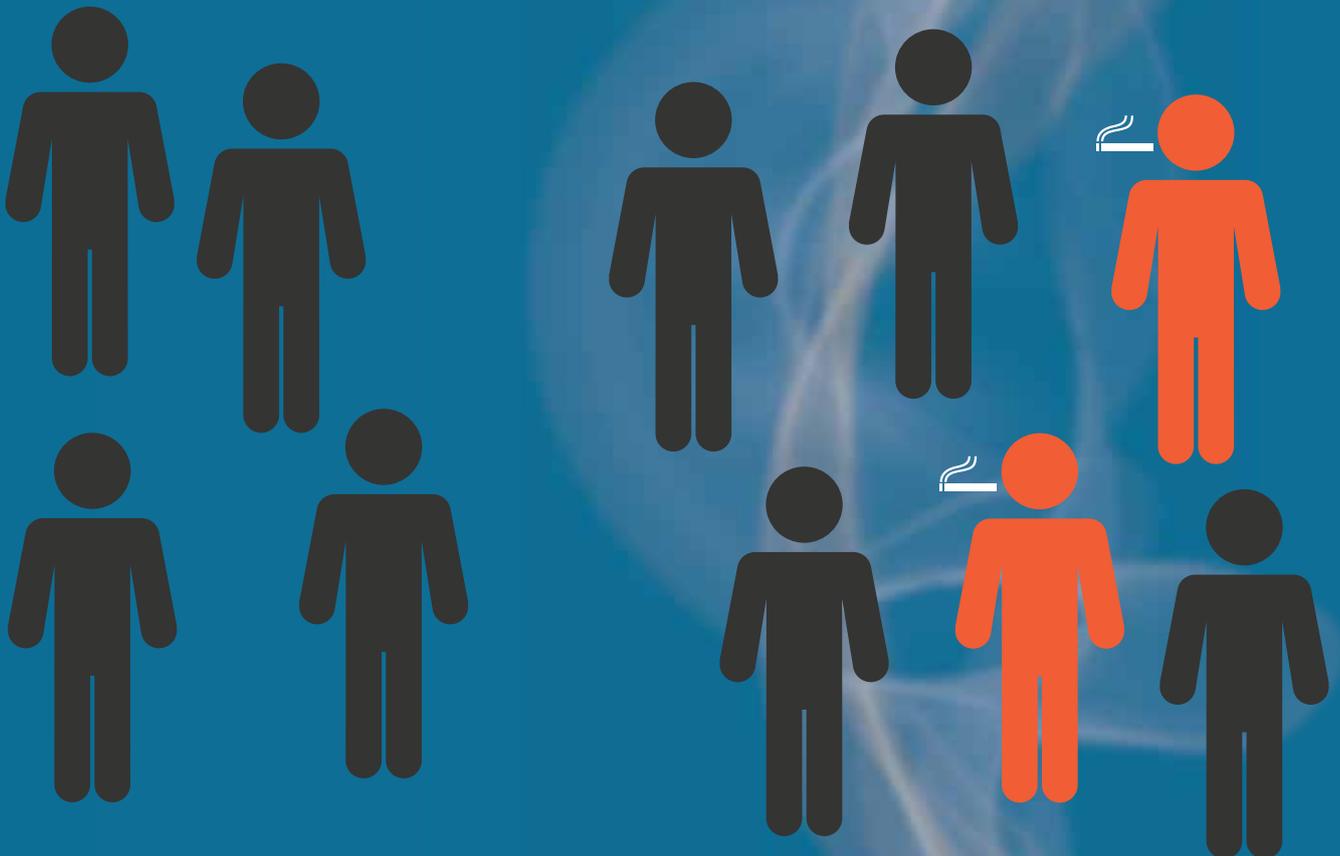


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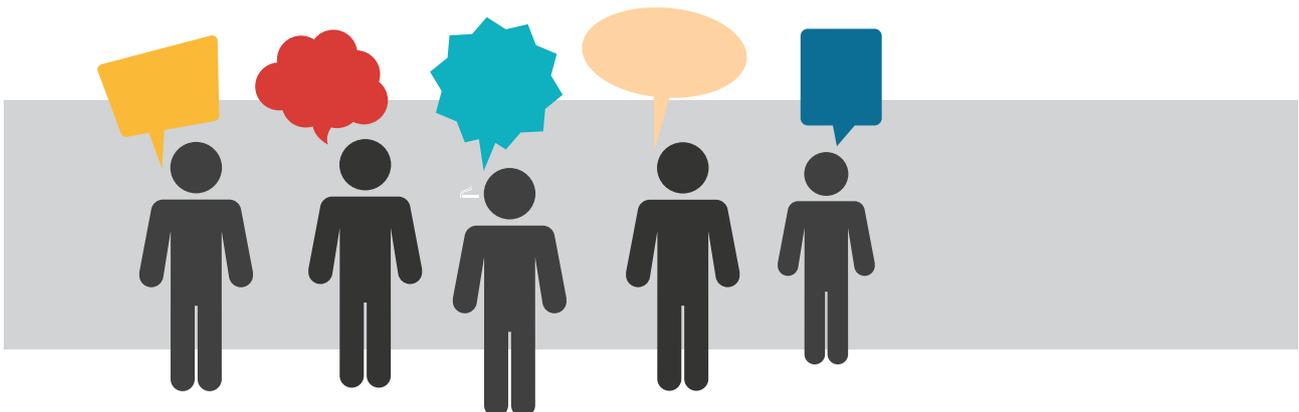
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Attitudes to UK
Smoking Policies



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A majority of the public believe that measures to tackle smoking have gone too far or gone far enough.
- The public overwhelmingly believe the government has more pressing priorities than tackling smoking – investing in new doctors and nurses, for example.
- There is no appetite for additional tax rises on tobacco products – a huge majority believe that tobacco duty is already about right, too high or far too high.
- A significant majority believe that purchasing illegal tobacco is an understandable response from consumers faced with the high cost of tobacco products.
- Measures to restrict smoking in outdoor public places such as parks and beaches have no popular or scientific legitimacy and would be hard to police.
- Following a dramatic fall in the number of people using NHS stop smoking services a significant majority of the public believe there should be a review of how these services are funded.
- A majority of the public believe the government's tobacco control policies should be independently reviewed and they should not be driven by taxpayer-funded lobby groups.
- Almost a decade since smoking was banned in pubs and clubs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and ten years since smoking was prohibited in Scotland's pubs and bars, a majority of the public believe that pubs and private members' clubs, including working men's clubs, should be allowed to provide a well-ventilated designated smoking room to accommodate smokers.
- More than half the public also believe that actors should be allowed to smoke on stage and screen when smoking is integral to the plot or characterisation of the play they feature in.



INTRODUCTION

In December 2015 the Conservative government committed to releasing a new smoking strategy¹ to replace the Coalition government's Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England,² which expired in 2015.

The Coalition government was the most radical anti-smoking administration to date. The measures the Coalition adopted, accepted or introduced severely restrict consumer freedoms. They include the display ban, the introduction of 'plain' packaging and the prohibition of smaller pack and pouch sizes. Such measures not only limit choice and smokers' ability to access products conveniently, they are also designed to stigmatise the consumer. Meanwhile the imposition of annual above inflation tax increases has driven the cost of tobacco ever higher, hitting those who can least afford it.

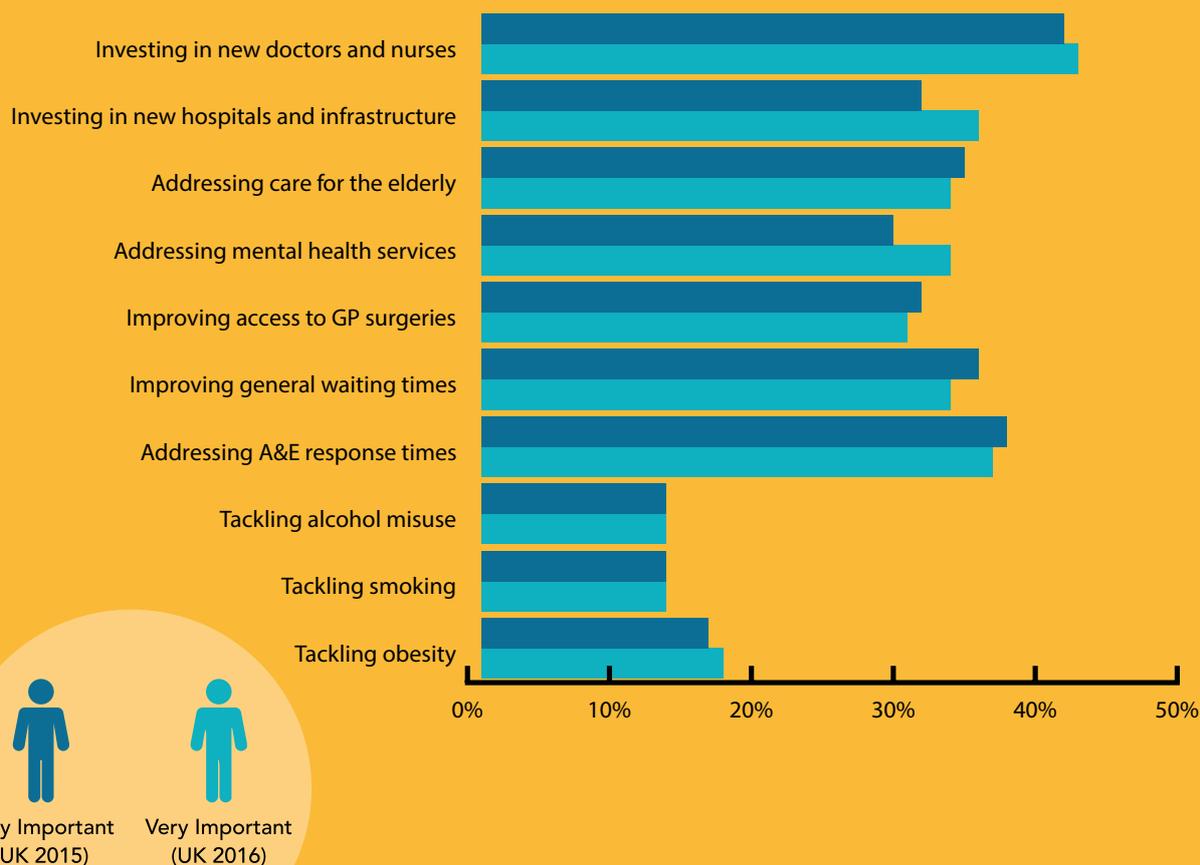
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), a taxpayer-funded anti-smoking lobby group, helped drive many of these measures. Yet, still not satisfied, ASH continues to lobby government to introduce more tobacco control measures. In its manifesto, *Smoking Still Kills* (2015), ASH set out a range of areas in which it believes the government should legislate or regulate. "New and renewed efforts," ASH argues, "are needed to tackle smoking."³

Since the publication of *Smoking Still Kills* FOREST has conducted extensive polling of public attitudes towards smoking issues. This report, which is based on that polling, demonstrates that the type of restrictive, untested measures that ASH is arguing for are not supported by a majority of the public, most of whom believe that anti-smoking measures have gone far enough and the government should focus on other more pressing priorities. It also shows that a significant majority of the public has concerns about the influence that unelected, state-funded lobby groups are having on the policy making process.



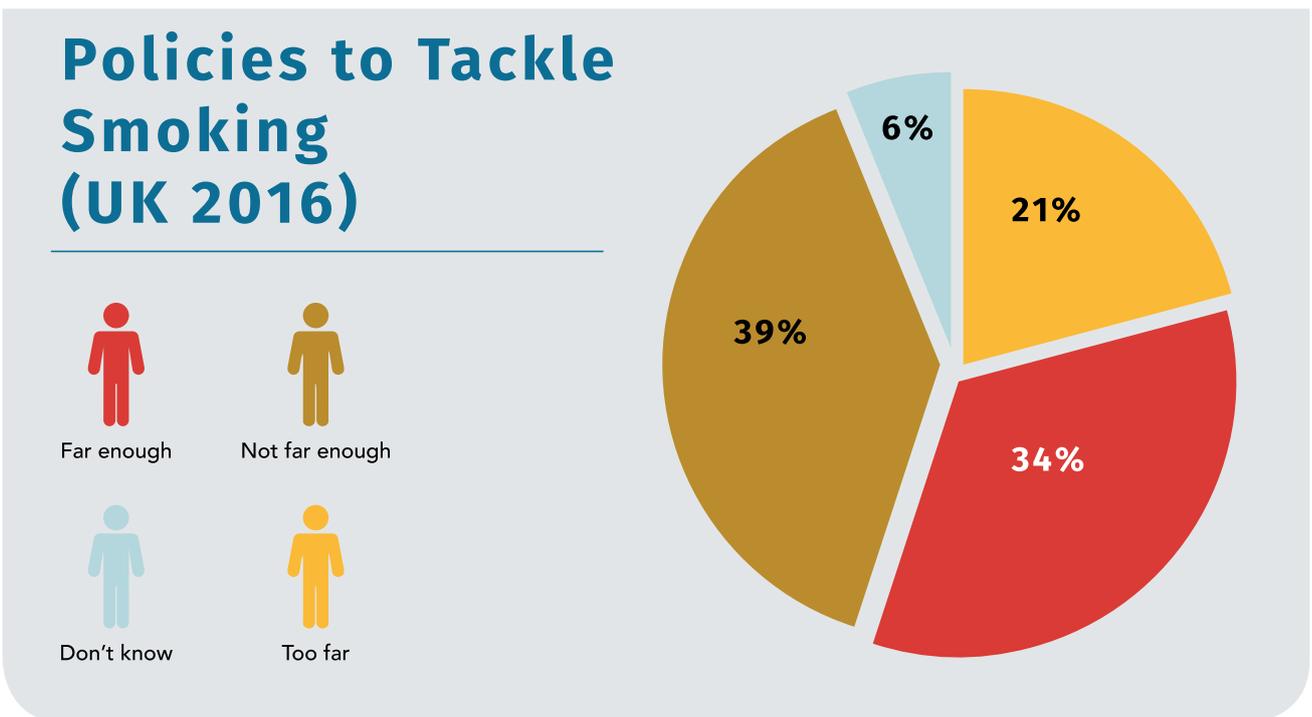
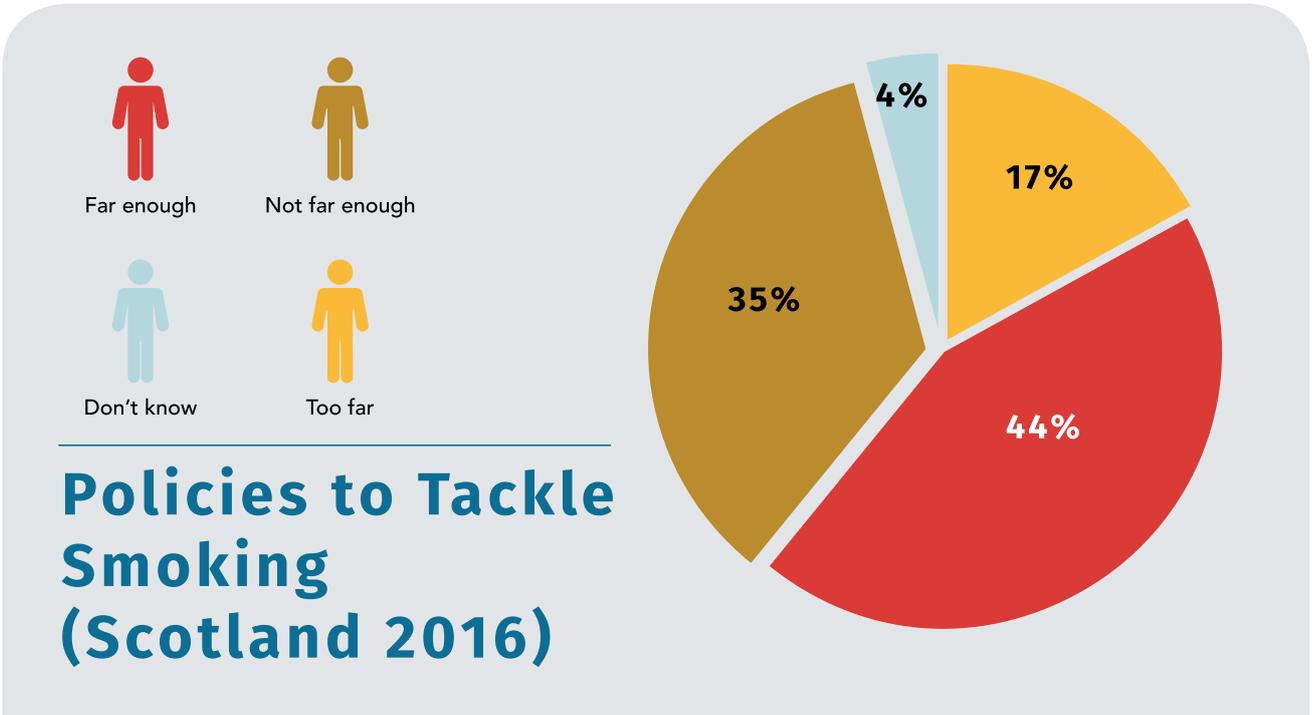
NEW TOBACCO CONTROL MEASURES

Anti-tobacco lobbyists, led by ASH, are lobbying the government to introduce new measures they believe are essential to tackle smoking. However it is clear that the public doesn't support ASH's desire to stigmatise smoking, reduce choice and target smokers' disposable income. Invited to prioritise issues that should be addressed by government, the public responded as follows:



The graph shows plainly that the public's views on government priorities have remained consistent over the course of the last year. This is particularly true on the need for government to tackle smoking. In 2015 a mere 13% believed that tackling smoking was a high priority and that percentage has remained constant in 2016.⁴ Overwhelmingly the public believe that other issues, such as investing in new doctors and nurses or addressing A&E response times, are far more pressing issues for government.⁵ These results are also reflected at local government level where only 10% of the public believe that tackling smoking is a very important priority for local authorities.⁶

What is clear is that a majority of the public believe that the anti-smoking measures that have been introduced by successive governments in recent years have gone far enough and many believe they have gone too far.



In Scotland 61% of the public does not think that further government measures are required in order to reduce smoking and 17% believe that such policies have already gone too far.⁷ Throughout the UK as a whole the picture is similar – 55% of people are of the opinion that no new measures are necessary to tackle smoking prevalence and, of those, 21% consider such policies to have gone too far already.⁸

In short, the public does not believe that new government measures are required to tackle smoking prevalence levels. Public opinion is clear: the government has more pressing issues to deal with than creating new and ever increasing obstacles for smokers.

INCREASED TAXATION ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS

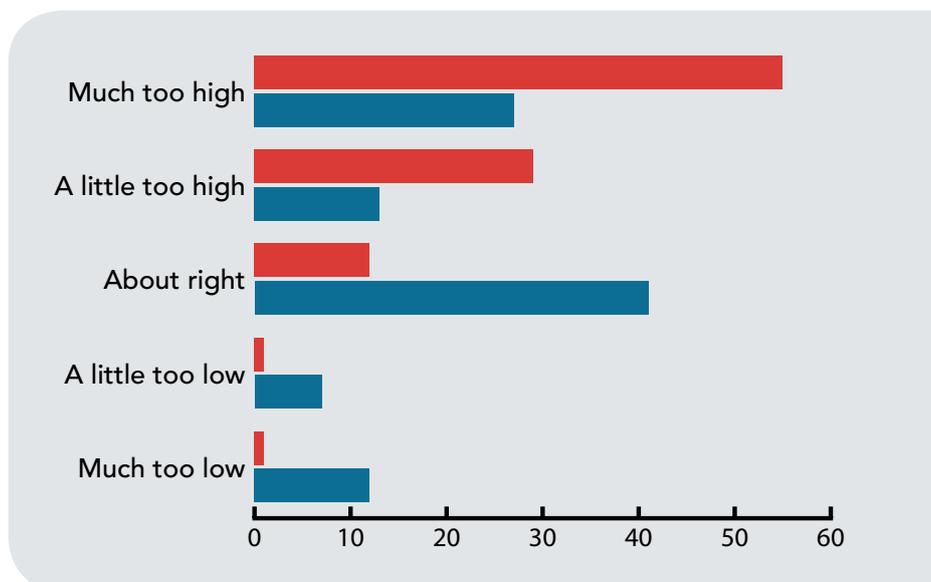


Smokers contribute around £12 billion per year (excise duty plus VAT) in tobacco taxation. This is the equivalent of £400 for every taxpayer every year.⁹ Only 4% of the public know this and 43% have no idea how much tax smokers contribute to the Treasury.¹⁰

Despite the enormous contribution smokers make to the nation's finances, ASH has a long track record of lobbying politicians and government departments to increase the tobacco duty escalator even more. ASH maintains that in terms of smokers' purchasing behaviour "price dominates their decision-making. Consequently, increasing the price of tobacco through taxation remains the single most effective way of reducing smoking prevalence."¹¹

ASH recommends that the government should increase the tobacco duty escalator from 2% above inflation to 5% above inflation. The government adopted this approach at Budget 2016 for hand rolling tobacco, though the escalator remained at 2% for cigarette products.¹² ASH also recommends bringing tax on hand rolling tobacco in line with that levied on cigarettes (which would require a 15% tax escalator in the short-to-medium term).

In spite of persistent lobbying by ASH on this issue, it is clear that this policy has little support amongst the public.



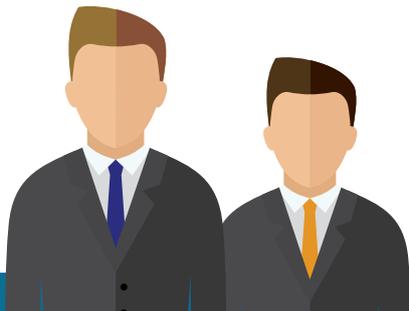
The data shows that 40% of the general public believe that taxation on an average packet of cigarettes is already too high and a further 41% believe it is at about the right level. In contrast, only 20% of the general public believe that a further increase in tobacco taxation is desirable.¹³ Moreover, survey data also shows that 84% of smokers believe that tobacco prices, which are driven by tax increases, are too high.¹⁴

The impact that successive governments' high tobacco tax policies have had on smokers' disposable incomes is well understood. This was illustrated in 2015 by the Fabian Society (a left-leaning think tank) in a report that recommended "Reducing the burden of 'sin' taxes on alcohol and tobacco".¹⁵ Its author stated that:

"People believe they have a moral imperative to help those who really need it, and the government should act to help the poorest. They are angry when they find out that poor families pay a higher share of their income in tax than the rich."¹⁶

The report argued that reducing the tax burden on alcohol and tobacco products should form part of a broader strategy to lower "indirect tax liabilities" for those who can least afford them.¹⁷

In short, any further above inflation increases in tobacco taxation would be unpopular amongst both smokers and the general public. More important, perhaps, it would also be grossly unfair to smokers who are still reeling from six years of above inflation increases.



FURTHER RESTRICTIONS ON SMOKING

ASH and its allies are committed to reducing the visibility of smoking and the ability of smokers to enjoy a legitimate habit whether in public or private spaces. It must be emphasised therefore that the type of policies ASH and other tobacco control campaigners would like to see implemented clearly lack widespread public support.

Smoking in Cars

ASH is committed to prohibiting smokers from lighting up in their own private vehicles regardless of the presence of children. In its 2015 manifesto the group stated:

“The ban on smoking in cars carrying children provides a platform for considering a wider ban on smoking in all motor vehicles.”¹⁸

However the latest research suggests that an overwhelming 64% of the public oppose such a policy, a 9% increase on similar research carried out in 2015.¹⁹ Moreover it is already widely accepted that the current less restrictive measure – the policy that prohibits smoking in cars carrying children – is unenforceable.

A new law to ban smoking in all private vehicles, as ASH recommends, would needlessly criminalise smokers and place even greater burdens on already overstretched police forces across the UK.



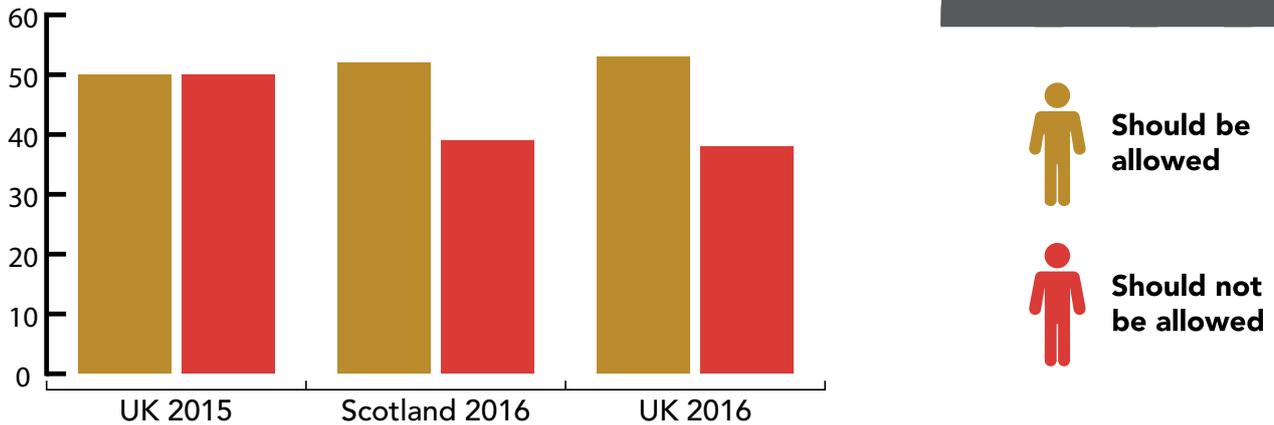
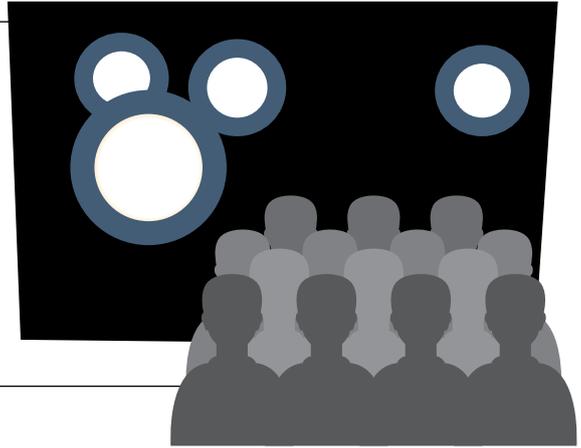
Nick Smart, chairman of the West Yorkshire Police Federation, recently stated:

“Cuts have had a huge impact on our roads policing capability, and we have lost a number of officers in that area. We now have to enforce this new law with dwindling numbers and capacity. There are already other road traffic priorities such as dangerous driving, driving without insurance, and the use of mobile phones. This is yet another ask of us when we are struggling for staff, and another burden placed on us when resources are diminishing. We don’t have the resources to police this new law how we would want.”²⁰



Smoking on Stage and Screen

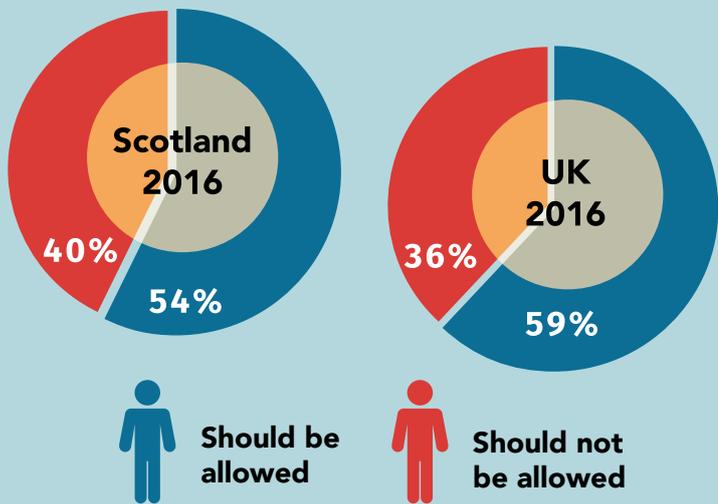
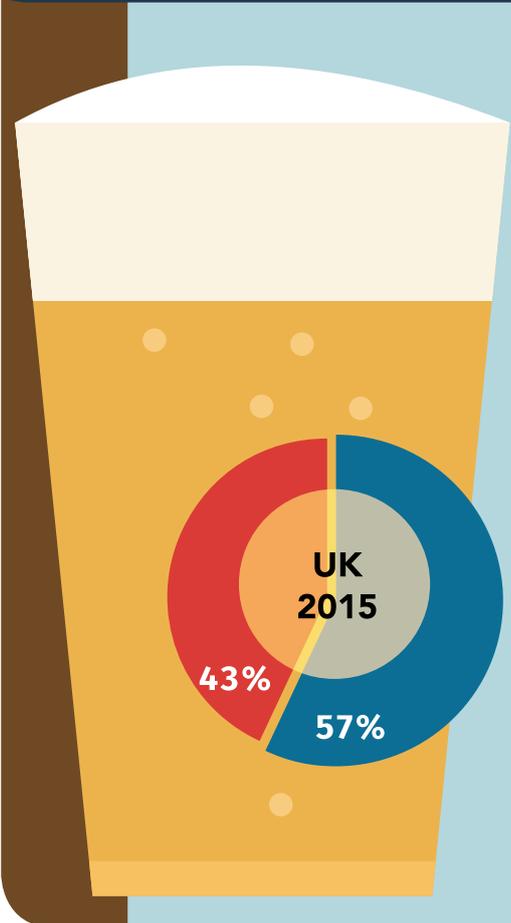
ASH is also lobbying the government to introduce new measures to ban smoking on stage and on screen, even when smoking is integral to the plot of a play or film.²¹ However this policy, like many of ASH's recommendations, has limited public support.



Over the course of the last year, as the graph above shows, there has been an increase in support for artistic freedom in this regard and a sharp decline (12%) in support for new restrictions on actors, directors and playwrights.

Smoking in Pubs and Clubs

Likewise, support for pubs and private members' clubs, including working men's clubs, to be allowed to provide a well-ventilated designated smoking room for smokers has become more popular since 2015 and opposition to the idea has decreased by 7%.²²



Smoking in Outdoor Public Places

The public holds similar attitudes with regard to smoking in outdoor areas such as parks and on beaches which ASH would like to see prohibited.²³ Half of all members of the public do not believe that smoking in parks and on beaches should be banned.²⁴ Scots are the most opposed to this policy, with only 43% in favour of prohibition.²⁵

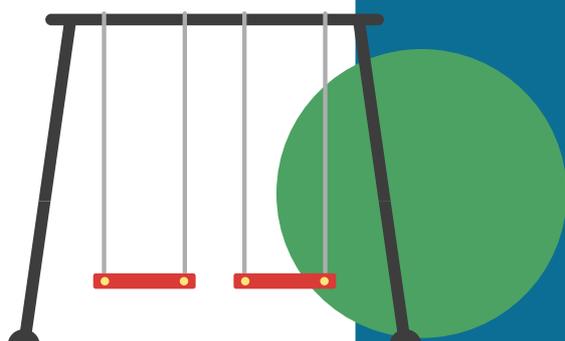
What is more there is no evidence that smoking in parks, for example, is either a health risk to non-smokers or widespread. According to Professor Michael Siegel, Boston University School of Public Health (2011):

“No evidence demonstrates that the duration of outdoor exposure – in places where people can move freely about – is long enough to cause substantial health damage.”

Professor Siegel added that “in trying to convince people that even transient exposure to secondhand smoke is a potentially deadly hazard, smoking opponents risk losing scientific credibility.”²⁶

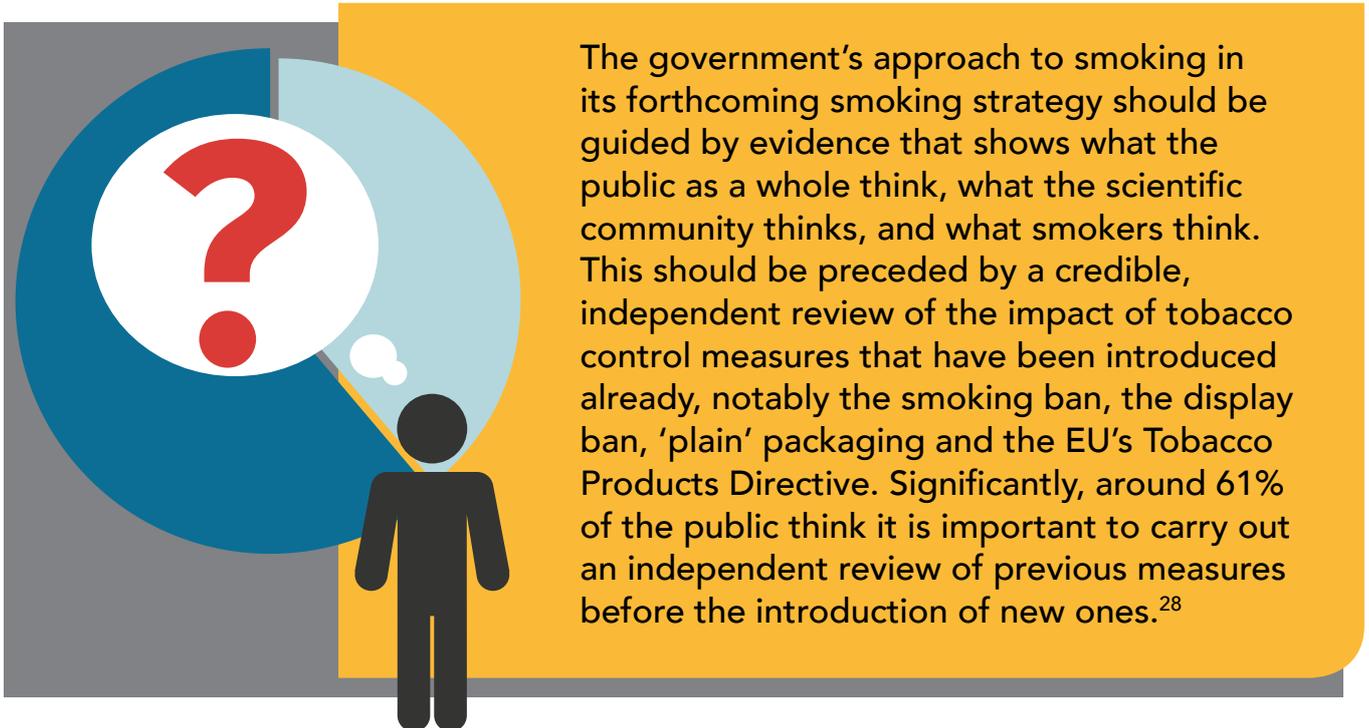
In July 2016 FOREST commissioned a research firm to carry out an analysis of smoking incidence in four parks across London – Queen’s Park, St James’ Park, Victoria Park and Queen Mary and Mile End Park – in order to assess how prevalent smoking is in the capital’s green spaces. The research found that the number of people smoking in the four parks under observation represented an insignificant proportion of visitors, comprising an average (weighted) of 1.6% of total park visitors.²⁷

Location	Victoria Park	St James’ Park	Queen’s Park	Queen Mary & Mile End Park
Date	25th July 2016	29th July 2016	30th July 2016	1st August 2016
Number of people in total	169	1522	716	184
% of people smoking	4.1	1.2	1.8	1.1



In short, further restrictions on where smokers can light up are not supported by a majority of the public; nor are they supported by those who would be charged with enforcing new regulations; nor are they supported by scientific and observational research.

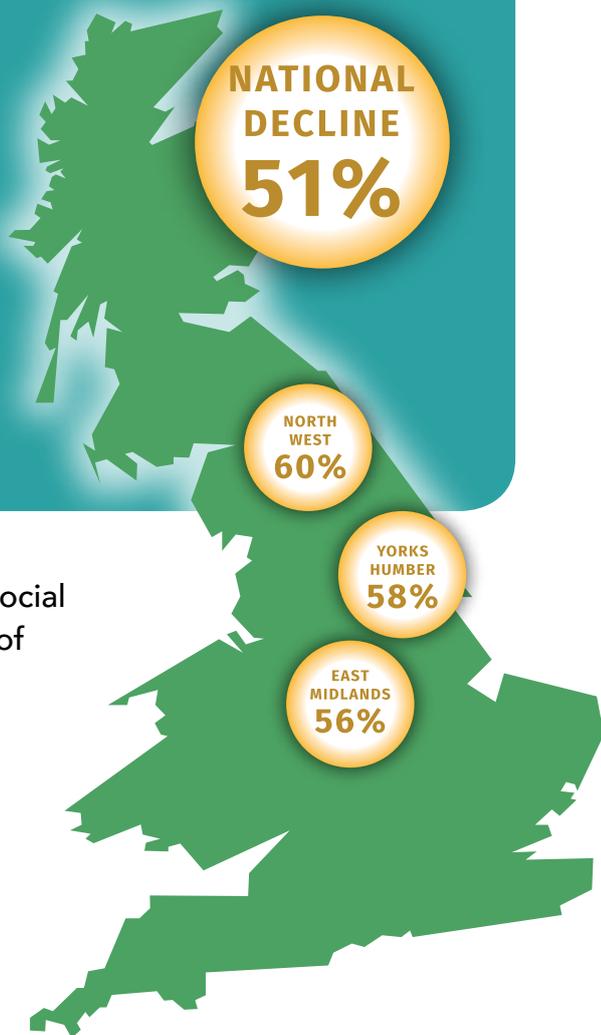
COMMON SENSE POLICY MAKING



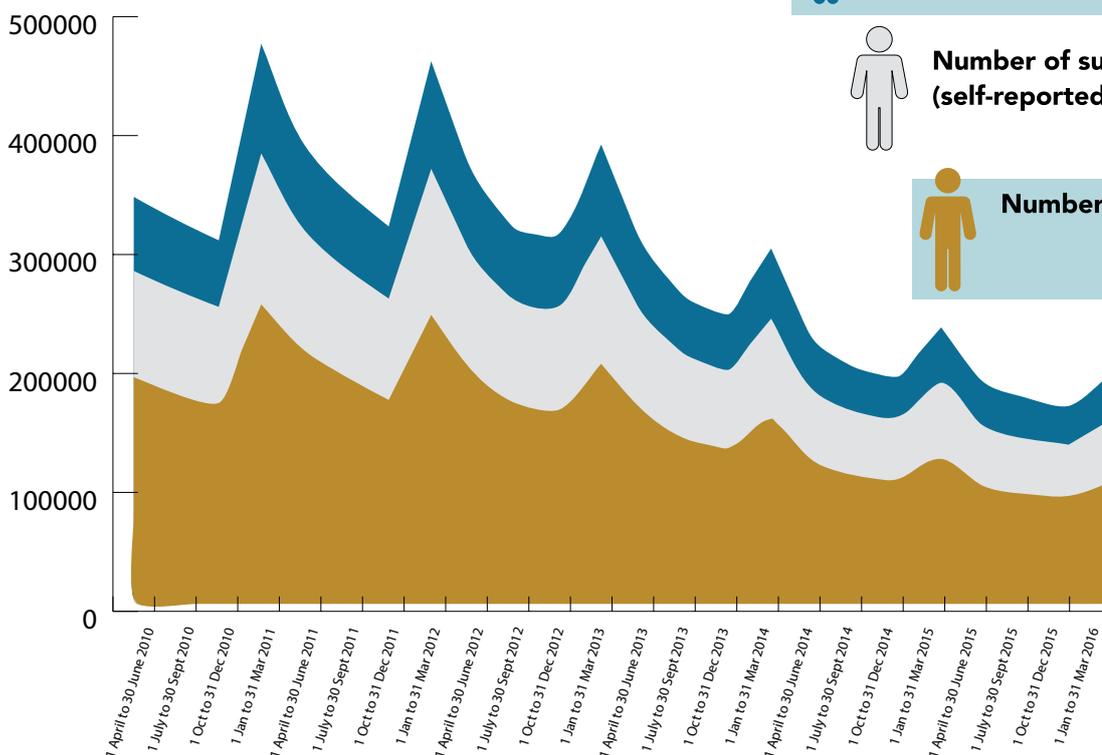
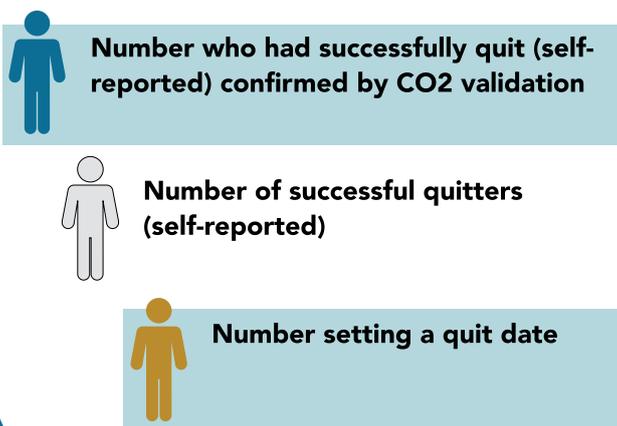
In particular the government should not be guided in its deliberations by a taxpayer-funded lobby group that has a clear vested interest in increasing the degree and severity of anti-smoking legislation. The public is clearly uncomfortable with taxpayers' money being used to lobby government. Latest research suggests that, excluding 'don't knows', 83% believe that public funds should NOT be used to influence decisions made by officials in government.²⁹ This represents a 6% increase on research conducted in 2015.³⁰



↳ It is this rationale that underpins ASH’s commitment to the introduction of a levy on tobacco manufacturers of £500 million, the proceeds of which will be used to fund national, regional and local level stop smoking services.³² The government has already rejected the idea of introducing a new levy on tobacco manufacturers on the basis that “the impact of a levy on the tobacco market would be similar to a duty rise, as tobacco manufacturers and importers would pass the costs of a levy on to consumers.”³³



However, information published by the Health and Social Care Information Council (HSCIC) shows that usage of the sorts of services that ASH claims it needs more funding for has declined dramatically. For example, the use of stop smoking services has dropped by around 51% in England and Wales since 2010/11 (see graph below).³⁴ In some areas of the country the drop off has been even bigger. The biggest declines in the use of stop smoking services took place in the North West (60%), Yorkshire and the Humber (58%) and the East Midlands (56%).³⁵



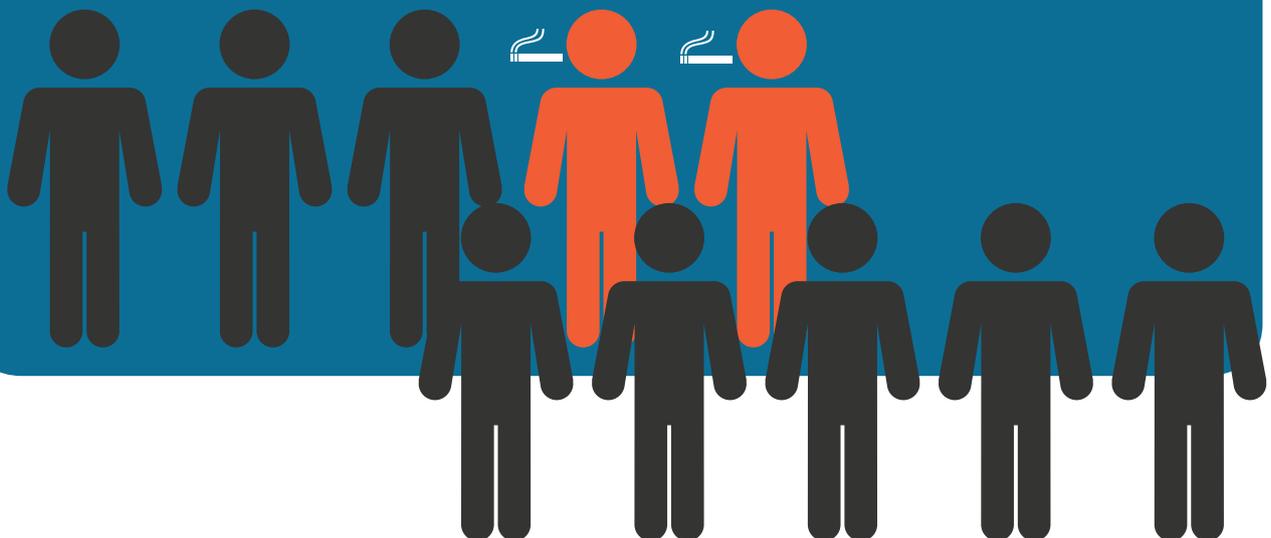
In light of the dramatic fall in the use of stop smoking services, 72% of the public believe that the way in which such services are funded should be reviewed.³⁶ This indicates that the views of the public are in line with the views of those working in local government. For example, in response to recent criticism by ASH concerning local authority cuts to stop smoking services, the Local Government Association (LGA) stated:



"Since the advent of e-cigarettes and campaigns such as Stoptober, we have seen the number of users of smoking cessation services fall, while the population of smokers left is now more challenging to get to quit. This means councils are re-evaluating what they do on tobacco control and how to be more effective. Councils remain committed to helping smokers quit, however they face significant cuts to public health budgets this year, and spending large volumes of money on a service people are not using will fast undermine the cost-effectiveness of providing it."³⁷

Local authorities have rightly re-prioritised funding away from smoking cessation services as demand for them has fallen due to the impact of emerging products including e-cigarettes on smokers' behaviour.

Meanwhile government policy should be made independently. It should be subject to credible, impartial review and should be guided by the available evidence rather than the prevailing dogma of influential lobby groups, particularly those that are funded by the taxpayer.



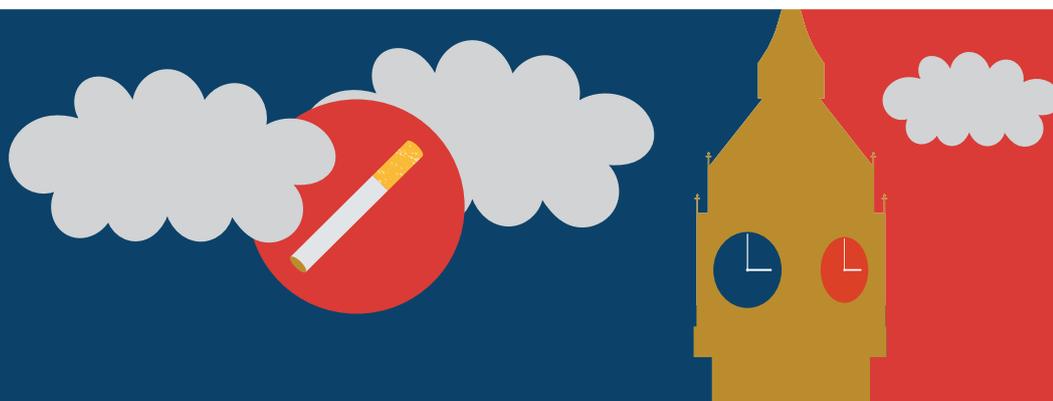
CONCLUSION

For five years from 2010-15 the Coalition government pursued an aggressive anti-tobacco, anti-smoker agenda. The Conservative government, which was elected in 2015, continued in this vein. The policies they adopted, accepted or introduced lacked widespread public support and were grounded on questionable evidence. Nevertheless both governments proceeded with a range of policies that ignored public opinion and were to the detriment of smokers, who still make up one in six people in the UK and one in five eligible voters.

The anti-smoker agenda is driven by ASH, an unelected taxpayer-funded lobby group. ASH created, and continues to create, 'false pressure' – an impression that the public at large is clamouring for anti-tobacco legislation. The research outlined in this report demonstrates that the reality is quite different. The general public is far more tolerant of smoking than ASH would have us believe. Public opinion places renewed efforts to tackle smoking and restrict smokers' behaviour low down the list of government priorities. It shows that even non-smokers have little desire to penalise smokers further by increasing tobacco duty beyond existing levels. Furthermore, the evidence outlined here demonstrates there is little appetite amongst the general public for further demonisation of smokers.

What is equally clear is the public's desire for a common sense approach to policy making in the area of tobacco control. Regulation should not be made at the behest of taxpayer-funded lobby groups but on the basis of credible, independent evidence. It should also be based on fairness not dogma. Punishing rather than educating the consumer is unacceptable. Nor should legislation be introduced without due consideration of the inevitable unintended consequences. Instead legislation should be reviewed impartially in order to determine its costs as well as its benefits. In short, government policy, as well as the policy making process, should stand up to the most rigorous scrutiny.

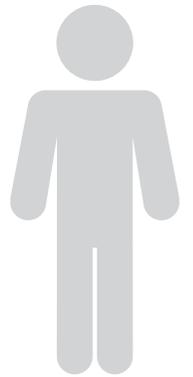
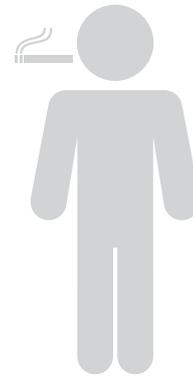
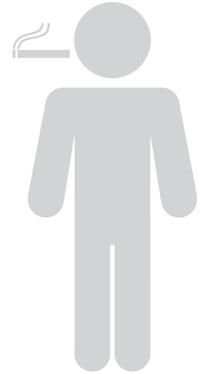
On assuming office the new prime minister Theresa May indicated that her 'mission' was "to make Britain a country that works for everyone". In the coming months, as the government's new smoking strategy is finalised, her ministers should reflect on what that truly means. A significant part of the population smoke and their contribution to society is substantial. Further discrimination against smokers would be the clearest sign that this new 'one nation' Conservative government is not as inclusive as it purports to be.



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Note: Populus interviewed 2,113 UK adults online between 1-3 July 2016; 2,111 UK adults online between 29-30 June 2016; 2,089 UK adults online between 24-26 June 2016; 1,011 adults in Scotland online between 11-14 March 2016; and 2,010 GB adults online between 3-4 June 2015. Populus is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.



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