopping may make this more difficult and this was particularly important as one in four children under 16 experienced family break-up trauma.

- concerns that consumer debt will rise
- do not want England & Wales to become like USA/Australia/Scotland
- believe it will increase operating costs for large shops
- concerns about impact on ancillary staff (as well as shopworkers)

For example, the TGWU have highlighted the anomaly of workers on the same site having different employment rights – shopworkers can opt-out of working Sundays, while distribution workers cannot do so. The TGWU would like the Sunday opt-out extended to distribution workers working on the same site as shopworkers.

- An issue raised by many individuals and some organisations (including USDAW, the lead union of shopworkers) was employment rights protection. The large retailers recognise, and in fact many emphasised that these should be retained. However there was concern that the current regime was not working well and needed strengthening.

Easter Sunday

10. Only 29 respondents referred to Easter Sunday. Four individuals and three organisations responded in support of Easter Sunday shopping, while 20 individuals and two organisations responded in support of the current situation (whereby large shops are prevented from opening at all).
11. The Trafford Centre noted that Easter Sunday could compound the confusion around store opening hours for consumers, saying that on Easter Sunday 2005, over 27,000 people visited the Trafford Centre. They used the restaurants, cafés, cinema and other leisure attractions but were not allowed to use the shops. This was a source of great confusion and annoyance to the visitors.
12. The Horticultural Trades Association also argued strongly for the restriction on Easter Sunday to be lifted. Easter Sunday falls in peak gardening season, and was the busiest trading day for garden centres in Scotland. It could also cause some confusion for consumers who believed they would be open – they refer to one member having to turn away 600 cars despite advertising the closure locally. The HTA said that this could adversely impact on Easter Monday sales too as consumers could easily assume that garden centres would be closed then as well.
13. On the other hand, Christian organisations obviously felt particularly strongly that there should be no change to the current restrictions on large stores opening on Easter Sunday.

Other input from stakeholders

14. In addition to the views expressed in written responses to our request for views and evidence, we have taken into account views expressed in meetings with Ministers and officials.
15. We also held a small business focus group on 8 February. A summary of this workshop can be found at:
www.dti.gov.uk/consumers/buying-selling/Sunday%20Shopping
16. Furthermore, we held a stakeholder conference on 10 May, and a summary of this can be found at:
www.dti.gov.uk/consumers/buying-selling/Sunday%20Shopping