

CRUK Code of Practice on Tobacco Company Funding to Universities

1. Background

Why is tobacco industry funding a special case?

Tobacco use is the single greatest cause of preventable illness and avoidable death in the UK, with over 100,000 people dying each year from smoking-related diseases, including cancer¹. In the UK, smoking accounts for 86% of lung cancer cases alone².

Tobacco is a unique consumer product which has no safe level of use. Up to two in three long term smokers will die of a smoking related cause^{3 4 5 6 7}. Worldwide, tobacco use kills six million people a year, 600,000 of those deaths are non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke⁸.

The tobacco industry has been aware of the serious health consequences of its product for decades, yet has sought to conceal the evidence from its customers^{9,10}. It has also continued to promote its products aggressively, especially to women, the young, the poor and to other new markets in low income countries.^{11, 12,13}

The tobacco industry have funded research which is used as part of lobbying strategies to block, amend and delay effective public health policy¹⁴ including, most recently, standardised packaging^{15,16}. The guiding principles to Article 5.3 of The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control recognise that “There is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry’s interests and public health policy interests”¹⁷.

2. Rationale for the Cancer Research UK Code of Practice on Tobacco Industry Funding to Universities

Why is Cancer Research UK so concerned?

Cancer Research UK’s vision is to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. Smoking is by far the biggest preventable cause of cancer in the world. It is estimated that smoking causes nearly a fifth of all cancer cases and more than a quarter of all cancer deaths in the UK.^{18 19} Although rates of smoking in the UK are falling, and are at their lowest level for decades, our ambition is to see a tobacco-free UK within a generation, where less than 5% of adults smoke. To help achieve this Cancer Research UK calls for the strongest possible measures to restrict tobacco companies marketing their deadly products, and the protection of public health policy from their influence.

In respect of its relationship with universities, Cancer Research UK believes there are two main areas where a university’s links with the tobacco industry may impact on its relationship with the charity, as set out in sections 3 and 4 below.

Cancer Research UK firmly supports the principles set out in the Joint Protocol of Cancer Research UK and Universities UK. The Joint Protocol sets out CRUK’s code of practice and highlights the key principles for independent research and the ethical concerns of tobacco industry funding of research. CRUK will ensure that the Joint Protocol of Cancer Research UK and Universities UK is consistent with this Code of Practice.

3. Circumstances in which Cancer Research UK may make public comment on tobacco industry funding to universities

While recognising that certain decisions rest with individual universities, Cancer Research UK feels it has a right and duty to comment in certain situations.

All universities are asked to consider the great harm to public health caused by tobacco, and the damage to their reputation if they accept tobacco industry funds. If a university accepts donations from the tobacco industry, Cancer Research UK reserves the right to publicly criticise such funding.

Furthermore, Cancer Research UK applauds those universities which already have a policy not to accept such funds and encourages other universities to follow their lead.

Cancer Research UK believes that no form of association with the tobacco industry is acceptable. Therefore, nothing in this Code shall be taken to imply that Cancer Research UK supports or approves the use of tobacco industry funding for research or any other activities.

4. Conditions Under Which Cancer Research UK Funding May Be Withheld (Revised 2018)

Cancer Research UK has a legitimate right to protect its own research funding where there is likely to be close proximity of its funding to funding from a tobacco company.

Cancer Research UK will not provide financial support to those supported by funding from a tobacco company. Cancer Research UK will also not provide financial support where those who are, or would be, supported by Cancer Research UK funds are working in such proximity to others supported by funding from a tobacco company that there is any possibility or likelihood that facilities, equipment or other resources will be shared. The conditions of this Code, at a minimum, apply at research team level. In the case of substantial investment made by a tobacco company into a higher education institution or research establishment, CRUK reserves the right to withdraw funding from a research team or programme unrelated to the specifics of the tobacco company funding.

The application of this rule would apply to any e-cigarette companies which are fully or partially owned by tobacco companies.

However, Cancer Research UK will consider funding research teams in close proximity of those funded by an *independent* e-cigarette company, those in receipt of funding from *independent* e-cigarette companies and those working alongside *independent* e-cigarette companies, where independence for e-cigarette companies is understood as the absence of ownership, funding, or comparable engagement with a tobacco company. Cancer Research UK reserves the right to place additional conditions on applicants to avoid its brand being directly associated with an individual e-cigarette company or individual e-cigarette brands. Cancer Research UK will continue to examine the questions raised by e-cigarettes and by the rapidly changing structure of the e-cigarette industry. Cancer Research UK will therefore regularly review this approach.

Where Cancer Research UK is considering major new funding, association of the university with the tobacco industry will be a key criterion.

Definition of Tobacco Industry Funding (Revised 2014)

“Tobacco Company” means a company, entity or organisation (or groups or combinations of the same) whose business other than for an insignificant part (i.e. less than 10% of its revenue), is the

development, production, promotion, marketing, or sale of tobacco in any country of the world, or is a subsidiary or a holding company or affiliate of the same. (Nb. This includes novel tobacco products such as heated tobacco products.)

E-cigarette companies, fully or partially owned by the tobacco industry, are also considered tobacco companies under this definition.

Cancer Research UK will have the final decision in any dispute.

Policy endorsed by CRUK Scientific Executive Board in 2015 and the CRUK Executive Board in 2019.

¹ Peto, R et al (2012). Mortality from smoking in developed countries 1950-2010. University of Oxford. UK: pp.512-523. Available at ([pdf](#))

² Parkin, DM (2011). Tobacco-attributable cancer burden in the UK in 2010. [Br J Cancer 2011; 105\(S2\):S6-S13](#)

³ Doll, R. et al (2004). [Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors](#). BMJ, 2004.

⁴ Banks, E et al (2015) Tobacco smoking and all-cause mortality in a large Australian cohort study: findings from a mature epidemic with current low smoking prevalence. BMC Medicine 2015, 13:38 doi:10.1186/s12916-015-0281-z

⁵ Pirie, K et al. (2012) The 21st century hazards of smoking and benefits of stopping: a prospective study of one million women in the UK. The Lancet. Volume 381, No. 9861, p133–141, 12 January 2013

⁶ Prahata, J et al (2013) 21st-Century Hazards of Smoking and Benefits of Cessation in the United States. N Engl J Med 2013; 368:341-350 January 24, 2013 DOI: 10.1056/NEJMsa1211128

⁷ Thun MJ, Carter BD, Feskanich D, et al. (2013) 50-Year trends in smoking-related mortality in the United States. N Engl J Med 2013;368:351-364

⁸ World Health Organization. Tobacco: Fact sheet N°339 (Updated May 2014). Accessed at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs339/en/>

⁹ University of Bath. Tobacco Control Research Group. [Tobacco Institute](#)

¹⁰ State of California Department of Justice. Office of the Attorney General. Master Settlement Agreement. Documents available at: <http://oag.ca.gov/tobacco/msa>

¹¹ Yach D, Bialous SA. Junking Science to Promote Tobacco. Am J Pub Hlth, 2001; 91(11):1745-1748.

¹² University of Bath. Tobacco Control Research Group. [British American Tobacco in Africa: A Past and Present of Double Standards](#)

¹³ University of Bath. Tobacco Control Research Group. Be Marlboro: [Targeting the World's Biggest Brand at Youth](#)

¹⁴ Smoke Free Partnership. Block, amend, delay. Report on Tobacco industry's efforts to influence the EU's Tobacco Products Directive (2001/37/EC). Documents available at <http://www.smokefreepartnership.eu/news/block-amend-delay-tobacco-industry-efforts-influence-european-union%E2%80%99s-tobacco-products>

¹⁵ University of Bath. Tobacco Control Research Group. [Ashok Kaul](#).

¹⁶ University of Bath. Tobacco Control Research Group. [Michael Wolf](#).

¹⁷ WHO. Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. Available at http://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_5_3.pdf

¹⁸ Parkin, DM (2011). Tobacco-attributable cancer burden in the UK in 2010. [Br J Cancer 2011; 105\(S2\):S6-S13](#)

¹⁹ Peto, R et al (2012). Mortality from smoking in developed countries 1950-2010. University of Oxford. UK: pp.512-523. Available at ([pdf](#))