



**Tobacco and Vapes Bill, 2024**

**Summary of Mentimeter Survey  
of  
Youth Assembly Members**

**9 April 2024**

## Background

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021. The current 90 Youth Assembly Members took their seats in October 2023. At the time of recruitment, they were in school years 9-12 which is approximately age 12-16. They are a diverse group. Membership includes young people from every constituency and recruitment was designed to ensure proportionate representation of Section 75 categories such as gender, religious background, race, care experience, sexuality, disability and young people with caring responsibilities.

The Youth Assembly was established to perform three functions:

- To engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, specifically with Assembly Committees on legislation and inquiries relevant to young people;
- To undertake project work generated by the three Youth Assembly committees; and
- To enable consultation with government Departments and to participate in youth voice projects.

## Tobacco and Vapes Bill

Youth Assembly Members received a briefing from Health Committee Clerk on 9 April 2024 in order to explain the clauses in the Tobacco and Vapes bill. They had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the key points.

Using the online survey app, Mentimeter, Youth Assembly Members gave their answers anonymously to a range of questions related to the bill.

Below is a summary of their responses.

They will present this summary report to Members of the Health Committee on 18 April in Parliament Buildings.

## Q1. What are your views on the age limitation of tobacco products? (No sale of any products if born after 1st Jan 2009)

Members were split on this question. Most were broadly in favour.

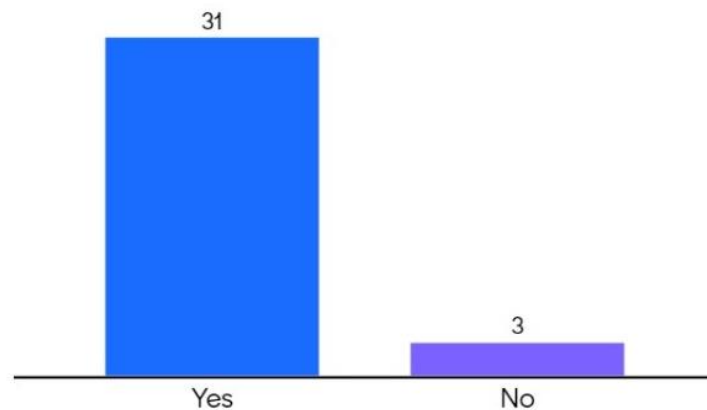
- I think it's a good idea as there is already big issues in schools and there is a vape shop next to my local school this has made issue worse.
- Should be closer to 2000 as it should be banned for people before then and include vapes.
- A step in the right direction as it emphasises the consequences and health effects of smoking as it's taken seriously. It also helps promote the dangers of smoking.
- Fair it ensures a new generation of non-smokers. Changes mindsets to smoking and bodily harm for pleasure.
- I think it's good but overall, they should be banned for any individual under the age of 18
- Long awaited!
- I think it is good but I think all teenagers should be banned from vapes.
- I believe it is an excellent idea - it will relieve pressure on our health service, and any argument of infringement of rights can be countered by the matter of public safety.
- A necessary sacrifice for rights.
- Although I think it is a good idea in theory, I don't know how it will be in practice.
- I think that is a very good idea as tobacco products are a massive problem in our country.
- I am in agreement with the selected age.
- It's low enough of an age that it will not overly impacted the addicted.
- Unfair but good in the end.
- Needed to relieve pressure of the NHS.
- If it can be enforced it's a great idea.
- I believe that this law would work because similar laws have been made in different countries and they seem to have worked.

### Other expressed concerns or suggested changes.

- It doesn't seem fair.
- Wrong as it infringes on personal freedoms and will find criminal gangs.
- I am worried about the black market.
- It would be better to ensure that tobacco products aren't being targeted children and making harsher laws on the sale of tobacco.
- It's a good concept, but there would be a lot of downsides to this.
- I don't think it is good because the age is a bit weird.
- imagine it will cost a lot for the government/councils and the police with the increase in black markets etc.
- Good idea but it will be hard to regulate.
- I feel it can increase black market which is riskier and can be viewed as an infringement of rights.
- More should be done to limit selling of vapes.
- I believe that it is possible that it could back fire and lead to an increase in civil unrest.
- Should be banned for everyone.
- It would be better if it was banned for people born after.
- Everyone should be banned to have an effect.
- It will be difficult to enforce in practice - it will take time for all shops to ask for ID.
- Need to be stricter on vapes - the real problem of the future.
- Why can't NI move back the age requirement?
- Show photos of health problems on vapes like cigarettes have.
- Stop ads on public places.
- They should put images of the consequences of vapes like cigarette packets have.
- People will want to do it more if its banned.
- I think they should be hidden behind doors. The colours and flavour are tempting for young people. That is part of their selling point!

## Q2. Do you think the 'age of sale' for vaping products should rise from 16 years old to 18 years old?

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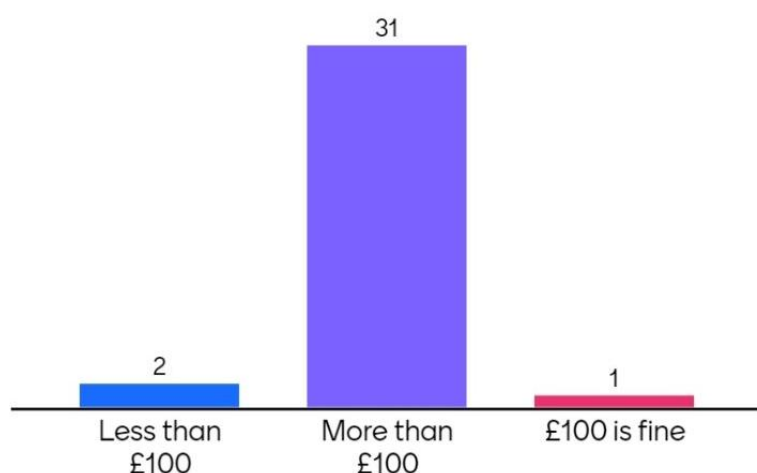


## Q3. Why do you say that?

- Vapes should be illegal for all people below age of 18.
- It cracks it down in schools because young people are still developing - it can damage your brain.
- If you start early, it would cause bad health effects in the long run.
- It ensures that those who remain in a secondary school setting don't sell to younger children.
- Young people have enough on their plates without having to worry about health problems and addiction.
- Some people's bodies don't fully develop until 22 and it can affect their health even more at young age.
- Vapes are quite addictive, and 16 is too young for vapes as it can create problems early in life.
- Vaping is just as addictive as cigarettes and should be banned in the same way (on or after January 2009).
- It's just as dangerous as smoking a cigarette, with chemicals and nicotine.
- If we aren't allowed to vote why are we given an option to destroy our health?
- It should be raised to 18 as people at 16 are too young and aren't thinking about the impact vaping will have.

- As people at sixteen can still be very irresponsible and there is currently a lot of vaping in school and school bathrooms.
- Nicotine is an addictive substance which is setting up young people to being addicted
- There's not enough research to know the dangers.
- I think it should be raised as 18-year olds are they more mature and will have a better understanding of what they are doing.
- Secondary smoke, even from vapes, can damage other people's lungs, even if they're just around someone smoking and not doing it themselves.
- It can be harder to detect if it is being used in school as they can smell nice and not be detected.

#### Q4. What do you think of the £100 fine – is it ok or should it be less or more?



#### Q5. Why do you say that?

The vast majority felt that £100 is not a deterrent.

- Big retailers won't be bothered.
- £100 is no deterrent.
- £500 for first time 1000 for repeats offending.
- It will stop people more if they are charged £500 than £100.

- Giving cigarettes to kids should be a more punishable offence. It won't threaten huge companies when it comes to profit and income. A £100 fine is a similar price to a parking fine but this is more serious.
- £100 for many retailers is nothing, a real deterrent would be short jail sentences or public shaming, e.g. companies such as Tesco's.
- It should be raised with repeat offenders. massive companies see £100 as barely anything while they make over £1000 an hour off other products.
- I've heard if people selling on vapes for £5-10, it won't damage them financially to sell them.
- When it comes to black market they will make more than the fine.
- More expensive to do the admin to collect the fine!
- People will still see and know about vapes even if banned in shops.
- If they sell enough vapes, they can cover the fine.
- No-one will pay the fine.

## Q6. What do you think of the proposal to restrict the display of vaping products?

The vast majority were in favour and pointed out how appealing vapes are to children. They also mentioned that most young people are exposed to advertising online rather than in shops.

- I think it should be hidden and only be accessed when people ask for them.
- Brilliant if they can't see it they won't buy it.
- I think it's a good idea because it makes it less likely to target kids because of their colours and flavours. It also makes it less likely to get stolen as they'll be locked in a shelf behind a counter.
- The restrictions of the display will work the same way as the restriction against the view of cigarettes to ensure those who are addicted don't have temptations.
- There should be a similar section restricting social media ads like TikTok and Snapchat. This is where they are advertised to children.
- Social media is being used too much to advertise.
- Some vapes are shaped like sweets i.e. some are designed like watermelon slices or sweets.

- Vaping is so appealing for many reasons- colours and flavours and names e.g. UNICORN. Hide the products.
- The vapes sound friendly and are brightly coloured, children find bright colours friendly. Blue is seen as calmness and Yellow or Red is excitement
- As long as it is completely banned long term. cigarettes were not banned as the government made tax money. Vapes will continue to evolve we can't treat them the same as cigarettes
- Good, they can appeal to children when they see them on the shelf
- It should either be displayed behind the shutters or in the alcohol bit with the closed gates. They should also be dull and dark colours.
- I think it is a good idea since it might deter people and it would make it harder to get since you would have to ask for it.
- Absolutely agree - it is definitely needed, vaping is a massive problem in schools especially. I think if display was restricted it would decrease sales. I have doubts about enforcement though.
- It's a bad idea as they'll just be sold under counter and be less regulated.
- I think they should display images of people who have suffered due to vapes similar to cigarettes packaging. Vapes are too attractive to young people.

### **Q7. Do you think the Minister should impose restrictions on packaging of tobacco, nicotine or vaping products? Why or why not?**

Most were in favour of restrictions to packaging.

- Absolutely - colours and flavours are too appealing to young people.
- Yes, as I feel teenagers are more likely to buy it if it is a popular brand.
- Yes, they should remove the friendly colours and friendly pictures which children would find appealing.
- They should be darker and should have to have less attractive names to deter people buying them.
- Yes, because the colours attract teenagers and under 18s. Some also have a logo of a popular or funny thing.



- Cigarettes don't have bright colours or cool flavours and they have warnings - vapes deserve the same.
- Absolutely - they are far too attractive to young people who can't make an informed decision.
- Yes, otherwise it can seem very child friendly and safe.
- They should have to demonstrate the damage which they can do and help create awareness of the severity.
- All nicotine products should be unbranded. There is no reason to attach a name to such a harmful business.
- ANY tobacco products should be heavily restricted. Vapes should show the same warning labels as cigarettes.
- We should ban all use in public.
- Yes! it will become less appealing to young people and they can predict the flavour by the colour.
- Should show images of bad lungs and people in hospitals like cigarettes.
- We don't know enough about vapes yet, like we didn't know about cigarettes until people started to die, we don't know the full effects of vapes therefore there isn't enough information to display.
- Dangerous chemicals are used to create the flavours and we do not know the long-term impact.
- Packaging should inform consumers of the health risks.
- Flavour isn't the problem it's the colour and the names; if you have dark dull packs then it doesn't matter what the flavour is.
- It should be illegal to sell tobacco AND vape products to under 18 AND any one born after 1st January 2009.
- Social media ads should be restricted as well as packaging.
- No, as manufacturers should be allowed to have creative freedom.

## Q8. Do you think the Minister should introduce restrictions on tobacco and/or vape flavours? Why or why not?

Most were in favour of restrictions to flavours.

- Yes, it's too targeted at kids.
- Yes, flavours are too appealing to young people.
- Yes, ban fruity glaciers on vapes; make them sort of plain.
- Certain flavours may contain harmful artificial chemicals that we used to mimic the taste.
- Yes, because it can make kids taking it ignore the bad effects while taking them.
- Change the names of the flavours not the flavours themselves.
- There should not be flavours of vape that are named the same as popular sweets.
- The flavours make it easier to get addicted to since they are familiar, fun and exciting if they tasted more off-putting it would deter people.
- Absolutely - the flavour is one of the largest factors in buying a vape product.
- Should just taste like tobacco.
- The flavours could be using harmful or carcinogenic chemicals.
- They're manipulating young people and damaging their health for profit - this should be heavily restricted.
- It's easier in toilets to hide compared to cigarettes.
- No, it will mean people buy from paramilitaries as they are already addicted.

## Q9. Is there anything else you think should be included in this bill?

Suggestions included banning disposable vapes, increasing fines, education in schools around vaping, banning social media advertising on vapes and “vape shops, and stronger enforcement around illegal vapes. Concerns were expressed around enforcement and unintended consequences such as paramilitary involvement in a large black market leading to an increase in illegal vapes which may be more unsafe.

- Ban disposable vapes.
- Repeat offenders should have bigger fines.
- A restriction is required in the purchase of tobacco products by those in older generations.
- A higher fine and prison time for repeat offenders.
- A long-term strategy to eventually ban tobacco all together.
- I think there should be an education programme mandatory in schools to teach kids and show the dangers.
- Schools and adults should be under an obligation to report it if they know an offence has occurred.
- Perhaps a license scheme to sell tobacco and vapes like there is for alcohol to minimise illegal selling.
- I think the buyer should also be fined as well as the seller.
- Bus stations need to control how many young people go there to vape.
- Ban illegal vapes.
- Bigger fines for social media companies who purposely advertise to children.
- This bill seems very difficult to enforce.
- A long-time strategy for tobacco which should be eventually banned altogether.
- Vaping adverts are a huge problem - they should be included in the bill.
- Ban vape shops, they are renowned for being relaxed with selling to young people.
- I believe it will increase the black market and gang involvement.
- People might be inclined to buy vapes or other tobacco products illegally that are mixed with cheaper substances making them even more harmful.
- Include ingredients on packaging.
- Show health conditions on packing of vapes.
- Vapes should be included in the January 2009 section of the bill.

## Q10. What impacts do you think this bill may have (positive or negative)? Why do you think this?

Comments were mixed with many emphasising the drawbacks of the bill as they see them.

### Positive

- Will be good so it will because people will not be smoking or vaping.
- The positives are that it promotes the dangers of smoking/vaping and helps make a smoke free generation.
- Positive as it will improve health throughout the next generation.
- Positive - healthier people are happier people.
- It will stop littering of vapes.

### Negative

- Black market and slippery slope to suppression of personal rights.
- The bill could create a black market, it will be awful in terms of those who are already addicted in this age demographic.
- More illegal trading of tobacco between people.
- Negative remove the rights of the consumer.
- It will have an impact on the tobacco industry and could put companies out of business
- Gang warfare may become a problem.
- It could lead to a further increase in the sale and distribution of unregulated vapes with totally unknown ingredients and that potentially contain THC.
- I am pessimistic about enforcement.

### Both

- Both it will help people but it doesn't go far enough.
- It will have a neutral impact because it will make it harder for purchasing but it will give a larger black-market economy.
- Definitely positive as hopefully it would greatly decrease people smoking yet stricter restrictions and consequences should be in place.