WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Tobacco Control Legislation

Thursday 15 December 2011

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): The Government will publish a consultation on the packaging of tobacco products in spring 2012.

In March 2011 the Government published "Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England" which set out how our comprehensive, evidence-based programme of tobacco control will be delivered within the context of the new public health system over the next five years.

The Tobacco Control Plan included a commitment to explore options to reduce the promotional impact of tobacco packaging and to publish a consultation paper.

The Government takes very seriously the need to reduce the number of young people who take up smoking. Each year, in England alone, around 330,000 children under 16 first try smoking and the majority of smokers start smoking regularly before they are 18 years old.

I am pleased to confirm that this consultation will be carried out on a UK-wide basis. Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also eager to gain a better understanding of whether the plain packaging of tobacco products could be effective in reducing the number of young people who take up smoking and in supporting adults who want to quit. Participating in this consultation will help them in making decisions about how they wish to take forward this matter in their own administrations.

It is also important to create a supportive environment for adults who want to quit smoking. Most smokers report that it takes many attempts before they succeed in quitting. Removing sources of temptation that undermine quit attempts can be of great help.

The Government wants to make it easier for people to make healthy choices. To do this, we need to understand whether there is evidence to demonstrate that the plain packaging of tobacco products would have an additional health benefit, over and above existing tobacco control initiatives. The Department of Health has, therefore, commissioned an independent academic review of the existing evidence relevant to the effects of tobacco packaging. This systematic evidence review will be peer reviewed and made available alongside the consultation.

Department of Health officials are also working with colleagues across Government to explore the implications and likely impacts of options for tobacco packaging.

This presents a complex series of issues and we will need to take all the relevant factors into account.

In view of these requirements, the consultation will not be available prior to the new year. The consultation will be published in spring 2012 and I would encourage all those with an interest to respond.