

UK government should fund media campaigns that promote quitting, not films that promote smoking

A letter from leading international tobacco researchers published today by *Addiction* calls for the UK government to stop subsidising films that they claim promote smoking and spend more on media campaigns that promote quitting.

Anti-tobacco media campaigns can help smokers quit and discourage children and young adults from taking up smoking. Spending on such media campaigns in England has dropped in the past five years from just under £25 million in 2009-10 to £5.3 million in 2015. Further cuts are expected this year.

By contrast, a recent study found that between 2007 and 2015, UK Film Tax Relief provided subsidies worth an estimated £473 million to at least 90 top-grossing UK or US-UK films that contained tobacco imagery, with 97% of this granted to films which are youth-rated in the UK.* In so doing, the UK Government appears to be ignoring World Health Organization recommendations to give adult ratings to films with smoking scenes and withhold tax credits for such films.

The authors of the letter point to evidence that smoking imagery in films promotes smoking in young people. Lead author Nicholas Hopkinson says "The UK Government says it wants to achieve a 'smoke-free generation' and aims to publish a new tobacco strategy 'led by the evidence' this summer. It is counterproductive for the UK Government to continue subsidising films that contain smoking while cutting spending on mass media anti-smoking campaigns. If the new government strategy is to succeed, it must include evidence-based funding for mass media campaigns and a disincentive for depicting smoking in films."

* Millett C, Polansky JR, Glantz SA (2011) Government inaction on ratings and government subsidies to the US film industry help promote youth smoking. *PLoS Med* 8: e1001077.

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For editors:

Hopkinson NS, Millett C, Glantz S, Arnott D, and McNeill A (2016) UK government should fund stop smoking media campaigns not give tax breaks to films with smoking imagery. *Addiction*. doi: [10.1111/add.13511](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13511)

Media seeking interviews with lead author Dr Nicholas S. Hopkinson should contact him via Colin Smith at Imperial College London by email (cd.smith@imperial.ac.uk) or telephone (+44 (0)20 7594 6712).

Addiction is a monthly international scientific journal publishing peer-reviewed research reports on alcohol, illicit drugs, tobacco, and gambling as well as editorials and other debate pieces. Owned by the Society for the Study of Addiction, it has been in continuous publication since 1884. *Addiction* is the number one journal in the 2016 ISI Journal Citation Reports ranking in the substance abuse category for both science and social science editions.