



National Manifesto

A Consultation with Young People on a Life Without Tobacco?

An Irish Perspective...



Introduction

This document was formed as the result of a national consultation process undertaken by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). These are the views of the young people that took part in the consultation process and not those of NYCI. On 1st April 2006 young people from all over Ireland, representing many different organisations, came to the Mansion House in Dublin for a day long National Consultation Event.

The main objective was to get fresh perspectives on how we can deal with the ongoing problem of young people and tobacco. While Ireland is seen as being quite progressive with its approach towards smoking, at the consultation it was felt that there is still more to do on this issue.

The '**Young People: for a Life without Tobacco?**' consultation asked young people about their opinion on a life without tobacco. Is it possible? Why? Why not? How? Specifically, they were asked for recommendations on how they and others can work towards a life without tobacco. The opinions of young people under 18 were collated and fed into the discussion in the form of an audio presentation.

1. Campaigns

It was the unanimous opinion of the participants at the consultation that there is much room for improvement in the current anti-smoking campaigns. It was acknowledged by participants that to change people's opinions and behavioural patterns, multi-faceted campaigns need to be adopted. Focusing on the diversity of the population, and approaching different perspectives, would strengthen future campaigns.

Campaigns need to both deter people from starting to smoke and encourage smoking cessation. It was felt that in order to achieve this, campaigns should empower and not patronise the person. A campaign should offer support, not preach to the individual and make them feel judged. In today's world, people are becoming more and more aware of their individual rights, responsibilities and choices. Effective campaigns would benefit from recognising that someone may make the choice to smoke, but they can also choose not to smoke, or to quit. The key is to empower people to make the latter choices by



National Manifesto

emphasising positive coping skills for dealing with stress, boredom and confidence as an alternative to smoking.

A key finding arising from the consultation was that campaigns need to make an immediate connection with the target audience in order to be effective. Young people are not concerned about heart attacks and developing diseases so scare-tactics are almost irrelevant to them. Young people live in the 'here and the now'; shock-tactics are often too extreme to have relevance to a young audience. Describing the symptoms of diseases, and not just the names, would help to address this issue. Young people are concerned with acceptance, identity, finances, sexuality, enjoyment etc. so it is essential to highlight the issues of smoking in relation to these; that is, show the attractive side of choosing not to smoke in relation to sexual, social, financial and physical aspects of life.

Although it is important to empower individuals to make the positive choice, it may also be worth concentrating on social responsibility. One way of supporting this facet of the campaign would be to have a National, or European, No-Smoking Day. This would serve to make quitters and non-smokers feel supported, and to emphasize the relevance smoking has to all members of society. Ash Wednesday is the current Irish National No-smoking day but not many people appear to be aware of this. With this in mind, Valentines Day as a possible date for this, as this would tie it in to what most young people are concerned with, physical attraction.

In light of the different mediums of communication that are developing at an ever-increasing rate, a no-smoking campaign would be muted if it did not expand beyond posters and television. Websites that are attractive to young people (eg. Bebo), Play stations and computer games, text messages, vending machines, information packs in schools and at youth events are just a few channels that have yet to be utilised.

Giving a campaign a face may make it more accessible and memorable. A positive role model, someone famous that young people relate to and/or admire could sell the message faster and more effectively.

Amidst hectic lives, full of options and swamped with advertising, we must compete to sell our message. We must sell an attractive and accessible thing and make people want to choose what we are selling.

Recommendations:

1. Young people are concerned with acceptance, identity, finances, sexuality, enjoyment etc. so it is essential that campaigns focus on



National Manifesto

these issues and show the attractive side of choosing not to smoke in relation to sexual, social, financial and physical aspects of life.

2. National or European No-Smoking Day on Valentines Day.
3. Use advertising in arenas which young people use to communicate your messages, such as websites, via text, play stations, vending machines.
4. Famous person to front the campaign would give it more visibility.

2. Access

During the consultation discussions took place on how easy it is for young people to access tobacco. It was thought that the legislation in place at the moment governing the sale of tobacco is far too lenient. At the moment, the age limit in this country to buy tobacco is 18. This came into place little over two years ago when the age limit was 16.

There are some hard-line measures in this country when it comes to selling alcohol, i.e. a premises selling alcohol to a minor can be shut down for a number of days and fined, people under the age of 18 are not allowed to sell alcohol and a premises has to have a license to sell alcohol.

The participants felt that the measures applicable to the sale of alcohol should be applied to the sale of tobacco.

Recommendations:

1. Introduce an EU wide age limit of 18 years to buy and sell tobacco
2. All premises must have a license to sell tobacco.
3. Introduction of penalties for selling tobacco to persons under 18 years of age such as fines and closure of premises.
4. Launch a national campaign to discourage older people (i.e. peers, friends and strangers) from buying tobacco for minors.



3. Smoking and Government Policy

From the group discussions it was clear that major government and EU policy changes need to be made in order to address the issue of young people and tobacco. At the consultation it was felt that if the governments were actually serious about the aspiration of a tobacco free society, policy changes would be a good way to determine this.

One of the main issues highlighted at the consultation was inadequacy of funding for “positive education”. Government needs to show an integrated education approach across many disciplines e.g. education, health, in order for this to be successful. Government and EU Policy should enable choice and provide alternatives for both young people to give up and for them not to start in the first place. Greater emphasis needs to be given to the alternative lifestyles available to young people. For example, it was agreed by participants that sport was an excellent outlet for young people and if they were involved, they were less likely to start smoking. However participants also expressed the view that more funding needed to be allocated to non-sporting alternatives for young people.

Another point from the day was that it should be government policy to class nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products as medical products. Currently they are classed as luxury items and are taxed accordingly. Products that are designed to help people to give up smoking should not be more expensive than tobacco, which is currently the case. We felt this was an indication that government currently have conflicting policies. On one hand they are encouraging us to give up smoking but on the other they don't want to help us financially to do this i.e. price the alternative lower than the cigarettes. By government reducing taxation on these NRT products, it would be an excellent determination of how serious the governments are about the aspiration of a tobacco free society.

Another point highlighted in the course of the consultation was that it was uncommon to be asked for ID when purchasing cigarettes. The participants also pointed out that there were always adults willing to buy cigarettes for young people. It was agreed that enforcing the law, currently in place, preventing the sale of tobacco to minors would send a message to young people and adults alike. By ensuring that the laws are enforced, it will hopefully send out a message that government is serious about the health of young people and wants to help them in their positive decisions.



National Manifesto

On the issue of social class and whether young people smoke because of socio-economic reasons, the group did not find consensus and was fairly split. Some believed that family influence had a lot to do with whether young people started smoking, as access was easier. However it was agreed by all that if government and EU policy was more integrated i.e. has a more continuous feel throughout every section of society and every daily part of life, that campaigns would be more successful. It was also stated that there doesn't just need to be campaigns, but that there should be continuous education for all ages and sectors of society so that we see a real change in attitude towards smoking.

Recommendations:

1. More resources for alternative activities for young people, both sporting and non-sporting.
2. Make Nicotine Replacement Treatments medical products which would help reduce the cost by lowering the tax on them.
3. Ensure law on selling cigarettes to young people under 18 is rigorously enforced.
4. More integrated approach by Government to tackling problem.

4. Smoking Ban

There was a consensus at the consultation that the smoking ban was a positive initiative. The smoking was banned in all work places in Ireland on 29th March 2004. This ban includes bars and restaurants. At the time Ireland was the first country in the world to go smoke free. Bars and restaurants are permitted to have an outdoor smoking area provided it is not more than fifty percent enclosed. Since the inception of the ban the compliance rate has been 95%. A recent poll for the Office of Tobacco Control found that 93% of the population supports the smoking ban.

Recommendation:

1. We recommend that an EU-wide smoking ban enacted based on the same principles as the Irish ban. While bars and restaurants should be permitted to provide outdoor smoking areas for their guests, extra care should be taken by the relevant authorities to ensure that they are not more than fifty percent enclosed.