

Nottingham University & British American Tobacco – What’s all the fuss about?

On 4 December 2000, Nottingham University announced that it had accepted a donation of £3.8 million from the multinational tobacco giant British American Tobacco (BAT) for a “Centre for International Corporate Social Responsibility”. The inappropriate nature of the sponsorship brought widespread condemnation and incredulity. Many believe that BAT is one of the most anti-social and irresponsible companies in the world.

Why is BAT an unacceptable sponsor for a school of corporate social responsibility?

There are so many reasons, but here’s just a few:

- BAT’s *annual* cigarette sales will result in the premature death of over 500,000 people
- The DTI is investigating BAT’s role in tobacco smuggling (see over for DTI press release)
- Internal BAT documents show the company knew about the harmful and addictive nature of its product for many decades but consistently denied it to the public.
 - BAT faces over 500 lawsuits, including a major case for racketeering and smuggling
- The company engages in aggressive marketing of cigarettes in developing countries

Campus life at Nottingham University?

- The Guardian reported that staff are in revolt over the donation (6 December 2000)
- The Students Union President, Alain de Sales, told newspapers that the student community is split down the middle by the decision
- A survey by the Association of University Teachers found that over 85 per cent of the university academics who responded believe that the decision damaged the university’s reputation (Guardian, 10 January 2001)
- Jon Rouse, MBA *Business student of the year* at Nottingham University, refused his award as a protest against the decision to take money from BAT.
- The Vice Chancellor has refused to respond to his critics or argue his case – except at a debate with a carefully selected invitation-only audience.

Cost of taking tobacco money

- Reputation tarnished from association with the tobacco industry.
- Widespread condemnation (for examples visit: www.ash.org.uk/?conduct)
- Lost funds. The Cancer Research Campaign chose to raise extra funds for Newcastle University, instead of Nottingham, because Newcastle refused to take tobacco money.
- The decision to take £3.8m over 3 years from BAT could cost the university in terms of lost sponsorship and research funding if health charities and companies decide they do not want to be associated with the tobacco industry.
- To defend his decision, the University Vice Chancellor has had to argue in favour of the tobacco industry, use tobacco industry arguments and provide favourable publicity for BAT.

A few questions...

- 1) What does this donation tell you about the attitude of the people that run Nottingham University?
- 2) Do you want to be involved by association with a multinational tobacco company?
- 3) Would a qualification in ‘corporate social responsibility’ be worth anything to the student?
- 4) Did Nottingham University inform you of its links to BAT before you travelled here?

What can you do about it?

Think carefully about whether Nottingham University is the sort of place you want to spend your time as a student. You can email a message to Nottingham@globalink.org to express your views on the decision to senior staff at the university.

Before you apply to Nottingham, read the full story at www.ash.org.uk/?conduct and *then* decide.

Printed and Published by Students for Action on Smoking and Health (SASH).