



Royal College
of Physicians

Setting higher medical standards

**Royal College of Physicians
Response to the European Commission's Green Paper:
'Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level'**

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) plays a leading role in the delivery of high quality patient care by setting standards of medical practice and promoting clinical excellence. We provide physicians in the United Kingdom and overseas with education, training and support throughout their careers. As an independent body representing over 20,000 Fellows and Members worldwide, we advise and work with government, the public, patients and other professions to improve health and healthcare.

The RCP greatly welcomes the Commission's Green Paper as a way forward to promote smoke-free policies across Europe. The College has a long-standing interest in tobacco policy, from its first ground-breaking report 'Smoking and Health' in 1962¹, which recommended wider restrictions on smoking in public places. In particular, our 2005 report 'Going Smoke-free: The medical case for clean air in the home, at work and in public places'², urged the UK Government to introduce smokefree policies as soon as possible, and on July 1 smoking will be banned in nearly all public places in the UK.

The College urges the Commission to promote smokefree policies in all members states as quickly and effectively as possible. This would reduce the immense toll of avoidable death and disability caused by smoking.

Section IV – Scope of the smokefree initiative

Question 1. Which of the two approaches suggested in Section IV would be more desirable in terms of its scope for smoke-free initiative: a total ban on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workplaces or a ban with exemptions granted to selected categories and venues?

The RCP believes a total ban on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workplaces is by far the best option and should be pursued as soon as possible.

The reasons for the RCP's support for this option are taken from the 2005 report² and are as follows:

- There is an unanswerable moral case to protect all people from passive smoking at work. All employees have a right to work in a safe environment, and all employers have a duty to ensure that they do
- Comprehensive smoke-free legislation, making all public places and workplaces completely smoke-free, without exception, is the only effective means of achieving this
- Comprehensive smoke-free policies also improve public health by helping existing smokers to quit, and discouraging young people from starting to smoke

- Preventing passive smoking at home, particularly for children, is a public health priority. Home exposure is prevented only by helping parents and carers to quit smoking completely, and/or by making homes completely smoke-free
- Population and individual-level interventions to encourage smoking cessation and smoke-free households, including comprehensive smoke-free legislation and sustained health promotion campaigns, are the most effective means of reducing ETS exposure at home
- Experience from other countries has shown that partial bans and voluntary measures are not effective in protecting workers and the general population.

Section V – Policy options

Question 2. Which of the policy options described in Section V would be the most desirable and appropriate for promoting smoke-free environments? What form of EU intervention do you consider necessary to achieve the smoke-free objectives?

The RCP believes that ‘No change from the status quo’ is not an acceptable option. All EU citizens should have the right to be protected at the highest level, and the status quo would simply allow citizens from many countries to continue to be exposed to tobacco smoke with the resultant deaths and diseases.

In addition to the response above, the College also fully supports the responses from the UK organisation Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

¹ Royal College of Physicians. *Smoking and Health*. Report of a working party. London: RCP, 1962.

² Royal College of Physicians. *Going Smoke-free: The medical case for clean air in the home, at work and in public places*. Report by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians. London: RCP, 2005
<http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/contents/fe4ab715-2689-4a4a-b8c7-53e80386c893.pdf>
 (accessed 30 May 2007)

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