

Politics and Policy Analysis: Assignment 2

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Introduction: Air Quality Policy

The UK Air Quality Policy sets out standards, objectives, controls, framework and enforcements, to improve outdoor and indoor air quality in order to protect human health and the environment. The objectives, regulations and plans within this policy are developed through ongoing and forthcoming changes, issues, concerns and trends that government groups such as the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) identify and assess (Bolton, 2024)

National, regional and local levels are required to adhere to objectives and regulations as part of the policy. Each area can have their own policies (that still comply with Government legislation) depending on the nature of their air quality problem, with specific goals and actions within that area (Defra,n.d.). Wales has their own Clean Air Act as a result of the Air Quality Policy. The Acts aim is to improve the air quality and reduce the impacts on human health nature, environment and economy in Wales by setting targets and legislation on road users, smoke control, idling, promoting awareness on the effects, promoting active travel and providing funding (Wales, 2024).

As part of the Air Quality Policy limits have been put in place for certain air pollutants such as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter as these have been linked to risks (DEFRA, 2023). If organisations or businesses extend these limits fines or prison sentences will be implemented as well as further costs like higher insurance, loss of contracts and paying compensation to parties involved (Gov, 2024). This includes businesses like construction, engineering and agriculture that use machinery that could cause effect (Minett, 2022).

Not only is air quality managed outdoor but indoor conditions such as ventilation, mould, heating and gas, vapours and chemicals can have an impact on people health and the environment. As part of the Air Quality Policy, businesses and organisations should be monitoring these effects.

Clean Air Zones and Ultra Low Emission Zones have been introduced in major cities such as London, Birmingham, Bath and Bristol, which charge vehicle owners £12.50 daily if their vehicle does not meet emission standards, this includes public transport (London, 2024). Wales have lowered speed limits in 5 congested areas to 50mph to reduce vehicle emissions, areas being; Wrexham, Deeside, Pontypridd, Port Talbot and Newport (Government, 2022).

Public transport in the UK has also implemented measures as a result of the Air Quality Policy such as improving ventilation on vehicles and transportation areas (e.g. train stations and bus stops) to protect staff and users from pollution, reducing idling and introducing more low/zero emission vehicles (Transport, 2025).

The UK government is offering businesses access to their Air Quality grant scheme to support businesses on improving their local air quality, raise awareness and focus on business areas that are reaching pollution limits (Gov, 2023). In 2020 the UK Government awarded around £64.5 million to various projects which benefited schools, businesses, communities (Office, 2020).

The main problems this policy aims to address is human health, the environment, and the harm to children, elderly and vulnerable. The government considers poor air quality to be “the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK” (Smith, 2025), with The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) reporting 30,000 deaths per year in the UK link to air pollution, reduced quality of life and productivity losses (RCP, 2025). This report also showed the direct links that air pollution has on almost every organ in the body. Poor air quality can contaminate soils and waters, imbalance ecosystems, reduce biodiversity and damage plants and animals, all causing direct harm to the environment and planet (Gov, 2019).

UK government have said that children may be exposed to higher levels of traffic pollution when travelling to school. Schools are often located near busy roads increasing exposure in and around schools. Because of this the government aims to reduce children's exposure to harmful pollutants near schools (Agency, 2025)

Following the death of a nine-year-old girl; Ella Adoo-Kisii-Debrah, who was the first person to have air pollution listed as a cause of death in 2013, a bill was proposed for the human right to clean air in the UK (News, 2020). The government objected to this law, and the law was not put into place. However, the government have said they on of their aims is to improve the provision of air quality information to the public, after the inquest of her death (Exley, 2025).

The Development Process

Air pollution was recognised as an issue during the Industrial Revolution as the process of burning fossil fuels staggered and working conditions as a result of pollution worsened. The Industrial Revolution also resulted in the event of the Great Smog of London in 1952 killing thousands of people. These events led to increased concern regarding air pollution and it effects, later following the first UK Clean Air Act in 1956 regulating domestic and industrial emissions (Earth, 2017).

Technology development also influenced the process of the Air Quality Policy. In 1961, National Survey was established which allowed air black smoke and sulphur dioxide to be monitored at about 1200 sites in the UK. This allowed for air pollution to be observed and measure helping to develop effective legislation (DEFRA, 2020).

It is estimated that impact of poor air pollution is costing £50 billion per year in UK healthcare costs (Parliament, 2025). The significant healthcare costs raises the

problem of creating pressure on health services and reducing government spending on other areas such as pollution control technology development. Identifying this problem has contributed to the development process of the Air Quality Policy to help remove the economic burden through improving the UK's air quality and health.

As a result of the Environmental Act 1995 and the Environmental Act 2021 the Air Quality Policy was cultivated. The Environmental Act 1995 produced the statutory requirement and the framework for the Air Quality Policy, which was then amended by the Environmental Act 2021 creating new targets, reports and data. The increased awareness of the effect pollution has on the environment influenced legislative action to be taken by the UK government, creating the need for an Air Quality Policy that targets all areas of the problem (Hub, n.d.).

Globalisation and its Impact

Globalisation has an impact on air quality policies and its developments and progression. Globalisation results in the expansion of businesses and organisations through building new infrastructures and expanding globally, this can lead to habitat losses, increased energy and water usage as well as higher demand for raw materials. Globalisation also increases transportation for goods, which leads to greater emissions and high carbon footprints (Stobierski, 2021). Industrial pollution is also increased due to increased production, wastage and need for raw materials (leading to deforestation and biodiversity loss). Considering all of these impacts, air quality and environmental progress can worsen or reverse leaving policies and targets weakened.

However, globalisation can have a positive impact as it can help increase awareness about environmental and air quality issues, allowing other countries, businesses and organisations to become more educated, insightful and develop new laws and policies based on others. Globalisation increases interconnection around the world which can result in improving technology in various places that can help monitor and control air quality, increasing knowledge and expertise's on the issue and improve and share air quality policies.

Budget and Funding

As part of the 2025 budget, the UK government is increasing their Electric Car Grant by an additional £1.3 billion worth of funding and extending it to 2029-30 as they believe it will improve air quality and create a cleaner economy (GOV, 2025). As of 2025 electric cars accounted for 473,340 new registrations (Leggett, 2026). This grant helps drivers switch to electric vehicles by provide up to £3,750 off electric vehicles, with 320,000 extra electric vehicle sales expected over the next 5 years. However, the budget also includes plans to bring in a "per mile" tax on electric vehicles, to offset reduction for fuel company revenues, meaning sales could be cut around 440,000 due to the new tax plan.

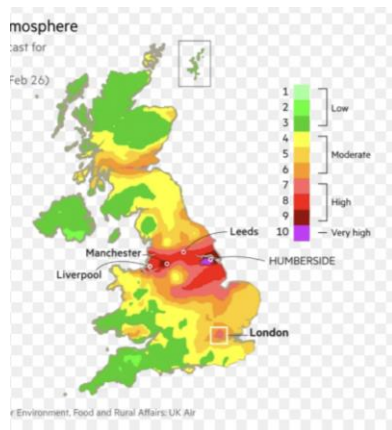
The budget for local councils used to help tackle air pollution in their area was cut from £225 million a year (2020/21) to £1.5 million by the government in the last 5 years. From 2016/17 to 2023/24 the average grant for local councils was £71.8 under the Conservative Government but has fallen to an average £1.5 million under Labour Government (2024/25) (Lungs, 2025). This shows a 99.4% reduction in funding (from £225 million) (Mortimer, 2025). Many pressure groups and campaigns such as 'Mums for Lungs', are spreading awareness about this cut and are aiming to hold the government accountable as spending has been cut yet many areas of the UK are still exceeding legal levels pollutants harming the public.

The Labour Party promised to bring in the legal right to breathe clean air as part of a Clean Air Act in 2023. They also said as part of the act World Health Organisation clean air guidelines would be implemented, government would stay accountable, and they would grant new powers to local authorities to take urgent action on air quality (Parliament, 2024). However, this act was absent from the party's manifesto in 2024. A petition was then made to urge the government to take further steps and formally enact Labours Clean Air Act, labours responses was that they are already taking action to tackle air pollution.

£104 million of taxpayer funding was spent creating a Clean Air Zone in Greater Manchester which was later cancelled by Mayor Andy Burnham in 2023. 462 cameras and £3 million worth of signs were installed as part of the plan to charge drivers up to £60 per day with vehicle producing unsuitable levels of pollutants (Gawne, 2025). Due to public backlash the plans were scrapped, which cost around £600,000 to be removed, which was paid by the government (Fitzpatrick, 2025). This ordeal led to large sums of money being wasted which could have been put into strong clean air plans, public disapproval and potential used signs and cameras, creating waste. Plans were then moved to create cleaner taxis, costing £8 million and electric busses investing £51.1 million as well as £21.9 million for additional costs e.g. delivery, admiration (Roberts, 2025).

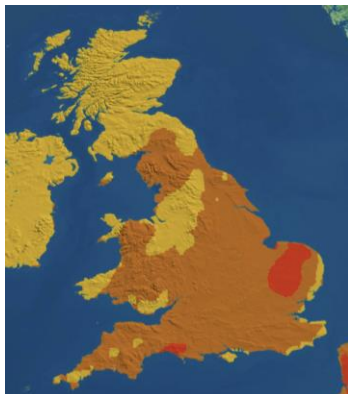
Impact and Practical Outcomes

27th February 2019:



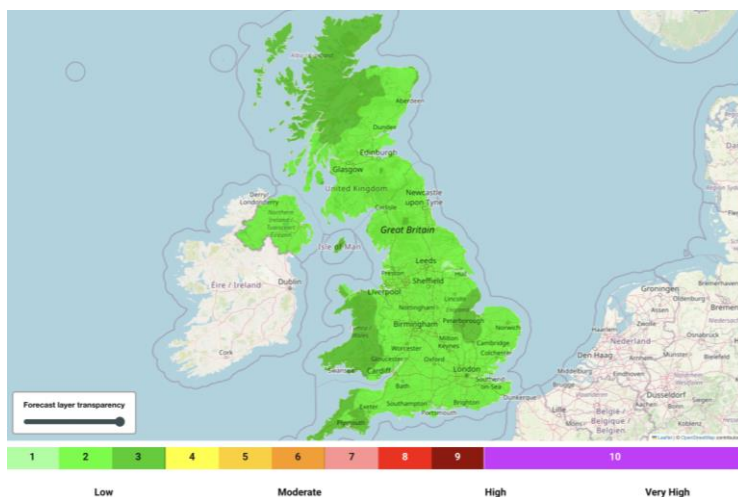
(Times, 2019)

18th June 2021:



(News, 2021)

15th Jan 2026:



(Environment, n.d.)

Looking at 3 different years' worth of DEFRA's pollution forecasts, it is clear that air pollution has improved across the UK from 2019-2026.

UK government says from 2023 to 2024 there has been decrease of both PM2.5 and PM10, both reaching the lowest levels recorded in both urban and roadside areas. There has also been an 8% decrease of NO2 in urban areas, and a decrease of 6% in roadside areas (2023 to 2024) (Gov, 2024). This shows that air quality policies are helping lower levels of harmful pollutants. From 1990 to 2025 emissions have lowered by 50.4% as a result of new emission legalisation on sectors such as transport, business, and housing (Gov, 2024).

UK transport emission have decreased 16% since 2008 due to the increase of electric vehicles doubling every two years, clean air and ULEZ charges, public transport making steps to becoming greener and 2016 legislation that ensure new vehicles must comply with Euro 6 (exhaust emission limits). Also, from 1990-2021 newer vehicles have been more fuel effective meaning emissions do not rise as fast as mileage increases.

Import emissions have increased by 7% from 2021 to 2022 and have not changed much since 2008. This could be due to high consumer demand, other countries not implementing air quality policies and businesses not abiding.

The closure of Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal fired power station in 2024 and the increased use of renewable energy, both contributed to emissions in the electricity sector lowering by 82%. Renewables make up 40% of the UKs electricity, compared to 7% in 2010 (Committee, 2025).

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