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**PRESS STATEMENT**

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**Responsible Gambling Trust responds in detail to article published in The Times newspaper**

On February 17 the Times published an article about the Responsible Gambling Trust (RGT) in the context of an examination of the bookmaking industry which was published over two days in the newspaper and whose main theme was the problems caused by addiction to gambling.

The article about RGT was headlined "Gambling Charity faces inquiry into its industry links" and proceeded to make a number of serious allegations about RGT including about its relationship to bookmakers and the gambling industry, leading to supposed improper bias and lack of independence in favour of the industry and about its research into problem gambling, which cannot therefore be relied on, that its chairman had to resign as a result of his pro-industry stance being exposed by the Guardian, and that RGT is rightly facing an investigation into its affairs by the Charity Commission.

The article is riddled with errors half-truths and distortions as set out below and wholly fails to present a balanced account of RGT's work. It is most regrettable that The Times should have set out to denigrate the valuable work that RGT undertakes.

As a first general point RGT has always been entirely open about the background of its trustees and officers and about its funding; where any individual has or has had any connection with the industry that connection is clearly set out on RGT's website - as well as in the annual accounts available via the Charity Commission website - which also explains why direct experience of the industry is relevant to RGT's work; and the fact that RGT receives significant funding from the industry is not only well known but is also evident from its website, its published annual accounts and annual reports.

As a second general point The Times failed to put to us in advance of publication many of the points it then made against us ; and inexplicably it left making any contact with us until 6 pm on the day before it was going to press, saying we only had until mid-afternoon the following day to respond to a series of questions. So, on any view we were not given a fair or proper opportunity to address the allegations that The Times made. This does not accord with proper journalistic practice and, if we had been put on notice of all the points, The Times could have avoided the errors and distortions of the article. Even then much of the response that we were able to give was omitted from the published article.

We consider and have been advised that The Times has breached the Editor's Code of Practice issued by the Independent Press Standards Organisation of which The Times is a member and we will be seeking redress accordingly.

Below we address the principal errors and distortion of the article, in each case setting out the allegation followed by our commentary on it.

**1. That the research conducted by Feature Space commissioned by the Trust suggested that betting machines were not themselves a problem and that the best approach to minimise harm was to identify problem gamblers.**

The Featurespace report is not accurately quoted. What it said was as follows: "From this research it is not possible to state categorically whether only gaming machine play predominantly contributes to problem gambling status, or whether this is accounted for by participation in multiple forms of gambling. Readers should not assume that problem gambling status is causally and predominantly related to gaming machine play. Indeed, given the complexity of problem gambling and gambling behaviours in general, the researchers have concluded that any corporate responsibility strategy must take a balanced, rounded approach. That is, that by factoring in the environment, the individual player, and the product being played to provide a complete view rather than focusing on a single variable the gambling industry will be able to significantly improve the detection rate of problem gamblers and the minimisation of gambling related harm." (page 1 Executive Summary Report 3).

The report including the above quotation is and was available on-line on RGT's website.

The Times did not put these allegations to RGT.

**2. That Neil Goulden stepped down as chair of the Trust as a consequence of reports about a strategy paper he wrote in favour of gambling**

As the Trust's press statement at the time (<http://www.responsiblegamblingtrust.org.uk/news/Press-release-2016---003>) made clear, Neil Goulden retired from his role as chair and trustee after five years in post. The implication that he did so because of an article in the Guardian on 6 January 2016 is plainly inaccurate because he notified the trustees of his intention to step down on 19 December 2015. This allegation was not put to RGT.

**3. More than half of the trustees and senior executives have worked for bookmakers**

This is clearly untrue, and is self-evident from the biographies of trustees and senior executives published on our website. <http://responsiblegamblingtrust.org.uk/Trustees-and-management> Even amongst those trustees with an interest in the gambling industry, only 3 of eleven trustees could be associated with the bookmaking sector in any way, and amongst senior executives, none has ever worked for bookmakers (2 of the 4 worked in the casino sector). Again, by suggesting a preponderance of bookmakers, this added weight to the false allegation that RGT is in hock to that sector.

This specific allegation was not put to RGT.

**4. That Featurespace was the "lead partner" for the research**

The article does not mention the role of NatCen, a charity, and other researchers who contributed to the analysis and to the conclusions of the research. By implication, the article impugns the independence of NatCen as well as other members of the overall research team. As already indicated this research is all published on RGT's website from which it is clear that Featurespace was not the "lead partner" – indeed of 7 reports into betting machines published concurrently it was the lead author for just 1. <http://responsiblegamblingtrust.org.uk/Research-Publications>

This allegation was not put to RGT.

The article also failed to record that all the research commissioned by RGT is peer-reviewed as well as being published, even though this fact was set out in its response to The Times. That all its research including its research into betting machines is plainly relevant to its robustness and independence and the omission of this fact was (at best) misleading.

The article does not mention the published conclusions of the one report which was published under Featurespace's name which offered a balanced conclusion, and cannot be described as fully supportive of either the case for or against machines. Instead, the article selectively used one narrow element of the conclusion which weighed on the side of the argument to support The Times's allegation of bias.

## **5. That RGT faces an inquiry into its industry links (headline)**

The article itself states that "Campaigners are preparing a dossier of evidence to present to the [Charity] commission, which will review the findings before deciding whether to investigate." Coupled with the alarmist headline the article clearly suggests that an investigation is needed to uncover the links that RGT has to the industry and that RGT has sought to conceal those links both from the public and the Commission, its regulator. In truth as already recorded there is no secret about such matters and no need for any inquiry to establish the position which is clear from, for example, RGT's website.

This allegation was not put to RGT. It is at best misleading in suggesting there is something worth investigating, whether in the foregoing or in any other respects.

## **6. That RGT is exclusively funded by bookmakers**

It is abundantly clear from the list of donors on RGT's website (<http://www.responsiblegamblingtrust.org.uk/2015-16-Supporters>) that it is funded by the industry as a whole, not just bookmakers. Singling out bookmakers was clearly designed to add weight to the damaging allegation that RGT is influenced by bookmakers in respect of its work relating to betting machines. Given that the industry as a whole has a mixed view on machines, making it clear that RGT's funding comes from across the industry would of course have mitigated the implication of the article that RGT is beholden to only those operators that support machines. This allegation was not put to RGT.

## **7. That RGT should be investigated for commissioning a company with an interest in the gambling industry to conduct research into betting machines**

To conduct the research into machines, RGT needed a company with the relevant expertise, experience and capability to understand and analyse gambling industry data. It is not therefore in any way inappropriate to use a company which already works with gambling industry data. To further safeguard against any bias, it is clear that Featurespace were a part of a consortium that included the independent and widely respected charity NatCen and RTI. Also, the research methodology and final reports were peer-reviewed by an international panel of eminent academics with expertise in this field and all the reports were published and presented at a public conference allowing for public scrutiny of the methodology and conclusions.

The supposed seriousness of the allegation was made worse by the untruthful claim that Featurespace had concluded that the machines were not harmful - see 4 above - and by the omission of any mention of the peer reviewing process.

## **8. That RGT and therefore its trustees are biased in favour of the gambling industry**

All charity trustees have a personal obligation in law to act in the best interests of the charity, and to declare any conflicts of interest. The article alleges that trustees are failing in their legal duties which could lead to serious consequences. There is no proper foundation laid against RGT or the trustees for such serious allegations which inevitably will cause serious harm to the reputation and standing of the trustees including the eminent academics who their number includes.

In terms of what the Times put to us before publication, in the circumstances set out above, we set out their email:

1. Why does the Responsible Gambling Trust think that it is right to have half the trustees and senior executive positions at the charity filled by former and existing employees from the gambling industry?
2. Why has the Responsible Gambling Trust not condemned fixed-odds betting terminals as a problem gambling product?
3. Why did the Responsible Gambling Trust fund FeatureSpace to conduct research into fixed-odds betting terminals when this company had a commercial interest in the gambling industry?
4. Does the Responsible Gambling Trust think that it was appropriate for FeatureSpace to state on the record that lowering the stake on fixed-odds betting terminals to £2 would be ineffective when it did not test that proposition in its research?
5. Was it appropriate for Neil Goulden to lobby for Britain's bookmakers and warn operators of regulatory dangers to the industry while chairman of the Responsible Gambling Trust?

6. Why did the Responsible Gambling Trust think that it was appropriate for Mr Goulden to retain his shareholdings in Gala Coral when he was chairman of the trust?

We provided the following reply, which, when read in conjunction with the information already available on our website, should have made clear to the author of the article that there was no proper basis for making any allegations of wrongdoing arising from the questions and that he should accordingly not have published the article.

"The Responsible Gambling Trust (RGT) is an independent charity registered and regulated by the Charity Commission committed to minimising gambling-related harm. The charity has **robust and transparent governance arrangements to ensure the independence of all research it commissions**. Professor Jo Wolff, RGT's senior independent trustee, chairs the research committee that oversees all research matters; a process that excludes all industry-related trustees but includes representatives from government, the Gambling Commission and the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board (RGSB). The commissioning of all research is guided by priorities set down in the national Responsible Gambling Strategy published by the RGSB and is subject to protocols agreed between RGT and RGSB. All research commissioned by RGT is peer-reviewed and published.

"RGT, via its predecessor organisations, was originally conceived over a decade ago by senior executives working in the British gambling industry, including some of the existing trustees, and has since raised and distributed more than £50million to support services including counselling and a national gambling helpline. The motivation then and today is to encourage the industry to be socially responsible. RGT believes that it is right to foster an 'engagement' model with the industry, which is helped by having a number of trustees who work in the industry. This not only encourages businesses to donate funds but also to provide access to data, venues and customers for the independent research necessary to better understand how to minimise gambling-related harm. Gambling businesses are the best-placed to implement effective harm-minimisation measures but it is important that such measures are based on independent research and evaluation, which RGT is able to facilitate within a framework of robust and transparent governance.

"RGT is not a lobby organisation and it is not its role to either condemn or support any specific gambling products beyond commissioning independent research and evaluation, which is intended to speak for itself. Any regulatory response is a matter for the Regulator and the Government.

"Neil Goulden is stepping down after five very successful years as RGT Chairman. Fundraising has grown by more than 30%, the range of funded treatment and harm-minimisation activity is rapidly expanding and being more effectively evaluated, and unprecedented access to industry data, venues and customers continues to be granted to independent researchers. All trustees' interests are publicly registered on RGT's website and the charity manages the potential for conflicts of interest in accordance with Charity Commission guidance."

RGT is very familiar with the allegations in the article and so are confident the source is the Campaign for Fairer Gambling / Stop the FOBTs. Its own website lists those who fund that organisation (<http://www.stopthefobts.org/the-story-of-the-man-behind-stop-the-fobts-and-the-campaign-for-fairer-gambling/>).

**-ENDS-**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

- The Responsible Gambling Trust is the leading charity in the UK committed to minimising gambling-related harm. As an independent national charity funded by donations from the gambling industry, the Responsible Gambling Trust funds education, prevention and treatment services and commissions research to broaden public understanding of gambling-related harm. The aim is to stop people getting into problems with their gambling, and ensure that those that do develop problems receive fast and effective treatment and support.
- The Responsible Gambling Trust raises a minimum of £5million each year from the gambling industry operating in Britain within a voluntary (donation based) system and funds research, education, prevention and treatment services. Funding priorities are guided by the national strategy advised by the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board (RGSB) and endorsed by the Gambling Commission. The latest strategy was published in December 2012.