



Rt Hon David Cameron MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013

Dear Prime Minister

### **Standardised “Plain” Packaging of Tobacco Products**

We are writing to you on behalf of the Smokefree Action Coalition, an alliance of over 100 health and welfare organisations committed to reducing the harm caused by tobacco. We are extremely disappointed to read reports in the Sun newspaper (Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013) that, at your initiative, the Government has abandoned proposals for legislation requiring tobacco products to be sold in standardised packaging. Such a step would seriously undermine the Government’s credibility on public health issues.

Cigarette packaging is designed to be as attractive as possible to the tobacco industry’s target markets, including young adult women and teenagers of both genders. The General Lifestyle Survey shows that two out of three smokers become addicted before the age of 18, and almost two in five before the age of 16. Cancer Research UK has used a government commissioned annual survey of youth smoking habits to calculate that in 2011 more than 200,000 children started to smoke. The number of new teenage smokers rises by an estimated 570 a day. Half of all lifetime smokers will die from disease related to their addiction.

Standardised packaging, as envisaged in the Department of Health’s consultation document, would make tobacco packaging less attractive, increase the effectiveness of health warnings, prevent the use of misleading design to promote mistaken consumer beliefs about strength and quality, and remove any positive association with specific cigarette brands and images. The latest polling evidence suggests that nearly two thirds of the English public would support a standardised packaging. Experience of legislation on smokefree public places and the retail display ban also shows that public support would be likely to grow after the legislation came into force. The evidence overwhelmingly backs the case for standardised packaging.

The Sun story suggests that two factors may have influenced the reported decision not to proceed, first, the possible impact on the UK packaging industry, and secondly concerns about a possible rise in cigarette smuggling.

On the impact of standardised packs on the packaging industry, we understand from the British Printing Industries Federation that tobacco cartons account for less than 5% of all folding cartons produced in this country, and the total value of tobacco cartons

manufactured in the UK in 2011 was less than £50 million, so it is a very small part of our packaging industry (see enclosed brief for references). Standardised packaging would still of course need to be manufactured, so the actual impact on the packaging industry would be negligible and more than counteracted for by the positive effect on public health.

On the impact on illicit trade, all independent evidence, and in particular successive "Measuring Tax Gaps" publications from HM Revenue and Customs, shows that the level of illicit tobacco in the UK is falling, and not rising as industry funded reports regularly claim. The key security features present on existing packaging would also be present on standardised packaging, including covert anti-counterfeit marks and printed codes on packs. This argument is therefore also specious.

The UK Government has in recent years achieved a justified international reputation as a leader on tobacco control issues. This reputation could now be lost, as other countries follow the Australian example and introduce standardised packaging. Instead, the Government will be seen as having bowed to pressure from a well funded and mendacious tobacco industry campaign. It should be noted that one of the big four tobacco manufacturers, Japan Tobacco International, has announced that it is spending at least £2 million on this campaign, and the other three manufacturers are also heavily engaged.

Abandoning standardised packaging would be to miss a golden opportunity to take a further big step to cut smoking rates and the awful toll of death and disease that smoking causes would also have been missed. Many thousands of young people now starting to smoke will face painful and debilitating illnesses and shortened lives as a result. We cannot believe that this is an outcome that the Government is prepared to accept.

We therefore hope very much that the Sun report will prove inaccurate and that this important public health measure will not simply be abandoned in the face of tobacco industry lobbying. However, if you are not minded to proceed with the introduction of standardised packaging as Government policy, we would strongly suggest that Parliament be given the opportunity to determine this issue in a free vote. A clear precedent for this exists, since this was how comprehensive smokefree legislation was introduced, a measure which you have subsequently accepted has been a great success. We believe that Parliament would back standardised packaging if given the opportunity.

We would be happy to meet Ministers or your officials to discuss the matter further or to supply you with any further information or evidence you might require. We look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely



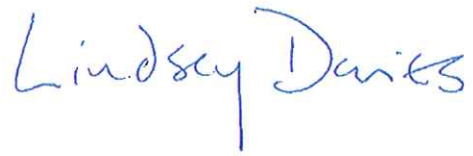
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Chair of Council  
Royal College of General  
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Janet Atherton  
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Harpal Kumar  
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Cancer Research UK



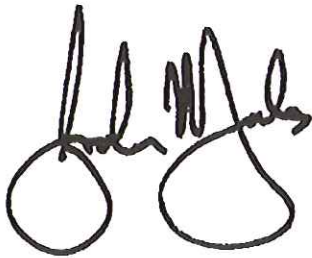
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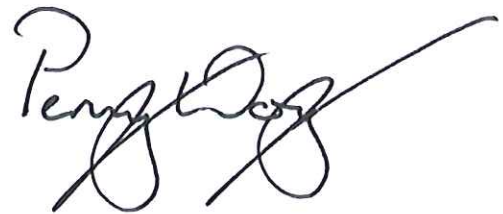
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