

Active citizenship: learning resources for topical issues

8. Smoking and alcohol: the politics of bans





Introduction for staff

The government of any country has a legitimate interest in the health and welfare of its people. Illness and premature death, as well as being very distressing for victims, family and friends, cost the health service huge amounts of money and affect the economy through loss of labour and benefit claims.

However, in democratic societies, people do not like being told what to do by their governments. Most people recognise that some protections are acceptable: age limits on drinking, smoking and gambling, control of illegal drugs, child protection, etc. But they argue that sometimes things go too far.

Despite some opposition, the UK ban on smoking in enclosed places finally covered the whole country in July 2007. We are not alone. Other countries in Europe that have some kind of smoking restrictions include: Ireland, Germany, Italy and Spain. The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan became the first country in the world to ban the sale of tobacco products nationwide in December 2004. And what about alcohol? Could alcohol ever be banned here in the UK? There is certainly concern about 'binge drinking' among the young, and doctors frequently warn about the increased likelihood of liver disease in those who drink to excess.

Citizenship learning opportunities

Citizenship education encourages discussion of topical and controversial issues and the policies that impact on them. When governments in democratic countries bring in laws that attempt to control our lifestyle choices, people use terms like 'nanny state', 'do-gooders' and 'moralisers'. In the case of bans of one sort or another, the argument boils down to a debate about what balance should be struck between the need to protect society on the one hand and the need to preserve individual liberties on the other. Young people should have informed discussions about the costs to society of potentially harmful behaviour such as smoking and drinking alcohol, and the threat to our freedom if these choices are constrained.

These materials, aimed at level 1 and 2, examine recent discussions on smoking and drinking alcohol, and provide young people with the opportunity to consider a wide range of arguments. The materials help to meet learning objectives identified in *Play your part: post-16 citizenship* QCA guidance (QCA, 2004). An examination of government policy affecting personal freedoms can be used to illustrate the key concepts of democracy, rights and responsibilities in the programme of study for key stage 4 citizenship (from September 2008).



Suggestions for using the materials

- As an introduction to the topic, photocopy the cards giving arguments for and against the smoking ban (page 5). Chop them up, shuffle them, give them out to small groups and ask groups to sort the cards into 'for' and 'against' piles; then into 'agree' and 'disagree' piles. Then ask them to select one of the arguments to research, using 'Smoking bans: an Action Network briefing' (BBC Action Network), available on: www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/A2702143, where the research evidence for each argument is supplied.
- The page headed 'Some opposing views' (page 6), gives the viewpoints of the main contenders in the debate. Some additional views from the general public appear on the message board (page 7). Using these sources of information, and any others that they have identified, young people could debate the motion: 'This house supports the right of smokers to smoke indoors in public.'
- Drinking alcohol to excess has given rise to fears about the effect on a person's health, and also the relationship between drunkenness and violence or other forms of anti-social behaviour. 'Should alcohol be further controlled?' (page 8) asks for young people's response to the suggestion of a charity that parents should not allow children to drink at home. It might be possible to invite a representative from Alcohol Concern to debate the topic with young people.
- Learners could work in pairs to list the arguments for and against a complete ban on the sale of alcohol. The 'bubble' activity (page 9) provides some of the arguments to start them off. Once they have developed the arguments, they could swap them with another pair and try to refute the other pair's arguments.
- The final activity, 'The Battle of the Binge' (page 10), puts young people in the position of a working group advising the Prime Minister on how to reduce binge drinking. Having decided on their recommendations, they should debate the civil liberties implications of each.



Arguments for and against the smoking ban

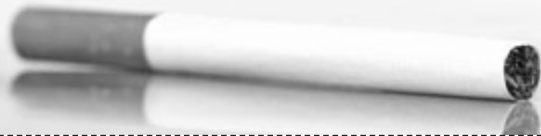


FOR THE BAN

The evidence that smoking is harmful is now overwhelming, and that it costs the health service millions of pounds



A ban will encourage more smokers to quit because smoking will be less easy



Most people are in favour of a ban



The voluntary approach, in which non-smoking areas were to be provided, has failed



Passive smoking is dangerous for other users of the premises, especially staff in bars and pubs

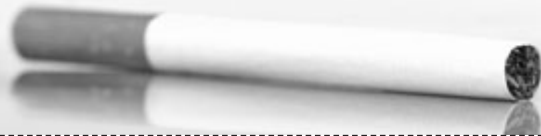


AGAINST THE BAN

Smoking bans damage business and will lead to closures of pubs, clubs and restaurants



People should have freedom of choice in a free country to smoke if they wish



People want restrictions on smoking not an outright ban



Self-regulation should be given longer to respond to market forces. People could choose to go to smoking or non-smoking places



The link between passive smoking and ill-health is unproven



Some opposing views

Read these views and research them in more detail. **Either** (a) hold a debate on the motion 'This house supports the right of smokers to smoke indoors in public'. Choose two people to support the motion and two to oppose it. After each speech of about four minutes, the chair should take points from the 'floor' (the audience) and then have a vote, **or** (b) add your own view to the message board on the next page.

ASH stands for Action on Smoking and Health. It is a campaigning public health charity working for a comprehensive societal response to tobacco aimed at achieving a sharp reduction and eventual elimination of the health problems caused by tobacco. 114,000 people per year die from smoking-related diseases in the UK and tobacco is a major cause of illness and health inequalities. Tobacco is a powerfully addictive drug that most of its users would like to quit using.

Deborah Arnott, Director of ASH, said: *'After years of dogged campaigning for the right to work and socialise in places free of tobacco smoke, our goal is finally in sight. The Government should be congratulated for passing this landmark legislation that will have a lasting impact on the health of the nation. This is truly a time for celebration. This law has popular support, is good for health and will be good for business too. The only losers are the tobacco companies who have fought and failed to prevent this incredibly important measure from being implemented. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of countless organisations, politicians, health advocates and the support of the hospitality trade, the days of smoke-clogged rooms and stinging eyes are almost over.'*

www.ash.org.uk

FOREST stands for Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco. It is a pressure group, set up in 1979, which supports the right of smokers to smoke if they choose.

On the forthcoming smoking ban, they had this to say: *'We may have lost this battle but we don't intend to go away. We will never give up arguing that people should be allowed to smoke in some indoor public places (it's called freedom of choice) but the reality is that the debate is moving on. Already some people are calling for a ban on outdoor smoking and there is a deliberate, publicly funded campaign to "denormalise" smoking. This can only lead to further discrimination against people who smoke and our role is to combat those who want to promote intolerance and illiberal policies designed to target a substantial minority of the population.'*

www.forestonline.org

The British Medical Association (BMA) represents doctors throughout Britain.

It had this to say on the ban: *'The BMA is absolutely delighted that politicians opted to put the lives and health of their constituents first and vote for a total ban on smoking in all enclosed public places in England. The legislation will mean that from 6am on 1 July 2007 virtually all workplaces in England [this includes all bars and restaurants] will not allow any smoking. It is now essential that workplaces prepare for this date. The BMA urges restaurants and pubs not to wait until the last minute to protect their staff and customers – they should act now and make their premises smoke-free. We hope there will be a good public education programme so that everyone is prepared and ready for when the legislation comes into force. Smoke-free workplaces will save lives and protect health. 1 July will also be a great incentive for smokers to quit. Most smokers want to kick their habit and now they have a date to help them plan their quitting strategy. This means extra investment should be directed to cessation services for people who want to stop smoking.'*

www.bma.org.uk

Here is a selection of views on a proposed ban on smoking in public places (from a BBC Scotland message board). Add your own message at the end.

As an ex-smoker who still smokes when in the pub, I for one will be pleased to not have temptation put in my way and I'm sure bar staff will be happy for a better environment whether they smoke or not.

Gordon Patrick, Glasgow, UK

We have a total smoking ban on all indoor places here, pubs, restaurants, offices, etc. We have had it for several years. It works great. Business is up because the 75% who are non-smokers now go where they wouldn't before. I am looking forward to my trip to Ireland because now I can visit the pubs, which I never did in Scotland because of the smoke.

Sue Boatner, Victoria, Canada

Why not have a self-regulatory state, where licencees can decide whether to make their premises smoke free or not and clearly advertise it? That way it will make everyone happy. But licencees, especially the large chains, have a large responsibility to ensure that a certain number of their premises are kept smoke free. I just could not see areas in Govan or Maryhill to name but two having smokers standing outside of pubs, puffing away. This will only lead to more trouble on the streets.

Allan, Glasgow

So let's see. There's to be a ban on fox hunting, teachers aren't now allowed to shout at children, parents can't slap their own children, you can't park outside a school. The list of bans goes on and on. People's freedom to be individuals is being slowly undermined. After banning smoking, then what next? Should they ban alcohol perhaps and so eliminate drink driving at a stroke? What about fatty foods? That's another good one for the axe. Why can't government get off our backs and do something constructive for a change?

Dick, Inch, Scotland

I stopped smoking many years ago but I disagree completely with the proposal that smoking in public places is banned. Pubs, restaurants, etc. are not publicly-owned – they are privately owned businesses and I don't think the executive should be interfering. Business premises should be encouraged to set up separate rooms/areas for smokers and improve the air conditioning.

Anne Aitken, Edinburgh

As a heavy smoker for 20 years (and who has unsuccessfully tried to stop many times) I would suffer if there was any type of complete ban on smoking. However, having a four-year-old son makes me realise that this may not help the current generation of adults but, with time, would be accepted as normal for future generations. If we cannot help ourselves, then at least we can help our children

Stephen Hull, Rome, Italy

Add your comment here:

Should alcohol be further controlled?

One of the contributors to the message board on smoking raised the question of banning alcohol. Prohibition in the United States (1920–1933) was the era during which the United States Constitution outlawed the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages. Many social problems have been attributed to the Prohibition era. A profitable, often violent, black market for alcohol flourished. Racketeering happened when powerful gangs corrupted law enforcement agencies. Stronger liquor surged in popularity because it was more profitable to smuggle. Some countries in Europe have had prohibition, or at least some restriction, on the sale of alcohol, for example Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland. Many Middle Eastern and North African countries still uphold a ban on the production, importation or consumption of alcohol, for example Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Libya. In other Muslim countries in the region, alcohol can only be sold to tourists or those with special licences.

Some people in this country argue that controls on drinking alcohol should be tightened. Recently, a charity, Alcohol Concern, made the suggestion that parents should be prosecuted for allowing underage children to drink alcohol at home.

‘Prosecute parents who let children drink’

Parents who give alcohol to children under the age of 15 — even with a meal at home — should face prosecution, a charity says today.

Alcohol Concern makes the call as it publishes research revealing that girls aged 11 to 13 are drinking 83 per cent more alcohol than six years ago.

A charity spokesman said: “It is legal to provide children as young as five with alcohol in a private home. Raising the age limit to 15 would send a stronger message to parents of the risks associated with letting very young people consume alcohol.” It is illegal to buy a drink in a pub under 18, but a 16- or 17-year-old can drink wine or beer if having a meal with parents.

Although the number of children who drink alcohol has declined slightly, the amount they have consumed has soared, according to the report, which was collated by an independent health body funded by the Government. In 2000, girls aged 11–15 who had drunk alcohol the previous week admitted consuming just under five units. By 2006 this had risen to just over eight units — equivalent to eight small glasses of wine, four pints of lager, nine pub measures of spirits or four pints of cider. Boys of the same age were drinking six units a week — this is now 12 units.

The Glass Half Empty report says the Government’s Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, published three years ago, was failing children.



Alcohol Concern says there are strong links between drunkenness and teenage pregnancy — England has the worst record for teenage pregnancies in Europe. Srabani Sen, chief executive of Alcohol Concern, said: “Binge drinking by children can have serious consequences for brain function, significantly raises the risk of alcohol dependency in later life and diminishes life chances. We are not doing enough to protect our children.”

www.telegraph.co.uk

Give your views on this suggestion. Write a reply to Alcohol Concern, giving reasons why you agree or disagree with their suggestion.

The arguments about banning alcohol

What are the arguments for and against a complete ban on alcohol? You fill in the bubbles with some of the arguments – we've given you three to get started. You could look on www.idebate.org/debatabase to get some ideas.



Alcohol is just as addictive as many lethal drugs and just as destructive to homes, families and health. If drugs are illegal, so should alcohol be.

Banning alcohol would put thousands of people out of work. The drinks industry is an enormous global employer and banning alcohol would wreak havoc on the world's economy.

Alcohol leads to crime, assault, vandalism and fighting. It makes the street disgusting at the weekends.
Ban it!

The Battle of the Binge

A study by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit shows 17 million working days are lost to hangovers and drink-related illness each year. The annual cost to employers is estimated to be £6.4 billion while the cost to the NHS is in the region of £1.7bn. Billions more are spent clearing up alcohol-related crime and social problems. In addition, alcohol-related problems are responsible for 22,000 premature deaths each year. However, the authors of the report said that even these figures may be a conservative estimate. They found that there are 1.2 million incidents of alcohol-related violence a year. Around 40% of A&E admissions are alcohol-related. Between midnight and 5am that figure rises to 70%. Alcohol-related accidents and illnesses land around 150,000 people in hospital each year. Up to 1.3 million children are affected by parents with drink problems, the report said. They are also more likely to have problems later in life themselves.

Your whole group has been appointed by the Prime Minister to look into action that could be taken to reduce alcohol abuse and binge drinking. Elect a chair of the working party, and then divide into small sub-groups to consider the options. In your small group, discuss each of the following options, and decide which **THREE** to recommend to the whole working party. The whole group must decide what to include in its report to the government, and produce a presentation to explain its decisions. What are the civil liberties' issues involved in some of these options?

Option 1 – Triple the price of alcohol to make it more difficult for people to afford.

Option 2 – Launch a nation-wide educational campaign about the effects of alcohol on a person's health.

Option 3 – Raise the age at which young people can purchase alcohol to 21, as in the USA.

Option 4 – Ration the purchase of alcohol and allow people to buy it only from government-run shops, open a few hours per day.

Option 5 – Label bottles with more information about the alcoholic content and the dangers of drinking to excess.

Option 6 – Place police officers outside every pub in city centres and arrest and charge anyone who is inebriated.

Option 7 – Place details of people who drink to excess on a list which is available for future employers to consult.

Option 8 – Prosecute pub landlords and bar staff who serve more alcohol to someone who is clearly very drunk.

Option 9 – Ban all advertising of alcohol on television, street hoardings and at cinemas.

Option 10 – Your suggestion: _____



Resources

Goodbye to all that: Smoking and restrictions in public places

A BBC Television 'Open Door' programme produced by Action on Smoking and Health which focuses on non-smoking public places. The areas targeted are restaurants, cinemas, pubs, buses, London Underground and the workplace. There are a series of different interviews with proprietors of public places that have introduced non-smoking facilities and with people on the street ascertaining their opinions about non-smoking provisions for themselves and others.

Running time: 30 minutes, VHS.

Available for hire or sale from:

Concord Video and Film Council,
Rosehill Centre, 22 Hines Road,
Ipswich, Suffolk, IP3 9BG

Telephone: **01473 726012**

E-mail: **sales@concordvideo.co.uk**

Towards a future without tobacco: the report of the smoking prevention working group, Scottish Executive

Suitable for level 3 students, the summary and recommendations of this report provide many suggestions for policies that could prevent young people starting to smoke. It could provide the stimulus to motivate young people to carry out their own research and follow-up activity in England.

Available at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/21155256/2

Smoking in public places

This online resource from the Citizenship Foundation, provides arguments and statistics on the topic of smoking as part of a series of source materials for teaching controversial issues. Available at **www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main**

The Portman Group Code of Practice on the naming, packaging and promotion of alcoholic drinks

A code of practice from a group that promotes responsible drinking. They say 'moderate drinking in appropriate circumstances presents little or no harm to the drinker and can even provide health benefits'.

Free download at:

www.portmangroup.org.uk ('Publications' section)

Binge drinking and citizenship

This paper, aimed at post-16 students, presents materials covering binge drinking and citizenship and explores the issues involved.

Drug and Alcohol Education and Prevention Team, Drugscope, Alcohol Concern 2005. Free download at **www.drugscope.org.uk/uploads/projects/documents/citizen.pdf**

Under the influence

A film made by and for young people about the use and abuse of alcohol. The film was written, directed and stars young people in Leiston in Suffolk. Young people draw upon their own experiences to tell a story and engage young people in discussion about alcohol.

Running time: 10 minutes

VHS hire: £10

VHS or DVD sale: £25

Available from Concord Video and Film Council, contact details as above.