

PRESS RELEASE BY FEDERATION OF RETAIL LICENSED TRADE

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**DSD MINISTER BACKS FRLT AND ELECTORAL OFFICE TO LAUNCH 'CHALLENGE 21 CAMPAIGN'**

The Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA and Douglas Bain, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland have both given their support to the campaign by the Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade (FRLT) to tackle the issue of underage drinking and low levels of voter registration amongst the young in one fell swoop by introducing the 'Challenge 21' initiative.

The 'Challenge 21' highlights the fact that if you are lucky enough to look under 21 you will be asked to prove that you are over 18 when you buy alcohol. The FRLT are keen to highlight that an electoral identity card is an acceptable form of proof of age and are urging young people to register to vote and to apply for a free ID card. The scheme therefore has a dual role in that it illustrates the importance of registering to vote whilst also tackling the issue of the sale of alcohol to minors.

**Commenting on the launch of the 'Challenge 21' campaign, the DSD Minister Margaret Ritchie said:**

**"Many young people in Northern Ireland aged 18-21 are fortunate to look younger than they are. In such circumstances publicans and off-license owners are only upholding their civic responsibility in asking young people for proof of age. It can be very easy for teenagers under 18 to get their hands on fake identification cards so it is essential that the pub and off license trade only accept recognised forms of identification.**

**As many young people may not have a driving license or carry their passport with them I would encourage them to register as electors and to apply for an Electoral Identity Card. This can not only be used in the pub or club but also for domestic flights and more importantly it will ensure you are able to vote at election time."**

This is also an important step in order to crack down on underage drinking in Northern Ireland and the FRLT and its membership are to be congratulated and supported by all in their actions and their zero tolerance approach in tackling this issue" said Mrs. Ritchie.

**Speaking at the launch, Stephen Kelly, Chief Executive of the FRLT said,**

**"We delighted to have the Minister's support for this campaign with the Chief Electoral Officer in ensuring that our members are aware of the importance of the project and are active in tackling the issue of under 18's seeking to purchase alcohol. Our members will be showing support to all customers by using the campaign posters and leaflets on their premises. It is the expectation of the Federation that it will soon become the norm for younger customers to carry a credible form of identification such as an electoral ID card."**

The initiative's poster campaign clearly demonstrates that the trade takes the issue of underage sales very seriously. It will highlight to those under 18 that they will not be sold alcohol and remind people who work in the trade that implementing a Challenge 21 policy is the best way of ensuring they don't sell to under18's.

**Douglas Bain, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, commented:**

**I am pleased to work with the FRLT on this initiative which will tackle both the issue of the underage buying of alcohol and the low level of electoral registration amongst young people. It is important that young people are able to play their full part in shaping our future and they can only do this if they are registered to vote. Registering has the added benefit of entitling them to a free Electoral Identity Card which can be used to prove their age when buying alcohol or for entry into certain clubs as well as to prove their identity when flying on domestic routes. I would urge anyone who is not already registered to do so now and to apply for their free Electoral Identity Card.'**

To register to vote or to apply for an Electoral Identity Card visit any Electoral Office (addresses in telephone book), phone 0800 4320 712 or download and print from [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

**ENDS**

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